



UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY



Distr.  
LIMITED

A/C.5/34/L.3  
19 October 1979

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-fourth session  
FIFTH COMMITTEE  
Agenda item 98

PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Arabic Language Services for the General Assembly  
(Question of summary records) a/

Note by the Secretariat

1. Until 1974, the only Arabic language unit in the Secretariat was a small translation unit in the Department of Conference Services which translated a maximum of 4,000 pages of text annually under the terms of General Assembly resolution 678 (IX). At its twenty-eighth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3190 (XXVIII) which included Arabic among the languages of the General Assembly and its main Committees. It was agreed at that time that the costs of implementing the resolution during the first three years would be met collectively by the Arab States Members of the United Nations.

2. In preparing the associated statement of administrative and financial implications (A/C.5/1564), the Secretariat, after consultation with the Arab States Members, sought to propose the most economical arrangement for the provision of Arabic translation services. The estimates were based on the assumption that a major part of the summary records of each General Assembly session would not be issued during the session, but would be translated thereafter. This arrangement was devised to spread some part of the total workload of the Arabic Translation Service more equally throughout the year, thus reducing the total number of staff required and minimizing the cost to the Member States.

3. In his report on this subject to the thirty-first session (A/C.5/31/60), the Secretary-General drew attention to the problems of imbalanced distribution of workload over the year. In an attempt to deal both with that problem and with the need to provide Arabic translation services to UNCTAD, an expansion of the Arabic Service at Headquarters was proposed in the following terms (A/C.5/31/60, para. 23):

a/ A report dealing with the full range of questions related to the provision of Arabic language services is being issued. As the question of summary records is considered to be urgent, this paper addresses itself solely to that.

"Expansion of the New York Translation Service would entail economies of scale, not only regarding the utilization of existing overhead but also, and perhaps more importantly, regarding the distribution of workload over the year. The monthly Arabic Translation workload in the United Nations would vary less over the year than at present if Arabic were used in UNCTAD, since most of the UNCTAD workload would fall during the first months of the year, the months in which, in the past three years, there has been a relatively lighter workload at Headquarters. By giving this additional workload to the New York Arabic unit rather than to a parallel unit in Geneva, the inefficiencies inherent in the present unevenness of workload over the year could be reduced."

The proposed arrangement was approved in resolution 31/208.

4. At the following session, however, the General Assembly in adopting resolution 32/205 decided to transfer to Geneva the posts previously authorized at Headquarters to deal with UNCTAD documentation. The transfer of the unit resulted also in the transfer of some of the more experienced staff members of the Arabic Service.

5. Recently, a number of delegations in the Fifth Committee have expressed dissatisfaction with the present arrangements, and the Chairman has decided that the matter would be discussed.

6. Should the Assembly decide that all summary records of the main Committees be issued during the session in Arabic, temporary assistance in the amount of \$483,000 would be required for 1980 to provide for 20 translators, 7 revisers and 20 typists during 11 weeks of the session. The cost for the full biennium 1980-1981 would be \$995,000.

7. It should be noted, however, that the available pool of Arabic free-lance staff is limited and the number of intergovernmental and international organizations drawing on it is increasing. As a result, the Organization has not always been able to recruit the number and the quality of short-term staff needed. It is conceivable, therefore, that if the Assembly should decide to appropriate the necessary funds the Secretariat would still experience difficulties in recruiting sufficiently qualified staff. The Secretariat would remain in contact with the interested delegations with regard to the progress made.

-----