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FIFTH COMMITTEE
29th meeting
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at 10.30 a.m.
New York

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

Official Records*

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10 30 a.m.

TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF HIS EXCELLENCY GENERAL MPHEVU DLAMINI, PRIME MINISTER OF SWAZILAND

1. The CHAIRMAN expressed the Committee's condolences to the delegation of Swaziland on the death of His Excellency General Mphevu Dlamini.

AGENDA ITEM 104: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

(a) COMPOSITION OF THE SECRETARIAT: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/34/408)

2. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that, despite the efforts made by the Committee at a number of sessions, the personnel question had still not been resolved. The long and arduous negotiations conducted in 1978 by the Working Group on Personnel Questions had only resulted in the formulation of an innocuous text. One year later, it might be thought that the result of the measures recommended in that text was out of proportion to its length. It was necessary to go to the root of the problem, which was political rather than administrative.

3. In 1974, Morocco had expressed the opinion that taking contributions to the budget into account in calculating the desirable number of posts for each State would work to the disadvantage of small countries and developing countries.

4. One year after the adoption of resolution 33/143, certain comments were called for. Firstly, the report of the Secretary-General (A/34/408) hardly differed from the reports submitted at previous sessions. In fact, it was vaguer than ever and the rejection of the aspirations of the third world was even more obvious. Secondly, it seemed that there was now a large majority of delegations which objected to the principle of desirable ranges and wanted a new set of factors to improve the representation of the developing countries. Even the large contributors were no longer making a point of the amounts they were paying, which in any case were well within their capacity to pay. It would, therefore, be advisable to reform the system on the basis of indicators that were more exact and acceptable to all.

5. As the representative of Romania had said, the principle of equitable geographical distribution should apply to all staff, since there was nothing in the Charter or in the resolutions of the General Assembly providing that it should apply only to the professional category.

6. Moreover, the application of static rules to an evolving administrative system constituted yet another advantage for the wealthy countries. The desirable range for the various countries had not changed since 1974, and the Committee might rightly wonder how the 400 new posts created since that date had been distributed. The Secretariat must endeavour to remedy that situation, which was a major cause of concern to his delegation. The efforts made to solve the problem of non-representation and underrepresentation were not convincing; agencies which were authorized to recruit their own staff, particularly UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR, claimed

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(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

that they could find competent candidates only in the countries which were large contributors. Paragraph 6 of the Secretary-General's report also clearly illustrated, by means of figures and percentages, the increasing structural imbalance of the United Nations Secretariat. Although the Secretary-General had drawn the attention of all heads of departments and offices to the need to increase the representation of the developing countries, Group A, consisting of the African and Asian countries, provided only half as many nationals as the States of Group B, consisting of the developed market-economy countries.

7. Regarding the question of inheritance of posts, which was the subject of paragraph 10, the decision that no post should be the exclusive preserve of any State or group of States had obviously been intended to apply to senior positions. It was regrettable to have to repeat that Morocco, which had been a Member of the Organization for 23 years, was qualitatively represented only at the P-5 level and was, moreover, the only country of the North Africa region to have such meagre representation. In that respect, as pointed out by the representative of Spain, it should be recognized that it was rather misleading to view representation from a regional standpoint.

8. The problems connected with the representation of Member States were complex; however, the new Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services, Mr. Jonah, who belonged to the third world, was very familiar with them, and it might therefore be hoped that solutions would be found.

9. Mr. BROCHARD (France) said that on the whole, in the opinion of his delegation, the report of the Secretary-General on personnel questions met the request made by the General Assembly in resolution 33/143, which constituted the framework for a recruitment policy. It was evident that the implementation of the recommendations set forth in that resolution was still not entirely satisfactory; however, the Secretariat could not give full effect to all parts of the resolution in so short a time. When such substantial modifications were made to a system already in operation, a fairly lengthy running-in period must be accepted and undue haste would be a mistake.

10. The various innovations provided for in resolution 33/143 were all of importance, but the one relating to Secretariat posts which were subject to geographical distribution seemed to take precedence over all the others, in view of its implications regarding non-representation, underrepresentation and overrepresentation.

11. In that connexion, one should not be misled by figures or make too hasty a judgement. A case in point was the situation of United Nations staff members of French nationality. It was true that in 1979 France, like a number of other States, was above the limits of the desirable range established by the Secretary-General. However, account must be taken of the fact that, as France had participated in the creation of the Organization, a large number of staff members of French nationality were approaching the retirement age of 60. By 1983, 55 French nationals would have reached that age and left the Secretariat. If that situation were to remain frozen, France would join the category of underrepresented countries.

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(Mr. Brochard, France)

12. The implications of that example should be borne in mind, and care should be taken not to adopt a static concept. The common aim was certainly to ensure that the Secretariat took all necessary measures to establish equity among all Member States, if not immediately, then at least in the near future. It was in that spirit that a competitive examination had been organized in 1979 by the Secretariat and the French Government for the recruitment of three young Professionals in the P-2 category. The successful candidates, two of whom were women, were all under 27 years of age, thus meeting the desired requirements. If the experiment was continued in coming years, such recruitment would enable France to remain within its desirable range in the future.

13. With respect to selection by competitive examination, his delegation wished to express its concern regarding the examinations which were to be held for the promotion of General Service staff to the Professional category. While it was in favour of that form of selection, it felt that it would have been preferable to take interim measures in favour of some particularly deserving staff members, since the reforms now being carried out should not be detrimental to those who, for many years, had proved their competence and their sense of responsibility.

14. On that particular point, as in the case of all the other recommendations set forth in resolution 33/143, it should be borne in mind that the resolution was essentially a framework establishing principles and targets, and not rigid and strict quotas which would be incapable of implementation if taken literally. While his delegation trusted the Secretariat to implement the provisions of that resolution in the most effective possible way, it too would like to have a more comprehensive report on the subject at the next session of the General Assembly. However, the special responsibilities for staff matters assigned to the Secretary-General under the Charter must be borne in mind.

15. Mr. RASOELISOLOFOMANANA (Madagascar) commended the Secretariat for the quality of the working documents before the Committee, particularly document A/34/408, where the tables enabled each Member State to know its position in relation to the Organization as a whole. The numerical data presented in that document gave a clear idea of the present situation, of what action had been taken and of what remained to be done.

16. The fact that there were some 11,000 staff members, accounting for more than 75 per cent of expenditure under the budget, explained why the Committee devoted a great deal of time each year to the consideration of personnel questions. The magnitude of the question justified resolution 33/143, which dealt with it in all its aspects. Clearly, there were still a number of problems to be solved, and it was therefore desirable that the next report should be further improved, as requested by several other delegations. In particular, something should be done about the slowness of recruitment, which considerably impaired the due implementation of resolutions that had been adopted and prevented any continuity. The proper and effective implementation of the various resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly would seem to be the only way of settling personnel questions. United Nations activities were interrelated, and spelling out and correctly disposing of any problem yielded benefits for the Organization as a whole. It was therefore desirable to refrain from any action that would result in carrying forward unresolved problems from year to year.

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(Mr. Rasoelisolofomanana, Madagascar)

17. With regard to the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/34/7), his delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee in condemning the practice of including in the regular budget posts previously financed from extrabudgetary funds. Practices of that kind should not be automatic, and very sound reasons should be shown for any such transfers. The same applied to the conversion of posts financed from temporary staff budget appropriations into established posts. His delegation therefore supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that only 222 of the 255 posts requested by the Secretary-General should be approved. Lastly, his delegation wanted the full implementation of the provisions of resolution 33/143, particularly those relating to competitions organized on a national, subregional or regional basis for selection of staff at the P-1 and P-2 levels, to necessary measures to protect the confidentiality and objectivity of the methods of selection, taking into account the cultural and linguistic diversity of Member States, to non-inheritance of posts, and to increasing the representation of developing countries at senior and policy-making levels during 1979-1980.

18. The Malagasy Ministry of Population and Social Condition had a Status of Women Department, which showed how much importance the Government attached to the problems of women, who constituted more than half the population. Accordingly, his delegation also attached particular importance to arrangements for giving women the same employment opportunities and career prospects as men.

19. Mr. ADAN (Somalia) said that his delegation shared some of the views expressed by the representatives of Australia and Italy, who had said that they were pleased with the implementation of resolution 33/143. The Committee should not, therefore, adopt any new resolution, which, as the representative of Italy had said, would only complicate the issue. His delegation had welcomed the introductory statement by Mr. Jonah, Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services. Where personnel policies were concerned, the important point was that they should not harm the interests of the developing countries.

20. In improving the recruitment of nationals of unrepresented or underrepresented countries, the qualifications, competence and experience of candidates must remain the basic criteria. In that respect, the guidelines established by the Secretary-General in pursuance of resolution 33/143 were satisfactory.

21. The many imbalances in the composition of the Secretariat were interrelated, whether they involved the numerical underrepresentation of developing countries, the underrepresentation of most of those countries in senior posts, or the insufficient number of female staff even from overrepresented and adequately represented countries. All those imbalances were the consequence of the system of basing desirable numerical range for countries on financial contributions. It seemed unrealistic to expect any equitable geographical distribution when the desirable range of a few countries exceeded the total range for entire regions. More equitable ranges should therefore be established in the future.

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(Mr. Adan, Somalia)

22. In saying that, his delegation wished to stress that equitable geographical distribution should not be confused with the recruitment of a few nationals of each unrepresented or underrepresented country. The basic objective of equitable geographical distribution was to ensure a diversity of background among United Nations staff, particularly at the management level. It was from that standpoint that consideration could be given to the possibility of taking steps to improve the representation of nationals of developing countries and women in positions at the senior and management levels.

23. Mr. BRUCE (Canada) said that, since it was too early to assess the implementation of General Assembly resolution 33/143, Mr. Debatin and Mr. Jonah should be encouraged to proceed towards the personnel policy objectives set by the Assembly and towards establishing a more effective recruitment policy.

24. With regard to competitions for promotion to the Professional category, his delegation considered that the principle of competitive examinations established in resolution 33/143, section I, paragraph 1 g, remained valid, but that the modalities of its implementation were the responsibility of the Secretary-General. Apparently the staff questioned, inter alia, the relevance of seniority and performance to the competitions. The Secretary-General should be given adequate time to work out a solution to that matter and should be requested to report at the thirty-fifth session on how the competitive examination would be implemented.

25. With regard to the matter of staff access to the General Assembly through the Fifth Committee, it was of course desirable for the Committee to be informed on staff views concerning the establishment of personnel policies, and the Secretary-General should study the question and report on it. However, the Fifth Committee should not become an arbiter or intermediary between the staff and the Secretary-General; personnel management was the undivided responsibility of the Secretary-General, and it was to be hoped that he would take that consideration into account in submitting any proposal which would provide the Committee with a better awareness of staff views on relevant issues.

26. Mr. THOMAS (Trinidad and Tobago) expressed appreciation of the efforts exerted by Mr. Gherab, congratulated Mr. Jonah on his appointment as Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services and offered him every co-operation. His delegation, which had joined in the drafting of General Assembly resolution 33/143, looked forward to evaluating its implementation at the thirty-fifth session. It hoped that the initial misunderstanding and hesitation which the resolution had caused in the Administration, despite its balance and clarity, were now ended and that the Secretary-General would submit a comprehensive report at the next session. The report on the composition of the Secretariat in document A/34/408 was of course an interim one, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services who had only recently assumed his duties, would need time to give full effect to resolution 33/143.

(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

27. Although the Committee had requested data on the retirement age provision, paragraphs 25 to 28 of the report dealt only with exceptions to that provision. In addition to the information already requested, his delegation would like to know what percentage of language staff would be maintained through exceptions, what duty stations were referred to in paragraph 27 and what were the likely numbers of staff involved, before agreeing to exceptions to a newly established provision.

28. He noted that according to paragraph 10 of the Secretary-General's report, dealing with the non-inheritance of posts, heads of departments and offices had simply received instructions that that rule was "to be taken into account", whereas in resolution 33/143 the Secretary-General had been expressly requested to ensure that the principle was "applied faithfully". He would like to be reassured on that point. Moreover, the rule should also apply to heads of departments and offices themselves. Nor was there any reason why it should apply particularly to nationals of underrepresented or marginally represented States, as paragraph 10 seemed to suggest, when the provision pertained to all Member States.

29. His delegation was happy to see that the provisions of resolution 33/143 on the recruitment of women, youth and nationals of unrepresented or underrepresented States were being applied in an integrated manner. His delegation had at first been alarmed by the rigidity with which the Secretary-General had proposed to meet the target of 40 per cent recruitment from unrepresented or underrepresented States, but had concluded that the guidelines set out in paragraph 7 in fact constituted the most practical approach and were designed to minimize disproportions in recruitment from office to office. When read in conjunction with paragraph 8, the guidelines in paragraph 7 did not in any way contradict Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter. It was to be hoped that the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services would continue to apply those guidelines with justice and wisdom.

30. When the target for the recruitment of nationals of unrepresented and underrepresented countries had been established at 40 per cent of all vacancies in Professional posts, there had been an understanding among the majority of delegations that the resolution should not be interpreted as a bar to recruitment of personnel from overrepresented States. He recognized that the recruitment of nationals of overrepresented countries must be reduced in relation to recruitment from countries within the desirable range, but the recruitment of nationals of overrepresented countries must not be excluded or considered merely as an act of convenience, especially in the case of developing countries. He hoped that delegations would restate their position on the question so that the Assistant Secretary-General would know how the majority understood the provision on recruitment in General Assembly resolution 33/143. If minority views sometimes prevailed - as witnessed by the fact that the real growth rate of the budget had been limited to 0.8 per cent to satisfy a few members who had requested a zero real growth rate - it was to be hoped that the wishes of the majority, constituted by the developing countries, would be taken into consideration on personnel questions. Two days earlier, a delegate had declared that if the Assembly adopted a resolution on personnel questions it would not be given consideration; however, that was a matter for sovereign States to decide.

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(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

31. With regard to the competitive examinations for promotion to the Professional category, it should be recalled that it had been on the basis of findings by the Joint Inspection Unit that resolution 33/143 had established that method of promotion, on the one hand to provide equal opportunities for promotion to all General Service staff who had attained the G-5 level, and on the other hand to ensure that the staff promoted to the Professional category had the required qualifications.

32. The delegations, among them his own, which had supported the adoption of a provision to that effect in resolution 33/143 had wished to enhance the career prospects of all by a more equitable selection. Furthermore, the United Nations was expanding the practice of holding competitive examinations for recruitment to the P-1 and P-2 grades outside the Secretariat so as to put all candidates on an equal footing. The competitive examinations seemed to have met with some opposition from staff, who were contesting primarily the methods of implementation. Since no one could deny that the competitive method of selection was the one which assured the greatest measure of objectivity and fairness, his delegation supported the establishment of the competitive examinations. It would nevertheless be prepared to examine any other system of objective evaluation that might be proposed by delegations, staff or the Administration, but under no circumstances would it accept the continuation of the current subjective practice.

33. Even though it could not be expected that the initial project would be ideal, the preparation and organization of the examinations must be such as to provide the basis for reasonable attainment of the proposed objectives. The preparation and administration of the examinations was a function of the Secretary-General, once the guidelines had been established. The views of the staff should, however, be taken into account in preparing the examinations and they should be organized so as to promote their interests. Where a substantial number of the staff had difficulties with certain aspects of the examinations, their position should be made known to the Fifth Committee, in conjunction with the measures the Administration was proposing to meet those difficulties. In preparing the examinations, the Administration should refer to the Fifth Committee any matters which required clarification. The experience acquired by the Administration in the process would serve as a lesson to improve techniques for future examinations.

34. Although his delegation did not think that because a General Service staff member had held a P-1 or P-2 post for a substantial period of time that staff member was thereby entitled to the post, it would like to know how the Administration proposed to recognize that situation. His delegation believed that all staff members who fulfilled the requirements should be eligible to compete for identified posts, that occupational groups must be properly but not too narrowly delineated, and that disproportionate resources should not be utilized to select General Service staff for vacant Professional posts.

(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

35. The General Assembly had set a 30-per-cent limit to the number of Professional posts to be filled by the promotion of General Service staff, but whatever the percentage, there would always be some who considered it insufficient. The real issue was the need to set up proper career structures, either through a unified structure or through streams of career structures enabling staff at the G-5 level to advance in their functions. The United Nations would willingly or unwillingly have to face the need for suitable career structures to meet the needs of some 6,000 to 7,000 frustrated staff members. In that regard, the adoption of the 30-per-cent figure was merely an interim measure, pending a resolution of the general situation. His delegation suggested, as it had already done two years earlier, that the General Service range should be complemented by parallel senior executive and secretarial ranges. The problem had already arisen in relation to the supervisors in the typing services; the General Assembly had recognized that the duties involved in those posts needed some compensation above the G-5 level but did not justify reclassification to the P-2 level, and had urged the Secretary-General to study the restructuring of the General Service category to provide additional compensation for the supervisors of those sections. Other similar cases existed, and nothing short of a restructuring in the interests of all personnel could solve the growing number of problems.

36. Turning to the question of the composition of the Secretariat and particularly the issue of desirable ranges, he noted that, despite demands from the developing countries for a new set of desirable ranges, there had been little or no improvement over the years: in 30 years, the minimum desirable range had moved from 1-3 to only 2-7. His delegation, which was among those which had sponsored a resolution establishing the latter range, still believed that the change had been only a token increase in desirable ranges for developing countries, and that a new approach was required to make those ranges compatible with the dynamic evolution of the Organization. Such a new approach would be timely, since with the introduction of a new scale of assessments the desirable ranges would be revised in 1980.

37. According to the information provided in document A/34/408, under the current system of desirable ranges, the upper limits of the desirable ranges of the developing countries added up to 1,028 posts out of a total of 3,106 posts, while the upper limits of the developed countries, the countries of Eastern Europe and China added up to 2,088 posts. In other words, 114 States, or 75 per cent of the membership of the Organization, were entitled to no more than 30 per cent of posts, while the remaining 37 States were entitled to 70 per cent of posts. Similarly, Africa, which comprised 49 developing States Members of the Organization, was entitled to a maximum of 304 posts, while Western Europe, with 18 developed countries, had a maximum entitlement of 701 posts. As to Asia and the Pacific, 21 countries of that area had a maximum entitlement of 317 posts and the 4 remaining countries of the area had a maximum entitlement of 349 posts. In North America and the Caribbean, 7 countries had a maximum entitlement of 50 posts, while the remaining 2 countries of that grouping had a maximum entitlement of 573 posts. Such examples showed the majority of the Members of the Organization - the developing countries - to be entitled to startlingly fewer posts than the minority, which was made up largely of developed countries. He could not understand how it could be maintained that there was no difference between developed and developing countries with respect to geographical representation. In numerical terms, the developing countries were grossly underrepresented, both singly and collectively.

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(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

38. That unfortunate situation reflected world realities, regarding which change was sought, with little success so far. It was the result of the practice of calculating desirable ranges primarily on the basis of contributions. Thus, in calculating the minimum desirable range (2-7 posts), weights of 65.9 per cent, 25.3 per cent and 8.8 per cent were assigned to the contribution, membership and population factors respectively. While the historical basis for that weighting was understandable, it was now out-dated and should be reviewed and brought into line with the realistic requirements of the membership of the Organization.

39. For the majority of the Members of the Organization, the issue of desirable ranges was not entirely a question of underrepresentation or overrepresentation, but rather of an imbalance which favoured the rich minority and which should be corrected by new weighting of the various criteria. That would require the agreement of the rich minority that contributions in absolute terms should not continue to be the determining factor in the establishment of desirable ranges. In addition, the Organization had achieved a degree of universality which required a revision of the weight attached to the membership factor in the determination of new ranges.

40. Once those matters had been dealt with, his delegation would suggest: first, that the existing ranges, the basis of which was not in the least "desirable" for the majority of States, should be revised; second, that a weighting of 50 per cent, or a weight at least equal to that assigned to the contribution factor, should be applied to the membership factor; third, that, pending a revision of the ranges, of every 10 nationals of overrepresented States recruited, nine should, for reasons of equity, be from developing countries (the actual ratio between April and September 1979 had been 2:1) provided that the candidates met the requirements laid down in the Charter and without prejudice to resolution 33/143; and, lastly, that a new formula for calculating weighted desirable ranges should be worked out.

41. Of course, the Organization needed money if it was to be able to function, and recognition should be given to those States which made the highest contributions. But without Members, the Organization could not exist at all. Accordingly, it was essential to strike a judicious balance between the membership and contribution factors in the calculation of the new desirable ranges.

42. Mr. GOSS (Australia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he wished to correct two misinterpretations of his remarks by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago. First, in his statement at an earlier meeting, he had not denied the existence of developed countries and developing countries. He had simply stated that the situation of Member States with regard to equitable geographical distribution of posts in the Secretariat cut across the lines of developed and developing countries. There were cases of developed countries that were grossly underrepresented and of developing countries that were overrepresented.

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(Mr. Goss, Australia)

43. Secondly, his delegation had not intended to suggest that, if a resolution on personnel questions was to be adopted at the current session, it would be disregarded. Taking a strictly pragmatic view of the matter, his delegation had observed that it would be impossible to draw up at the current session an omnibus resolution on personnel questions since the Committee had the proposed programme budget on its agenda. Proper consideration of a substantive resolution on personnel questions therefore seemed out of the question.

44. Mr. JONAH (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services), replying to questions asked by the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago, said that a conference room paper would be issued shortly on the question of the Panel to Investigate Allegations of Discriminatory Treatment established in pursuance of paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 31/26. The information which the Secretary-General would provide in that paper would undoubtedly answer the questions concerning the Panel which had been asked by various delegations.

45. A number of statements had been made on the question of promotion to the Professional category of staff in other categories. It would be hard to explain in detail the difficulties posed by the organization of a competitive examination to govern such promotion. In his previous statements, he had referred members to the reports which the Joint Inspection Unit and the Secretary-General had submitted in 1976 on what was apparently a long-standing problem. The matter had been the subject of very long and detailed discussions with the representatives of the staff, the Administrative Management Service and staff members at duty stations away from Headquarters. The discussions had been continuous, and when the first circulars relating to the competitive examination had been issued, most of the difficulties seemed to have been ironed out. However, problems had arisen some three weeks earlier, even though the elected representatives of the United Nations staff continued to support the Administration's position. Thus, questions had been asked concerning the haste with which the Secretariat had allegedly moved to hold the competitive examination, whereas complaints were being voiced in general over the slow pace with which it was implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 33/143. It would be recalled that, on 5 July 1979, the Staff Council had adopted resolution 5 (27/SC/RES/5), paragraph (f) of which emphasized the importance of promotion machinery.

46. There had also been criticism, first, of the 10 per cent bonus to be given to some candidates in the competitive examination, as outlined in paragraph 27 of the Administrative Instruction ST/AI/268 and, second, of the selection of posts to be filled from the competitive examination, as enumerated in annex I of circular ST/IC/79/54. As to the former question, the percentage of the bonus had been decided on following negotiations with the staff representatives, who had themselves put forward the idea of a bonus. Regarding the latter issue, it should be noted that the Secretariat departments and offices had been requested to indicate those posts which could be filled through the competitive examination.

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(Mr. Jonah)

47. In terms of complying with principles, every effort had been made to implement the decisions of the General Assembly, which had called for the use of competitive methods of selection. After studying all possible alternatives, it had been agreed with the staff that advancement should be by competitive examination, in its present format, despite the disadvantages such a method entailed. The Administration would have been prepared to agree to exceptions, but the staff representatives had insisted, as was their right, on adherence to the rule. There had also been criticism of the manner in which the circulars and administrative instructions had been issued. As the officer in charge of personnel services, he had had both to respect strict time-limits and to respond to concerns to which the competitive examination had given rise. Transitional measures had been adopted to safeguard the rights of staff members who had expected to be promoted on 1 January 1979.

48. It had been pointed out that the posts set aside for the 1979 examination exceeded 30 per cent - the proportion set by the General Assembly - of the total number of posts at the P-1 and P-2 levels for which appointments were to be made. It should be borne in mind that it was difficult to forecast exactly the number of posts to be filled at any given time. Moreover, if the competitive examination helped to identify a greater number of gifted candidates than there were posts, it would be sound policy to promote them to the Professional category, exercising a degree of flexibility in the interests of the Organization.

49. The new system for promotion to the Professional category had been designed to respond to the wishes of the General Assembly in such a way as to meet two main conditions. First, it had been organized on the basis of occupational groups, in accordance with the scheme developed by ICSC, so as to ensure that the General Service staff promoted were qualified to carry out various functions and thus be able to move ahead in their new responsibilities. That was highly important since all General Service staff members with five years' seniority had permanent contracts.

50. Secondly, the competitive examination had to be compatible with the recruitment examinations for outside candidates from unrepresented or underrepresented Member States, which must be held annually, as decided by the General Assembly. The difference between the two competitive examinations was that candidates for the former were already staff members with at least five years' experience in the Organization and did not necessarily have university degrees. Consequently, in that examination, greater stress was placed on the core paper to test knowledge of the structure of the United Nations. In the case of the specialized papers, there would be no basic differences. The level was analogous to that of the recruitment examinations held recently in Italy, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom and France. The two examinations had to be comparable so that General Service staff who were promoted would be able to perform their new Professional functions on an equal footing with staff recruited from outside.

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(Mr. Jonah)

51. There was no reason to assume any inability on the part of staff members already performing the functions of the posts listed in annex I to information circular ST/IC/79/54 to reply correctly to questions to test their knowledge of the United Nations and their analytical capacity, or to summarize a statement made before a United Nations body. They were no less likely to be able to reply to questions relating to their occupational group. General Service staff in receipt of a special post allowance had every chance of passing the written papers, given that they would receive a 10 per cent increase in their mark. In view of their record of performance it would be unfair to assume that their respective departments had been wrong to assign them to the posts in which they were currently performing or that they would be incapable of passing the test.

52. During the transitional period, it would be preferable to treat individual problems as exceptions, without prejudice to the interests of any other staff member, as laid down in rule 112.2 of the Staff Rules (ST/SGB/Staff Rules/1/Rev.4). Any changes made in the machinery that had been set up would only weaken it and expose the Secretary-General to appeals.

53. On the subject of the petitions, he said that his principle was to defend the interests of the staff of the Secretariat as a whole, not those of a small minority. More than 700 staff members had applied to take the competitive examination for promotion to the Professional category, and the representations of staff at New York should not be allowed to damage the chances of staff at other duty stations. The attitude of the Secretary-General in supposedly having allowed himself to be influenced by the staff during the collective action which had taken place at Geneva had been criticized. Yet, currently, he was being taken to task for not paying heed to the concerns of a few staff members. The Administration was pursuing its contacts with the elected staff representatives in order to find a solution which would allay the understandable anxiety of some members of the Secretariat.

AGENDA ITEM 98: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)
(A/34/6 and Add.1, A/34/7)

First reading (continued)

Section 22. Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (continued)

54. Mr. GOSS (Australia) noted that the Committee found itself faced with the same dilemma as had the Advisory Committee in considering the appropriations requested under section 22. On the one hand, it was necessary to respond to the decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly, which had recommended the transfer to the regular budget of a substantial portion of the cost of the remaining administrative activities of the core programme that were being financed from extrabudgetary funds, and, on the other, to consider the requests submitted by the Secretary-General, in particular with reference to the transfer of nine posts to the regular budget. The Advisory Committee had been unable to reach a decision and had refrained from giving any guidance to the Fifth Committee. What it undoubtedly should have done was clearly to state the alternatives; that would have facilitated the work of the Fifth Committee.

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(Mr. Goss, Australia)

55. His delegation was not opposed in principle to the transfer to the regular budget of posts financed from extrabudgetary resources. When resources permitted, it was interesting to experiment, even if it meant discontinuing the experiment as the need arose. His delegation would be inclined to adopt a flexible approach to real growth under that section of the budget - which the Secretary-General estimated at 30.8 per cent - especially since the body in question was a relatively new one. It would seemingly be difficult not to implement the provisions of paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 32/56, the aim of which was to put the Office of the Co-ordinator on a sound financial basis.

56. However, his delegation was concerned at the large number of vacant posts in the Office of the Co-ordinator; the arguments presented by the Secretary-General did not explain why the vacancy rate was so much higher than elsewhere. It also has some doubts about posts financed from extrabudgetary resources, which were established without any real control by the Advisory Committee. It hoped to have the Secretary-General's replies to the various questions raised by the Libyan delegation, as they would permit a more detailed discussion.

57. In the absence of any recommendation from the Advisory Committee, his delegation was ready to approve the proposal of Pakistan to reject the post reclassifications requested by the Secretary-General and to approve an appropriation of \$4,442,200 under section 22.

58. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his country would continue its past practice of providing a wide range of assistance to countries hit by natural disasters. On the other hand, the Soviet Union could not agree to all Member States bearing the responsibility for financing activities which benefited only a small number of States. Such expenditure should be purely temporary in nature. Moreover, his delegation believed that the transfer to the regular budget of posts previously financed from extrabudgetary resources was an unacceptable practice which ran counter to the sound management of United Nations resources. He recalled that, since 1 January 1978, his country had deducted from its contribution that portion corresponding to the financing of any such posts transferred to the regular budget, and said that it would continue to do so.

59. Mr. BROCHARD (France) said that the appropriation requested under section 22 represented an increase of 33.9 per cent in comparison with the revised appropriations for 1978-1979. When setting up the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, the General Assembly had envisaged that it would have a small secretariat and for 1976-1977 a mere 15 posts had been charged to the regular budget. That number had since risen to 33, an increase of 120 per cent. His delegation had no wish to criticize the activities of the Office, but pointed out that such a growth rate was clearly in excess of the average growth rate recommended by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination. The large increase was essentially due to the transfer to the regular budget of nine posts previously financed from extrabudgetary resources, a transfer his country could not accept. For that reason it would be willing to support the United States proposal to reduce the appropriation requested under section 22 to \$3,424,900.

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60. Mr. TUNSALA (Zaire) said that his delegation could not but welcome with satisfaction the Secretary-General's initiative in strengthening the activities of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, and reaffirmed its support for the Secretary-General's request to transfer nine posts to the regular budget. It was surprised and indignant to hear certain States resist the transfer of expenditure for such activities to the United Nations regular budget and oppose provision in the regular budget of a sum of \$948,400 to fund the nine posts proposed for transfer, while, on another occasion, they had insisted that several million dollars should be charged to certain other sections of the budget.

61. Mr. PAL (India) said that his delegation was surprised that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had been unable to make any recommendation on the budget proposals under section 22, since the Secretary-General had provided a great deal of information in support of his point of view. Paragraphs 22.9 and 22.36 of the proposed programme budget contained a detailed description of the functions of the posts proposed for transfer to the regular budget. From that description it was very clear that they were administrative functions relating to the core programme and not support functions for technical co-operation activities. His delegation also noted that the Secretary-General, by deleting one P-3 post assigned to technical co-operation activities, was strictly observing the mandate which the General Assembly had given him. Finally, it supported the proposal of the delegation of Pakistan to approve the appropriation requested by the Secretary-General under section 22.

62. Mr. SWEGER (Sweden) said that his delegation attached great importance to the activities undertaken by the office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator and therefore supported the proposal of the delegation of Pakistan, including the transfer of nine posts to the regular budget. However, it agreed with the Advisory Committee's suggestion that the reclassification of two of those posts from P-2 to P-3 (A/34/7, para. 22.9) should be rejected.

63. Mr. PICO DE COAÑA (Spain) said he regretted that the Advisory Committee had merely stated that "before a proposed transfer can be approved, however, there is need to ascertain whether the related administrative activities can be discharged under the regular budget without an increase in staff through a reordering of priorities" (A/34/7, para. 22.6) instead of providing the Fifth Committee with more detailed consideration of the subject. His delegation was ready to approve the appropriations requested under section 22, including the proposed transfer of posts, but not their reclassification. It believed, however, that in the future any deviation from the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on the average growth rate must remain the exception rather than the rule.

64. He also asked whether some of the posts to be included in the regular budget were unfilled and, if so, how long they would remain unfilled. Lastly, his delegation would like official confirmation of the figures submitted by the United States delegation in its proposal.

65. Mr. HAMZAH (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation supported the proposals by the Pakistan delegation and by the Secretary-General relating to the proposed transfer of nine posts and shared the concern of the Libyan delegation.

66. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) asked whether the recruitment of professional staff in the Secretariat of the length of contracts offered depended on the source of financing of the post or posts to be filled - in other words, whether there was any obstacle to granting staff recruited for the Office of the Co-ordinator fixed-term contracts for two years, which was the normal term of an initial contract. In the opinion of his delegation, the reply to that question would justify or invalidate the proposal of the Pakistan delegation.

67. Mr. BEGIN (Director, Budget Division), replying to the various questions raised by delegations, said that the problems encountered in the recruitment of staff for the Office of the Co-ordinator had stemmed from the special nature of the posts to be filled and the limited number of candidates likely to be available for such posts. At present, all posts proposed for transfer had been filled, except one, which would be filled very shortly. The other posts required the recruitment of highly specialized staff (hydrologist, meteorologist, volcanologist/seismologist), and for that reason it was impossible to utilize staff that had been available to the Office at the beginning of January 1978. The recruitment procedure had taken its normal course, and it had proved possible to fill all the posts during 1979.

68. He confirmed that the Office had been reorganized two years earlier and had been given a relatively flexible structure designed so that, although it was divided according to geographical sector, one section could, where necessary, call upon the services of staff from another section, particularly since there was some complementarity between the skills possessed by the staff of different sections. With regard to extrabudgetary resources, he said that the fund for which grants of \$400,000 had been included under the proposed programme budget for 1980-1981 (table 22.8) had already amounted to \$400,000 in 1978-1979 and had been used up by August 1979. A special trust fund had been opened to raise the amount allocated for each disaster from \$20,000 to \$30,000, taking inflation into account, but, apart from individuals, only two countries had contributed to it. With regard to the Subaccount for Technical Co-operation activities, financed from voluntary contributions, the Office had hoped to have \$1,400,000 available in 1978-1979, but it had collected only \$450,000 (table 22.1); the amount specified for 1980-1981 was \$900,000. In the case of the Subaccount for Strengthening the Office of the Co-ordinator, the financial situation would have been alarming if there had not been delays in the recruiting of staff: the Office had received only \$580,000 in 1979, as against \$980,000 in 1978; the amount available for the biennium was therefore no more than \$1,570,000, which was much lower than the estimated figure (table 22.1).

(Mr. Begin)

69. In conclusion, he said that if the nine posts were not transferred to the regular budget, as proposed by the Secretary-General, a figure of \$1,300,000 would have to be raised from extrabudgetary resources, which meant that the amount of the voluntary contributions the Office hoped to receive for 1980-1981 would have to be doubled.

70. Mr. RUEDAS (Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services), replying to the question by the representative of the United States, said that nothing prevented or required the employment under fixed-term contracts of staff in posts financed from extrabudgetary resources but the Secretariat avoided granting long-term contracts to persons in specialized posts who could not be transferred to other Secretariat services if the sources of financing of the posts were to disappear.

71. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Committee was considering two proposals: the first was a proposal by the United States delegation to approve under section 22 an appropriation of \$3,424,900 (i.e. the sum requested by the Secretary-General minus the amount necessary to finance the posts whose transfer he had proposed); the second was a proposal by the Pakistan delegation to approve an appropriation of \$4,442,200 for that section (i.e. the establishment of the nine posts would be approved, but not the reclassification of two of them). Under rule 131 of the rules of procedure, if two or more proposals related to the same question, the Committee should, unless it decided otherwise, vote on the proposals in the order in which they had been submitted.

72. Mr. KEMAL (Pakistan), referring to the same rule, proposed a procedural motion to the effect that his delegation's proposal should be put to the vote first, since in his view, the debate had shown that the majority of the members of the Committee favoured the proposal and the Office of the Co-ordinator would find itself in an untenable situation should that proposal be rejected.

73. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) maintained that under rule 131 of the rules of procedure, his delegation's proposal should be put to the vote first, as it had been submitted before the proposal of the Pakistan delegation; the fact that any given proposal received support from a number of delegations, no matter how large that number might be, in no way altered the order in which the proposals should be put to the vote.

74. The CHAIRMAN asked the Committee to decide on the procedural motion made by the Pakistan delegation.

75. By 70 votes to 14, with 8 abstentions, the Committee decided to vote first on the proposal by the Pakistan delegation.

76. The Pakistan delegation's proposal for an appropriation of \$4,442,200 under section 22 was approved in first reading by 70 votes to 10, with 5 abstentions.

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77. Miss GUIMARAES (Brazil), speaking in explanation of vote, said that her delegation had abstained because it would have preferred the transfer of the nine posts concerned to be staggered over two consecutive biennia.

78. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) said that his delegation had strong reservations concerning the advisability of transferring posts previously financed from extrabudgetary resources to the regular budget; it did not think that the transfer could serve the best interests of the Office of the Co-ordinator and the States that received assistance from the Office.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.