



GENERAL

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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
Eighth session  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME AND ESTABLISHMENT OF  
PRIORITIES

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The attention of the Commission is respectfully drawn to the terms of resolution 324 (XI) of the Economic and Social Council, in which the Council inter alia approved certain specific recommendations and suggestions made by its Co-ordination Committee. The operative part of the relevant report of the Committee is set out in the Annex to the resolution and includes the following passage, among others, dealing with some criteria "which would provide for the organs of the United Nations and the specialized agencies concerned a common approach to the evaluation of priorities between programmes within a particular field of work and between projects within those programmes":

"The criteria should be taken as a whole, and the order in which they are listed below in no way reflects their relative importance. They are all subject to two over-riding principles: (a) that international action will be justified only in cases where the desired results cannot be achieved by unassisted national action with some degree of certainty and within a reasonable time; (b) that the proposed action must be technically sound and adapted to its purpose. No single criterion is intended to be absolute, nor will all the criteria necessarily be applicable to every programme or project under consideration. Several of the criteria indeed relate primarily to operational programmes rather than to long-term studies which may be necessary to provide a general framework for action.

Criteria for Priorities

Urgency: Is there a pressing need for action of the kind proposed?

Feasibility:

- (a) Can qualified personnel be made available?
- (b) Are local conditions likely to be favourable?
- (c) Will the Governments concerned participate?

Scope:

- (a) Will the proposed action benefit directly or indirectly a significant number of Member States?
- (b) Will the proposed action benefit directly or indirectly a significant number of people?

Preparation and Co-ordination:

- (a) Have the necessary preliminary studies and preparations been made?
- (b) Has full account been taken of work already carried out in this field by other organizations?
- (c) Have the possibilities of action or financing from sources other than United Nations and the specialized agencies been fully explored?
- (d) Is the organ or agency concerned best suited to undertake the proposed action?
- (e) Can the proposed action be integrated into other projects in the same field?

Results:

- (a) Are results likely to be significant in relation to the outlay of effort and financial resources and are they likely to accrue within a reasonable time?
- (b) Will those results be demonstrable?
- (c) Will the States concerned be in a position to carry on the proposed activities after they have ceased to be under international auspices?
- (d) Will the proposed action assist and stimulate national action so as to ensure that the international effort expended produces the maximum results at the national or regional level?
- (e) Will the proposed action assist a significant number of those Member States or those people whose needs for economic and social advancement are greatest?

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(f) Will the proposed action further significantly, the total effort of the United Nations and the specialized agencies for the promotion of the economic and social objectives outlined in the Charter?"

2. In resolution 413 (V) the General Assembly inter alia requested the Council "to review, during 1951, the 1952 programmes of the United Nations and the specialized agencies..." Subsequently, in resolution 362 B (XII) the Council requested its Commissions:

"(a) To review during 1951 their 1952 programmes, using the criteria set forth in Council resolution 324 (XI); and

"(b) To indicate, when new projects are recommended, which **current projects might be deferred, modified, or eliminated** to ensure that the economic and social work of the United Nations will be carried on most effectively."

3. The Economic and Social Council, at its thirteenth session, adopted resolution 402 B I (XIII) in which it took note of the report of its Co-ordination Committee on the review of 1952 programmes of the United Nations and the specialized agencies (E/2121), and approved the specific recommendations and suggestion contained therein. At the same time the Council in resolution 402 B II (XIII) decided to transmit the report of its Co-ordination Committee, to, inter alia, its functional commissions with the request that they should take into account the recommendations contained in that report when reviewing their 1953 programmes and when communicating information thereon to the Council. In the same resolution, the Council also decided to place the following item on the provisional agenda of its second regular session in 1952: "Adoption of United Nations priority programmes in the economic and social fields". Subsequently the Council decided to include this item on the provisional agenda of its single session in 1952. In resolution 402 B III (XIII), the Council stated that it considered that, in order to achieve the greatest possible economy and reasonable stability while endeavouring to avoid the application of budgetary ceilings to the activities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies in the economic and social fields, the Council, its subsidiary bodies and the specialized agencies should endeavour, in undertaking periodic reviews of their programmes, to establish priorities and eliminate or defer less urgent projects.

4. The Annex to resolution 402 (XIII) sets out the recommendations and suggestions contained in the Report of the Co-ordination Committee, to which reference was made in resolution 402 B I (XIII) (see above).

5. The Co-ordination Committee in its report to the Council (E/2121 and E/2121/Corr.1 and Annex to resolution 402 (XIII), paragraph 12) noted "the special case of the Commission on Human Rights, which because of its pre-occupation with the drafting of the International Covenant on Human Rights and measures of implementation had been unable to consider the numerous other items in its programme". The Committee recommended that the Council request the Commission on Human Rights "to consider this situation at its next session with a view to advising the Council of any steps that might be necessary to rectify it".

6. During the discussion in the Co-ordination Committee (E/AC.24/SR.80, (d), pages 21-26), which led to the adoption of its recommendation, it was pointed out that at present the primary task of the Commission on Human Rights was to draft the International Covenant on Human Rights. It was observed that the Commission at its last session had been engaged on this important task almost exclusively and that it had not yet been able to establish a list of priorities of any kind. At the same time it was constantly receiving more work from the General Assembly and the Council, with the result that it was difficult to know when the Commission would be able to deal with all the items on its agenda.

7. Various methods for dealing with the existing situation were advanced. It was suggested that the Commission might portion its time between items on its agenda and devote, for example, two-thirds of each session to drawing up the Covenant and one-third to other items. Another suggestion made was that there might be allowed more time for a session of the Commission, or that the number of sessions be increased, such a measure to apply until the consideration of the draft Covenant had been completed. It was also suggested that the Council might itself decide upon the points which the Commission should consider and allocate certain items to other United Nations organs. It was generally felt that the Commission on Human Rights should devote some time at its next session (1) to considering the problem of how to lighten its

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burdens, including the possibility of transferring certain items to other organs and including also the question of the number and length of its sessions; and (ii) to examining its programme of work and drawing up an order of priority; provided that the consideration of these matters did not hamper the work on the draft Covenant by leading to protracted discussions.

8. The recommendations made by the Co-ordination Committee and approved by the Council included, in addition to that relating to the Commission on Human Rights mentioned in paragraph 5 above, further relevant recommendations which are contained in paragraphs 11 and 20 of its Report. Paragraph 11 sets out the procedures which are recommended by the Committee for application by all Commissions of the Council in establishing programmes of priorities. These procedures are as follows:

"(a) The Secretary-General should report to each commission session the action which he has taken to carry out the commission's programmes according to the priorities previously established, and submit suggestions of priorities for future work, including suggestions regarding projects which might be deferred or eliminated;

"(b) The programme of work of each commission should be divided into broad subjects, a differentiation being made, where practicable, between those of higher and lower priority;

"(c) The broad subjects should be subdivided into three groups, the first group consisting of continuing projects of high priority, the second group of ad hoc projects also of high priority, and the third group of projects of lower priority, which might be deferred or eliminated, or undertaken only in so far as resources permitted;

"(d) It is not necessary to indicate the relative importance of individual projects in the first and second groups, respectively, mentioned in (c); but, within the group of projects of lower priority, individual projects should be listed, if possible, in their order of priority, or some indication of priority should be given;

"(e) In the case of ad hoc projects, there should be an indication of probable duration;

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"(f) The Secretary-General, within his existing authority, should have discretion as to the scheduling of work in order that the best use may be made of existing staff and resources and to take account of unforeseen circumstances which may arise."

9. Paragraph 20 of the Committee's report recommends that the Council "should ask its commissions and the specialized agencies to review their programmes for 1953 and subsequent years in the manner outlined in General Assembly resolution 413 (V) and Council resolution 362 B (XII)".

10. The General Assembly at its sixth session adopted resolution 533 B (VI), in which, inter alia, the General Assembly requests:

- (i) the Secretary-General, with due regard to normal financial procedures, to continue to assist the Economic and Social Council to discharge its obligations under General Assembly resolution 413 (V) and Council resolution 402 B (XIII) by making to the Council and to its functional and regional commissions suitable suggestions as regards priorities and the co-ordination of programmes;
- (ii) the Secretary-General, when presenting estimates of the financial implications of a project in accordance with rule 33 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, to give an estimate of the time required to complete the project; and
- (iii) the Economic and Social Council and its functional and regional commissions, in considering the implementation of General Assembly resolution 413 (V), to focus attention upon the results achieved in relation to expenditure for economic and social activities and to indicate the duration of its authorization of each project so as to ensure that no short-term activity becomes a continuing or permanent activity without a thorough examination of the size, efficiency and other relevant factors of the service concerned.

11. The Secretary-General in drawing up the provisional agenda of the eighth session of the Commission, in consultation with its Chairman, has included on it all items which emanate from the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the Commission, as well as all items whose consideration was deferred to the eighth session of the Commission from its seventh session.

12. The General Assembly has requested the Secretary-General to make to the Council and its functional and regional commissions suitable suggestions as regards priorities and co-ordination of programmes; while the Co-ordination Committee has proposed, inter alia, that the Secretary-General should report to each commission session the action which he has taken to carry out the commission's programmes according to the priorities previously established, and submit suggestions of priorities for future work, including suggestions regarding projects which might be deferred or eliminated. The Secretary-General is of the opinion that, under the special circumstances of the work of the Commission on Human Rights, which were recognized by the Co-ordination Committee itself, and in the light of the special recommendations of the Committee relating to the Commission on Human Rights, it would be more appropriate for the Commission itself to consider the whole subject.