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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME AND PRIORITIES

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In resolution 665 D (XXIV) the Economic and Social Council approved certain recommendations of its Co-ordination Committee relating to the work of its regional and functional Commissions in general. These are set out in resolution 664, (XXIV), Annex, paragraph 3 (a) to (d), wherein the Council decided to:

"(a) Impress on its subsidiary bodies the desirability of limiting their requests for reports to matters of major importance;

"(b) Request the regional and functional commissions, whenever they deem it appropriate, to leave to the Secretary-General decisions on the timing of reports requested by them;

"(c) Request the Secretary-General to present reports in the briefest and most concise form compatible with the thorough treatment of the subjects under consideration, and to ensure that such reports are distributed in all the working languages as punctually as possible and in accordance with the applicable rules of procedure;

"(d) Request the regional commissions and functional commissions, with a view to obtaining the best possible results, to keep under constant review their calendars of conferences and meetings, particularly those of working parties, ad hoc bodies, and subsidiary organs, with the aim of reducing, whenever possible, the number and the length of these meetings;"

2. The Secretary-General also draws the attention of the Commission to General Assembly resolution 1203 (XII) on Control and Limitation of Documentation. This resolution requests the Secretary-General to continue his efforts, in

co-operation with Member States, to reduce the length and amount of documentation produced in 1958, and suggests for this purpose the target figure of 25 per cent below the 1957 level for the over-all output of such documentation.

3. The Economic and Social Council, at its 998th meeting on 13 December 1957, in the course of which it worked out its basic programme for 1958, decided that it would consider at its twenty-sixth session, resolution 1202 (XII) on the pattern of conferences, adopted by the General Assembly on the same date. The Council decided to consider the resolution in connexion with its general review of the development and co-ordination of the economic, social and human rights programmes and activities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies as a whole, and also in connexion with the question of the calendar of conferences for 1959. The Council further decided to transmit the resolution to its subsidiary organs, calling their attention in particular to paragraph 5. Paragraph 5 invites all organs of the United Nations to review their working methods and the frequency and length of sessions in the light of resolution 1202 (XII) and of the growing volume of meetings, the resulting strain on available resources and the difficulty of effective participation of Members.^{1/}

4. The Secretary-General has these resolutions in mind in presenting his suggestions on the Commission's programme of future work. These suggestions^{2/} and the Commission's comments thereon will be included in the further report^{3/} requested of him by the Council in its resolution 665 (XXIV). The importance of the formulation of programmes of work has recently been emphasized by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in a report to the General Assembly^{4/} which states in part:

^{1/} See also document E/CN.4/755 which sets out the discussions and decisions at the twenty-fourth session of the Economic and Social Council concerning the periodicity of future sessions of the Commission on Human Rights.

^{2/} The suggestions made relating to the work of the Commission are contained in document E/2903, paras. 19-26.

^{3/} The Report of the Secretary-General to the twenty-fourth session of the Council is contained in document E/3011.

^{4/} A/3752, paragraph 3.

"... every organ of the United Nations which initiates a work programme should be in a position to indicate an order of priority for items in that programme, or at any rate, for groups of items. Specifically, in considering proposals for additional work, United Nations bodies must have regard to projects already included in their work programmes and, in the light of the relative importance and urgency of new projects, must assign them their proper place in the total programme within the competence of the body concerned, deleting as necessary, items which appear no longer of the greatest urgency".

5. The Secretary-General assumes that in reviewing its programme and in establishing priorities, the Commission will include the work of both the Commission and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.
6. The Sub-Commission plans to consider at its eleventh session its future work, including further studies, and has requested the Secretary-General to present in 1959 a list of rights which might usefully be studied from the point of view of discrimination.^{5/} Any suggestions that the Commission may wish to make in this connexion would naturally be appreciated. It should be noted that the current studies of the Sub-Commission are not likely to be finished for some years, and with the presently available resources a new programme could not actively be begun for some time to come.
7. In its resolution D,^{6/} the Sub-Commission noted the decision of the Council,^{7/} according to which the country studies utilized in the preparation of the Sub-Commission's studies be not normally issued as documents, and requested the Commission to recommend to the Council that a reasonable amount of flexibility should be allowed to the Sub-Commission in deciding on the form which the studies and their ancillary material should take. Whatever methods of study may in future be adopted by the Sub-Commission, it is hoped that the arrangement by which the country studies would be issued as conference room papers only will meet the needs of the Sub-Commission and the requirements of the Council resolution referred to above.

^{5/} E/CN.4/764, para. 188, resolution F.

^{6/} E/CN.4/764, para. 173, and v., paras. 168-172.

^{7/} Resolution 664 (XXIV), Annex.

8. The recommendations of the Committee on the Yearbook on Human Rights are noted with interest. If adopted, they will bring the Yearbook much closer to fulfilling the requirements of resolution 303 H (XI) as well as give effect to the general policy of streamlining the work of the United Nations and of limiting documentation.

9. As stated by his representative at the 578th meeting of the Commission, the Secretary-General is not fully convinced that the risk of overlapping between the triennial reports and the Yearbook has altogether been eliminated. Note is taken, however, of paragraph 18 of the report (E/CN.4/756) where the Committee expresses the opinion that "the Commission might wish to return to the question of the contents of the Yearbook when it has had further experience of the operation of the triennial reporting procedure".

10. With regard to advisory services in the field of human rights, the Secretary-General draws the attention of the Commission to document E/3075. This paper sets forth the programme which has so far developed under these services and contains, to the extent that it was possible within the short period in which these services have been available, an appraisal of the programme.

11. In response to the Council's request^{8/} the Secretary-General will make his views known to the Council on holding a second Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations interested in discrimination and will take into account the comments of the Commission and its Sub-Commission on this subject.

^{8/} Resolution 651 D (XXIV).