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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979

Establishment of an information services unit in the
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

Addendum

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered a note by the Secretary-General on the establishment of an information services unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (A/C.5/32/47), in which he responds to some of the points raised by the Committee in its previous report on this subject to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session (A/32/256).
2. The Committee recalls that in that report it expressed the opinion that, before the General Assembly could take a decision on the most cost-effective type of information retrieval system for the material in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, it would want to be informed of the volume and nature of the data of permanent value available in unpublished material in the Department (A/32/256, para. 9). In paragraph 5 of his note, the Secretary-General states that about 20,000 pieces of material have accumulated during the last five years which have to be processed and systematically stored for future retrieval. The Secretary-General does not indicate, however, how much of that material is likely to be of permanent value. Indeed, both the note and additional oral evidence provided to the Committee by representatives of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs seem to suggest that the underlying tendency is to include virtually all existing material in the proposed system. The Committee doubts that such an approach would be of much benefit to potential users, including Member States.
3. As the Committee stated in its report (A/32/256, para. 5) it agrees that it is desirable that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should have access to selected information of lasting value contained in unpublished reports available in

the Department. In this connexion the Committee reiterates the view it expressed in paragraph 6 of its report (A/32/256) that the examination of existing material can only be done properly by specialists in the disciplines concerned. The Committee agrees that, if it were shown that the computer mode would be cost effective, there would be need at a later stage for expertise in computerized abstracting. The Committee also sees merit in the establishment of institutional arrangements which would eliminate duplication and improve the quality and quantity of available information. But the need for the establishment of a special unit, headed by a chief at the P-5 level as of the beginning of 1978, has not been demonstrated to the Committee's satisfaction.

4. The Committee notes that the proposed unit, as described and costed in the note by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/32/47, paras. 11 and 12) is somewhat smaller in size than was contemplated last year (A/C.5/31/69) and that it is now felt that computer support would not be needed in the first year of operation of the unit. The costs in 1978-1979 are now estimated at \$344,000, to be financed from extrabudgetary sources.

5. The Committee notes that, in paragraph 10 of his note (A/C.5/32/47), the Secretary-General suggests that, at the end of the first two years, the Joint Inspection Unit might be requested to assess the desirability of continuing the operation of the Unit and to submit its recommendations to the Assembly at its thirty-fourth session.

6. The Advisory Committee has no objection to the Secretary-General's proceeding in the manner proposed in his report (A/C.5/32/47, para. 5). The Committee is of the opinion that the Secretary-General should submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session a progress report on the work which will have been carried out in 1978, so that the Assembly can pronounce itself on whether computerization should be undertaken.

7. The Advisory Committee also recommends that the General Assembly should decide that, if the Secretary-General were to accept the offer of voluntary funds in 1978-1979, such acceptance would not imply any commitment on the part of the Organization subsequently to transfer the costs of the operation to the regular budget.
