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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1976-1977

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations
Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Comments of the Secretary-General on recommendations
Nos. 3 and 4 in the report

1. Further to this note of 29 October 1976 (A/31/137/Add.1) transmitting the joint comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) on recommendations Nos. 1, 2 and 5 contained in the report submitted by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976 (A/31/137), the Secretary-General submits his comments on recommendations Nos. 3 and 4 which relate, respectively, to staff-management relations at the United Nations Office at Geneva and to the establishment of a career development plan for General Service Staff of the United Nations both at Geneva and in New York. At the same time, the Secretary-General desires to bring to the attention of the General Assembly a number of changes affecting the administrative structure and procedures of the United Nations Office at Geneva which he has decided to make in order to strengthen the lines of communication, authority and responsibility within the Office.

2. At the request of the Secretary-General, the Controller undertook a special mission to Geneva early in September 1976 to examine the administrative and management programmes of the United Nations Office at Geneva and to prepare a report containing proposals for improving the methods of operation and the structure of the Office. The changes which the Secretary-General has decided to make are based largely on that report as well as the comments thereon by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. They are made with a view to:

(a) Streamlining and defining more clearly the lines of communication and authority within the administrative structure;

(b) Delineating more clearly the administrative responsibilities between Headquarters and the Office at Geneva;

(c) Strengthening the relations between the United Nations Office at Geneva and the specialized agencies, on the one hand, and the other United Nations organizational units at Geneva, on the other;

(d) Improving and extending the channels of communication and consultation between the administration and the staff;

(e) Improving personnel management methods, especially with respect to General Service staff, including questions of recruitment, post classification and career development.

3. Among the steps now being taken to achieve the aforementioned objectives are the following:

(a) The function of the Assistant Director-General in relation to the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva as well as to the Director of Conference and General Services and the Director of Administrative and Financial Services is being redefined and clarified;

(b) Greater administrative cohesion among the various organizational units at Geneva is to be established and maintained through periodic meetings at the most senior administrative levels under the chairmanship of the Director-General;

(c) The Administrative Management Service has been assigned the task of reviewing, as a matter of priority, the delegation of authority from Headquarters to Geneva in the personnel, finance and general service fields, taking fully into account the need for continuing central policy guidance, coupled with a maximum degree of delegation in policy implementation;

(d) The Administrative Management Service has also been asked to carry out, on a priority basis, a full review of workload and staff requirements of the Division of Administrative and Financial Services of the United Nations Office at Geneva, with particular attention to the Personnel Division's work load in order to ensure that the Division is adequately staffed in terms of numbers and grade-levels of staff to carry out the functions which are assigned to it under any increased delegation of authority;

(e) In order to further strengthen co-operation with the executive heads of the other Geneva-based agencies, the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva has been asked to expand the periodic exchanges of views at the senior administrative levels with these agencies on matters of common interest in the field of administration and staff relations.

Staff-management consultation and communication

4. Recommendation No. 3 in the JIU report calls for steps to be taken as soon as possible "to improve the machinery of consultation between the administration and the staff at the United Nations Office at Geneva with a view to creating a better climate of confidence". The Secretary-General has taken the necessary measures to ensure its implementation. The Secretary-General has requested the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva to review, in close consultation with the authorized representatives of the staff, the entire machinery for communication between staff and management with a view to:

(a) Broadening the channels of communication between management and staff so as to ensure open interchange with staff at all levels on matters relating to the substantive and administrative activities of the various organizational units (among others the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRC)) which make up the United Nations Office at Geneva;

(b) Establishing, after consultation with the heads of the main organizational units concerned (ECE, UNCTAD, UNHCR etc.), mechanisms for encouraging periodic consultations between the staff representatives and heads of the units for the purpose of discussing and resolving issues of a local or domestic nature, thus avoiding the escalation of these problems to a higher level; under no circumstances, however, would these mechanisms take the place of the central Joint Advisory Committee, whose function is to deal with issues affecting the Office as a whole;

(c) Ensuring that consultations with staff on specific issues take place at the appropriate level at the earliest stage possible so as to give maximum weight to the staff views in the decision-making process;

(d) Maintaining, in accordance with the principle of freedom of association, total impartiality in respect of staff groups which pursue staff interests within the framework of the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules and which, therefore, accept the Staff Council as the sole and exclusive representative body of the staff as a whole in so far as formal consultations with the Administration are concerned;

(e) Providing, through "house publications", information bulletins, news flashes and summaries and, in other ways, an enhanced flow of information to members of staff as well as to the news media, on issues of common concern and interest to all organizations in Geneva. This should be done in close collaboration with the other agencies concerned.

Career development

5. With respect to recommendation No. 4 on the need for action without delay on the establishment of a rule governing career development for General Service staff of the United Nations both in Geneva and New York, the Secretary-General indicated in a report (A/C.5/31/9, para. 7), to the General Assembly his intention to make proposals to permit the immediate implementation of a job-classification study of the General Service category in Geneva starting early in 1977. This is a necessary prerequisite to the inauguration of a sound system of career development. The study will be undertaken under the supervision of the Classification Team established by the Assembly for the purpose of classifying Professional and higher level posts in the Secretariat. The financial implications of the extension of the classification project to staff in the General Service category are set out in a separate note (A/C.5/31/47).

6. Pending completion of the more comprehensive job classification study, the Secretary-General has requested the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva to arrange with the Classification Section of the Office of Personnel Services to develop, as a matter of urgency following examination of practices of other Geneva-based agencies and after consultation with the staff, an interim set of guidelines for career ranges of General Service posts which would define an appropriate span of grades for the various occupational groups. It is understood that any interim arrangements made will be subject to adjustment in conformity with the findings of the job classification study.

7. The question of establishing a system of examinations and training related to the access of staff to the various grades within each type of occupation and its effect on the present promotion procedures will be pursued at the same time by the Office of Personnel Services. In addition, a suitable training programme will be developed to assist staff to acquire the qualifications required to transfer from one occupational group to another.