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held on

Wednesday, 22 November 1978

at 3.30 p.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MARVILLE (Barbados)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 111: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (continued)
(A/33/30 and Add.1; A/C.5/33/37)

1. Mr. GREEN (New Zealand) said that the introductory statement of the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), like the report itself (A/33/30) had been clear, objective and carefully reasoned, yet sensitive to the complexity of the problems. His delegation was especially pleased to see that, notwithstanding a heavy workload of specific issues referred to it by the General Assembly for consideration on a priority basis, the Commission had continued to work on matters such as the classification of occupational groups, for which it had set a time-table, and recruitment and career development, to which it had decided to devote a substantial portion of its ninth session. Both were fundamental to an improved administration and it was hoped that the Commission's deliberations would lead directly to the preparation of a rational and equitable foundation for the more comprehensive personnel policy which had been the subject of so much discussion.

2. Chapter IV of the report illustrated in specific and human terms the effects of currency instability on net and pensionable remuneration. His delegation supported both the Commission's decision to study the problem of pensionable remuneration, in consultation with the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board, and its recommendations to protect the value of the education grant and the child allowance payable in local currency.

3. Bearing in mind the unique characteristics of the international civil service, as opposed to national services, his delegation found the Commission's argumentation and recommendations with regard to the improvements in several categories of benefits persuasive, although it shared the concern of the delegation of Japan that the proposed extension of the assignment allowance might not be compatible with the more frequent rotation of personnel between duty stations. A reassurance from the Chairman of ICSC would be welcomed on that point. The latest proposal on the end-of-service grant, with the provisions set out in paragraph 173 of the report, was an improvement over the original one, but it had to be stressed, on the basis of paragraphs 170 and 173 (a), that such a grant would be essentially an interim measure, the justification for which might be affected by future recommendations of the Commission. He assumed that, in suggesting on behalf of heads of organizations participating in the common system that the Fifth Committee should follow the example of the World Health Organization (WHO) in that matter, the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, had recognized that WHO's decision was an interim one, designed to meet a particular set of circumstances.

4. His delegation did, however, welcome the intention to absorb the additional costs and hoped that that example would be followed by other organizations participating in the common system. At the same time, it recognized that the Commission's efforts to regulate and co-ordinate conditions of service would not necessarily result in cost reductions, but if Member States believed the

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(Mr. Green, New Zealand)

Commission's recommendations to be the logical consequence of the objective application of a sound methodology, then they had to be prepared to accept the financial consequences, however unpalatable. Acceptance of the recommendations was not only a matter for Governments; the staff and heads of participating agencies also had a responsibility if the Commission was to be able to carry out the full range of functions assigned to it. It was perhaps unfortunate that its first efforts at surveying General Service salary scales, in Geneva and Paris, had produced negative results from the viewpoint of many staff members, with the regrettable consequence that it was seen in some quarters as a tool of the Administration operating under preconceived guidelines to cut costs. His delegation therefore welcomed the Commission's intention to accelerate its programme of surveys with a view to the completion of a general methodology for such surveys. Until then, it was important that there should be no significant deviations from the Commission's recommended scales within organizations or between organizations at a particular duty station.

5. His delegation could accept the recommendations arising from the thorough and professional studies described in chapter II of the report. In addition, it would welcome further elaboration of the comments made by the Chairman of the Commission in his introductory statement on the need for efficient use of staff resources. The Committee should regard the conclusion that organizations throughout the common system had more staff than they needed as a call to action.

6. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that under pressure from the organs of the system - especially CCAQ and ACC - and the Federation of International Civil Servants Associations (FICSA), the Commission had devoted an enormous amount of time to ad hoc measures and very little to formulating general proposals to make the international civil service more efficient. In the four years of its existence, the Commission had confined itself to re-examining limited aspects of existing conditions of service with a view to correcting anomalies and bringing about improvements. Faced with the immediate problems of inflation and currency instability, it had barely laid the foundations for the radical reforms demanded of it. As stated in its statute, the Commission had been established for the regulation and co-ordination of the conditions of service of the United Nations common system, and, more specifically, the development of a single unified international civil service through the application of common personnel standards, methods and arrangements. That was an extremely wide-ranging task on which it should embark without delay. It was clearly not its basic function to sift the numerous demands with which it was overburdened, or to paper over the cracks of the common system whenever its foundations were undermined by any particular institution. In that respect, his delegation unreservedly supported the comments made at the 37th meeting by the representative of Japan on the subject of the regrettable decisions taken on General Service salaries by the International Labour Organisation.

7. It would be better to re-examine the current system of conditions of service and salaries and allowances as a whole, rather than to adopt additional costly measures which overlapped and whose impact and need could not easily be determined. In a situation where, in some Western cities, the net remuneration of

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(Mr. Pirson, Belgium)

international civil servants expressed in dollars was more than double that of the comparator national civil service, it was difficult to claim that the Noblemaire principle was being respected system-wide. Moreover, his delegation did not believe that the post adjustment system remained valid; indeed, it had prevented a salutary restoration of the balance between remuneration on the two sides of the Atlantic. Both he and the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany had independently arrived at identical preliminary conclusions in that regard. By giving rise to accelerated growth of the pensionable remuneration (which had increased by 50 per cent in four years) the post adjustment system was placing further heavy burdens on Member States, which, according to the Chairman of ICSC, would have to increase their contributions to the Pension Fund by \$22 million per annum. The post adjustment system had been put completely out of joint by the current monetary instability, which had accentuated the imbalances in the purchasing power and real standards of living of international civil servants at duty stations on different continents. The Chairman of the Commission had recognized that the automatic adjustment of pensionable remuneration was not working properly and that an urgent review was necessary. The whole system of remuneration and post adjustment should therefore be rethought and, in the interim, the obvious defects in the automatic adjustment of pensionable remuneration should at least be alleviated; otherwise Member States would suffer the financial consequences of a succession of absurd situations.

8. While pensionable remuneration had increased by 50 per cent in four years, half of that increase having occurred during the second half of the current year, the Commission was still taking it as a basis for the calculation of most allowances, which, according to the report, had remained unchanged. The fact was that, under pressure from staff organizations and associations, in the past seven and a half years pensionable remuneration had increased by 110 per cent on average, at any rate at the P-4, step XII and D-2, step IV levels, and pension contributions paid by States had therefore more than doubled. That situation was unacceptable, and the pension should no longer be calculated on that basis. Urgent measures were required from the Commission. According to the report, studies were in progress, but since they were in large part prepared by bodies in which the majority of members had a vested interest in establishing the most generous pension and allowance system possible, the Commission would have to show greater vigilance in order to differentiate between specious arguments and real needs. Uncontrollable automatic increases of pensionable remuneration, which were over-sensitive to currency fluctuations, should be abolished.

9. Where pensions were concerned, the reasoning set out in paragraphs 106 to 117 of chapter IV of the report (A/33/30) on the comparison of pension benefits between the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund and the United States Civil Service Retirement System, on which his delegation already had serious reservations, would become increasingly groundless in coming months due to the uncontrolled increase in pensionable remuneration in the United Nations system. The Commission's conclusion in paragraph 113 that, for the purposes of the "Noblemaire comparison", the inclusion of pension benefits was not vital, was no

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(Mr. Pirson, Belgium)

longer valid. Between 31 March 1978 and 1 January 1979 there would have been an increase of 25 per cent in pensionable remuneration, and United Nations pensions would be very much higher than those of the national comparator service. His delegation could not therefore subscribe to the view of the Commission that a comparison based on net remuneration provided a reasonably reliable interim basis for comparing the effective levels of remuneration of the two services (A/33/30, para. 117). A ceiling should be introduced without delay on the proportionally higher benefits received by senior civil servants. In 1976 his delegation had suggested fixing that ceiling at the level of the maximum pension of a D-2 official with 30 years' service which, on the basis of 1 January 1979 figures, would be an amount in excess of \$40,000 per annum. The purchasing power of that pension would be protected in accordance with the new provisions proposed by the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board. Such a system was already being used with beneficial results by some Member States and would permit the available resources of the Pension Fund to be used to meet the basic needs of its members. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that the Fund had an actuarial deficit.

10. With regard to the possibility of establishing a ceiling for maximum aggregate entitlements to terminal payments, which the Commission had been requested to re-examine, his delegation noted that it was principally the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) which was making the case for the whole range of entitlements adopted or proposed in 1976, and which was opposing the aggregation of entitlements (A/33/30, paras. 154-156). There was no justification for a 50 per cent increase of the termination indemnity paid to a staff member on permanent contract in the case of an "agreed termination" (para. 162). Moreover, that indemnity should no longer be granted to staff members who had reached the age of 57; the arguments presented at the end of paragraph 163 were particularly specious. He requested the Chairman of the Commission to provide figures on the number of termination indemnities paid in the case of "agreed terminations" throughout the United Nations system, and particularly in the United Nations itself, since the introduction of that indemnity, and the maximum amount of the indemnity in dollars. His delegation remained in favour of the aggregation of the termination, repatriation and unused annual leave entitlements, which should not exceed 18 months' pay and should be calculated, as in the past, on the basis of net, rather than pensionable, remuneration.

11. His delegation was totally opposed to the introduction of an end-of-service grant, for which there was no legal justification. If the General Assembly should decide in favour of it, it should not, under any circumstances, be paid to staff members who had reached the age of 57. The repatriation grant, which had been \$5,000 in 1963, had grown out of all proportion, particularly at the higher grades. It was playing with words to say, as the Commission did in paragraph 180 of its report, that the amounts had remained as originally established in 1950. They had increased considerably, and would continue to increase unjustifiably because they were based on pensionable remuneration. The grant should be strictly limited to staff members who resettled in their home countries and, despite the arguments in paragraph 186 of the Commission's report, administrative control of their movements was warranted. There was absolutely no justification for paying

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(Mr. Pirson, Belgium)

the death grant to recognized secondary dependants (para. 187); it should be awarded exclusively to the surviving spouse or dependent children. In any event, it should not be financed from the regular budgets. The arguments set out in paragraph 197 to justify payment in lieu of unused annual leave were feeble, it was up to staff members to take their leave before they retired. The cumulation of entitlements on cessation of service could amount to 28 months' salary; that was excessive, and his delegation recommended that in no case should such entitlements exceed 18 months' salary.

12. Although the justification given for an extension of the conditions of eligibility for the education grant in relation to post-secondary studies was totally unconnected with the rationale on which the grant had been introduced, his delegation was not opposed to it, although it had to be understood that the grant was warranted only for expatriate staff, and only for children up to the age of 21. However, it was no secret that within two years the Commission, at the request of FICSA, would be asking for the age limit to be raised to 22 or 23. His delegation had no objection to the proposed method of reimbursement of education costs, and the special provisions for the education of disabled children (para. 246) had his delegation's full support. For the reasons already given by several delegations, the assignment allowance should not be payable beyond a maximum of five years.

13. Much remained to be done on the issue of conditions of service of the General Service category, but steps should already have been taken to put an end to the absurd situations which had arisen, particularly at Geneva, where the pensions of some General Service staff were considerably higher than those of the high-ranking Professionals who had been their supervisors. He wondered what was preventing the Committee from taking account of the fact that, as stated in paragraph 286, outside the United Nations system gross salary was rarely the basis on which pensions were calculated.

14. Straight talk was not easy in an Organization where adulation often masked true feelings, yet it was essential that representatives in the Fifth Committee should have the courage to speak out on the matters under consideration and to leave ICSC in no doubt as to their views on its recommendations. Moreover, that would assist it in its discussions with the various bodies concerned. He was aware of the difficulties facing the Commission and its Chairman; and their efforts merited the Committee's gratitude.

15. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) expressed satisfaction with the diligence with which ICSC was performing its task. In its report (A/33/30) the Commission provided a critical examination of the various approaches to problems faced by the organizations participating in the United Nations common system, with a view to avoiding ill-considered solutions that might give rise to pernicious anomalies.

16. With regard to the difficulties involved in bringing General Service salaries in the International Labour Organisation into line with the United Nations common system of salaries, he stated that the conclusion reached by the judges of the ILO Administrative Tribunal, as recorded in paragraph 22 of the report (A/33/30), could

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(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

not be upheld. His delegation agreed with ICSC that it was regrettable that the staff of one of the seven organizations in Geneva were being remunerated on a different basis from those of the other six organizations (para. 24), a situation which was perhaps due to the fact that the administrations of some organizations were intimidated by threats of strikes. Strike threats, however, could not be justified in the case of staff paid with funds coming from Member States, including third-world countries which were going through difficult stages in their development, and the situation must be remedied. Subject to those comments, his delegation supported all the recommendations of the Commission.

17. His delegation recognized that the effects of currency instability were most evident at Geneva, and supported ICSC in its efforts to find a solution to the problems caused by such instability and the depreciation of the dollar.

18. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) said his delegation fully supported ICSC's efforts to bring a measure of sanity and order to the basis for compensation in the United Nations system and to the application of the practices deriving from its findings. The key to the success of ICSC lay in the acceptance of its statute and compliance with its decisions by all organizations of the United Nations system. He endorsed the views of those speakers who had deplored the separatist tendencies which, if unchecked, threatened to undermine or destroy the common system of salaries and benefits for the international civil service. The Committee must give all possible support to ICSC, and the Assembly must leave no room for doubt that the full and complete acceptance by all concerned of the common system of salaries was essential to the functioning of the United Nations system. Acceptance of the ICSC statute must signify acceptance of the common system.

19. The Governing Body of ILO should pay due regard to Judgement No. 236, of 20 October 1978, of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal, which had as a body upheld the Secretary-General's decision to introduce a new salary scale for General Service staff in the United Nations at Geneva, since the reasoning and conclusions in that Judgement dealt with precisely the same issues as existed for ILO. The conflicting advice the Governing Body of ILO had received from its own Administrative Tribunal had been given by the judges in their individual capacity. He therefore hoped that ILO would give far greater weight to the decision and reasoning of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal. With a view to instituting a dialogue between the Fifth Committee and the specialized agencies on matters of mutual concern, he suggested that the representative of ILO explain to the Committee why ILO had departed from the common system in the matter of General Service salaries in Geneva and how ILO intended to rectify that mistake. He further called upon the representative of WHO to explain why WHO considered the simultaneous payment of termination indemnities and end-of-service grants to be justified; and on the representative of UNESCO to state why UNESCO had not fully applied ICSC's recommendations in respect of General Service salaries.

20. ICSC had done a good job in establishing equivalencies of grades between the United Nations common system and the United States Civil Service. At its subsequent session, the Commission should proceed to identify the equivalent grades in the United States Civil Service for United Nations posts at the D-2 level and

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(Mr. Saddler, United States)

above. His delegation was not convinced by the arguments advanced by ICSC (para. 90) for not recommending grade equivalencies for the posts of Assistant Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General. The General Assembly, in resolution 31/141 B had requested the Commission to extend its comparison of grades to "all levels" of the common system. He therefore formally proposed that the Fifth Committee should request ICSC to establish equivalencies for those higher positions too.

21. His delegation did recognize that the United States might no longer have the highest-paying national civil service, and it believed that ICSC should keep the matter under review. If the Commission decided that another civil service should be used as the comparator, his delegation would be no less insistent upon fixed equivalencies between that other service and the United Nations system. But it was unnecessary, costly and wrong to pick and choose between the most advantageous features of different systems so as to inflate the salary and allowance structure of the common system of the United Nations.

22. His delegation accepted without question the proposed textual change to clarify the provisions of the Staff Regulations relating to the termination indemnity (para. 164) and the condition which ICSC recommended should be imposed with respect to the repatriation grant (para. 186). The latter condition was completely in accord with the spirit and letter of the Staff Regulations, which represented the final authority for interpreting conditions of service.

23. Although it had no objection a priori to the standardization of the death grant for all organizations of the United Nations system, his delegation wondered whether the adoption of the recommendation might entail additional costs for the United Nations system, and would welcome authoritative views on the subject, so that the Fifth Committee could make its decision in full knowledge of all the factors involved. It believed that United Nations staff members should share the financial burden of providing for the welfare of the surviving dependants of a staff member and that ICSC should recommend for approval by the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session an actuarially sound fee to be levied on staff to help defray the cost of providing protection for dependants through the death grant.

24. His delegation agreed with ICSC that it was inequitable to deny to the expatriate families of handicapped or disabled children allowances for education which were available to the expatriate families of normal children. It therefore supported the provision of special grants for the education of the disabled or handicapped children of expatriate staff, in amounts not exceeding the financial ceiling of grants for the education of normal children of expatriate staff. The provision of such grants should be subject to the conditions prescribed by ICSC in paragraph 246 of its report. But special education for the disabled children of non-expatriate staff must remain the responsibility of the staff member concerned and his country. The organization's responsibility to provide special education for such children should accord with the common practice of local employers. If local employers contributed to national social security systems or the equivalent to obtain such coverage, ICSC should determine, in the context of the over-all emoluments package, whether United Nations organizations could make similar arrangements.

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(Mr. Saddler, United States)

25. ICSC was recommending the establishment of a "floor" on the local currency value of the children's allowance and the education grant, based on the exchange rate between the dollar and the local currency. His delegation would prefer to link the children's allowance, in particular, to base salaries, and to adjust it through the post adjustment system, which was designed to compensate for differences in the real cost of living between Headquarters and the affected duty station. Fluctuations in currencies alone, without taking into account differing rates of inflation, were an inadequate measure of differences in the real cost of supporting a child. His delegation had the same reservation in principle with regard to the education grant, although the amount of the grant paid to the staff member in that case represented only a portion of his actual expenses, and the adoption of the formula proposed by ICSC would thus make little practical difference.

26. He noted that the estimated financial implications of those measures, as of September 1978, should be revised downward considerably in the light of developments on the currency exchanges in New York and Geneva over the past month.

27. The Chairman of ICSC had stated that the proposed end-of-service grant would not be paid to retiring staff members. That exclusion, however, was not specified in the proposed amendment to the Staff Regulations outlined in paragraph 174 of the report. The text would therefore have to be revised before his delegation could take a favourable position regarding the end-of-service grant.

28. His delegation opposed extending the education grant to cover tuition and boarding costs for post-secondary studies at the staff member's duty station. The United States Government did not provide university education grants to its civil service employees, nor did the Governments of a number of other countries referred to in paragraph 232 of the report. The practice of other international organizations was not relevant. Moreover, the proposed liberalization could cause serious morale problems for non-expatriate staff whose children might also be attending universities. The education grant had originally been intended to provide children of expatriates with an education which would permit easy assimilation into their own societies; the exclusion of university studies in the country of the staff member's duty station from eligibility for the grant, in no way detracted from that goal. Member States should not expect the tax-payers of countries not providing post-secondary education grants to their own civil servants to help finance such costs.

29. Mr. BEDRANE (Algeria) said that the Committee was considering the report of the International Civil Service Commission (A/33/30) at a time when his delegation had also to digest a great many lengthy documents, including the medium-term plan, and that, as a result, it was difficult to deal with the issues raised by the ICSC report (A/33/30) in the thorough manner they deserved. In that connexion, he urged that the meetings of the various bodies whose work had a bearing of that of the Fifth Committee should be scheduled so that in future documents relating to items on the Fifth Committee's agenda were available to delegations before the opening of the Assembly session.

30. His delegation had noted with interest the reply given by the Chairman of ICSC to the question raised by the representative of Tunisia concerning the end-of-

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(Mr. Bedrane, Algeria)

service grant, but continued to have doubts regarding the administrative and legal basis for such a grant. An end-of-service grant, especially if the amount was to be calculated in the manner suggested by ICSC, would constitute a gross discrimination against permanent staff, who would be ineligible for it and would receive at the end of their careers only a monthly pension that shrank in value because of currency depreciation, while staff members on fixed-term contracts would receive a golden handshake. His delegation had not been convinced by the argument put forward by the Chairman of ICSC that the grant would serve as an "incentive" and compensation for job insecurity. His delegation was likewise not in favour of leaving it to the discretion of the executive heads to determine the amount of the indemnity to be paid to staff members who were terminated because of unsatisfactory service, since such an arrangement would invite abuses of all sorts. It might be best to refer doubtful cases to a joint body, similar to those which existed in national civil services for dealing with such situations, which would determine the amount of the indemnity within a range to be established by the General Assembly.

31. From its rapid reading of the report his delegation had gained the impression that the International Civil Service Commission was playing the role of a trade union and was defending the interests of the Professional staff. That impression led it to question the soundness of the statute of ICSC and to lament that, perhaps owing to the manner in which its members were selected, the Commission was not always as independent vis-à-vis the Secretariat as other bodies, such as JIU.

32. His delegation also regretted that ICSC had shown little interest in the Fifth Committee's discussion of personnel questions and that it had not participated in the meetings of the various working groups concerned with personnel questions. In its consideration of the situation of international civil servants in the organizations of the system, the Commission would be well-advised to take into account the suggestions made regarding a number of questions which the Fifth Committee deemed to be urgent and which the Commission unfortunately did not plan to take up until 1979 or 1980.

33. His delegation agreed with the remaining recommendations in the Commission's report and, in particular, with its suggestions regarding special provisions for the education of disabled children.

34. Mr. SCALABRE (France) noted that the submission of the report of the International Civil Service Commission had coincided with a period of unprecedented currency instability. Since the beginning of the current session, the currency on which the finances of the United Nations were based had declined 10 per cent in value, and then had regained its previous level. It was difficult to ensure the sound management of a world-wide network of duty stations in countries whose currencies were evolving in very different manners. ICSC had, nevertheless, concluded in paragraph 40 of its report (A/33/30) that the United Nations salary system had performed remarkably well in circumstances of unforeseen strain and complexity, and his delegation concurred, on the whole, in that view. It was gratifying that the Commission had not favoured a change in the unit of account used by the Organization, since the risks of such a step far outweighed any

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(Mr. Scalabre, France)

advantages to be gained, and that given the importance and complexity of the question of salary and benefits, the Commission had decided to defer its consideration of a number of issues.

35. His delegation was deeply concerned over the tendency to separatism evinced by the failure of ILO to apply the new salary scale for the General Service category in Geneva. It was strange that there should be two administrative tribunals within the United Nations system, although the existence of the ILO Administrative Tribunal could be explained by historical reasons. What was more surprising, however, and certainly less justifiable, was that the judges of the ILO Administrative Tribunal, although recognizing that the Tribunal's statute did not empower it to give advisory opinions, had, nevertheless, given an opinion on the new salary scale in their individual capacities and had concluded that, in terms of labour law, the Director-General of ILO should have negotiated with the Staff Union before accepting the new scale, even though the Staff Regulations did not require him to do so. Heeding the personal opinions of the judges, which were devoid of all legal force, the ILO Administrative Committee had entered into negotiations, and it was not clear what stage had been reached. However, as the Commission indicated in paragraph 24 of its report, the very fact that the ILO staff were being remunerated on a different basis from those of other Geneva-based agencies infringed an essential condition of a common system, namely, that staff of the same category in the same duty station should have the same conditions of service. In the view of his delegation, the situation was inadmissible and should be remedied without delay. The same applied to the recalcitrance being shown by UNESCO and WHO.

36. His delegation supported the view put forward earlier by the representative of Belgium regarding the calculation of pensionable remuneration. It endorsed the Commission's recommendation in paragraph 92 with regard to grade equivalencies between the United Nations common system and the United States Civil Service. It also agreed with the recommendations regarding the children's allowance (para. 153), the education grant (paras. 233, 234 and 239), and special provisions for the education of handicapped children (para. 246).

37. His delegation was in favour of the recommendation in paragraph 194 concerning the payment of a death grant, as well as the recommendation in paragraph 164 concerning the termination indemnity, but would have liked those recommendations to be made in a budget year owing to their financial implications.

38. The recommendation in paragraph 174 regarding the end-of-service grant was not acceptable to his delegation. Although the Commission's arguments in favour of the establishment of such a grant were not without merit, the paramount consideration was that, when an individual signed a fixed-term contract, he was fully aware that the contract might not be renewed and that it did not entitle him to the payment of any indemnity in the event of non-renewal. According to the Advisory Committee, the average cost of the end-of-service grant for the entire system would be approximately \$3 million. His delegation was, on the whole, against all special grants paid at the end of service and believed, moreover, that the existing repatriation grant should be strictly limited. With regard to paragraphs 27 to 29, which would be discussed in another context, his delegation reserved its position.

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39. Mr. QUIJANO (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) said that the comments and criticisms expressed by delegations would be of great assistance to the Commission; in previous years it had not had the benefit of the views of Governments regarding its activities. As the first four years of its existence drew to a close - a period during which it had devoted its attention to the urgent priorities referred to it by the General Assembly and the organizations of the United Nations system - ICSC could benefit from the kind of stock-taking to which the representative of Belgium had referred earlier. He would reply at a future meeting to all the questions raised during the discussion of the Commission's report.

AGENDA ITEM 106: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT: REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT
(continued)

Implications of additional languages in the United Nations system (continued)
(A/32/237, A/33/340, A/33/368)

40. Mr. IYER (India) said that, in spite of its title, the report of JIU (A/32/237) dealt with two separate but interrelated questions, namely how to improve the utilization of existing languages in the United Nations system and the consequences of adding new languages. The information on which JIU had based its report was not always incontestable, and the Advisory Committee had raised questions regarding a number of issues. The point made by JIU that existing resources should be put to better use was, of course, most apposite.

41. His delegation could support JIU recommendations 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 14. The recommendations regarding increased co-ordination of meeting schedules in order to make greater use of existing resources were useful but would require more efficient planning of calendars of conferences and meetings, and that goal was difficult to attain. The United Nations itself was not yet able to make the most efficient use of its conference servicing resources, and system-wide planning would require an even higher degree of co-ordination than had so far proved possible. His delegation welcomed the suggestion that the Committee on Conferences should study the question of the optimum utilization of language resources and facilities, although to a great extent that Committee already took such considerations into account in its work.

42. ACC had rightly observed that JIU had taken a somewhat utilitarian approach to the problem of additional languages and had failed to recognize that linguistic and cultural diversity was an essential element of an international community (A/33/340, annex, para. 7). Decisions regarding which languages to use for various purposes rested exclusively with the General Assembly and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies. It would be entirely inappropriate for a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, such as the Committee on Conferences, to make recommendations in that area. While cost effectiveness and functional efficiency were undeniably important, other factors, including the notion of universality and the diversity of the peoples represented must be taken into account. ACC had drawn the attention of the General Assembly to the specific situation of UNESCO,

(Mr. Iyer, India)

whose very mission implied that the use of language was an end in itself and not merely a means to an end. Thus, a uniform approach for the entire system would be impractical and, in the case of some agencies, entirely inappropriate.

43. As to the cost of language services, he stressed the importance of the principle that once a language became an official language of an organization the cost should not be borne by the users alone but should be shared by all member States. He noted that in the report of JIU and the comments of ACC a number of peculiar distinctions had been made and that languages had been arbitrarily categorized as "well known" and "less well known".

44. The concern of JIU and ACC over the so-called multiplier effect was, in the view of his delegation, exaggerated. Since some 80 per cent of the documentation was drafted in English, the addition of new languages would not have as great an effect as was predicted. As to the relay method of translation and interpretation, no major failure in communication had ever resulted from its use.

45. No language could expect to enjoy for ever a paramount position in the world, and the primacy of English was a relatively recent phenomenon. His delegation, which represented one of the most multilingual countries in the world, was prepared to endorse a number of the JIU recommendations but did not consider it appropriate for the Committee on Conferences to study the question of additional languages; that was the exclusive prerogative of the General Assembly.

46. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said the fact that the JIU report (A/32/237) was based on a study undertaken at the joint suggestion of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management at United Nations Headquarters and the Deputy Director-General of WHO raised the question whether the report included all or only some aspects of the information yielded by the study.

47. Paragraph 15 of the report stated that English, French, Spanish and Russian, in that order, followed by Chinese and Arabic, were the languages most widely used throughout the United Nations system. The Inspectors had, however, failed to deal with the dynamic character of the languages and their line of development since their introduction as working and official languages. The figures contained and the comparisons made in paragraph 18 reflected the static nature of the study. It had to be admitted that the languages had all followed the same course of development. The present difficulties of Chinese and Arabic (serious shortages of interpreters and other qualified language staff) were not insurmountable and had already been faced by the other languages. He therefore reproached the Inspectors for their comment in paragraph 90 that the recruitment of qualified language staff presented special problems in regard to Arabic and Chinese, both particularly difficult languages for an outsider to master. As ACC had observed, the Inspectors did not seem to recognize linguistic and cultural diversity as an essential element of a genuinely international community and as a positive factor in international thinking and action (A/33/340, annex, para. 7).

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(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

48. The question was whether the Inspectors had fulfilled their mandate and whether they had been fully mindful of their responsibility when they concluded that any major addition to the language services already provided, or being set up, in the United Nations system was likely to impose an unduly heavy administrative and financial burden on the organization concerned and to divert resources from more productive use (A/32/237, para. 117 (a)). He wondered whether it was the Inspectors' intention to amend the Charter with respect to collective responsibility by recommending that the States concerned should pay for the languages they used. In that case, his Government would have to pay for the four languages uniformly used by its delegation.

49. There was a positive side to the report, namely the objective examination of the situation without distinction between languages and the recommendation concerning the establishment of training centres. All Member States were concerned with the question of savings and any recommendation designed to save money would be endorsed by his Government. Nevertheless, his delegation could not accept the report as a whole and supported the suggestion that it should be submitted to the Committee on Conferences for its consideration. The international mission of the United Nations was incompatible with attempts to treat certain languages as poor relations, to divide States according to the languages they used and to introduce the "user-pay" principle, thus strengthening the stranglehold of rich nations on the Organization and further reducing the role of third-world countries.

50. Mr. SCALABRE (France) said that the JIU report contained in document A/32/237 supposedly dealt with the implications of additional languages in the United Nations system. The Inspectors had given details of the cost and problems of introducing additional languages in the United Nations and the specialized agencies, and in that respect the results of the study were useful, since the legislative bodies should be aware of the financial and administrative implications of their decisions. However, the JIU report had gone further. Recommendation 3 stated that additions to existing or planned language services should be avoided as far as possible. That was a question with essentially political dimensions. As the Advisory Committee had noted in paragraph 5 of its report (A/33/368), not only technical and financial, but also political considerations entered into the decision whether to introduce an additional language. His delegation considered that recommendation 3 was too far-reaching and encroached on the competence of the legislative bodies, which only needed to know the objective aspects of the problem at the financial and technical level.

51. The JIU report was a general study of the organization, operation and cost of the language services and contained a number of general recommendations. The recommendation that additions to existing or planned language services should be avoided as far as possible was ambiguous and could be taken to mean that the development of interpretation and translation services for the existing official languages should be limited. All the other recommendations in the report dealt, not with additional languages, but with the organization of language services for the existing official languages. As the Advisory Committee had noted in its report (A/33/368, para. 5), several of the JIU recommendations fell within the purview of

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(Mr. Scalabre, France)

member States. The principle of selectivity for interpretation and translation referred to in paragraphs 116 and 117 (b) of the JIU report (A/32/237) could easily lead to discrimination. Though it was tempting to systematically reduce interpretation and translation to a minimum and though the resultant savings could be substantial, the international character of the United Nations and the basic principle of the equality of Member States would undoubtedly be impaired. A number of representatives spoke only one official language fluently, and that language was not always the one most commonly used. Many delegations felt justified in opposing what could become a linguistic monopoly, which would be contrary to the spirit of the Charter.

52. JIU recommendation 1 was that language services in the United Nations system should be provided on a flexible basis and only to the extent that they were indispensable for the proper functioning of deliberative organs. If that meant that committees and working groups doing essential work and serving as a forum for important negotiations should systematically be deprived of interpretation and translation in all the official languages represented, such a measure would put some delegations at a disadvantage. A number of representatives already found it awkward to express themselves in a foreign language, and they should at least be allowed to choose the official language in which to express themselves.

53. It was not his delegation's contention that no savings or improvements were possible in respect of language services. As the Inspectors had stated in recommendation 8, savings could be effected through a reduction in the production of documents, especially records of meetings. An attempt should also be made to reduce the number of meetings. Another way to realize substantial savings would be to follow the example of the Fifth Committee and begin meetings on time. Thousands of hours were lost every year as a result of lack of punctuality on the part of delegations.

54. His delegation supported JIU recommendations 8 to 16. It could not approve recommendations 1 to 7, since they raised delicate political problems falling within the exclusive competence of the legislative bodies. It endorsed the ACC comment that, in some respects, the Inspectors might have taken a somewhat utilitarian approach to their subject and did not seem to recognize linguistic and cultural diversity as an essential element of a genuinely international community and as a positive factor in international thinking and action (A/33/340, annex, para. 7).

55. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) noted that the recommendations in the JIU report (A/32/237) were addressed not only to the implications of additional languages in the United Nations system, but also to the broader question of language services in the system. After studying the most recent cases of the introduction of additional languages in the various United Nations organizations, including their financial implications, the JIU report, in paragraph 82, listed the main "problem areas" involved in the introduction of additional languages. The concrete evidence leading to the establishment of that list had enabled the Inspectors to reach their conclusions and formulate 16 recommendations.

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(Mr. Abraszewski, Poland)

56. Recommendation 3 was that additions to existing or planned language services should be avoided as far as possible. Paragraphs 24 and 25 of ACC's comments on the JIU report (A/33/340, annex) gave the reasons why the agencies supported that recommendation. However, an examination of those reasons seemed to reveal that a perfect opportunity was being missed to show clearly to member States the limiting factors of any further expansion of language services or of the introduction of additional languages. His delegation agreed with the view already expressed in the debate that the present level of language services had reached or was about to reach saturation point and that any new addition would make the present difficulties virtually insoluble.

57. JIU recommendation 12 (a) was that long-term possibilities of providing common language services on an interagency basis should be considered by the appropriate bodies. His delegation was surprised at ACC's cold and restrained reaction (A/33/340, annex, paras. 43-44), which could suggest a parochial approach on the part of some organizations of the United Nations system. The idea of common services had a long history in the system and was reflected in some of the agreements concluded between the United Nations and the specialized agencies. However, the practical effect of common services was still rather limited. Greater use should be made of such services, which could be a useful instrument of administrative and budgetary co-ordination. In preparing its next report on administrative and budgetary co-ordination, ACABQ should explore the feasibility of the further expansion of common services throughout the United Nations system.

58. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) noted that the Chief Editor, in reply to a question put by the representative of Tunisia, had indicated that the JIU report (A/32/237) had been prepared because the secretariats of the United Nations and WHO had become increasingly concerned about the problems that were posed by the addition of languages, in addition to purely financial questions (cf. A/C.5/33/SR.33, para. 26). It was therefore reasonable to expect the report to assist those who had originally requested it and propose economical and effective administrative measures to enable the secretariats concerned to carry out the fundamental function of implementing the decisions of their legislative bodies. In that connexion, his delegation endorsed the observations of the Advisory Committee contained in paragraph 5 of its report (A/33/368); political considerations did enter into the decision whether to introduce an additional language; for that reason, several of the JIU recommendations, in particular recommendations 1, 2 (a), 3 and 5, fell within the purview of the member States, and the secretariats of the organizations could only reflect and implement the decisions of their legislative bodies in that regard.

59. The title of the JIU report did not accurately reflect its content, since the report also dealt with the existing services for official and working languages. As ACC had pointed out, although the JIU report had as its main theme the implications of additional language services, the recommendations in themselves related largely to the reduction, control and limitation of the existing services (A/33/340, annex, para. 3). ACC had also rightly stated that the JIU report did not attempt to suggest any means by which language services could be provided for

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(Mr. Ramzy, Egypt)

any additional languages for which a need might arise, other perhaps than to suggest that Governments might themselves provide some translation and printing services (para. 3).

60. By definition, a truly international community could be founded only on the recognition of the linguistic and cultural diversity existing in the world. The concept of the United Nations was itself based on the kind of international thinking that accorded due respect to all cultures and civilizations which had contributed to the progress of mankind as a whole. The United Nations had recognized that fact since its inception. Article 111 of the Charter stated that the Chinese, French, Russian, English and Spanish texts of that instrument were equally authentic. Those were the languages which had represented the main cultural regions of Member States at the time and were the official languages of at least two thirds of the membership. In resolution 2359 B (XXII) and 2479 (XXIII), the General Assembly had stated that the use of several languages by the United Nations could constitute not a hindrance but rather an enrichment and a means of attaining the objectives of the Charter. Member States had been careful not to give the principle of diversity an extreme interpretation, which would have made it meaningless. That was evident from the JIU report (A/32/237). Paragraphs 6 to 10 showed that the expansion of language services since 1945 had been limited, with very few exceptions, to the original five official languages; that such expansion had been at widely spaced intervals, and only when made necessary by changing circumstances or absolutely imperative needs; and that the implications had not gone beyond what could normally be expected when an official language was adopted as a working language by one of the organs of the United Nations. The table contained in paragraph 7 of the JIU report showed that even at United Nations Headquarters the original five languages still had to achieve full parity in all the organs. As far as the specialized agencies were concerned, paragraphs 11 and 12 made it clear that the expansion of the language services had been on a small scale and that there was a great discrepancy in the services provided for the original five languages.

61. Although the JIU report was very helpful in pointing to most of the major problems of the language services, the proposed solutions were inadequate, and his delegation had great reservations regarding them. The report provided valuable information indicating that many of the problems were caused by mismanagement on the part of the various secretariats, which seemed to prefer to adopt the easiest possible solutions in implementing decisions concerning language services. Four of the major problems identified in the JIU report in connexion with the introduction of additional languages were the "multiplier effect" of languages, the scarcity of qualified staff, uneven workloads and competing demands for language staff (A/32/237, para. 82).

62. Another problem, of major importance and not dealt with in the report, was the question of the quality of the language services. With respect to the "multiplier effect" of the introduction of additional languages, the Advisory Committee had reiterated in its report that a section with 10 translators or interpreters

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and two working languages would need to increase its numbers to 20 for three working languages, to 40 for four working languages and to 80 for five working languages (A/33/368, para. 4). That was a theoretical and exaggerated view not supported by the actual state of affairs with regard to the six working languages. There was no evidence to suggest that the inclusion of Arabic as an official and working language of the General Assembly had entailed any increase in the number of translators or interpreters in any other service. As far as translation was concerned, the reason was elementary and should not have escaped the attention of JIU. As indicated in paragraph 18 of its report (A/32/237), the great majority of documents were drafted in English and French. Accordingly, the small proportion of documents drafted in any other language could be translated into English or French by any translator in any language service having the requisite knowledge of English or French and the other language in question. Those documents could then be translated from English or French into the remaining languages. As far as interpretation was concerned, the relay system in the United Nations had proved successful in respect of all languages when the interpretation was done by those who possessed the necessary competence and experience. Consequently, solutions to any problems in that area must be sought in the context of solutions to problems connected with the provision of competent and experienced personnel.

63. With respect to the scarcity of qualified personnel, the Joint Inspection Unit had made the rather curious suggestion that a new category of language staff be created, namely, translator/interpreter/précis-writers. If it was already so difficult to find competent translators, interpreters and précis-writers, how much more difficult would it be to find staff who could perform all three tasks at the level of competence the United Nations required, particularly in the case of Arabic and Chinese? Inadequate recruitment was more a problem than any real scarcity of qualified personnel. Competitive recruitment examinations were held, and some candidates were successful. However, at that point the whole recruitment process came to a halt, and the candidates then had to wait for prolonged periods of time, perhaps for ever. JIU maintained that there was a shortage of qualified Arabic language staff. Following the inclusion of Arabic among the official and working languages of UNCTAD, 17 Arabic interpreter posts had been established in 1976. In 1977 an Arabic interpreters' examination had been held, yielding a sufficient number of successful candidates to fill all those posts; yet only 8 had thus far been appointed.

64. In his delegation's view, the root cause of difficulties in the recruitment of sufficient qualified language staff was the fact that the level of posts and the opportunities for career development available to permanent language staff did not match the qualifications required of them. As a result, such posts were unattractive for well-qualified persons, who preferred free-lance employment, with its well-known inducements and relative financial advantage. It would therefore be useful to undertake the study proposed in JIU recommendation 9. But the study should certainly not be confined to the question of whether the permanent language staff should be increased; rather, its main emphasis should be on ways to make language services more attractive from a career point of view. Consideration should also be given, in that context, to the possibility of upgrading some language service posts in order to align them with the levels accessible to non-language staff in other career areas of the United Nations. That measure seemed especially

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appropriate if it was recalled that the qualifications for employment required of language staff were, generally speaking, more stringent than those required of staff in many other categories. Opportunities for the promotion of language staff must also be improved.

65. Regarding the comment by ACC that there could be no savings unless permanent staff were fully occupied (A/33/340, annex, para. 39 (a)), everything pointed to the fact that permanent staff would be fully occupied throughout the year if the necessary co-ordination was established among the various United Nations organizations. Paragraph 89 of the JIU report stated that, with the increasing number of meetings, the problem had become one of finding enough interpreters and conference translators, regardless of their quality.

66. In short, if adequate permanent staff were provided, and if the necessary administrative measures were taken to ensure better co-ordination between United Nations organizations, so that the best use was made of the services of language staff, the problems of quality, unevenness of the workload and excessive dependence on temporary staff could be solved.

67. He wished to cite some examples of the unsatisfactory manner in which the secretariats had implemented decisions of legislative organs regarding languages, with particular reference to the Arabic language, simply because Arabic was the most recent addition to the official languages of most of the organizations of the United Nations system and the problems to which it had given rise were still vivid. The World Health Assembly (WHA) had adopted Arabic as an official language in 1973 and had decided in 1975 to make it a working language of WHO. One would then have expected a permanent Arabic translation service to be established along the lines of the existing translation services. However, the WHO secretariat had chosen instead, on the pretext of reducing costs - which were, in any case, to be paid collectively by the Arab States until the end of 1978 - to resort to other measures, which could only be described as an attempt to nullify the decision to use Arabic. Instead of creating the 60 new Professional and General Service posts the additional workload required, the WHO secretariat had decided that as much work as possible should be contracted out or done by free-lance staff and had created only five permanent posts, on the understanding that conference staff would be engaged ad hoc for meetings. As a result, it had been deemed necessary to translate documents into Arabic on a very selective basis and, as the JIU report indicated in paragraph 48, to concentrate solely on technical documents and publications of particular interest to Arab countries. Thus, in implementing the WHA decision to adopt Arabic as a working language, the secretariat not only had drastically cut the services envisaged but had adversely affected their quality, since temporary or free-lance staff, for obvious reasons, lacked the experience and knowledge required to translate the highly specialized documents produced by WHO. Similarly, the decision by UNESCO in 1975 to adopt Arabic as a working language had resulted in a disproportionate use of temporary staff alongside permanent staff for the purpose. Such examples pointed to many of the reasons for the problems afflicting the language services and explained why nothing had been done to train qualified staff, why there was increased dependence on temporary staff, why the quality of

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the language services had deteriorated, why there was such severe competition among organizations of the United Nations system for the services of language staff and why language costs had soared.

68. The Egyptian delegation supported most of the recommendations of the JIU. However, it could not accept the principle of selectivity advanced in paragraph 117 (b) of the JIU report unless it was interpreted in the light of the comment of ACC that: "choices will have to be made, and can be made, only by the legislative bodies concerned". (A/33/340, annex, para. 4). Moreover, the principle of selectivity could not be applied in the absence of a clear and well-established definition of official and working languages.

69. Finally, his delegation had doubts about the wisdom of adopting the recommendation of ACABQ that the General Assembly should refer the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and the related observations of ACC to the Committee on Conferences (A/33/368, para. 9), since it felt that such action would not facilitate the work of the Committee on Conferences.

70. Mr. EL-HOUDERI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that despite certain reservations, his delegation felt that the JIU report contained much pertinent comment on ways to improve language services, efficiency within the United Nations system and ease of communication among delegations.

71. His delegation did not oppose the principle of flexibility advanced by JIU in recommendation 1, since it was possible for the secretariats to consult with member States, as needed. However, unless carried out in a manner acceptable to member States, it could give rise to difficulties in practice. The JIU proposal that language services at the regional level be confined to the languages used in a given region was very practical and conducive to savings, but would require revision of annex A of the JIU report in order to make it acceptable to member States. Annex A did not deal with the distribution of languages within regions or distinguish between regional activities and international activities taking place in a given region but involving the whole international community. In that connexion, his delegation had not quite understood the intent of the JIU in notes 1 to 6 to annex A. Was it proposed that Arabic, for instance, should not be used outside the General Assembly and its Main Committees? Or that Chinese should not be introduced in the Economic and Social Council? Or that Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Spanish should not be introduced in activities or institutions in which they were not as yet used, except in relation to the geographical regions covered by those activities or institutions? He would appreciate clarification in that regard by the JIU.

72. His delegation supported JIU recommendation 2 regarding the savings which could be effected by keeping language services to the lowest level compatible with the needs and interests of member States. The suggestion that the translation services might offer scope for economy was relevant, but it was necessary, when curtailing the production of documents, to ensure that the needs of the users were met.

(Mr. El-Houderi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

73. JIU recommendations 3 and 4 urged restraint in expansion of language services and reliance on the principle of selectivity. Those recommendations set limitations on the aspirations of member States and diminished the prerogatives of legislative bodies, which alone had the right to lay down policies. His delegation therefore found much difficulty in accepting them. Member States were responsible for deciding whether or not additions to existing or planned language services should be made. Any limitations upon the expansion or improvement of language services was a limitation upon the means of communication available to member States and an impediment to the promotion of relations among the members of the international community, one of the principal goals of the United Nations system. His delegation therefore objected strongly to recommendations 3 and 4, although it realized that any additional language services would necessarily imply additional administrative arrangements and costs. As ACABQ rightly said with regard to the introduction of additional languages, the secretariats of the organizations could only reflect and implement the decisions of their legislative bodies (A/33/368, para. 5).

74. The United Nations was not a commercial enterprise selling services to users but an organization with far loftier principles. His delegation therefore strongly opposed recommendation 5 to the effect that member States requesting new or expanded language services should consider paying or contributing to their cost.

75. In recommendation 6, the JIU called upon organizations to re-examine their language services with a view to introducing further selectivity. However, selectivity was a prerogative of legislative bodies. On the basis of what criteria could the secretariats, which were the executive organs, be allowed to dictate to member States what languages they should use or what documents should be issued in what languages? Whatever consultation procedures were instituted, the policy-making prerogatives of the legislative bodies would to some extent be eroded. His delegation therefore strongly opposed recommendation 6.

76. Recommendations 7 to 13 could bring about some improvements in language services. Achieving greater control over production of documents, reducing dependence on temporary staff and seeking ways to make United Nations language services more attractive in terms of career prospects, particularly with regard to translators and interpreters, of languages, such as Arabic and Chinese, who were - it was alleged - in short supply, were sound suggestions. Efforts must also be intensified to establish training centres for Arabic and Chinese language staff. With regard to the alleged scarcity of qualified persons versed in those languages, the problem, in his delegation's view, lay not so much in any lack of suitable candidates as in the inadequacy of current training and recruitment procedures. Moreover, his delegation did not understand why recommendation 13, regarding interagency co-operation, was confined to the Arabic and Chinese language services. In view of the fact that the United Nations system had facilities for training translators and interpreters, his delegation did not understand why recommendation 14 called upon member States to create such facilities. Were training activities in the system to be discontinued? Was recommendation 14 consistent with the principle of co-ordination set forth in recommendations 12 and 13? His delegation supported recommendations 15 and 16.

77. Mr. CUNNINGHAM (United States) said that, on the eve of the oldest festival of the host country, he wished the members of the Committee a happy Thanksgiving.

The meeting rose at 6.35 p.m.