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FIFTH COMMITTEE
28th meeting
held on
Thursday, 27 October 1977
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TALIEH (Iran)

later: Mr. SCHMIDT (Federal Republic
of Germany)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979 (continued)

First reading (continued)

Section 23 - Conference and library services (continued)

Section 11A - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (continued)

Section 13 - United Nations Environment Programme (continued)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979 (continued)
(A/32/6, A/32/8, A/32/38; A/C.5/32/12 and 13)

First reading (continued)

Section 23 - Conference and library services (continued)

1. Mr. VOLPE (Venezuela) emphasized the vital importance of conference and library services to the functioning of the United Nations, as reflected in the substantial proportion of the budget allocated to them. His delegation supported the Advisory Committee's position with respect to the lack of uniformity between Geneva and New York in presenting the budgetary requirements (A/32/8, paras. 23.2 and 23.3) and recalled, in that connexion, the recommendation adopted by the General Assembly at its thirtieth session. As the Advisory Committee suggested, those discrepancies should be eliminated without delay.
2. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that he would endeavour, in response to questions put by members of the Committee, to supplement the information provided by the Controller at the previous meeting.
3. The representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom had asked on what basis the Department had assumed a 2 per cent increase in its workload for the next biennium and what would be the impact on that increased workload of the renovation of three large conference rooms at Headquarters.
4. The Committee should bear in mind that any increase in the activities of the Organization was directly reflected in the Department's workload in the form of an increase in the number of meetings, formal and informal, and an increase in the volume of documentation required. Indeed, the Department was the final link in the activities chain. Since it was fair to assume a 2 per cent increase in the substantive programme, the Department's workload could be expected to increase by the same percentage. It should be noted, however, that the Secretary-General had requested only a 0.3 per cent increase in real resources for conference services. Even if the location of meetings had to be shifted because three large conference rooms at Headquarters would not be usable for the first half of each year of the biennium, there was no reason to assume any reduction in the meeting schedule, and pre-session and post-session documentation for those meetings would have to be produced at Headquarters. The renovation of the conference rooms would create many managerial and administrative problems and the Department would have to provide conference staff wherever meetings were being held outside Headquarters, with most shifts of personnel mainly to Geneva.
5. Replying to a query from the United Kingdom representative, he pointed out that, while it had not been known with certainty at the end of 1976, when the Department's budgetary requirements had been prepared, how many posts could be eliminated from the Reproduction Section, the Advisory Committee had been informed as early as the spring of 1977 of the possibility of reducing the staff of the

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Section by 12 posts. No attempt had been made to conceal the resulting surplus; in fact, it had been taken into account in the medium-term plan for the period 1978-1981.

6. The lack of uniformity between Geneva and Headquarters in the budget presentation (A/32/8, paras. 23.2 and 23.3), to which the representative of Venezuela and others had referred, was being remedied. In compliance with the Advisory Committee's recommendation for the biennium 1976-1977, it had been agreed at the highest level that the two Departments would prepare their budgetary requirements on the basis of uniform production and related statistics. In fact, through interagency consultation, they hoped to persuade other members of the United Nations family to follow their example.

7. The discrepancies between Geneva and New York had arisen from the historical development of the two bases of United Nations operations: as the site of the League of Nations, the Geneva Office had tended to continue certain traditions characteristic of the League, whereas in New York the United Nations had developed as a completely new organizational operation. The differences between the two had sometimes been jealously guarded, often with the help of delegations. Moreover, even with uniform statistics, the geographical gap and the difference in the character of operations and in the organs which normally worked in the two cities had created differences in the way the conference services had developed. In order to correct the disparity and prevent its recurrence, an exchange of executive and managerial staff had been proposed. The exchange of such staff between field offices and headquarters was a widely accepted practice.

8. The large increase in the Department's budget despite the assumption of only a 2 per cent increase in workload, to which the United States representative had referred, had been partially explained in the ACABQ report (A/32/8, para. 23.4). It reflected the effects of inflation, the addition of new services, in particular the Arabic language service, and the implementation of previous General Assembly decisions regarding conference staff. The real increase in the Department's budget amounted to \$563,900. As would be seen from table 23.2 of the proposed programme budget (A/32/6), the real growth rate at Headquarters, with an expected 2 per cent increase in workload, was only 0.3 per cent for conference services and zero for library services. The real growth rate for library services in Geneva was 7.1 per cent, or one third of the total increase in the budget of the conference services and libraries in both locations.

9. With regard to the possibility of reducing the cost of travel to service meetings away from Headquarters, a point raised by the United States representative, it should be emphasized that the major proportion of that cost represented travel of Geneva staff to Headquarters for the General Assembly and the balance covered travel for free-lance conference staff during peak meeting periods. It was difficult to reduce the total cost: if permanent staff from the Geneva office were not brought to New York for the Assembly, the Organization would have to pay more to recruit free-lance staff. The large cost of such temporary staff could be reduced if conferences were more evenly distributed throughout the calendar year.

10. The United States representative had suggested the possibility of changing the system of budgeting for conference services in the United Nations family by charging the costs to the various bodies being serviced. Theoretically, it was

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(Mr. Lewandowski)

possible. As a matter of fact, the suggestion raised the problem of meeting quotas. While certain limitations existed for documents originating in the Secretariat, there was no quota for meetings or for other documentation. Limitation of the number of meetings was in the interest of smaller and medium-sized delegations and had been repeatedly discussed in the Committee on Conferences. However, any attempt to control the number and frequency of meetings was fraught with political and economic implications and it was difficult for the Secretariat to lobby for that or any other solution of a problem which had become acute not only for the Department of Conference Services but for the entire United Nations operation.

11. As would be seen from paragraph 23.16 and its foot-notes in the proposed programme budget, there had been a decrease in the workload for the Editorial and Official Records Division. The six posts requested in paragraph 23.18 were not new posts, but reclassifications of supervisors' posts in the typing pools, which had been undergraded for years as a result of a misconception of the nature of the United Nations Stenographic Service. A conference typist in the United Nations had to pass a difficult examination, was subject to strenuous working conditions, including night shifts, and careful monitoring and was asked to perform very exacting services and to assume final responsibility for the stencil which became the printed record. Supervisors in the Stenographic Service were responsible for 50 to 60 staff members working in those conditions. Their supervisory capacity had therefore been equated with the Professional level and a request had been made to reclassify their posts to that category.

12. Waste of resources was one of the most serious problems for the Department of Conference Services and it was for United Nations bodies to prevent such waste - also by starting meetings punctually. The Chairman of the Fifth Committee was to be commended on his success in that respect. The Secretariat was prepared to over-programme meetings; however, if no cancellations followed, it should be authorized to refuse to service an excessive number of meetings. He hoped the Fifth Committee would support his Department on that point and would scrutinize the question of over-programming in connexion with its consideration of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

13. With regard to the French delegation's suggestion that summary records might be produced by multilingual teams in the original languages of the speakers, he pointed out that in current practice the composition of the translator/précis-writer team enabled direct coverage from English, French, Spanish and Russian, so far as possible without relying on the interpretation and drafting of the summary record in the first three of those languages by a team of three précis-writers. Under the system of multilingual teams, at least six précis-writers would have to serve on each team for the Main Committees, but with widely varying workloads, since the volume of statements in each of the languages fluctuated sharply. While the difficulty might be overcome by writing the summary record from the recordings, experience had shown that presence at the debate was an important element in capturing its tone, and the issue of the summary record would be seriously delayed. Since languages lent themselves to summarization in different ways, it would be difficult to achieve unity of the record if it was drafted in several languages. The multilingual system had been used in Geneva, but only in English and French, and had been abandoned with the addition of other working languages for such large bodies as UNCTAD, for example. It should also be borne in mind that, in order to

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(Mr. Lewandowski)

meet the deadlines for the production and issue of records, the précis-writers had approximately 3 1/2 hours in which to summarize the proceedings of a three-hour meeting. That was the basic reason for the procedure of having delegations submit corrections. Every effort would be made to improve the operation and to continue to produce good summary records.

14. He wished to thank the Committee for allowing him to clarify some of the questions raised. Although he knew that it would refuse some of the requests for resources made by the Conference and Library Services in New York and Geneva, the Fifth Committee was the only Assembly body which understood the operation of those services and gave them full and meaningful support.

15. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that his delegation was satisfied with the Secretary-General's requests for resources, as modified by ACABQ, and appreciated the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General to effect economies without detriment to the high level of services consistently provided by his Department. After the reductions made by the Advisory Committee, the budget of the Department would represent a decrease in real terms. After the General Assembly session, other decisions would be taken which would have the effect of reducing some of the Geneva conference services.

16. Mr. RHODES (United Kingdom), referring to the elimination of 12 posts in the Reproduction Section, said that he accepted the assurances given by the Under-Secretary-General that he had volunteered the information that there would be a surplus of posts to ACABQ. He was pleased to hear the Under-Secretary-General confirm that the renovation of conference rooms at Headquarters would have some effect on the allocation of meetings between New York and other cities. At least a preliminary assessment of that impact could have been included in the ACABQ report.

17. Mr. CUNNINGHAM (United States of America) expressed appreciation to the Under-Secretary-General for his replies. He strongly agreed that the idea of over-programming meetings should be re-examined by the Fifth Committee in connexion with the report of the Committee on Conferences. That idea, as well as the suggestion that conference services costs should be charged to the entities being serviced, was intended to place some limitation on the demand for conference services. Unlike any other department of the Secretariat, the entire budget of the Department of Conference Services was apportioned away to other units. He expressed appreciation of the excellent work being performed by the Department and its key role in assuring the smooth functioning of the Organization.

Section 11A - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (continued)

18. Mr. LEMP (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the Secretary-General's request for 15 additional posts for the UNCTAD secretariat should be seen against the background of the considerable expansion authorized by the General Assembly at the previous session against the advice of ACABQ. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee (A/32/8, paras. 11A.6 et seq.) were unduly generous; no increase in UNCTAD secretariat posts was warranted and his delegation was supporting the Advisory Committee's recommendations less than enthusiastically.

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(Mr. Lemp, Federal Republic of Germany)

19. His delegation agreed with the ACABQ recommendation for a reduction in appropriations for travel, where savings could be expected from the transfer of the trade financing programme to Geneva, and endorsed the principle that Deputy Directors should rank no higher than D-2. It further welcomed the ACABQ proposal to analyse the intended staffing of the UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters in greater depth and to report on its analysis in connexion with agenda item 103. Drawing attention to paragraph 11A.12 of the Advisory Committee's report, he stressed that steps should be taken to eliminate the top-heaviness in the UNCTAD secretariat by methods other than merely expanding the number of Professional posts.

20. His delegation shared the doubts expressed by other representatives that enough had been done to avoid overlapping between the activities of UNCTAD and other elements of the United Nations system.

21. Mr. BOMELE (Zaire) welcomed the fact that the budget estimates submitted under section 11A had been presented in such a clear manner. His delegation supported UNCTAD in its task of promoting international trade relations, establishing a new international economic order and implementing the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, and it was important that UNCTAD should have adequate resources at its disposal. UNCTAD had drawn up an integrated programme of action in the field of commodities in the belief that producer and consumer countries were now aware of their common interests. The estimates submitted by the Secretary-General must therefore be examined closely with a view to ensuring that UNCTAD could operate satisfactorily.

22. A large portion of the additional appropriations requested for UNCTAD for the biennium 1978-1979 was accounted for by the 15 additional posts requested by the Secretary-General. Although his delegation was aware of the scope of the new programme of UNCTAD, it could not support all the Secretary-General's proposals concerning new posts. Efficiency was more important than size. It therefore supported the recommendations made by ACABQ in paragraphs 11A.6, 11A.7 and 11A.9 to 11A.12 of its report. UNCTAD must establish priorities and ensure the efficient use of the resources available to it. With respect to organizational changes, his delegation endorsed the creation of a new division "Money, finance and development" and the establishment of a new special programme for least developed, land-locked and island developing countries. Such changes were consistent with the new programme of UNCTAD. The Fifth Committee should postpone its decision on the UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters until the question had been examined by ACABQ within the framework of its report on administrative and budgetary co-ordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies. The Secretary-General had requested the reclassification from the principal level of the General Service category to the P-2 level for the assistant to the Secretary of the Trade and Development Board (A/32/6, vol. II, para. 11A.57). His delegation endorsed the views of ACABQ on the reclassification of posts from the General Service to the Professional category (A/32/8, para. 89), and supported the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the post in question should not be reclassified. With respect to the Secretary-General's estimates for travel, his delegation supported the reduction of \$30,500 recommended by ACABQ but, since UNCTAD V was being held at Manila, would not support any further reductions in the estimates for travel. Finally, his delegation supported the reduction of \$590,000 recommended by ACABQ under section 11A.

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23. Mr. AKASHI (Japan) said that, under section 11A, the Secretary-General's estimates for personnel costs for the biennium 1978-1979 were 10.3 per cent higher than the initial estimates for personnel costs for the biennium 1976-1977. His delegation therefore endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation to grant only five of the requested new posts. The reduction in the estimate for travel recommended by ACABQ was also well justified. His delegation endorsed the flexible approach of UNCTAD with respect to the utilization of personnel resources, and approved the fact that one half of the Professional staff and one third of the General Service staff of UNCTAD would be involved in the proposed redeployment scheme. Such schemes should be recommended to other units of the Secretariat. With respect to the addition of a second Deputy Secretary-General at the Assistant Secretary-General level, there was no reason for the Fifth Committee to change the decision it had taken at the thirty-first session to reject that proposal. The Secretary-General had stated that the new Assistant Secretary-General, if appointed, would have a particular responsibility in the field of external relations with Governments and regional groups and in substantive collaboration with other institutions of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions. However, those activities were the responsibility of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD himself, and the creation of the new post might lead to rivalry between two competing centres of power. With respect to the UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters, his delegation cautioned against the undue expansion of such offices in general and looked forward to the Advisory Committee's report on the appropriate size of liaison offices. The UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters was small and did not warrant the redeployment of a D-2 post. It had been argued that the head of the Liaison Office must be able to speak with the full authority of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD. However, if the necessary mandate was given, even a P-1 officer could speak with just such authority. Another reason for caution was the unusually high ratio of D-2 posts at UNCTAD. Finally, the D-2 post earmarked by the Secretary-General for the Liaison Office could be used for the post of director of the Transfer of Technology Division. His delegation fully agreed with the Advisory Committee's recommendations under section 11A.

24. Mr. ATAPATTU (Sri Lanka) said that, in view of the "grade creep" that was endemic in the Secretariat, the fact that the request for a second Deputy Secretary-General at the Assistant Secretary-General level had been repeated was not surprising. "Grade creep" should be eliminated everywhere, but the same considerations could not apply to all organs of the United Nations, since emphasis must be placed on those areas to which priority had been given by legislative bodies. Major emphasis had been placed on UNCTAD and, in accordance with paragraph 2 of General Assembly resolution 31/206, the general principle of strengthening the higher echelons of UNCTAD deserved more detailed consideration. His delegation was willing to accept that the post could not be created immediately because of the need for economy, but the matter should be considered further by the Secretary-General and dealt with at a later stage.

25. With respect to the UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters, active liaison between Geneva and New York was extremely important and should be strengthened. His delegation supported the proposal to second staff members, particularly at the higher levels, on a rotating basis, and did not agree that the responsibilities of the head of a Liaison Office were less important than those of the head of a

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(Mr. Atapattu, Sri Lanka)

substantive division. ACABQ had rejected the Secretary-General's proposal to redeploy a D-2 post to the Liaison Office, but had then suggested the redeployment of such a post to the Transfer of Technology Division. His delegation urged that the new P-5 post for the Liaison Office be granted and that staff be rotated as proposed by the Secretary-General.

26. With respect to the proposal to create a new D-2 post for the transfer of technology programme, the argument that the new post should be refused on the grounds that UNCTAD had a higher proportion of staff at the D-2 level than the Organization as a whole was not valid. Considerable emphasis had been placed on the transfer of technology, and the growth of the transfer of technology programme was not an accident. That programme was of great significance to the developing countries in particular and if no D-2 post was to be granted for the Liaison Office, a D-2 post should be approved for the transfer of technology programme. In paragraph 11A.11 of its report, the Advisory Committee had referred to the transfer to the regular budget of two P-5 posts currently financed from overhead resources. His delegation had consistently opposed the practice of using funds to create posts instead of providing direct technical assistance, but the shipping and ports programme was important enough to merit the transfer of the P-5 post to the regular budget. His delegation's views on the budget estimates submitted under section 11A were based on the general need for economy taken together with the need for a minimum level of expansion.

27. Mr. CUNNINGHAM (United States of America) said that the Secretary-General's estimates under section 11A related basically to the cost of the UNCTAD secretariat and did not include conference servicing costs, the share of the costs of the UNCTAD/GATT International Trade Centre borne by UNCTAD or the direct conference servicing costs of the fifth session of UNCTAD, all of which had been transferred to other sections of the budget. The estimates submitted under section 11A were nevertheless 13.5 per cent higher than the corresponding revised appropriations for the biennium 1976-1977, and his delegation therefore supported the reductions in the estimates recommended by ACABQ. In particular, the new D-2 post requested for the transfer of technology programme should not be granted, since UNCTAD already had a higher proportion of staff at the D-2 level than the Organization as a whole. Also, the request for a second Deputy Secretary-General at the Assistant Secretary-General level had been rejected by the Fifth Committee at the thirty-first session, and there was no reason to change that decision. Finally, his delegation opposed all reclassifications pending the results of a classification survey.

28. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller) said that, although the transfer to Geneva of the programme on financing related to trade would result in some savings, it would also give rise to new travel requirements since staff members would have to consult financial institutions located in the United States, particularly the World Bank. It should be noted that additional expenditure on travel had been requested only with respect to the expanding programme for the transfer of technology. No additional expenditure for travel had been requested in connexion with the increases in UNCTAD personnel. The reductions in the travel estimates recommended by ACABQ would mean that expenditure on travel in 1978-1979 would decrease as compared with the previous biennium.

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(Mr. Debatin)

29. CPC had recommended that the rate of growth of UNCTAD should be "above average", which meant a rate of 2.5 to 3.5 per cent. In view of the revised estimates approved at the thirty-first session, it would be wrong to insist upon such a growth rate; however, if the recommendations of ACABQ were accepted, the growth rate of UNCTAD would be less than 1 per cent and therefore well below average. With respect to the recommended new posts, the Secretariat was aware that the UNCTAD staffing table seemed top-heavy, but the relatively high number of D-2 posts reflected the small average size of UNCTAD units. It should be noted that the proportion of UNCTAD staff at the D-1 level was only very slightly higher than average. With respect to the UNCTAD Liaison Office at Headquarters, the Advisory Committee had questioned the need to establish a D-2 post for that Office, and had recommended against the approval of a new P-5 post to assist the Director of the Liaison Office on the grounds that two Professional staff members would be seconded to the Liaison Office from substantive divisions in Geneva on a rotating basis. However, the two Professional staff members to be seconded from Geneva would be sent to New York on an ad hoc basis from time to time. They would work in areas where substantive co-ordination was needed with ongoing work in New York, but they would not engage in liaison activities per se. The reasons for establishing a high-level post in the New York Liaison Office remained valid. It was clear that the General Assembly was becoming the main forum for the discussion of the policies and approval of the objectives to be followed by the various organs of the United Nations system in furtherance of international economic co-operation. UNCTAD would play a major role in concrete negotiations in that field, and liaison between UNCTAD and Headquarters was more important than ever. That liaison must therefore be conducted on a permanent basis and at the appropriate level. Because of his commitments at Geneva, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD was frequently unable to attend important meetings at New York, and should therefore be represented at a high level. If the Fifth Committee was not convinced of the need for a D-2 post for the head of the New York Liaison Office, it might consider approving a D-1 post for that position, with a full-time Deputy at the P-5 level.

30. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) pointed out that the Secretary-General had requested \$187,800 for UNCTAD V, whereas the actual expenditure on UNCTAD IV had amounted to \$2,407,777 (A/32/8, para. 11A.3). He wished to know whether the lower level of expenditure on UNCTAD V would result in a lower level of conference activity.

31. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller) said that the level of conference activity at UNCTAD V would be the same as that at UNCTAD IV. The reduction in the estimates for UNCTAD V was caused by the fact that for UNCTAD IV estimates for conference services had been included in the budget of UNCTAD, whereas for UNCTAD V, estimates for those services had been included in the budget of Conference Services at Geneva.

Section 13 - United Nations Environment Programme (continued)

32. Mr. BELYAEV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that his delegation supported UNEP and actively participated in its activities. It was important that UNEP co-ordinate its activities with the related programmes of other United Nations bodies in order to eradicate duplication. Programme components must be planned in a rational manner, resources should be concentrated on the most important projects,

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(Mr. Belyaev, Byelorussian SSR)

and the need for economy should be observed. Much had been achieved in that respect, but inadequacies continued to exist in the administration and financial management of programmes. His delegation therefore supported the recommendations of CPC (A/32/38) and ACABQ (A/32/8) with regard to UNEP, and hoped that those recommendations would be implemented fully and without delay. However, CPC and ACABQ had not gone far enough in their recommendations concerning the implementation by UNEP of the decisions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council on programme budgeting procedures and methodologies. Not enough had been done to eradicate duplication, concretize programmes, establish programme priorities, reduce unproductive expenditure and so on, while estimates for the biennium 1978-1979 were 22.2 per cent higher than the revised appropriations for 1976-1977. Moreover, the rate of real growth of UNEP was four times higher than the average rate for the Organization as a whole and was considerably higher than the rate of growth recommended by the General Assembly in the medium-term plan.

33. The estimates for 1978-1979 represented an increase of \$1,510,900 over the revised appropriations for 1976-1977, which were already unjustifiably high. One of the main reasons for such a sharp increase was that the estimates made provision for the impact of inflation. Such an approach was inconsistent with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its twenty-first session whereby increases in expenditure due to inflation should as far as possible be absorbed by savings in other sectors, the reassessment of priorities and the redeployment of resources. Moreover, at its twenty-ninth session, the General Assembly had requested the Secretariat to act in accordance with the wishes of Member States when selecting ways and means of offsetting the impact of inflation, and the vast majority of Member States had indicated that the cost of inflation could and must be covered by improving programme management rather than by increasing the level of expenditure. Accordingly, his delegation could not support the increase in expenditure related to inflation.

34. The other main reason for the proposed increase in expenditure was programme growth. However, in practice, the proposed programme growth consisted of administrative manipulation whereby posts were transferred from the budget of the Environment Fund to the regular budget. Such transfers were inconsistent with the decisions of the General Assembly on administrative and financial practice, and gave rise to a situation whereby activities were carried out even though they had not been approved by all Member States. The reason for such transfers was clear. Contributors to the Environment Fund considered that the Fund's resources were being used irrationally and in the wrong manner, and they had therefore decided to transfer posts to the regular budget so that the cost of those posts would be shared by all Member States. Such transfers were inconsistent with the principle of equitable geographical distribution. When posts financed by the Environment Fund were filled, preference was given to the nationals of countries which contributed to the Fund. The posts and their incumbents were then transferred to the regular budget, causing imbalances in the geographical distribution of the Secretariat. His delegation opposed such manipulation of posts and objected to the programming of activities which had not been approved by the appropriate legislative bodies. His delegation would consider withholding that part of its contribution relating to the activities referred to, and would not support the estimates submitted under section 13.

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35. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that his delegation supported the recommendations of ACABQ. However, he wished to know what percentage of the budget of UNEP was related to administrative support and how UNEP compared in that respect with other organizations financed by voluntary contributions and extrabudgetary funds. He also wished to know whether UNEP indicated all sources of extrabudgetary funds in its budget. The Secretary-General had referred to a significant imbalance between the terms of General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) and the present ratio of posts in UNEP between the regular budget and the Fund (A/32/6, vol. II, para. 13.12). He asked the Secretariat to express that "significant imbalance" in figures.

36. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said that the practice of transferring to the regular budget posts originally financed from extrabudgetary funds led to bureaucratic growth. The increase in expenditure recommended by the Secretary-General under section 13 was extremely high, and his delegation therefore supported the reductions recommended by ACABQ, although it considered that those reductions should have been greater.

37. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller), referring to the statement made by the representative of Japan at the 27th meeting that his delegation would not support the requested transfer of one Professional post for a librarian and local level post for a library assistant, said that the posts in question were being requested so that activities which would have to be carried out in the UNEP secretariat even in the absence of an Environment Fund could be undertaken. A technical and scientific library was essential in order to provide substantive services for the small core UNEP secretariat in developing a system-wide environment programme. No provision had been made in the original regular budget staffing table for library services, as it had been assumed in 1972 that UNEP would be located in Geneva where it would be able to utilize existing library services. The inclusion of the library posts among those to be transferred to the regular budget was fully in keeping with the rationale for the allocation of staff costs between the regular budget and the Environment Fund which had been approved by the Fifth Committee at the thirty-first session.

38. With regard to the concern expressed by the representative of Japan about the high ratio of common staff costs for UNEP, he indicated that the higher figure for UNEP was the result of the low post adjustment for Nairobi and the higher travel costs arising from the location of the Programme there.

39. Replying to the representative of Belgium, he said that, if the Advisory Committee's recommendations were adopted and assuming that the posts to be transferred to the regular budget should enter into the calculation, the real growth rate for UNEP would be 6.6 per cent. As to the question regarding the number of posts which could be transferred to the regular budget if the growth rate for UNEP was to correspond to the over-all growth rate of 2.2 per cent for the programme budget, he said that, taking into account provisions currently included in the 1978-1979 budget estimates for UNEP as a whole, which were estimated at 0.5 per cent, the possible allocation for posts to be transferred from the Fund to the regular budget amounted to 1.7 per cent or \$114,900. That level of resources would permit the transfer of one P-4 and two local level posts.

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(Mr. Debatin)

40. The Secretary-General had felt that the transfer of posts from the Fund to the regular budget should be presented in an open manner and, therefore, taken into account in calculating the real rate of growth. It should be stressed, however, that the posts considered for transfer were existing posts. Therefore, the transfer did not entail increased Programme activities but was essentially a matter of sources of financing. The current rate of 0.5 per cent of real growth in Programme activities under the regular budget was well below the over-all 2.2 per cent level of the Secretary-General's budget proposals.

41. Mr. Schmidt (Federal Republic of Germany) took the Chair.

42. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that any decision that the Committee might take with regard to the estimates for UNEP would be subject to revision in the light of the decision it would take at a later stage with regard to the financial implications of all the recommendations of CPC.

43. His delegation wished to reflect on the subtle distinction that had been drawn by the representative of the Secretary-General between programmes and resources.

44. Mrs. DERRE (France) said that, while the position of her delegation on the transfer to the regular budget of posts originally financed from extrabudgetary sources was well known, it had not yet received instructions from its Government on the estimates for UNEP and it urged that a decision not be taken at the current stage.

Establishment of an information services unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (continued) (A/32/256 and A/C.5/31/69)

45. Mr. AKASHI (Japan) said that his delegation supported the step-by-step approach advocated by the Advisory Committee because it had doubts as to whether the proposal had been thoroughly thought out. It was not clear, for example, whether the proposed information services unit would be completely compatible with other information systems in the United Nations, although assurances to that effect had been given. There was a need to sift through the available information to determine what should or should not be included in the system, and his delegation feared the inclusion of material of a highly theoretical or politically sensitive nature. The potential users of the system, both internal and external, should be identified and it was necessary to determine how their divergent needs might be met. Ways must be found to make the information service accessible to all users and yet preserve the necessary degree of confidentiality.

46. While his delegation recognized that the proposed information unit would help to improve intra-departmental co-ordination, it was not convinced that it was the only way to attain that objective. Administrative measures to ensure co-ordination should have been taken many years earlier and the addition of computer hardware was not necessarily essential to co-ordination. His delegation noted the frank admission of the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs

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(Mr. Akashi, Japan)

that there was some overlapping in the work of the existing units, which seemed to work in semi-isolation. A centralized approach was one way of dealing with that problem but other alternatives should be explored. If it was determined that the establishment of the proposed unit was indispensable to enhancing co-ordination in the Department, his delegation would support it.

47. His delegation noted the assertion that the project could be undertaken with voluntary funds and might be terminated at the end of a trial period. It doubted whether it would be easy to terminate a project of that size since it would acquire its own momentum and become a vested interest. His delegation noted further that there were no financial implications for the biennium 1978-1979 but only for the biennium 1980-1981. It wondered whether the financial requirements had been closely examined and to what extent they might be scaled down, as suggested by the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. His delegation therefore was not in disagreement with the project as outlined but believed that further clarifications and information were necessary before the Committee could take a decision.

48. Mr. ADEYANJU (Nigeria) said that, while the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and other potential users of the proposed information unit should have access to selected information of continuing value contained in unpublished reports, his delegation strongly believed that the existing information units of the United Nations system could be put to maximum use for that same purpose. In the light of the work currently being carried out by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System, existing facilities should be put to maximum use before new ones were created. His delegation therefore supported the step-by-step approach recommended by the Advisory Committee to justify the establishment of the proposed system. The first step should be to draw up an inventory of existing materials with a view to selecting those of permanent interest and then to identify potential users.

49. A decision to establish the system should be preceded by a cost/benefit analysis. It was not enough to presume that the resources needed for the unit would be obtained from voluntary funds in the first three years, after which it would be transferred to the regular budget. There were questions as to whether enough voluntary funds would be available to get the unit started. The establishment of the unit would eventually result in an increase in the regular budget, which the Fifth Committee was endeavouring to reduce. It was interesting to note that the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which was the bastion of opposition to the funding of operational activities from the regular budget, was anxious to obtain such financing for the proposed information services unit. If the Department's position on that matter was a precedent, the Group of 77 would draw the necessary conclusions and act accordingly at the appropriate time.

50. Lastly, his delegation proposed that the question of the establishment of the unit should be put to a vote at the conclusion of the debate.

51. Mr. VAN HOEK (Director, Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that a central information services unit in the

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(Mr. Van Hoek)

Department of Economic and Social Affairs was needed because there were no links between the 13 existing reference units and many of them did not keep on file the unpublished reports of the Department. As a result, there was no solid support for the substantive work of the Department, staff members in one unit were deprived of information in others and the quality of work suffered. Moreover, the absence of a well-organized information base affected work outside the Department, in view of the latter's co-operation with the specialized agencies and other components of the United Nations system. The Department was unable to meet the requests of the regional economic commissions, for assistance in building up their own information base in order to give effect to the important principle of decentralization. The existence of a central information services unit would make it possible to bring the experience already gained by one developing country to bear on the solution of a similar problem in another country.

52. The cost of the proposed unit would amount to far less than 0.2 per cent of the cost of all technical co-operation projects for which the Department of Economic and Social Affairs acted as an executing agency. The unit would, moreover, eliminate duplication of work and occupy far less space than the existing 13 units which it would eventually replace. Based on conservative estimates, the space occupied by the filing systems of the existing units was 3,400 sq. ft. in the UNDC building alone, while the central unit would require approximately 1,700 sq. ft. In addition, the establishment of the central unit would result in an eventual reduction of staff.

53. For the two-year trial period, the services of two Professional and two General Service staff members were being requested, all recruited on a temporary basis. The total outlay for the unit would be approximately \$165,000, which represented a 20 per cent reduction in the original estimate of \$210,000 submitted at the thirty-first session. In drawing up the inventory of existing material referred to by the Advisory Committee, the Department could proceed along the lines suggested by the representative of Mexico at the 27th meeting and thereby ensure that no work would have to be redone if a decision was taken to use mechanical rather than manual means.

54. The question of computer hardware was a minor aspect of the proposal. A computerized system had been mentioned because it was more efficient, facilitated linkages with other systems, was less dependent on human memory and would require less space. There was no intention to buy or lease hardware, as the unit would make use of the existing United Nations computer facilities for which there would be an annual charge of approximately \$40,000.

55. The decision on software for the proposed information system would be made by the computer centre. In any event, in the phased approach that had been proposed, there would be no need to have access to a computer in the first year.

56. Lastly, it might be more appropriate to answer the technical questions raised by the representative of Canada in a technical note or to make available to interested delegations copies of a report prepared by Svein Nordbotten in 1976 which constituted the basis for the Department's proposal.

57. Mr. Talieh (Iran) resumed the Chair.

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58. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) said that, having provided extrabudgetary resources for the establishment of an information services unit, his delegation was anxious to see them put to good use without delay. The recommendations of the Advisory Committee, however, seemed to imply that extrabudgetary resources would not be used for the project for the next 12 months at least. The question arose as to whether it was justifiable to allow funds to lie idle or whether they should be rechannelled to some other project. If the latter alternative was adopted, what would happen when the time came to establish the information service unit?

59. His delegation saw considerable validity in the argument that the examination of material to determine what was of continuing value was similar to processing it for classification and cross-reference.

60. The co-ordination and technical back-stopping of sectoral information and reference services was one of the main objectives of the proposed information services unit. In the view of his delegation, such co-ordination could best be ensured by a central departmental unit.

61. His delegation was confident that ways might be found to take advantage of the voluntary contributions that were available to establish a central unit on an experimental basis without committing the General Assembly at the current stage, to the approval of such techniques as electronic data processing. In any event, it would seem that the Committee might authorize action beyond that which was being proposed and his delegation was willing to join others in exploring that possibility.

62. Mrs. DERRE (France) proposed that document A/C.5/31/69 should be revised to include the new cost estimates given by the representative of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

63. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.