



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 56th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TALIEH (Iran)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (continued)
(A/32/8/Add.16, A/32/30, A/32/362; A/C.5/32/48, 50 and 51)

1. Mr. AKASHI (Japan) said that his delegation was most grateful to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) for its third annual report (A/32/30) and to its Chairman for his lucid introduction. The Commission had again amply justified the confidence of Member States.

2. The items on the agenda for the Commission's future work were complex, numerous and wide-ranging, and it was hoped that it would be able to tackle them with the due speed, diligence and thoroughness which had characterized its work so far, and with the close co-operation of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), even though that might impose an additional burden on the organizations and staff concerned. He drew attention to the statement contained in the ICSC report to the thirty-first General Assembly (A/31/30, para. 320) on its decision to include in its immediate future tasks a review of the question of language incentives.

3. While aware of the drawbacks mentioned by ACC and FICSA, his delegation felt that the new post adjustment formula recommended by ICSC for Professional staff was superior to the existing one because it would reduce the spiralling feature at high cost-of-living areas, establish greater equity between duty stations, reduce the problems with the comparator national civil service and, in the long run, decrease the cost to Member States.

4. His delegation had studied that part of the ICSC report which dealt with conditions of service of General Service staff in Geneva and had noted the statement of the Chairman of the Staff Committee of the United Nations Office at Geneva (A/C.5/32/48). It was firmly convinced that the methods and calculations of the Commission were sound. It took the opportunity of commending the Commission for its response to General Assembly resolution 31/193 B and for the devotion, hard work and courage it had shown in pointing out the appalling anomalies which had existed in the determination of the Geneva General Service salaries since 1950. The excellent report issued by the Joint Inspection Unit in 1976 (A/31/137) had also been useful in that respect. He welcomed the fact that General Service salaries had ceased to be a matter within the exclusive competence of the executive heads. His delegation appreciated the need for appropriate transitional arrangements to implement the new salary scale on 1 January 1978 in such a way as to cause minimum hardship to the staff members concerned. It was, however, greatly concerned at the long period required before the new scale became completely operative and would have preferred annual step increments to be credited towards reducing the amount of personal transitional allowances payable to the staff. According to ACABQ (A/32/8/Add.16, para. 15), the need for transitional allowances would disappear in five or six years, based on an inflation rate of 3 per cent a year and a turnover rate of 5 per cent, the cumulative cost being about 36 million Swiss francs. However, assuming an inflation rate of 1.5 per cent, the cumulative cost would be about 60.2 million Swiss francs and it would take 9 or 10 years before the need for those allowances disappeared. Judging

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(Mr. Akashi, Japan)

from the very low vacancy rate in Geneva and the fact that very few people would want to resign from a service which paid so much better than outside employers, the turnover rate might well be less than the assumed 5 per cent. He requested that the Secretariat should provide the Committee with information on the cumulative cost of transitional allowances in Swiss francs and in dollars, based on the ongoing inflation and exchange rates, and on the number of years required to phase out those allowances. A period which extended over five years could hardly be called "transitional".

5. The observations of ACABQ in paragraph 18 of its report were pertinent. In addition, if the administration were to succumb to the increased pressures for promotions which would undoubtedly arise from the introduction of the new scale combined with the establishment of a job classification system in Geneva in 1978, some of the projected savings would also be nullified. He hoped to have a firm assurance from the Secretary-General that he would exercise the necessary control over the situation and monitor the developments with a view to reporting on them to ICSC and ACABQ as appropriate. He welcomed the willingness of the Commission to carry out a new survey in Geneva in 1980; that should be reassuring to the staff concerned.

6. In view of the heavy financial burden that would be placed upon Member States by the payment of transitional allowances, which frankly went beyond what could be justified by objective criteria, his delegation would strongly support the introduction of some significant and concrete measures of budgetary restraint in the United Nations Office at Geneva, such as a suspension of recruitment of General Service staff during the biennium 1978-1979. Its endorsement of the Secretary-General's proposals would depend on the nature and scope of such measures.

7. He expressed the hope that the pensionable remuneration of General Service staff would be revised urgently in order to reduce the serious overlap between the Professional staff and General Service staff at Geneva. It was regrettable that the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) appeared to have offered less than full co-operation to the Commission in that regard. He urged CCAQ to complete its study in the next few months so that the Commission could make recommendations to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session.

8. His delegation assumed that, in the event of unauthorized absence from work of a collective character at Geneva, the Secretary-General would be fully prepared to take the necessary steps under General Assembly resolution 31/193 B II.

9. Mr. DE FACQ (Belgium) said that the report submitted by ICSC (A/32/30) supplemented the proposals that had been approved by the General Assembly at its thirty-first session and confirmed that at its thirty-third session the Assembly would have before it the remaining recommendations designed to rectify the most serious anomalies in the salary system. It would thereby have laid the foundations for the desired fundamental reform of that system. Once ICSC had completed the urgent tasks it planned for the coming months, it would be helpful if it could submit its general views on the fundamental reform to the General Assembly so that the necessary guidelines could be laid down. In his opinion, that reform should adhere more closely to the Noblemaire principle.

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(Mr. De Facq, Belgium)

10. The considerable margin between the over-all conditions of service of the international civil service and of the comparator civil service had increased further during the past year in favour of the international civil service, particularly if account was taken of the fact that the comparator service made no provision for post adjustment for New York. In that connexion, the various suggestions which his delegation had made at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly would be transmitted to the Chairman of ICSC. He shared the concern expressed by the General Assembly when ICSC had been set up in 1974 about elevated staff costs and about the growth of the international civil service, which was often neither planned nor systematic. In the context of a policy of wage moderation which was becoming the general pattern throughout the world, ICSC should give urgent priority to adumbrating a fundamental reform of the salary system.

11. His delegation supported the one recommendation of the Commission on which the General Assembly would have to take a decision at the current session, and which would bring about a change in post adjustment classification based on a uniform percentage cost-of-living increase, whatever the class of post adjustment. He did not share the ACC criticisms with regard to that proposal. It appeared undesirable to perpetuate the current system under which, in high post adjustment duty stations, a cost-of-living increase of a mere 2.86 per cent would suffice to move that duty station up into the next class, whereas a 5 per cent increase would be necessary to achieve the same effect at lower post adjustment duty stations.

12. The main focus of attention for the current year would obviously be the conditions of service of General Service staff. The first results of the examination of the fundamental principle on which those conditions were based were encouraging, but preliminary. The Chairman of ICSC had promised definite conclusions on that subject in the light of the survey to be carried out in certain headquarters cities and those conclusions would be studied most attentively.

13. With regard to the situation at Geneva, with the benefit of hindsight, he somewhat regretted that no request had been made to ICSC the previous year to determine salary scales for General Service staff in Geneva in accordance with the provisions of article 12, paragraph 2, of its statute. Such an arrangement could have avoided a great deal of the discussions, deputations, solicitations and equivocations that he had witnessed during the past two months. Undoubtedly, account would have had to be taken for that purpose of the timely recommendation 2 (d) made by the Joint Inspection Unit at the conclusion of its report on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976 (A/31/137). If first the General Assembly, and then the Secretary-General and executive heads, could support such an arrangement, it would give greater coherence to the Commission's actions, decisions and recommendations with regard to the international civil service as a whole and would enable uniform implementation. He suggested that that question be considered by the General Assembly the following year.

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(Mr. de Facq, Belgium)

14. The Commission had conscientiously and equitably carried out the sizable task entrusted to it under General Assembly resolution 31/193 B. It had established the facts and made recommendations on a new salary scale for General Service and other locally recruited staff, based on the best prevailing local conditions. He agreed with the executive heads concerned that the Commission's conclusions could not be seriously contested. They confirmed the opinion already expressed the previous year by the Joint Inspection Unit in paragraph 79 of document A/31/137, on the basis of which his delegation had proposed a temporary wage freeze at Geneva until ICSC was in a position to submit its report. If the Fifth Committee had adopted that proposal, the United Nations system would have saved what were totally unjustified salary increases.

15. The recommendations made by ICSC, particularly with regard to the new scale, which his delegation fully supported, should be implemented without delay and, in so doing, the General Assembly should ensure that the transitional allowances to staff were limited to the strictly essential minimum. The executive heads of Geneva-based agencies had accepted the Commission's report and recommendations and intended to implement the new salary scale on 1 January 1978. Serving staff would maintain their present rate of remuneration, which was more than 17 per cent higher than the best prevailing rate; that was acceptable. However, they would also receive periodic increases corresponding to a change of step; that was much more questionable. By that system, it would take 5 to 10 years before their remuneration was reduced to the level considered as corresponding to the best prevailing local conditions. The effect which that would have on the budget of the agencies concerned had not been sufficiently explained in the documentation before the Committee, but he reminded members that the cost of salary increases granted to General Service staff at Geneva the previous year had been more than \$25 million. The implementation of the transitional measures decided by the executive heads would involve expenditure of at least \$50 million in addition to the sums necessary to ensure that General Service staff of United Nations agencies in Geneva were remunerated according to the best prevailing local conditions. Yet a number of national administrations in countries where the cost of living was equal to or higher than that of Geneva were moderating salary increases, which already fell far short of those pertaining at the United Nations Office at Geneva.

16. That abnormal situation was made worse by the fact that approximately 30 per cent of General Service staff at Geneva were classified in grades higher than those to which they would normally be entitled. His delegation expected the administration to take urgent measures to implement a job classification system and looked forward with interest to considering a report on that subject at the thirty-third session of the General Assembly.

17. Finally, in supporting the Commission's recommendations, he expressed the wish that they should be implemented for all General Service staff at Geneva as soon as possible and said that his delegation was ready to consider administrative and budgetary measures to alleviate the burden that would be imposed on States by the maintenance of a general level of remuneration for the majority of General Service staff at the Geneva Office which clearly exceeded the levels recommended by ICSC.

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18. Mr. THOMAS (Trinidad and Tobago) noted that there were four aspects on which the views of ICSC concerning General Service salaries at Geneva differed from those expressed by the staff. First there was the question of the methodology for acquisition of data. The difference of views concerned the relative advantages of the pre-selection survey established by ICSC and the random sampling survey advocated by the staff. While it was true that the Commission might have failed to include in its pre-selection some best-paying employers and that a random sampling might have improved the survey, little advantage would have been gained through random sampling. His delegation did not therefore share the views of the staff representatives that the pre-selection survey of necessity prejudiced the findings. It had proved sufficiently adequate for the acquisition of data on the best prevailing rates.

19. The second issue was the value of the data. It could be noted from the Commission's report that it had had some misgivings on that point itself. However, it had sought data not only on remuneration, but on other conditions such as stability of employment, the existence of an established salary policy based on levels of responsibility and seniority, hours of work, pensions and health insurance and other advantages offered by employers. Despite the staff claim to the contrary, there was no evidence to refute the Commission's proposition that the data collected represented a fair reflection of best prevailing rates. The firms and employers surveyed were chosen from among the highest paying bodies on the local market and a further comparison between their rates and those of the local public service tended to support that proposition. The Commission had recognized that the data were not foolproof and it had included a mechanism of adjustment to compensate for possible short-comings.

20. The third point at issue was the application of the data in determining a recommended range of salaries. That was a most delicate issue and his delegation was sympathetic to the staff concern that that application might give grounds for some dissatisfaction with regard to wage discrimination against women and external and internal matching points. The Commission had admitted to a measure of extrapolation in applying the data and it was a difficult, if not impossible, task to establish a clear and accurate relationship between levels of jobs on the local market and in the complex and unique system of the General Service in the United Nations. The various salary ranges, step system, and the overlapping of grades were not totally identifiable on the local market and the job classification system defied accurate comparisons with external bodies. The Commission had accepted that and admitted the problems involved. After careful consideration of the Commission's proposals and the staff contentions, his delegation had come to the conclusion that the proposals were balanced and represented a fair construction of salaries on the basis of available data. The construction

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(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

of salaries proposed by the Commission revealed that existing salaries paid to General Service staff in Geneva were excessive and that some adjustment was necessary. Although some disagreement on the part of the Geneva staff was understandable, he hoped that they would not disagree too violently with that general conclusion.

21. The Secretary-General and the executive heads of United Nations agencies in Geneva had declared their intention to implement the Commission's recommendation as of 1 January 1978. In the course of 1980, ICSC would report to them on the results of a further survey to be undertaken in late 1979. If the recommendation were to be implemented as proposed, existing staff would retain the quantum of their present emoluments over a transitional period but would be put on the new scale as of 1 January 1978. That implied that they would lose the difference between the existing increments and the proposed increments, and the difference between the increases in promotion between existing remuneration and the proposed remuneration. On the other hand, they would retain the difference between the existing salary and the proposed one and their existing pension benefits were being protected. That was not an ideal situation, but it was a practical one designed to rectify a situation with minimum disruption to existing benefits. Not to implement the recommendations on the basis that the report was incomplete would perpetuate an anomalous situation and make it more difficult to solve. His delegation, after careful consideration, had come to the conclusion that the situation had to be rectified immediately and that the proposal was both fair and practical. It would therefore support it fully. It would also be particularly interested to compare the results of the new survey in two years' time with the data revealed by the present one.

22. Mr. LACHANCE (Canada) said that his delegation was in general agreement with the comments and recommendations of ICSC. With respect to pensions, his delegation welcomed the work carried out by ICSC in co-operation with the Joint Staff Pension Board and hoped that, at the thirty-third session, ICSC would submit recommendations on adjustments in pensionable remuneration that would ensure equitable pension benefits consistent with the common system principle contained in article 9 of the Commission's statute. It was also to be hoped that CCAQ would co-operate with ICSC in that respect.

23. With regard to post adjustments, the recommendation in paragraph 57 of the Commission's report was quite acceptable. A system of post adjustments based on index movements of 5 per cent rather than 5 points was statistically reliable and administratively uncomplicated. Such a mechanism would mean that an equal amount of movement in the cost of living would be required to produce a change of class at all levels of post adjustment. In its report on the matter (A/32/362), ACC had not given enough weight to the spiralling effect of the point system of post adjustments. Moreover, the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions apparently considered that either adjustment method was operable, and CCAQ had recognized that the proposed new system was feasible.

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(Mr. Lachance, Canada)

24. With respect to the indexing of Professional salaries, ICSC had still not reported adequately on possible means of correcting divergencies between remuneration in the United Nations and remuneration in the comparator civil service. That issue should be resolved in accordance with General Assembly resolution 31/141 B II. ICSC should expedite its work on the methodology to be used in the evaluation of total compensation, including pension benefits, and studies should not be limited to the more readily identifiable elements of compensation. A qualitative assessment of less readily identifiable elements would be useful, if only to assess the need for refining measurement techniques.

25. With respect to the Commission's survey of General Service salaries in Geneva, his delegation endorsed the methodology, results and recommendations outlined in the report (A/32/30) and welcomed the decision of the Secretary-General and the executive heads of other organizations based at Geneva to introduce the proposed General Service salary scale in 1978. His delegation recognized the importance of the issues raised in the statement submitted by the staff (A/C.5/32/48), but was not convinced that the recommendations of ICSC would give rise to a level of remuneration lower than the best prevailing level, certainly not within the next few years. The recommendations of ICSC met the wishes of the General Assembly, and, if significant problems arose as a result of those recommendations, they could be referred to in the next survey. All parties concerned should co-operate fully at the time of the next survey and, in the meantime, should exercise restraint.

26. With respect to the implementation of the Commission's recommendations, his delegation supported the measures outlined by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/32/51) and expected that all Geneva-based organizations would take similar measures as soon as possible. However, the Secretary-General should have sought to shorten the transitional period, and it was to be hoped that the appropriate measures would be taken at the time of the next survey.

27. His delegation welcomed the steps taken by ICSC with respect to job classification. In view of the desirability of harmonizing the job classification systems of different organizations at a given duty station, the Secretary-General should consult ICSC when dealing with the question of job classification in Geneva. ICSC should proceed with its work on common staff regulations and should keep the General Assembly informed of the important issues involved by submitting a separate report or a supplement to the Commission's annual report. The member States of each organization would have the final say in the matter.

28. Mr. MOLTENI (Argentina) said that the question of the scale of salaries of the General Service category at Geneva was an urgent one. The staff concerned had been given ample opportunity to submit their views, and it was to be regretted that they had resorted to forcible methods, thereby betraying the need for discipline and the objectives of the international organizations. Both ICSC and the executive heads of the organizations concerned had shown that they were aware of the needs of the staff and had ensured that, when the new scale of salaries was introduced, the net remuneration and pensionable remuneration of existing staff members would be protected. The claim of the staff concerned that the exceptionally high scale of salaries at Geneva should be maintained was completely unacceptable. ICSC had fully

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(Mr. Molteni, Argentina)

complied with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 31/193 B in that it had examined and confirmed the principle of best prevailing local conditions and had selected local employers who were sufficiently representative of the local community. The fact that the pre-selection method had been used did not invalidate the results of the survey, since it was important that the enterprises used in the survey resemble the international organizations in terms of numbers of employees. The staff associations claimed to have carried out another survey among employers in Geneva, but the statement submitted by those staff associations (A/C.5/32/48) did not give the results of any such survey.

29. His delegation welcomed the fact that, in conducting its survey, the Commission had taken account of discrimination against women, and the 8 per cent correction factor used in that connexion was reasonable. The scale of salaries resulting from the survey met existing needs adequately and should be applied immediately, as proposed by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/32/51). It was to be hoped that similar measures would be taken by the executive heads of the other organizations based at Geneva. The fact that ICSC intended to conduct another survey in 1979 was to be welcomed.

30. Mr. SCHMIDT (Federal Republic of Germany) said that the conclusions and recommendations of ICSC with respect to the scale of salaries of the General Service category at Geneva were well founded, and the fact that the Secretary-General and the executive heads of international organizations based at Geneva had decided to implement those recommendations was to be welcomed. His Government felt that the Commission's recommendations should have been put into effect more rapidly, but it respected the authority of the Secretary-General and the employer-employee relationship. That did not mean, however, that the General Assembly had no role to play in the matter, since the Secretary-General's authority was derived from the General Assembly and since it was the General Assembly that had asked ICSC to consider the question of General Service salaries in the first place. In that connexion, the tone of the statement submitted by the staff (A/C.5/32/48) was surprising, as was the fact that the statement took no account of the role of the General Assembly. The recommendations of ICSC were realistic, and the integrity, fairness and openness with which ICSC had conducted its survey were to be appreciated. A certain degree of judgement was necessarily involved in the survey but it was dishonest of the staff to claim that the survey was arbitrary. It was extremely difficult to defend a situation in which staff members refused promotion from the General Service to the Professional category because such a promotion involved a financial loss. The large number of applicants for General Service posts also showed the attractiveness of those posts. It was to be hoped that the staff concerned would recognize that their interests were being safeguarded, and they should refrain from their threatened work stoppage. The Secretary-General had the complete support of his delegation and should deal appropriately with any work stoppage that might occur.

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AGENDA ITEM 110: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS JOINT STAFF PENSION BOARD (continued)
(A/32/9, A/32/319)

31. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the draft resolution proposed by the Joint Staff Pension Board in annex V of its report (A/32/9), said that in part I of the draft resolution the figure \$3,373,200 should be replaced by the figure \$3,363,400, as proposed by ACABQ in its report (A/32/319, para. 9). He suggested that another operative paragraph be included in part I of the draft resolution concurring with the comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 2 to 9 of its report.

32. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that his delegation accepted the suggestion of the Chairman. It was to be hoped that such oversights would not recur in future.

33. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to the changes he had proposed to part I of the draft resolution in question.

34. It was so decided.

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)

Arabic language services in the United Nations (continued) (A/32/8/Add.17; A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1, A/C.5/32/9; A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2; A/C.5/32/CRP.8)

35. Mr. CUNNINGHAM (United States of America) said that the additional information on language costs provided by the Secretariat (A/C.5/32/CRP.8) was not complete, since there was no indication of the cost of recruitment missions, home leave for language personnel, building requirements, the acquisition of equipment to accommodate additional languages, facsimile transmission costs, etc. Such costs were not easy to itemize, but the actual cost of language services was probably significantly higher than suggested in document A/C.5/32/CRP.8. In that connexion, it should be noted that JIU had stated that language costs to the United Nations in 1976 had been \$53,390,000 (A/32/237, para. 20), whereas document A/C.5/32/CRP.8 stated that expenditure on languages in 1977 would amount to \$46.4 million.

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(Mr. Cunningham, United States)

36. With respect to the cost of each language, French was used by less than half as many Member States as English but cost 39 per cent more than English, and Russian was used by only 12 per cent as many Member States as English but cost 13 per cent more than English. Moreover, the total combined contributions of the users of Arabic barely covered the costs of that language, which meant that the contributions of Arabic-speaking Member States were not used for any expense of the Organization other than Arabic language services and that contributions from users of other languages covered the full cost of all United Nations programmes and administrative requirements. Draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 nevertheless demanded even higher expenditures. His delegation could not support the draft resolution, since the expenditures envisaged did not represent the best use of the limited resources available. In 1977, language services had consumed over 13 per cent of net contributions, and the cost and the administrative burden on the Secretariat of further language proliferation could easily become unbearable. The Organization might have the right idea about the use of languages, but it had not yet found the best way to pay for them. His delegation therefore requested the Secretary-General to conduct a study on a more equitable means of defraying language costs, including consideration of a "user pay" system, and to submit recommendations in that respect to the thirty-third session.

37. Mr. ABDEL FATTAH (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Arab delegations which had sponsored the draft resolution on Arabic language services in the United Nations (A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2), thanked the Secretary-General for his statement on the administrative and financial implications (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1) and the Advisory Committee for its report (A/32/8/Add.17). As stated in that report, the estimated cost of \$444,800 was indicative only; in fact, it represented a ceiling and would vary according to the number of transferred posts that were actually filled and the timing. Such arrangements were left entirely to the discretion of the Secretary-General in his attempts to provide adequate service to those UNCTAD bodies authorized to receive documentation in Arabic. Incidentally, it should be noted that the posts to be transferred to Geneva had been established by the General Assembly at its thirty-first session and that, up to the present time, they had not been filled and thus represented savings in excess of the figure requested under the draft resolution. The actual savings involved, as could be seen from table 2 of the report submitted in 1976 by the Secretary-General (A/C.5/31/60), was \$465,300.

38. The additional costs which would arise as a consequence of adopting the draft resolution could be regarded as a package deal, since a large part of them, when actually incurred, would be offset by savings. For instance, the sum of \$88,000 referred to in paragraph 3 (c) of the Secretary-General's statement (A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1) was no more than a budgeting formality, since it would be almost totally offset by savings in respect of all staff posted in Geneva, whether by transfer from Headquarters or by direct appointment. All of them would come from the Middle East, and the costs of their travel on home leave during the same biennium would be considerably reduced as a result of the fact that they would travel to and from Geneva rather than New York.

39. Furthermore, in paragraph 8 of that statement, the Secretary-General had

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(Mr. Abdel Fattah, Egypt)

conservatively estimated at \$116,000 the savings expected to arise from the use of staff from the Geneva section for the Conference on the Law of the Sea and the Conference on Succession of States in Respect of Treaties. The total actual savings represented by those two elements would amount to some \$150,000, so that the actual cost of implementing the draft resolution should not in practice exceed \$280,000.

40. In paragraph 3 of its report (A/32/8/Add.17), the Advisory Committee recalled that the experience gained from the present arrangement was to be reviewed at the end of the three-year period 1977-1979. Moreover, in paragraph 8, the Advisory Committee noted that normally the General Assembly, in its resolutions, addressed to the Secretary-General requests or directives on the substance of the question, while leaving it to him, in the exercise of his responsibilities, to submit proposals on how those requests or directives should be implemented. The Arab delegations had never sought to deviate from that practice or to infringe the prerogatives of the Secretary-General. Indeed, the previous version of the draft resolution (A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.1) had followed the practice referred to by the Advisory Committee, but had been replaced by a more detailed text for reasons that were well known to members of the Fifth Committee. All that was requested of the Secretary-General was that an unsuccessful arrangement be corrected by the simple means of transferring to Geneva the posts which he himself had considered necessary to meet the initial target level. The General Assembly, which had the authority to approve any organizational arrangement, certainly had the same authority to replace such an arrangement by a better one, at a later date, should the earlier arrangement prove unworkable, even if the substitute had not originally been proposed by the Secretary-General.

41. However, in order to allay the concern expressed by the Advisory Committee, and on the clear understanding that the Fifth Committee would accept the new arrangement as described in paragraph 3 of the Secretary-General's statement, the sponsors were prepared to delete the last part of paragraph 2 of the draft resolution. The revised paragraph 2 would read:

"Requests the Secretary-General, while continuing the speedy implementation of the organizational arrangements contained in paragraphs 15-21 of his report contained in document A/C.5/31/60 and Corr.1, to replace the present arrangement set out in paragraph 25 of this report by establishing, as of 1 January 1978, on a permanent basis, an Arabic Translation Section in the United Nations Office at Geneva, primarily to serve UNCTAD's bodies;"

42. He hoped that the Fifth Committee would be able to adopt the draft resolution, as orally revised, by consensus.

43. Mr. RINDORINDO (Indonesia) said it was clear from the Secretary-General's progress report (A/C.5/32/9) and the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments that considerable efforts had been made to train appropriate Arabic language staff. In the interests of recruiting such staff on the widest possible geographical basis, the possibilities offered by Indonesia should be carefully examined. He expressed his full support for draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, as orally revised.

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44. Mr. SEKYI (Ghana) said that the Arabic-speaking people should be given every opportunity to follow and benefit fully from the work of UNCTAD, whose importance to the developing countries could not be over-emphasized. He also wished to record his appreciation of the fact that the Arabic-speaking countries had for so long provided funds for the use of Arabic at the United Nations.

45. Mr. GOSS (Australia) agreed with the representative of the United States that the time had come for the Secretary-General to make a study of language services at the United Nations. He should consider not only the question of costs, as proposed by the representative of the United States, but also the broader issue of the use of languages in general, bearing in mind that every new language created additional costs for the existing languages. The Secretary-General should therefore carry out a thorough study of the whole question, along the lines suggested by the Joint Inspection Unit and in collaboration with other interested organizations.

46. Mr. KEMAL (Pakistan) recalled that at the twenty-eighth session his delegation had been a sponsor of resolution 3190 (XXVIII). It had been motivated on that occasion by the close ties binding Pakistan to the Arab world and by the special place that the Arabic language occupied for the people of Pakistan. Furthermore, Arabic satisfied the criterion of universality. His delegation had also expressed its high opinion of the language services and he felt sure that, if the problems were faced with determination, the work would continue to be carried out rapidly and efficiently.

47. He commended the moderation and constructive approach evidenced by the revision introduced by the representative of Egypt in paragraph 2 of the draft resolution, which he warmly supported and hoped could be adopted by consensus. He himself wished to suggest a minor change which would consist in replacing the words "failed to achieve" in the fourth preambular paragraph by "not sufficiently achieved".

48. Mr. LADOR (Israel) said that his delegation had already had occasion to express its position on the draft resolution before the Committee. After careful study of the note by the Controller (A/C.5/32/CRP.8) and in the light of the additional costs involved, he was unable to support draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2.

49. Mr. ANDRIANKIRIJA (Madagascar), after recalling the terms of paragraph 18 of General Assembly resolution 31/159, pointed out that the Secretary-General had proposed organizational arrangements to implement that resolution in document A/C.5/31/60 and Corr.1. In his view, the proposal contained in the draft resolution represented an improvement over the Secretary-General's arrangements, since it would lead to the establishment of an Arabic translation section on a permanent basis. That solution was in line with the efforts already made by the Secretary General, as well as meeting the wishes of the General Assembly.

50. The cost of the proposal had been estimated at \$444,800 which, should the General Assembly adopt the draft resolution, would have to be included in the programme budget for 1978-1979. In view of the need to make preparations for UNCTAD V, to be held in 1979, it was essential to set up the Arabic translation section at Geneva as of 1 January 1978.

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51. Mr. SIBAHI (Syrian Arab Republic) announced that the delegations of Ghana, Indonesia, Kenya and Pakistan should be added to the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2. Speaking on behalf of the sponsors, he said that they had no difficulty in accepting the amendment suggested by the representative of Pakistan.

52. As the representative of Egypt had pointed out, the actual financial impact of the draft resolution would not exceed \$280,000. In that connexion, he recalled that over the past three years the Arab States had contributed to the cost of introducing Arabic as an official and working language and would be prepared to approve the introduction of any other language, if such an initiative were taken. The Arab States had done everything in their power to facilitate the task of the Secretary-General in his arrangements for the use of Arabic and would continue to place all their resources at his disposal, so that the Secretariat might have highly qualified elements in the Arabic language service. He hoped that examinations for the recruitment of translators and interpreters would be held in a wide selection of cities of the Arabic-speaking world.

53. Arabic was a language used by 50 million persons for religious purposes, in countries ranging from Africa to Asia. The Arabic language was not only a major vehicle of communication in the present-day world, but had served as a bridge between ancient civilizations and the modern period. All those reasons explained the deep political significance of the draft resolution. He reserved the right to return to the subject, if necessary, at a later stage.

54. In his view, logic demanded that Israel, which represented the Arabic-speaking peoples in the occupied territories, take an interest in the use of Arabic and support the draft resolution.

55. Mr. WOLFF (United States of America) noted that, according to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, there were 50 million Arabic speakers in the world. There were, however, 85 million German speakers and 150 million Portuguese speakers and neither of those two languages was currently an official or working language of the United Nations. According to Conference room paper 8, the cost of translation into Arabic was \$4.1 million, exclusive of any additional costs that might be incurred if draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10 Rev.2 was adopted, while the net contribution to the regular budget of the United Nations of all Arabic-speaking countries was approximately \$4.1 million. He sought information from the Controller concerning whether the assessed contributions of Arabic-speaking countries covered anything other than the cost of Arabic language services in the United Nations.

56. Mr. DAHER (Jordan) pointed out that the Controller himself had acknowledged in Conference room paper No. 8 that there were conceptual problems involved in calculating the cost of a language. It might be useful for a specialized body such as the Advisory Committee to consider the question of an appropriate method for calculating the costs of Arabic language services. There were, moreover, a number of inaccuracies in the Conference room paper in figures relating to Arabic translation services.

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(Mr. Daher, Jordan)

57. The assessed contributions of Member States were decided by the General Assembly in accordance with a number of criteria, the most important being national income. The Arabic-speaking countries contributed approximately 1.21 per cent of the regular budget, since they were all developing countries. More importantly, however, the regular budget did not account for all the resources of the United Nations, and the Arabic-speaking countries made substantial voluntary contributions to numerous extrabudgetary funds.

58. Mr. OKEYO (Kenya) said that draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 recognized the importance of the Arabic language, which was spoken by a large number of Member States, many of which were from Africa. It was also a logical continuation of decisions taken with regard to the Arabic language at preceding sessions of the Assembly.

59. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that at the twenty-eighth session of the General Assembly, the Soviet delegation had supported the inclusion of Arabic as a working language of the General Assembly on the ground that Arabic was spoken by a sufficient number of Member States. Arabic language and culture had a significant influence on the development of western and world civilization, and especially on the cultures of a number of the central Asian republics in the Soviet Union. His delegation had also supported resolution 31/208 and viewed draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 as a further step towards improving Arabic language services in the United Nations. As indicated in document A/C.5/32/9, the Secretary-General had already adopted a number of measures in pursuance of resolution 3190 (XXVIII), and there did not, therefore, seem to be a need for any further directives from the General Assembly in that regard. His delegation believed that the measures called for in draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 could be implemented by the Secretary-General within approved resources. He noted that, as indicated by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 7 of its report (A/32/8/Add.17), there were still 16 Professional posts vacant in the Arabic Translation Service, which showed that the problem was not simply a question of money but rather of ensuring the rational use of existing resources, both financial and human. He therefore urged the Under Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments to make every effort, in implementing the phased programme of expansion of Arabic language services, to use all available resources before seeking new appropriations.

60. He sought further clarification regarding the financial implications, if any, of the revision introduced orally by the representative of Egypt.

61. Mr. MOHMOUD (Nigeria) endorsed the draft resolution, since his delegation fully supported the use of the Arabic language in the United Nations in view of the contribution of Arab civilization to world history and culture. That civilization had had a profound influence on his country and on the cultures of Africa. The use of the Arabic language in the United Nations was not at issue; the question was how to enhance the use of the Arabic language in United Nations and draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 had been designed to achieve that end.

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62. Mr. PICO DE COAÑA (Spain) stressed the importance and cultural richness of the Arabic language, which had left its mark in the Iberian peninsula where the Mozarabic and Mudejar cultures had flourished and where it still had a lasting impact. The Arabic language was spoken by approximately 150 million persons living in 22 countries; it thus ranked fifth among world languages. Accordingly, his delegation endorsed the measures proposed in draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 and would vote in favour of it should it be put to a vote.

63. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller), replying to the question asked by the representative of the United States, said that there was only one regular budget of the United Nations and that the balance of expenditure against income was met through assessments on all its Member States. There was no way of tracing any assessed contribution to any specific expenditure of the Organization or vice versa. He was not, moreover, in a position to provide information regarding voluntary contributions to extrabudgetary activities, as that fell outside the scope of the Fifth Committee's consideration of the budget.

64. With regard to the financial implications of the revision introduced by the Egyptian representative, it should be recalled that the financial implications of the draft resolution as it stood included the additional costs arising from the transfer from New York to Geneva of a number of posts and the establishment of three new posts. In addition, after the transfers were effected, the Arabic Translation Service in New York might experience staffing difficulties. In that connexion, he drew attention to paragraph 6 of document A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1, in which it was suggested that in the first performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 1978-1979 the Secretary-General should indicate to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session the level of additional requirements arising from the provisions of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, if adopted. The deletion from that draft resolution of specific reference to the transfer to Geneva of posts established under resolution 31/208 and a post of Chief of Section meant that an alternative solution might be adopted as more suitable. The final decision on that matter would have to be made by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments, and the financial implications of the revision would depend on the arrangement that was chosen. The Committee could, however, assume that the maximum financial implications would be those relating to the transfer to Geneva of the posts envisaged in paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, as it stood.

65. Mr. LEWANDOWSKI (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that he was somewhat taken aback by the impression given in the debate that there was a disagreement between the Secretariat and the great majority of Member States as to the importance to be given to Arabic language services in the United Nations. He emphasized that the Secretariat was doing its utmost to provide adequate Arabic language services. Its proposal for the establishment of an Arabic Interpretation Service at Geneva had been intended to facilitate the servicing of UNCTAD, the General Assembly and major international conferences, and had given rise to no complaints on the part of delegations. The chief problem was, therefore, one of translation services. The Secretary-General

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(Mr. Lewandowski)

believed that, if the use of Arabic was to be limited to the General Assembly and UNCTAD, the Secretariat could better service both bodies with a translation unit based in New York and using modern methods of facsimile transmission. Dividing the existing Arabic translation service between New York and Geneva would entail at least one year of temporary arrangements, which would adversely affect the quality of work. Not a single complaint had been received so far regarding the quality of documents in Arabic produced for UNCTAD.

66. If the Committee wished to go into the organizational aspects of the work of the Department of Conference Services, it was certainly free to do so. However, in that connexion, he drew attention to the observations of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 8 of its report regarding the usual practice of the Fifth Committee with regard to the contents of its resolutions.

67. Paragraphs 2 and 4 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2 would pose a number of problems of interpretation for the Department of Conference Services. The Advisory Committee had pointed out the ambiguity of the last part of paragraph 4, and the Department of Conference Services was concerned whether it would require the distribution of summary records in Arabic within 72 hours, as was done for other languages. When Arabic had been included among the working languages of the General Assembly, the Department had been authorized to have summary records translated into Arabic after each session of the Assembly in order to take advantage of lighter workloads during the inter-session period. If paragraph 4 would require a change in that arrangement, there would, of course, be financial implications.

68. Paragraph 2 did not explicitly request the transfer of a specific number of staff members to Geneva. With regard to the estimate of \$88,000 for the one-time costs of transferring staff to Geneva, which had been questioned by the representative of Egypt, he indicated that the Secretariat had based its calculation on the assumption that the Arabic-speaking delegations would not want the Geneva service to be staffed exclusively with newly recruited translators and that it would consequently be necessary to transfer a number of experienced staff members from New York. It was not clear therefore whether paragraph 2 would require the transfer of more or fewer staff members than envisaged in the previous draft resolution. The number of staff necessary would depend on actual requests from UNCTAD for translation services in 1978.

69. Mr. LACHANCE (Canada) said that, although his delegation would not oppose the adoption of a decision on the revised draft resolution at the current meeting, it was unhappy with the manner in which the Committee was proceeding. While the Secretary-General had submitted a statement of financial implications in connexion with draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2, the revision introduced by the Egyptian representative might entail different financial implications which were not entirely clear. His delegation was therefore concerned that the adoption of a draft resolution without a clear statement of its financial implications should not be repeated in future.

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70. The CHAIRMAN said that it had been his hope that the Committee could take a decision on the draft resolution at the current meeting. It would seem, however, in the light of the statements made by the Controller and the Under-Secretary-General, that more time was needed to study changes in the original statement of financial implications resulting from the revision.

71. Mr. KEMAL (Pakistan) said that it was his understanding that the representative of Egypt had proposed the deletion of the latter part of paragraph 2 on the understanding that the Fifth Committee would accept the financial implications described by the Secretary-General, with which the Advisory Committee had concurred.

72. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that it was, of course, the prerogative of the Fifth Committee to decide as it pleased. The Advisory Committee, however, had been under the impression, when it had submitted its report (A/32/8/Add.17), that the financial implications described by the Secretary-General were based on his interpretation of the latter part of paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.10/Rev.2. If the General Assembly should adopt a draft resolution which did not contain those provisions, from the constitutional point of view, the present statement of financial implications in document A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1 could give rise to questions as to whether it related to the draft resolution adopted in the revised form. The matter therefore called for further consultation and discussions in order to determine precisely what the financial implications of the draft resolution, as orally revised by the representative of Egypt, would be.

73. Mr. SIBAHI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, in a spirit of co-operation, the sponsors of the draft resolution would not object to postponing a decision until the next meeting.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.