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FIFTH COMMITTEE  
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held on  
Saturday, 17 December 1977  
at 10.30 a.m.  
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 66th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. TALIEH (Iran)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 104: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued)

Report on first-class travel in the United Nations organizations (continued)

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

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.60 concerning agenda item 59

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.97 concerning agenda item 62 (c)

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 concerning agenda items 67 and 71

First reading (continued)

Section 22 - Administration, Management and General Services (continued)

Revised estimates under section 22G (Administrative and Financial Services, Geneva) and section 22J.2 (Staff training activities, Geneva)

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21 December 1977

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 104: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued)

Report on first-class travel in the United Nations organizations (continued)  
(A/32/272 and Add.1, A/32/384; A/C.5/32/L.41, L.43/Rev.1, L.44)

1. Mr. CUNNINGHAM (United States of America), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.43/Rev.1, said that the draft resolution represented a compromise between the complete abolition of first-class travel for United Nations officials, with the exception of the Secretary-General, and the continuation of the current practice. Paragraph 2 A preserved the status quo with regard to first-class travel by the Secretary-General and one representative of each Member State, while under paragraph 2 B first-class travel for chairmen of intergovernmental committees would be limited to flights whose duration exceeded nine hours. Paragraph 3 allowed the Secretary-General the necessary discretion to make exceptions to the rules governing first-class travel on a case-by-case basis.

2. He did not believe that the provisions of the draft resolution would cause those individuals who served without remuneration on various United Nations bodies to decline to make their services available.

3. Mr. APALOO (Togo), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.44, said that, while he was aware of the financial difficulties faced by the United Nations and of the need to reduce expenditures, there were other ways to achieve that end than by reducing entitlements to first-class travel. Moreover, the elimination of entitlements to first-class travel might make it difficult to recruit the best people available for senior posts in the Secretariat and to secure the services of eminent individuals for United Nations bodies.

4. He announced that Egypt, Jordan and the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya had become sponsors of draft resolution A/C.5/32/L.44.

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)

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.60 concerning agenda item 59 (A/C.5/32/97)

5. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that ACABQ concurred with the Secretary-General's request, contained in paragraph 4 of document A/C.5/32/97, for an additional appropriation of \$23,800 to cover the travel and subsistence costs of UNIDO staff and members of national liberation movements attending the Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization as a Specialized Agency. The extent to which the amount of \$616,700 required for conference services could be absorbed within existing resources would be indicated in the consolidated statement of conference servicing requirements to be submitted later in the current session. The Advisory Committee was of the view that it would be possible to absorb the whole amount within existing resources.

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6. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation was of the view that the amount of \$23,800 could easily be absorbed within the appropriation already approved under section 12 of the programme budget. If a vote was taken, his delegation would vote against the approval of any additional appropriations.

7. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should request the Rapporteur to report directly to the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.60, an additional appropriation of \$23,800 would be required under section 12 of the budget and that a further amount of \$616,700 would be considered by the Committee at a later stage in the context of the consolidated statement of conference servicing requirements.

8. The Chairman's suggestion was adopted by 75 votes to 9, with 1 abstention.

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.97 concerning agenda item 62 (c) (A/C.5/32/98)

9. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that ACABQ had noted the view expressed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 13 of document A/C.5/32/98 that the adoption of draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.97 would not call for any additional appropriation under the regular budget for the biennium 1978-1979.

10. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should request the Rapporteur to report directly to the General Assembly that, should it adopt draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.97, no additional appropriations would be required.

11. It was so decided.

Administrative and financial implications of the draft resolution submitted by the Second Committee in document A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 concerning agenda items 67 and 71 (A/C.5/32/101)

12. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) noted that, in paragraph 4 of document A/C.5/32/101, the Secretary-General estimated that the travel and subsistence costs of the group of high-level experts referred to in paragraph 1 of draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 would amount to \$50,000 and that the preparation of material for the group would require \$20,000 for a senior consultant. The Advisory Committee had been informed that, for the biennium 1978-1979, UNCTAD had been asked by the Budget Division to absorb certain consultant costs. The Advisory Committee had noted an underexpenditure of \$1,280,000 under section 11 as a whole for the biennium 1976-1977. Bearing that in mind, and in view of the Fifth Committee's continued interest in the strict use of consultant funds, ACABQ recommended that the amount of \$20,000 should be absorbed within the provision already made under section 11 of the programme budget. Accordingly, the adoption of draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 would require an additional appropriation of \$50,000. The estimated cost of conference services (\$43,400) would be considered in the context of the consolidated statement of conference servicing requirements. However, ACABQ expected the Secretary-General to be able to indicate that the whole amount could be absorbed within existing resources.

13. Mr. HANNAH (New Zealand) endorsed the view that the cost of consultants could be absorbed. He wished to draw attention to the provisions made for the meeting of the group of experts: while his delegation appreciated the importance of the draft resolution, it felt that the provision of 24 experts was rather generous, especially since they would be meeting for only 10 days. He wished to know on what assumptions the decision to provide 24 experts had been based, and whether 20 would not be adequate.

14. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the mandate set out in paragraph 1 of draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 was a complex one, which would require the services of a group of experts in various different disciplines. Moreover, such groups of experts were normally selected on the basis of wide geographical distribution, and he assumed that the Secretary-General had considered geographical representation as well as expertise in determining the number of experts to serve in the group.

15. The CHAIRMAN said that it was customary for the Secretary-General to explain his decisions regarding the composition of expert groups to the committees which took the original decisions; that being so, the Fifth Committee did not normally seek to alter them.

16. Mr. HANNAH (New Zealand) said that he appreciated the arguments put forward by the Chairmen of the Committee and of ACABQ. None the less, he wished to appeal to the General Assembly to reconsider the over-all number of experts required to serve in the expert group.

17. Mr. GOONERATNE (Sri Lanka) said that, however desirable it was to make cuts in the regular budget, reducing the number of experts in the group would not bring about the required effect. The Secretary-General's recommendation that 24 experts be appointed was presumably based on his assessment of how best the work could be done.

18. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should request the Rapporteur to report directly to the General Assembly that, should draft resolution A/C.2/32/L.47/Rev.2 be adopted, an additional appropriation of \$50,000 would be required under section 11A of the programme budget, and conference service costs not exceeding \$43,300 would be considered in the context of the consolidated paper to be submitted at the current session.

19. It was so decided.

20. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the fact that his delegation had not objected to the appropriations did not mean that it agreed with them. The appropriation of \$50,000 could easily have been absorbed within resources already allocated under section 11A, particularly since they exceeded \$33 million.

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First reading (continued)

Section 22 - Administration, Management and General Services (continued)

F. ELECTRONIC DATA PROCESSING AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS SERVICE (A/32/8/Add.5, A/32/8/Add.25; A/C.5/32/37, A/C.5/32/85)

21. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) reminded the Committee that at the thirty-first session of the General Assembly ACABQ had recommended that the budget for the International Computing Centre, Geneva (ICC) should be reviewed and approved by the General Assembly. That recommendation had been endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 31/208. The Fifth Committee therefore had the ICC budget before it for the first time.

22. The ICC budget estimates for 1978 amounted to \$3,085,000 based on the concept of usage-related financing, which was explained in paragraphs 3 to 5 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/32/85). The funding of the ICC budget, set out in paragraph 7 of the ACABQ report (A/32/8/Add.25) showed that the United Nations was the largest single user of ICC and would contribute an estimated \$1,191,400 in 1978.

23. The ICC budget estimate also included a sum of \$1,593,500 for equipment. The Advisory Committee had been informed that, although it had already been decided to purchase the present central processing unit, ICC capacity might reach saturation point by 1979. Since ACABQ did not know what steps would have to be taken in that connexion, it recommended that plans to deal with that situation should be formulated and submitted for review in the context of the budget for 1979.

24. The estimates for salaries included a sum of \$2,630 for the reclassification of the post of the Director of ICC from D-1 to D-2. ACABQ was bound to stand by its judgement expressed in 1976, when the question had been previously raised, that there had been no changes in the duties and responsibilities of the Director which could justify such a reclassification.

25. Accordingly, ACABQ recommended the approval of an estimate of \$3,082,000 for the 1978 budget of the International Computing Centre.

26. A total revised budget estimate of \$7,037,100 was contained in the report of the Secretary-General for the New York Computing Centre (NYCC) in 1978-1979. The Advisory Committee was prepared to accept the Secretary-General's recommendations with a few minor modifications: it recommended the deletion of an amount of \$48,500 for overtime work related to computer operations, since the virtual doubling of NYCC capacity should reduce the need for overtime; a reduction of \$30,000 in the amount requested for data processing contracts; and a reduction of \$26,000 (at 1978-1979 rates) in the estimate for supplies and materials for 1978-1979.

27. The Advisory Committee was not satisfied with the presentation of the estimates for the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems and related activities (IOB). The information supplied did not enable the Advisory Committee

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(Mr. Mselle)

to analyse the estimates of IOB. ACABQ intended to take up the matter again at its 1978 spring session. In the meantime, it recommended that only one half of the United Nations share (\$166,500) of the estimates for IOB should be approved by the Committee.

28. ACABQ accepted the Secretary-General's estimate for United Nations usage of ICC in the amount of \$2,766,300 for 1978-1979. ACABQ was also prepared to accept the Secretary-General's recommendation that an appropriation of \$250,000 be made under section 26B for structural work related to the installation of additional computer components in NYCC.

29. The CHAIRMAN said he wished to register his concern at the late submission of some documentation to ACABQ, which had hindered the work of the Fifth Committee.

30. Mr. TERADA (Japan) said that he noted a marked increase in the importance attached to the use of computers by the United Nations. His delegation wished to request the Secretariat to use computers only where it was strictly necessary to do so.

31. His delegation had considerable difficulty in analysing the reports on the subject, owing to the technical nature of the vocabulary used in them. It felt that the Secretariat should be encouraged to express itself in terms more readily comprehensible to those who were not experts in the subject.

32. Japan agreed with ACABQ that there was no justification for reclassifying the post of Director of the International Computing Centre from D-1 to D-2. His delegation was concerned at the level of computer costs for the United Nations. It wondered whether such a high level of expenditure was really necessary, and whether the United Nations bodies concerned with co-ordinating computer use were keeping a tight enough control over the growth in costs. It believed that the recommendations made by ACABQ tended to reduce the over-all size of the regular budget, and it therefore gave them its whole-hearted support.

33. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) pointed out that the estimates being considered by the Committee were based on an assumed exchange rate of 2.51 Swiss francs to 1 United States dollar. He requested that they be revised to take account of the most up-to-date exchange rates available.

34. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the considerable appropriations requested under sections 22F and 26B of the programme budget were illegal, in that they had been recommended by the interdepartmental Information Services Board and not by the General Assembly. There were requests in annex II of document A/C.5/32/37 for the expansion of ICC, and for the establishment of seven entirely new facilities but, as the Chairman of ACABQ had stated, the information provided to justify such expansion was unsatisfactory, particularly in view of the size of the appropriations requested. He therefore proposed that the Committee should postpone consideration of the question until the thirty-third session of the General Assembly.

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35. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller) pointed out that the additional appropriations were for functional machinery which was extremely important to United Nations operations. If the computer services were denied the necessary financing, the effective implementation of United Nations activities would probably be hampered. That was especially true when one bore in mind that the United Nations made maximum use of computer facilities in order to streamline activities and to produce more precise results and forecasts. Moreover, as many of the United Nations activities in question were related to development and similar fields, the benefits which developing countries expected to gain from the use of computers might be diminished.

36. He sympathized with the comments made by the representative of Japan with regard to the highly technical terminology used in the documents on the Electronic Data Processing and Information Systems Service. Such terminology was required for the purposes of clarity and accuracy; however, some way might be found in future to provide explanations of the more technical terms.

37. In paragraph 21 of document A/32/8/Add.25, the Advisory Committee had recommended deletion of an amount of \$48,500 from the estimates for overtime. In his view, however, a clear distinction must be made between the cost of upgrading the International Computing Centre and the routine cost of operating the computer at weekends. The computer was already fully booked at weekends, when it was used to computerize the accounts of the United Nations, UNDP and UNICEF and the Pension Fund, and also for the Centre on Transnational Corporations. He therefore hoped that the Fifth Committee would leave him free to arrange the operation of ICC as efficiently as possible.

38. The CHAIRMAN suggested that, as a number of delegations from developing countries had expressed their concern about the item under consideration, the Committee should not abide by its earlier decision to take decisions on documents which had been submitted late without any preliminary discussion.

39. Mr. HART (Australia) said that there was a regrettable tendency to rush through very important decisions at the last minute, at the end of each session of the General Assembly. Accordingly, he would be inclined to sympathize with the proposal made by the Soviet delegation.

40. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) stressed that his delegation had not proposed that the operations of the electronic data processing centres should be suspended. The Electronic Data Processing and Information Systems Service (EDPIS) should of course continue to function. On the other hand, the Committee should not approve additional appropriations for the expansion of existing facilities and for the time being should limit EDPIS activities within the framework of existing appropriations until their expansion could be adequately justified. The decision to expand EDPIS had been taken by the interdepartmental Information Services Board, which had no power to impose its decision. Accordingly, he proposed that the Committee should discuss the matter of additional appropriations under that section at the thirty-third session of the General Assembly, when more information was available. It would be wrong to take a hasty decision at the present time, especially in view of the Committee's earlier decision not to discuss issues on which documentation had been submitted late.

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41. Mr. LANDAU (Austria) said that, while he regretted the fact that the documents in question had been submitted late, he was aware of the technical problems facing the Secretariat and the Advisory Committee and would therefore be prepared to support the recommendations in document A/32/8/Add.25. However, in view of the statement made by the Controller and, in particular, bearing in mind the need to expedite the closure of accounts such as pension accounts which were urgently required as an input for other activities, his delegation suggested that the amount of \$48,500 for overtime should be restored.

42. Mr. IDJI (Benin) formally proposed that, in view of the magnitude of the appropriations involved and the delay with which the relevant documents had been submitted, the Committee should postpone discussion of the subject under consideration until the thirty-third session of the General Assembly and should take no decision at the present time.

43. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that a vote must be taken as soon as possible on the appropriations for section 22 as a whole, including the revised estimates under section 22F.

44. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that certain delegations should be quite clear as to what they meant by proposing that consideration of the appropriations recommended in document A/32/8/Add.25 should be postponed. A large part of the amounts recommended in that document, for instance the appropriation for the New York Computing Centre, had already been included in the Secretary-General's initial estimates and related to programmes which had already been approved by the Fifth Committee. The \$250,000 recommended in paragraph 39 had also been included in the initial estimates and had simply been deleted and resubmitted in the revised estimates at the request of the Advisory Committee. The appropriation for ICC was designed to pay for usage, and the Fifth Committee could not recommend that the United Nations simply cease to use ICC. Similarly, if the Committee postponed consideration of the \$166,500 share in the IOB budget, IOB would be unable to operate between January and June 1978.

45. Mr. SAFRONCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) reiterated that he was not suggesting that EDPIS activities should be suspended but simply that no decision should be taken on additional appropriations until there was adequate proof that such appropriations were justified. His delegation was not wholly convinced that the proposed expansion of EDPIS activities was in the interests of the developing countries. The Fifth Committee could of course retain the amounts such as the \$250,000 appropriation which had already been approved.

46. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should take action on the amount of \$250,000 recommended under section 26B and should take a decision on the appropriations under section 22F when it came to vote on section 22 as a whole, at which time it could also consider the proposals made by the Soviet Union and Austria.

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47. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller) again stressed that the additional appropriations recommended in document A/32/8/Add.25 were required for specific programmes to be carried out by the Centre on Transnational Corporations, the Department of Conference Services and the Office of General Services. Those programmes had been authorized in previous years, not by the interdepartmental Information Services Board but by the Economic and Social Council, the Advisory Committee and the General Assembly respectively and, if the additional amounts were not granted, they could not be implemented.

48. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should vote on the additional appropriation of \$250,000 under section 26B for the biennium 1978-1979.

49. An additional appropriation of \$250,000 under section 26B for the biennium 1978-1979 was approved by 77 votes to 4, with 9 abstentions.

50. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee should also approve an amount of \$3,082,000 for the 1978 budget of the International Computing Centre.

51. It was so decided.

Revised estimates under section 22G (Administrative and Financial Services, Geneva) and section 22J.2 (Staff training activities, Geneva) (A/32/8/Add.26; A/C.5/32/67)

52. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) recalled that, in his initial estimates, the Secretary-General had included an amount of \$7,920,700 under section 22G and had indicated that the revised estimates would be submitted to the Advisory Committee at a later stage. The revised estimates were contained in document A/C.5/32/67 and amounted to \$8,146,900. Following discussion of the revised estimates, the Advisory Committee was recommending in document A/32/8/Add.26 an amount of \$8,061,300 under section 22G, i.e. an additional \$140,600 over and above the amount which it had recommended initially.

53. The revised estimates had been submitted within the framework of the recommendations of AMS in Geneva and, as a result, included a request for the establishment of a new P-4 post for a systems analyst with management skills and the conversion of three P-2 posts from temporary assistance to regular permanent posts (A/32/8/Add.26, para. 6). In considering that request, the Advisory Committee had not been satisfied that the Secretary-General had indicated clearly the relationship between the AMS recommendations and the evaluation made by the Board of Auditors of the financial management and control systems in the United Nations. The proposals for Geneva also provided for a grouping of services which had no parallel at Headquarters (para. 7). Moreover, as the revised estimates had been submitted rather late, the Advisory Committee had been unable to consider the AMS recommendations in all their ramifications. Accordingly, it had decided to recommend that consideration of the Secretary-General's requests with regard to the above-mentioned posts should be deferred to allow the Advisory Committee and the Fifth Committee more time to consider the implications of the AMS recommendations and to make appropriate recommendations. Otherwise, the Advisory

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(Mr. Mselle)

Committee had approved almost all the Secretary-General's recommendations, although it had recommended against the creation of a new P-3 post for a Financial Officer to supervise the Payroll Unit (para. 12).

54. He hoped that the Fifth Committee would not spend too much time on the amount of \$29,300 for staff welfare recommended in paragraph 14, as it had done at the thirty-first session. The amount included in the 1978-1979 estimates was lower on an annual basis than that previously recommended by the Fifth Committee for 1977. He hoped that that downward trend would continue and that there would be no need to continue to finance staff welfare beyond the 1978-1979 biennium.

55. With regard to the revised estimates under section 22J.2, the Advisory Committee was prepared to approve the Secretary-General's request for an additional post (para. 17), which would involve an additional amount of \$47,400.

56. Mr. FREYRE (Argentina) requested a reply to his question with regard to section 22H before the Committee voted on section 22 as a whole.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.