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Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 93: MEDIUM-TERM PLAN

- (a) MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1978-1981 AND REVISED PLAN FOR 1977  
(A/31/3 (chap. VII, sect. A), A/31/6/Add.1 (vols. I and II and Corr.1-5),  
A/31/38, A/31/139; A/C.5/31/15; E/RES/2017 (LXI), 2019 (LXI))

1. The CHAIRMAN noted that the documentation concerning item 93 was particularly voluminous. The medium-term plan for the period 1978-1981 (A/31/6/Add.1) had been published in two volumes and there had been a number of corrigenda to the first volume.
2. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) had undertaken an in-depth examination of the medium-term plan at its sixteenth session. In its report (A/31/38), CPC had dealt not only with the plan, but with the programme aspects of secretariat arrangements for narcotics control (chap. IV), which might be considered under item 93, and with the review of the machinery of the United Nations and of its system for administrative and budgetary control, investigation and co-ordination (chap. VI), which might be taken up under item 97 (Joint Inspection Unit).
3. When it had considered the medium-term plan, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had had the CPC report before it. The Advisory Committee had not found it necessary to present a written report on the Secretary-General's report with regard to implementation of the major recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit on medium-term planning in the United Nations system (A/C.5/31/15).
4. The Committee also had before it chapter VII, section A of the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/31/3) and Economic and Social Council resolutions 2017 (LXI) and 2019 (LXI) dealing respectively with Secretariat units for international narcotics control and the medium-term plan for the period 1978-1981.
5. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) recalled that the General Assembly, at its thirtieth session, had decided, on the recommendation of the Working Group on United Nations Programme and Budget Machinery, to consider the medium-term plan in those years when no budget was submitted. The new procedure was intended to meet two objectives: to have the plan serve as a framework for drawing up the programme budget, a wish already expressed by the General Assembly in operative paragraph 5 of its resolution 3199 (XXVIII), and the further desire expressed by the General Assembly, to enable CPC, the Economic and Social Council and the Fifth Committee to use the new procedure for an in-depth examination of the medium-term plan. It remained to be seen whether those two objectives could be attained at the current session and at future sessions. In any case, the in-depth consideration of the plan by CPC in 1976 under its new terms of reference indicated that the new procedure adopted by the Assembly for consideration of the medium-term plan was justified.

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6. As the Advisory Committee stated in paragraph 55 of its report (A/31/139), the General Assembly would have before it, in addition to the documentation already referred to, the annual reports of the principal organs and various subsidiary bodies and would bear all those elements in mind in deciding on the medium-term plan.

7. In its report (A/31/139), which was relatively brief, the Advisory Committee confined itself to drawing the attention of the Fifth Committee to a few broad areas. It had not made any specific recommendation and had not considered the plan in depth since that had already been done by CPC. In paragraphs 31-34 of its report, the Advisory Committee commented on how specific or detailed the medium-term plan should be and its comments were pertinent in view of the mass of information the plan contained. Information was a factor in decision-making and too much or too little could impair that process. The optimum amount of information to be included in any plan was of course a matter of judgement and was for the members of the Fifth Committee and for the General Assembly to decide.

8. The Secretary-General had on various occasions sought guidance on how detailed the plan should be and what information it should contain. He was requesting guidance again, as shown in paragraph 33 of the Advisory Committee's report. In paragraph 34 of the report, the Committee agreed that the plan should not be too detailed. What was needed was not more information but information of a better quality. The plan should be a much shorter and more concise document. The Fifth Committee should bear that point in mind in making its recommendations to the Secretary-General for drawing up the next plan.

9. In paragraphs 4-10 of its report, the Advisory Committee commented on the nature of the plan. Its observations were primarily intended to draw attention to possible improvements which could be made. As the Committee stated in paragraph 5, so far the plan was basically an exercise in taking stock of existing activities, relating them to the appropriate legislative authority and identifying new activities to be undertaken on the basis of decisions already taken by the competent intergovernmental bodies. Although planning in the United Nations could not be done as it was done on the national level, there was still room for improvement in the methods now being used both by the Secretariat in drawing up the plan and by the various intergovernmental bodies, particularly the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, in examining the plan. The role of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly in medium-term planning should be to provide general guidelines, define the broad options and designate priority areas.

10. Another question to ponder was the question of indicative budgetary projections, which the Advisory Committee had dealt with in paragraphs 11-17 of its report. In paragraph 10 of volume II of the medium-term plan (A/31/6/Add.1), the Secretary-General said that the programmes had been conceived on the basis of total resources available from all sources. However, in the plan itself, contrary to what he had said in the plan submitted to the thirtieth session (A/10006/Add.1), he had refrained from indicating the order of magnitude of the financial resources from budgetary and extrabudgetary sources which would be available to implement

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(Mr. Mselle)

the plan. The Ad Hoc Committee of Experts to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies had insisted on the need for the information omitted by the Secretary-General, as had the Joint Inspection Unit in its report on medium-term planning (A/9646). In paragraph 17 of its report, the Advisory Committee accordingly suggested that such information should be included in future plans, that is, some indication of the order of magnitude of the financial resources which would be available for implementing programmes. At the same time, the Committee stressed that indicative budgetary projections would not set a budgetary ceiling and would not bind Member States, collectively or individually, after the General Assembly had taken its decisions on the medium-term plan.

11. In paragraphs 18-30, the Advisory Committee dealt with the question of the rates of growth indicated in volume II of the plan. The Fifth Committee would undoubtedly have comments to make on that aspect of the plan and on CPC's recommendations on the subject. The Advisory Committee pointed out that the Secretary-General had compared the 1974-1975 expenditures with the funds requested and the initial appropriations for 1976-1977, thus giving an incomplete picture of the average rate of growth. It should also be borne in mind that since the rates of growth were expressed in percentages, there was no direct connexion between the rate of growth of a programme and its budgetary implications, and it was important to realize that the rates of growth proposed by the Budget Division, and on the basis of which CPC had made its recommendations, were only rough guidelines. In that connexion, it would be noted that in paragraphs 36 and 38 of its report (A/31/38), CPC provided guidelines as to how the rates of growth it recommended should be interpreted in formulating and discussing the programme budget for 1978-1979.

12. Drawing attention to paragraphs 23-25 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/31/139), he pointed out that in paragraph 23, the Committee again indicated that a rolling plan would be more responsive to the needs of the Organization than a fixed plan. In paragraph 24, the Committee raised an important point concerning the status of the medium-term plan, the role to be played by the various intergovernmental bodies in considering it and the extent and nature of the changes which might be made after such consideration. If the medium-term plan was regarded as a proposal by the Secretary-General, as the CPC stated, it should be implemented in the light of the decisions and recommendations of the various competent intergovernmental bodies, and particularly, of CPC. In paragraph 25 of its report, the Advisory Committee emphasized the need to differentiate between the medium-term plan document and the plan itself, and stressed that the decisions taken by the competent bodies after the plan had been approved were bound to affect programmes and their rate of growth without thereby invalidating the plan itself or requiring the issuance of amendments to the plan document or a new plan. The Advisory Committee wished to raise that point with the Fifth Committee because the latter would have to issue guidelines on how the Secretary-General should formulate the next medium-term plan, the procedures to be used by the competent intergovernmental bodies in discussing it and, in particular, on whether, once the medium-term plan had been discussed by those bodies, additional documents should be issued or certain parts should be redrafted.

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13. Paragraphs 40 to 51 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/31/139) dealt with the question of co-operation between the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee normally included such information in its first report on the programme budget, but in the passage of its present report to which he was referring, the Committee gave the Fifth Committee specific information so that it could evaluate how CPC and the Advisory Committee were co-operating and provide guidance on how to strengthen that co-operation. The functions of the two bodies were and would always be complementary and CPC had made an effort in its report (A/31/38) to strengthen that complementarity by drawing the Advisory Committee's attention to the areas which warranted more detailed study by the latter. In that connexion, he drew attention to paragraph 45 of the Advisory Committee's report.

14. With regard to programme evaluation, which was dealt with in paragraphs 35 to 39 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/31/139), the Fifth Committee would have to consider that very important matter on two occasions: once in considering the medium-term plan, and again in discussing the new terms of reference of the Joint Inspection Unit, which was slated to play a more important role in programme evaluation. In that connexion, the addendum to the report submitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in 1975 on budget and programme performance of the United Nations (A/10035/Add.1) was still one of the most useful documents issued: in it the Secretariat defined programme evaluation and its objectives and explained existing methods and procedures for programme evaluation in certain areas, noting, in paragraph 3, that it would welcome guidelines on the question. Furthermore, in chapter II of volume II of the medium-term plan (A/31/6/Add.1), the Secretariat had done a trial programme evaluation. The Advisory Committee felt that the method it had used was not yet right and should be perfected bearing in mind the guidelines provided by the Fifth Committee, which was to undertake a critical analysis of the method used by the Secretary-General with a view to channelling his future efforts in programme evaluation most effectively.

15. Mr. KEMAL (Pakistan), speaking as Rapporteur of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, introduced that Committee's report on the work of its sixteenth session (A/31/38), which was the first it had held since its terms of reference had been revised by the Economic and Social Council in resolution 2008 (LX) of 14 May 1976. The new mandate provided that CPC would henceforth act as the main subsidiary organ of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly for planning, programming and co-ordination. During its sixteenth session, which had lasted five weeks, CPC had carried out a systematic examination of the work programme of the United Nations, comprising 25 major programmes, for the medium-term plan period.

16. The Committee's agenda had included seven substantive items, most of which concerned such vast and complex subjects as the reports of the specialized agencies, reports by the Joint Inspection Unit on regional economic co-operation, review of the machinery of the United Nations and of its system for administrative and budgetary control, investigation and co-ordination, particularly the future of the Joint Inspection Unit, the report of ACC, programme aspects of the secretariat arrangements for narcotics control as well as specific requests made

(Mr. Kemal, Pakistan)

by the Council such as a review and appraisal of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 3442 (XXX) entitled "Economic co-operation among developing countries".

17. In view of the relatively short period available to the Committee to discharge its responsibilities with regard to the medium-term plan and in view of the importance of that plan, the Committee had decided to concentrate on the medium-term plan, particularly those programmes which seemed to warrant close scrutiny. It had divided the programmes of the medium-term plan into four categories based on the criteria set out in paragraph 73 of its report, and had decided to examine a number of those programmes in depth, as stated in paragraph 75 of its report.

18. As indicated in the report (A/31/38), the members of CPC had tried to develop a common point of view on which to base a set of recommendations for consideration by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. They had also discussed ways and means of strengthening the procedures for consultations between CPC, the Advisory Committee and ACC in order to make United Nations programming more effective.

19. With regard to the organization of work of CPC, a number of delegations had felt that it should hold two sessions instead of one, one of which would be devoted to the medium-term plan or programme budget, depending on which year it was, and the other, which would be a brief one, to the consideration of other items which were normally taken up by CPC.

20. CPC had clearly demonstrated, under its new terms of reference, that it could assist the work of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and play a positive part in planning, programming and co-ordination, inter alia by providing guidance on the relative priorities to be given to the various programmes and the role it planned to play in the evaluation of the various programmes.

21. In conclusion, he drew attention to operative paragraph 5 of Economic and Social Council resolution 2019 (LXI), dated 3 August 1976, in which the Council recommended to the General Assembly that it "allow the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, whose terms of reference have been broadened by the Council in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 3392 (XXX) of 20 November 1975, sufficient time to enable it to fulfil its task and to ensure that the Committee is given adequate assistance to this end by all organs of the United Nations system".

22. Mr. DEBATIN (Assistant Secretary-General, Controller) noted that one important aspect of medium-term planning was the termination of obsolete or completed activities. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3534 (XXX), paragraphs 127-139 of the plan listed all projects in the Social Development programme which were expected to be terminated during the period 1978-1981. That was only an example, but the plan would be too cumbersome if it gave that type of information for every programme and it had seemed preferable to give it in a more concise form in the report on the implementation of the programme budget for 1976-1977, which would be issued shortly. General Assembly resolution 3534 (XXX)

stated explicitly that it was the responsibility of intergovernmental bodies, particularly when they were examining the medium-term plan, to decide which activities were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective; the Secretariat was still awaiting instructions in that regard. However, the programme directors had been asked to evaluate their own programmes in order to make it possible to assess progress and to determine the usefulness of the various activities; their attempted evaluation was contained in volume II, chapter II, of the medium-term plan.

23. With regard to the nature of the planning exercise and the presentation of the medium-term plan, the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination had regarded the structure and degree of detail of the plan as being generally satisfactory (A/31/38, para. 79) and had considered the plan appropriate to the type of in-depth review which it intended to make; it had even requested more detailed financial information. The Advisory Committee, however, was of the opinion that the medium-term plan should be a much briefer and more synthetic document in which the Secretary-General would propose the directions in which United Nations activities might develop over the medium term; the plan would thus provide a framework of broad suggestions and recommendations to be passed upon by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly and would make it possible to avoid the addition of new, unco-ordinated activities through decisions taken by intergovernmental organs, each acting within its own field of competence. The Economic and Social Council had in a sense included both points of view in its resolution 2019 (LXI), in which it requested "the Secretary-General, while keeping the existing presentation and range, to prepare as an introduction to the medium-term plan a short statement on the directions that United Nations activities should take in the medium term".

24. As for the status of the plan, CPC had concluded that the plan had the status of a proposal by the Secretary-General and that the competent intergovernmental bodies could request the Secretary-General to amend the plan before it was approved (A/31/38, para. 82). However, the Advisory Committee did not believe that the Secretary-General should be requested to amend his medium-term plan, which in essence would reflect his own appreciation of the situation (A/31/139, para. 54). The Economic and Social Council had not taken a position on that issue.

25. With regard to indicative budgetary projections, the existing medium-term plan did not suggest any future over-all budgetary growth; it merely gave background information on past events and discussed relative real growth rates for the future. While CPC seemed quite content with that approach, the Advisory Committee felt that the medium-term plan should provide indicative budgetary projections and should indicate the likely availability of extrabudgetary resources. Once again, the Economic and Social Council had not stated its position on the subject.

26. Evaluation was an integral part of medium-term planning, and the Secretariat had made every effort to show how such evaluation could be conducted; in particular, it had requested programme directors to evaluate their own programmes (vol. II of the plan). In response to the request made by CPC in paragraph 44 of its

(Mr. Debatin)

report (A/31/38), the Office of Financial Services had undertaken a more detailed evaluation of activities related to the environment, human settlements, public information and transport.

27. The Secretariat needed guidance on those fundamental questions which were still pending, namely the nature of the plan and the advisability of proposing budgetary projections. It went without saying that the Secretariat had taken note of all requests for improvement or modification with respect to planning procedures and the presentation of the plan; it would take account of the Fifth Committee's observations on the medium-term plan and would do everything possible to act on them when preparing the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983.

28. Mr. BOUAYAD AGHA (Algeria) said that he was prepared to accept the conclusions and the general tenor of the Advisory Committee's report (A/31/139) but would like further details on the important question of co-operation between the Advisory Committee and CPC. He wondered whether the Chairman of the Advisory Committee had spoken at length on the question because he had wished to convey some message to the Committee indirectly - in which case he ought perhaps to have pointed out any difficulties that had arisen in that regard - or whether he had done so in order to point to instances of duplication in CPC and Advisory Committee activities relating to the examination of the plan. His delegation feared that the competence of the two bodies was so strictly delineated that they might well find themselves in "splendid isolation", which would be harmful to their activities.

29. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman, Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) stated categorically that there had been no difficulties, nor were any anticipated, relating to co-operation between the Advisory Committee and CPC. The Advisory Committee was an expert body whose members served in a personal capacity, whereas CPC was an intergovernmental body, but each had well-defined terms of reference, and co-operation between the two bodies had been established from the inception of CPC. Their roles were complementary and would remain so, subject, of course, to the decisions of the General Assembly.

30. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) requested clarification regarding the work method the Committee would follow. As the programmes contained in the medium-term plan had been the subject of in-depth consideration in CPC and the Economic and Social Council, there was perhaps no point in considering the plan once again in detail, since the Committee might end up spending the entire session doing so. The Committee could, instead, centre its discussions on the guidelines to be given to the Secretariat regarding the nature of the medium-term plan, its preparation and possible improvements in it, as suggested by the Controller.

31. Mr. THOMAS (Trinidad and Tobago) said that he would like some clarification of how the Committee intended to conduct its consideration of the medium-term plan. It might be preferable for the Committee to confine itself to giving the Secretary-General the advice and guidance he wished regarding the plan as a whole, while submitting observations on specific programmes of particular interest.

32. With regard to agenda item 93 (b) (Medium-term plan: implementation of the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit: report of the Secretary-General),

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(Mr. Thomas, Trinidad and Tobago)

it was his understanding that the Advisory Committee had thought it unnecessary to submit a report on the report of the Secretary-General. Accordingly, he asked whether that agenda item needed to be considered separately or whether it should be discussed in the context of the general debate on the medium-term plan.

33. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman, Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) replied that the report of the Secretary-General was not to be considered separately but rather within the context of the discussion on the medium-term plan.

34. Mr. STOTTLEMEYER (United States of America) said that he shared the concerns of the representatives of Belgium and Trinidad and Tobago. As CPC and the Economic and Social Council had already considered the programmes in detail, it would be best, in the interests of avoiding duplication, for the Committee to concentrate on the status and character of the plan in general, taking into account the conclusions submitted by the Advisory Committee in its report (A/31/139).

35. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the method of reviewing the medium-term plan, informed the Committee that, after consultation with the delegations concerned, he would propose to the Committee, at its next meeting, a formula which he hoped would be satisfactory to all delegations.

36. Mr. DAVIDSON (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management), replying to a question by Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines), said that in his opinion ACC and CPC should be able to devote one day to the medium-term plan at their forthcoming joint meeting. It was for the chairmen of those two committees to make a decision and take the necessary steps regarding the organization of work when they drew up the agenda for that meeting, as was customary, during their preliminary consultations.

#### AGENDA ITEM 102: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

##### (a) COMPOSITION OF THE SECRETARIAT: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/31/154)

37. Mr. GHERAB (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services) said that there were two questions of immediate concern to the personnel management of the Organization before the Committee at the current session. The first, which came under the item on personnel questions, dealt with the composition of the Secretariat and the geographical distribution of its senior staff among Member States and with the progress made in implementing the Secretary-General's proposals for the improvement of personnel administration, which had been approved by the General Assembly two years earlier and had been based on reports and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Management Service. The second question, which was of great importance to the management of the staff and came under agenda item 103, concerned the first substantial changes being proposed by the International Civil Service Commission following its review of the United Nations salary system. Later in the session, there might also be a report on the delegation of some special authority in personnel matters to UNIDO in connexion with interim arrangements for its secretariat.

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(Mr. Gherab)

38. In the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/31/154), a matter which had been raised by the General Assembly with respect to the composition of the Secretariat was being dealt with for the third consecutive session. At the last two sessions, questions had been raised about the existing formula for establishing the desirable ranges used to measure how adequately Member States were represented by their nationals in professional and higher-level posts subject to geographical distribution. Both the membership factor, which determined the desirable ranges for Member States which were assessed the minimum contribution to the budget, and the formula for establishing the ranges for Member States which were assessed above the minimum had been discussed.

39. The membership factor (entitling a member to between one and six posts) used to compute the desirable ranges had not been changed since 1967. When introduced in 1963, that formula had been intended to allow for a transition from a situation in which many States had not been represented at all or had been represented by one or two nationals to a situation where all Member States could have as many as six of their nationals in the Secretariat without being considered overrepresented.

40. Over 55 per cent of States assessed the minimum contributions currently had at least five of their nationals in posts subject to geographical distribution. Two-thirds of all Member States had five or more of their nationals in such posts. The current system of computing desirable ranges on the basis of two different assumptions, one of which was that all Member States should have only one staff member in posts subject to geographical distribution, was inappropriate and outmoded. The Secretariat hoped that the Committee would approve the proposed new method for computing desirable ranges on the basis of the uniform principle that all Member States should have the same number of posts for the membership factor.

41. While acknowledging the comments that had been made with regard to the population factor, the Secretariat had felt that no sufficiently clear instructions had been given by the Committee for altering the present situation. The increase from 2,400 to 2,600 in the base figure for posts occupied by staff subject to geographical distribution provided for a change in the population reserve from 200 to 220. However, it seemed reasonable that if the base figure was raised further, Member States assessed at the minimum should receive the minor benefit of having their range increased from 1-6 to 2-7 which had been their range from 1970 to 1974 under the current system.

42. Finally, the contribution factor would, of course, be changed in accordance with the new contribution scale for 1977-1979 and in the light of the changes in the membership factor. Table B in the annex to the Secretary-General's report (A/31/154) illustrated what results the proposals for change would have, assuming a membership of 144 States, a base figure of 2,700 staff members who might be expected to occupy geographical posts in June 1977 and the proposals of the Committee on Contributions for a new scale of assessments. That table gave only a general idea of the actual results, since the final ranges would take into account the scale adopted by the General Assembly, the number of Member States at the end of the session and the decision of the General Assembly in the matter.

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43. Turning to another question of substance, that of the status of women within the Secretariat in general and the distribution of staff according to sex, he drew attention to an innovation in the presentation of the various tables in the annex to the report which consisted in giving the number of female staff members in each rank in parentheses below the total number of staff of that rank for the same nationality. That feature would make it possible to obtain a clearer picture of the distribution of female staff throughout the Secretariat.

44. The Committee would see from the sixth table in the annex that the over-all situation had improved, the proportion of women in the Secretariat having risen from 19.4 per cent the previous year to 20.4 per cent in 1976. There were 698 women in the Secretariat in 1976 compared with 624 the year before. The Secretary-General believed, however, that the situation could be improved further and that it was impossible to do so without the active co-operation of Member States in the search for women candidates among their nationals.

45. In addition to the question of the employment of women in the Secretariat, there was General Assembly resolution 3417 A (XXX) on the recruitment of nationals of developing countries for senior posts in the Secretariat. The figures presented in table C of the report related to the situation as at 30 June 1976. The process of searching for suitable candidates and selecting the best ones in accordance with the principles laid down by the General Assembly assumed the availability of new posts or vacancies at the senior level which could not be filled more appropriately by staff members already in the Secretariat. The report for 1976 therefore did not reflect the Secretary-General's efforts pursuant to resolution 3417 A (XXX) but rather his efforts in the same direction in past years. Further results of his efforts under that resolution would become noticeable only after a longer period of time.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.