

United Nations
**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**



FIFTH COMMITTEE
10th meeting
held on
Monday, 18 October 1976
at 3 p.m.
New York

THIRTY-FIRST SESSION

Official Records *

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Republic)

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

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/31/SR.10
20 October 1976

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

76-90120

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 92: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1976-1977 (continued)

United Nations information centres (A/31/8/Add.2; A/C.5/31/14)

Yearbook of the United Nations (A/31/8/Add.1; A/C.5/31/12)

1. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the proposals in the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres system (A/C.5/31/14) did not entail additional appropriations to be approved at the current session. The Advisory Committee had therefore confined its observations to a number of administrative and financial aspects of the Secretary-General's report. In paragraph 4 of its report (A/31/8/Add.2), ACABQ referred to nine examples of action currently being taken by the Secretary-General to improve the efficiency of the information centres system. It had sought clarification from the representative of the Secretary-General regarding the financial implications of those actions and could inform the Committee that the measures in question were being carried out within currently authorized budget appropriations. However, as indicated in paragraph 24 of the Secretary-General's report, a number of factors would be examined in the preparation of the Secretary-General's proposed programme budget for the biennium 1978-1979.

2. Paragraph 5 of the Advisory Committee's report pointed out that list D in annex II of the Secretary-General's report should not be construed to imply that the top posts in the information centres should be equated with the top UNDP posts in each country, as the functions of the resident representatives and the centre directors were different and their respective grades were therefore not comparable.

3. In paragraph 6, the Advisory Committee recalled the concern expressed by the General Assembly in resolution 2897 (XXVI) that the directors of United Nations information centres should give their undivided attention to the dissemination of information about the United Nations rather than act as the representatives of the Organization.

4. With regard to the Yearbook of the United Nations, the Secretary-General was, in accordance with the request of the General Assembly, proposing measures to ensure a more timely issue of that publication. The proposals of the Secretary-General, based on the recommendations of a working group which he had established, were summarized in paragraphs 3 to 5 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/31/8/Add.1) and would entail an additional appropriation of \$108,500 in 1977 and \$136,500 in 1978.

5. The observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee were to be found in paragraphs 7 to 13 of its report. To some extent the Advisory Committee had been disappointed by the report of the Secretary-General, which contained no imaginative innovations to deal with the problem of the timely publication of the

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Yearbook and did not discuss in detail the causes of the problem. Moreover, the Secretary-General had not indicated the kind of alternative methods explored, if any. Equally disappointing was the fact that AMS had not been consulted, as it should have been, in the matter. The Secretary-General's report gave the impression that the main problem was a lack of resources and that the solution was to assign additional staff to the Yearbook Unit.

6. As pointed out by the Advisory Committee, the Yearbook was given low priority by contributing departments and, as a result, submissions to it were late and of inferior quality. CPC had requested the Secretary-General to give the Yearbook the high priority it deserved, and the Advisory Committee indicated in paragraph 9 of its report that clear instructions from the Secretary-General to that effect would be more effective than establishing new, complicated and expensive mechanisms. It did not believe that merely adding more staff to the Yearbook Unit would produce the desired results and, accordingly, it urged the Secretary-General to re-examine the question of timely submission of high quality material to the Yearbook Unit. The Advisory Committee also believed that to a great extent the resources needed for that purpose could be redeployed within the current Secretariat establishment. It agreed that additional credits should be authorized to remove the existing backlog. The figure given in paragraph 13 for the recommendation of the Advisory Committee was an error, however; the recommended additional amount for 1976-1977 should be \$77,000 and not \$85,000. The corrected figure reflected a reduction of the original request by \$23,400 plus related common staff costs, which represented the total cost of establishing one P-3 post as envisaged by the Secretary-General.

7. Mr. AKATANI (Assistant Secretary-General, Office of Public Information) said that the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations information centres represented the fulfilment of a commitment made to the Fifth Committee four years earlier, when a thorough review of the system of OPI field offices had been promised. That review had required more time than originally envisaged because it had been thought advisable to await the completion of a full cycle of the annual regional meetings of centre directors. The Committee therefore had before it the most comprehensive account ever prepared of the United Nations information centres system.

8. The principal conclusion of the report was contained in paragraph 9, namely, that the network of United Nations information centres was an indispensable instrument for the successful performance of a number of tasks relating not only to public information but also to the work of other parts of the Secretariat and other organs of the United Nations.

9. As the report stated, the network of information centres very much required strengthening if it was to function in a fully effective way. A number of measures were being taken for that purpose within current budgetary appropriations. In the longer run, however, additional resources would be required and, in that connexion, he drew attention to paragraph 28 of the report in which the Secretary-General appealed to Member States to increase their existing extrabudgetary contributions towards the cost of specific centres, and to initiate new contributions in cases where they had not been made in the past.

(Mr. Akatani)

10. Unlike the report on the information centres, the report on the Yearbook (A/C.5/31/12) did have financial implications for the current biennium. The report estimated the additional resources required at \$108,500, with regard to which the Advisory Committee was recommending a reduction of \$23,400 plus related common staff costs, which represented the cost of a new permanent P-3 post. The Office of Public Information would make every effort to produce the Yearbook more rapidly than in the past, even if it did not receive the full budgetary increase requested by the Secretary-General. Should the efforts of OPI in that direction not be successful, the Secretary-General would report to the General Assembly at a future session.

11. The Committee did not have before it at the current session the traditional over-all report of the Secretary-General on United Nations public information policies and activities, partly because the General Assembly had not specifically called for such a report the previous year and partly because the Secretariat did not want to overburden the Committee with too much documentation. He wished, however, to describe briefly the work of OPI in general during the past year, because of his conviction that the Office was only partly a service unit. Its work also had important substantive aspects regarding which Member States were entitled to be informed at regular intervals.

12. To a certain extent, OPI had been able to maintain indispensable regular contact with delegations through the 26-member Consultative Panel on Public Information. The Panel had held its fifth annual session at Headquarters in March 1976 and had provided the Secretary-General and OPI with valuable advice and guidance which had been particularly helpful to OPI in rethinking its work programme and reassessing its priorities with a view to meeting new demands within the limits of existing resources.

13. The primary concern of OPI over the past year had been to increase further the effectiveness of its work and output. It had, for example, continued to strengthen its co-operative links with the other departments of the Secretariat, the numerous United Nations bodies which assigned information tasks to it and the information units of other members of the United Nations system. For example, OPI continuously co-ordinated its efforts with those of the Centre Against Apartheid and was in close contact with the Special Committee Against Apartheid and its Sub-Committee on Petitions and Information. It had also pursued the matter in the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC). One result of such intensified co-operation was that the General Assembly had before it the first comprehensive account ever prepared of information activities against apartheid undertaken by the entire United Nations system, including proposals for future action. Another example of such co-operation was the joint plan of action for United Nations information, which had recently been submitted to the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC). The plan of action consisted of a number of specific proposals for combined activities in 1977 and for an exchange of information on the information programmes of the various members of the United Nations system aimed at avoiding duplication and harmonizing activities relating to certain common themes. The Centre for Economic and Social Information (CESI), as the secretariat of JUNIC, was acting as a focal point for that programming operation. He expressed appreciation to the Governments

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(Mr. Akatani)

of Denmark, Finland, the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, whose generous contributions to the Trust Fund for Economic and Social Information had made it possible for CESI to fulfil its important mandate.

14. OPI was also continuously reviewing its products and programmes with a view to finding better and more effective ways of doing its work within existing resources. For example, a new and more attractive mast-head for press releases had been introduced and the old mimeograph operation had been replaced by a high-speed photocopying process enabling OPI to provide better and faster service at no increase in cost.

15. OPI of course gave equal attention to the content of its output and was constantly mindful of the need to be objective and impartial in its reporting. For that purpose, improved editorial controls had been instituted for some of its publications.

16. OPI was also mindful of the injunction addressed to it by the Economic and Social Council three years earlier to make increased use of modern techniques in mobilizing public opinion. In that connexion, OPI would soon be making its 500th satellite transmission from Headquarters and the number of its direct radio circuits to all parts of the world was also increasing. In addition, all United Nations information centres would be provided with adequate audio-visual projection equipment in the near future. OPI was also exploring the use of existing United Nations computer facilities to improve services to information centres, particularly to their reference libraries, and was planning the gradual introduction of micrographic techniques.

17. OPI had continued in 1976 to devote considerable attention to the important question of feedback. It was obviously necessary to have more systematic information about public attitudes towards the United Nations in various parts of the world, and about the needs and interests of the audiences served by OPI. That was an extremely complex task to which OPI would like to be able to devote more resources. Nevertheless, progress was being made and the first steps would be taken towards an orderly survey and classification of the relevant information available in the mass media, supplemented by reports from the information centres, regular contacts with redisseminators of OPI products and personal assessment. That arrangement was far from satisfactory, but in the circumstances it was the best that OPI could do.

18. Finally, in accordance with the desire expressed by CPC, the Office had taken the necessary steps to present its programme budget proposals by activity. It hoped that it would thus provide a better basis for assessing its work programme at the next session.

19. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) welcomed the assurance obtained by the Advisory Committee that the actions being taken to improve the efficiency of the information centres system did not have any financial implications. His delegation also welcomed the major effort at rationalization and reorganization which was being made by OPI in order to improve the impact of its activities.

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(Mr. Majoli, Italy)

20. The United Nations information centres were of paramount importance in increasing knowledge about the United Nations, countering adverse propaganda and winning the confidence of public opinion. The activities of the centres should, therefore, be aimed at the general public and not at small groups of specialists. In that connexion, the use of modern mass media techniques was more effective than the distribution of documents and the sponsoring of lectures. The information centres should also translate United Nations jargon into plain language readily accessible to the general public. Because of the peculiarities of United Nations language and procedures, direct television or radio coverage of its meetings was inadvisable.

21. A reasonable amount of autonomy should be allowed the centre directors, who should not devote too much time to the collection of data to be transmitted to Headquarters. In addition to the functions described in paragraph 8 of the Secretary-General's report, centre directors must possess a thorough knowledge of conditions in the country in which they served.

22. He sought information from the Assistant Secretary-General regarding the results of the JUNIC meeting held in Washington in September. He also inquired as to whether the Secretary-General had been successful in his efforts to enlist the co-operation of more States in providing such indirect subsidies to information centres as rent-free premises, as was the case with the Rome centre. Care must be taken, however, to preclude the possibility of Governments subsidizing information centres for the purpose of disseminating propaganda under United Nations auspices.

23. With regard to the information provided in annex I of the Secretary-General's report, he indicated that the Rome centre also served the Holy See.

24. The Advisory Committee had rightly pointed out in paragraph 6 of its report that the function of centre directors was to disseminate information and not to represent the United Nations. In practice, however, centre directors did have a representational function, since in the eyes of the public the information centres were the image of the United Nations itself. His delegation agreed, however, that the respective ranks of UNDP resident representatives and United Nations information centre directors should not be compared.

25. The Yearbook of the United Nations was an invaluable reference work frequently consulted by delegations. For that reason, it was necessary to eliminate the backlog which existed in the production schedule and ensure publication of the Yearbook 12 months after the close of the General Assembly session. His delegation was not convinced by the arguments put forward by the Secretary-General in paragraphs 3 and 16 of his report (A/C.5/31/12) regarding delays encountered by the contributing departments, and it shared the views of the Advisory Committee on that point. The permanent missions themselves were able to prepare comprehensive reports to their Governments at the end of each Assembly session and it was reasonable, therefore, to expect the contributing departments and offices of the Secretariat to be able to make prompt submissions to the Yearbook Unit.

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26. Mr. SARAMO (Finland) said that much of the criticism of the new international economic order had been due to insufficient information concerning the United Nations resolutions on the subject and their background. If the new order was to be established with the requisite speed, the United Nations must concentrate on public information activities. In that connexion, the importance of the field establishment of OPI could not be overestimated.

27. It was not surprising that the Secretary-General's report contained little information concerning the day-to-day work of the information centres, as the various centres necessarily operated under a great variety of conditions. More consideration, however, might have been given to an evaluation of the degree to which information centres had been able to meet the reasonable expectations of their clients. Clients of the information centre in Finland had occasionally informed Finnish authorities that they had not always been provided with all the services they wished. While some of the unsatisfied requests might have fallen outside the terms of reference of the information centre, others could well have been met had it been possible to overcome certain comparatively minor legalistic, organizational or budgetary restraints.

28. With regard to the non-information tasks performed by some information centres, there was a genuine need for logistic support in the field for the growing number of United Nations meetings held away from Headquarters and the numerous overseas missions of United Nations bodies; such tasks, however, ought to be separated to the extent possible from the fundamental activities of the information centres. As pointed out by the Advisory Committee in its report (A/31/8/Add.2), General Assembly resolution 2897 (XXVI) laid emphasis on the need for centre directors to give their undivided attention to the dissemination of information about the United Nations. As matters stood, the situation was not sufficiently clear from a programme budgeting point of view. In that connexion, his delegation wished to ask whether the non-information activities of the information centres were budgeted under the public information programme or under other programmes to which they were more closely related. It would also like to know how large a part of total expenditure for the information centre system was for non-information activities.

29. Mr. ABOUL GHEIT (Egypt) asked for further information on the number and nationality of women appointed as information centre directors since the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly, on the number and nationality of women who had become deputy directors and on the future plans in that respect. He also requested information on the nationality of all information centre directors, on the number of countries providing facilities for information centres and on the nature of those facilities. Finally, with reference to paragraph 27 (a) of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/31/14), he requested further information on co-operation between the information centres and specialized agencies and on the results of the meeting of JUNIC in September 1976. With regard to the Yearbook of the United Nations, he endorsed the remarks of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the representative of Italy.

30. Mr. VIEIRA (Brazil), referring to the question of the United Nations information centres system, said that there was a need to make world public opinion more aware of the aims and accomplishments of the Organization and that it was therefore gratifying to learn of the growing efficiency of the United Nations information system. His Government had recently increased its subsidy towards the financing of the Rio de Janeiro information centre, which was the only United Nations information centre in a Portuguese-speaking country and was therefore in a unique position to play an important role in the dissemination of information on the United Nations to all Portuguese-speaking countries.

31. Mr. NORBURY (United States of America), referring to the question of the Yearbook of the United Nations, said that, like ACABQ, he was not convinced that the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/31/12) provided a comprehensive response to the request of the General Assembly that the Secretary-General explore ways and means of ensuring a more timely publication of the Yearbook. It was to be hoped that in future OPI and the Department of Conference Services would assign the highest priority to material for the Yearbook and ensure that contributions were on time and well prepared. His Government was firmly opposed to the allocation of any additional staff resources to Yearbook activities under the 1976-1977 budget. The problem of the timely publication of the Yearbook should be tackled through the allocation of available temporary assistance funds, the redeployment of available staff resources and the improvement of managerial techniques.

32. Mr. LEMP (Federal Republic of Germany) said that, if the Yearbook of the United Nations was given greater priority, it would not be necessary to devote additional staff resources to its preparation. In general, well-founded criticism of the work of certain Secretariat units should be answered not by requests for additional staff resources but by a thorough analysis of the short-comings. Paragraph 3 of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/31/12), concerning the reasons for delays in the publication of the Yearbook, was not detailed enough and should have shown which departments had delayed their contribution, why they had done so and whether they had done so repeatedly. Such information was vital since, according to paragraph 16 of the Secretary-General's report, without the co-operation of submitting departments the desired results might not be attained even if the request for additional staff resources was approved. He endorsed the recommendations of the Advisory Committee (A/31/8/Add.1), but did so reluctantly and on the understanding that they would not create a precedent for other spheres of Secretariat activity.

33. Mr. RHODIUS (Netherlands) endorsed the requests for further information made by the representatives of Italy and Finland. He welcomed the growing co-operation between the United Nations information centres system and UNDP, the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies; it was to be hoped that such co-operation in the field would be reflected at the headquarters of the organizations concerned. There was a need for more co-operation in the field of public information because of the increasing emphasis on system-wide activities. In that connexion, he noted with interest paragraph 108 of the annual report of ACC (E/5803), which indicated that progress had been made with respect to the development of a joint United Nations information plan.

34. He disagreed with the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the financing of information centres by means of extrabudgetary contributions (A/C.5/31/14, para. 28).

(Mr. Rhodius, Netherlands)

Information centres should be financed under the regular budget, except when the host country offered free accommodation or when the specialized agencies offered similar assistance. Paragraph 10 of the Secretary-General's report emphasized the role of information in encouraging people to identify with and support the Organization. However, in the final analysis, the image of the United Nations depended on its activities rather than on information concerning those activities. In conclusion, he reaffirmed his support for the activities of OPI.

35. Mr. ALDORNOZ (Ecuador) said that United Nations activities were expanding and must therefore be more widely publicized. To be effective, the United Nations information centres must have the support of government information services, UNDP and the specialized agencies. In that connexion, the close co-operation between United Nations information centres and UNDP, referred to in the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/31/14), was of particular significance. However, the task of UNDP resident representatives responsible for the dissemination of information would be easier if they received information directly from Headquarters or from OPI itself. In view of rising costs and inflation, he strongly supported the Secretary-General's proposal that Member States increase their extrabudgetary contributions to information centre activities (A/C.5/31/14, para. 28). It might even be desirable to open new information centres only in countries where the host Government was prepared to make a contribution, and provision should be made for the gradual absorption of information centre costs by the host Government. Another approach, which had been successful in the past, would be to merge information centres with other United Nations field offices.

36. Mr. NAUDY (France), referring to the question of the Yearbook of the United Nations, said that, like the Advisory Committee, he was not convinced that the Secretary-General had responded adequately to the request of the General Assembly that he explore ways and means of ensuring a more timely production of the Yearbook (A/31/8/Add.1, para. 7). There was no need to allocate additional staff resources to Yearbook activities, since the problem could be solved by using existing resources more efficiently, redeploying personnel and raising productivity.

Emoluments of the members of the International Court of Justice (A/31/8/Add.3; A/C.5/31/13)

37. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) observed that, since the Court was a principal organ of the United Nations but was not in the common system, the problem over the years had been how to develop a system of principles and guidelines for the review and adjustment of the salaries of members of the Court independently of the reviews and adjustments for the common system of salaries and allowances. In 1975, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals to enable it to arrive at a workable and durable solution.

38. The Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/31/13) dealt primarily with the question of interim adjustments to compensate for cost-of-living movements that affected the purchasing power of the salaries of the judges. A summary of the Secretary-General's proposals was contained in paragraphs 2 to 4 of the report of the

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(Mr. Mselle)

Advisory Committee (A/31/8/Add.3). The Secretary-General's scheme, if approved by the General Assembly, would operate in the manner indicated in paragraph 9 of the Advisory Committee's report.

39. Any scheme for adjusting salaries of members of the Court had to take into account, first, the view expressed by the Fifth Committee at the sixteenth session of the General Assembly that judicial salaries should not be subject to frequent review, and, secondly, the provision of Article 32 of the Statute of the Court that the salaries, allowances and compensation, once fixed by the General Assembly, should not be decreased during the term of office of a member of the Court.

40. The Advisory Committee, in examining the Secretary-General's proposed scheme, had paid particular attention to those considerations and to the view of the President of the Court that downward adjustments of cost-of-living payments would not be contrary to the relevant provision of the Statute of the Court. Accordingly, the Advisory Committee was recommending to the General Assembly that it should approve a system of interim cost-of-living adjustments in the judges' salaries payable between the periodic reviews of those salaries.

41. In paragraphs 12 and 13, the Advisory Committee discussed the question of the most appropriate index for such adjustment and came to the conclusion that the simple arithmetic average of post adjustment rather than the weighted average would be the most appropriate for the scheme proposed.

42. The Advisory Committee had also recommended (para. 10) that the amount of the adjustment should be constantly related to the annual salary, since it did not deem it appropriate to follow the mechanism in the Secretary-General's proposal, which, for purposes of subsequent adjustments, provided for no distinction between the base salary as approved by the General Assembly and the sum of the annual salary and whatever interim adjustments had already been granted.

43. In paragraphs 15 and 16 the Advisory Committee discussed the question of review of judicial salaries and recommended that such reviews should take place once every five years unless the General Assembly decided otherwise. In order to facilitate consideration of the matter, the Advisory Committee had included in the annex to its report a draft resolution which should be read in conjunction with paragraphs 9, 10 and 17.

44. Mr. KEFFA (Ivory Coast) said that the guiding principles laid down by the Preparatory Commission and reproduced in paragraphs 5 (a) and (b) of the Secretary-General's report remained valid.

45. The emoluments of the judges of the Court should not be established without taking into account the remuneration of the senior officials of the Secretariat, particularly since the Registrar of the Court had been assimilated to an Assistant Secretary-General. At the same time, his delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that those emoluments were of sui generis and that consequently they could not be directly related or compared to the remunerations of Secretariat officials. Nor could they be compared to the remuneration of the members of national judiciaries because of the diversity of conditions obtaining in national administrations.

(Mr. Keffa, Ivory Coast)

46. Over the years it had become customary to determine the level of remuneration for members of the organs or subsidiary organs of the United Nations by reference to the salaries for senior Secretariat officials. Since general reviews of the salaries of United Nations staff were normally conducted every four or five years, the Advisory Committee's recommendation of a five-year cycle (A/31/8/Add.3, para. 16) seemed appropriate, with the possibility of an earlier review if exceptional circumstances warranted it. Interim cost-of-living supplements, payable as of 1 January, when the weighted average of post adjustments had moved upwards or downwards by five points or more also seemed to be justified. However, as the Advisory Committee pointed out in paragraph 10 of its report, it would be wrong to confuse what was intended to be two distinct elements of remuneration, and therefore the amount of the adjustment should be a function of the annual salary only. Of the methods proposed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 24 of his report, his delegation preferred method H. It supported the draft resolution proposed by the Advisory Committee.

47. Mr. NORBURY (United States of America) said that his delegation strongly supported the International Court of Justice; his remarks should not be taken as an adverse comment on that organ or its members.

48. During the past year the United States press had published a number of articles criticizing the high salaries paid to officials of international organizations, thus reflecting the serious erosion of the public support which such organizations had previously enjoyed in his country. One of the chief criticisms of United Nations salaries was that, owing to the United Nations practice of indexing salaries against inflation, the remuneration paid to staff unreasonably exceeded that paid to members of the highest paid national civil service. His delegation was opposed to indexing, which contravened the Noblemaire principle, and regarded it as a significant factor in diminishing United States public support for international organizations.

49. One of the chief reasons advanced for requesting an indexing system for the judges was the view expressed by the Fifth Committee at the sixteenth session that judicial salaries should not be subject to frequent reviews. However, a careful reading of document A/5075, paragraph 64, clearly revealed that the Fifth Committee in 1961 had been opposed to linking the salaries of the judges to a fluctuating circumstance such as the cost of living. His delegation's position remained the same as in 1961, namely that the salaries should be such as to render the office of judge acceptable to the most eminent of the persons qualified to hold that office, that they should not be lower than such persons would receive in their own countries, and that they should be such as to guarantee the absolute independence of the judges.

50. Currently, the tax-free net salary of \$50,000 per annum received by the judges was substantially more than the comparable salary of a justice of the United States Supreme Court, which was the highest-paying national court system in the world. Consequently, he doubted whether any increase in emoluments could be justified. Without wishing to comment on the appropriateness of the current salary level of the Registrar, his delegation could not agree that that post should serve as a

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(Mr. Norbury, United States)

reference point in assessing the judges' salaries. In his delegation's view, an approach whereby salary levels for the judges and other professional staff of the International Court of Justice were established by comparison with salaries in the highest-paid national judicial system would still attract eminent and qualified persons and would preserve the sui generis character of the Court. His delegation would therefore oppose the draft resolution in document A/31/8/Add.3.

51. Mr. AKASHI (Japan) said that future changes in the base salaries of judges should observe the criteria provided for in paragraph 13 of the Secretary-General's report, account being taken of the observations in paragraph 14 of the Advisory Committee's report. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that the salaries should be reviewed every five years and that some formula should be found to maintain their purchasing power so as to obviate the need for more frequent reviews. Such interim adjustments were justified by the severeness of inflation rates in recent years and sharp fluctuations in exchange rates. Of the eight methods proposed by the Secretary-General, his delegation would have preferred method C, D, E or F, which took account of the fact that most of the judges spent approximately half the year in The Hague. However, it was prepared to accept method H, as recommended by the Advisory Committee, which had the merit of simplicity. It noted that there would be no financial implications for the 1976-1977 budget and was prepared to vote for the draft resolution proposed by the Advisory Committee.

AGENDA ITEM 93: MEDIUM-TERM PLAN (continued)

- (a) MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1978-1981 AND REVISED PLAN FOR 1977
(A/31/3 (chap. III, sect. H and 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, A/C.5/31/27;
E/RES/2017, 2019 (LXI))

52. Mr. ALLISON (Nigeria) said that the medium-term plan was of paramount importance to the existence and performance of the United Nations both in the immediate future and over the longer term. The use of the word "plan" by the Secretariat was not quite clear, since the medium-term plan was not a plan in the usual sense of the word. However, since there was no intergovernmental body to prepare a plan, the Secretariat's plan was the most appropriate working paper in an off-budget year. Accordingly, it was difficult to accept ACABQ's view that the plan was "an exercise of taking stock" (A/31/139, para. 5) and that its status was "not very clear" (A/31/139, para. 9), since the plan was clearly experimental and not only took stock of previous projects but recommended new ones. However, not all the projects had been approached in the correct manner. In its resolution 3392 (XXX), the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit a medium-term plan for the period 1978-1981, presumably on the grounds that it would be more logical to draw up a plan before making budgetary provisions for it. However, successful planning had to take account of available funds as well as of the effectiveness of the proposed programmes, and both CPC and ACABQ should therefore comment on the effectiveness and expected benefits of the plan. As for the structural deficiencies of the plan, the Secretariat had done all that could have been expected of it in the time available. Nevertheless, he supported all the recommendations calling for an articulated and co-ordinated approach to planning in the United Nations system.

(Mr. Allison, Nigeria)

53. In the last few years, the United Nations system had become increasingly aware of the problems of development. The plan, in volume I, part three, dealt with the question of economic co-operation among developing countries, but there was some concern among delegations from developing countries that the medium-term plan did nothing more than commission further studies on issues which were of fundamental importance to the development of the great majority of Member States. The plan was therefore grossly deficient, and future plans should establish priorities for projects affecting developing countries. It would also be important to ensure co-ordination between all bodies responsible for drawing up the plan, both at the regional and Secretariat level, and to provide the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly with guidelines concerning areas of the plan that could be de-emphasized. Furthermore, future plans should devise a means whereby the Secretary-General would not only have an over-all view of United Nations activities, but would be allowed discretionary powers for centralizing the planning of related projects in different geographical areas. In that way the temptation to allow intergovernmental agencies to add projects on an ad hoc and unco-ordinated basis would be avoided and interregional co-operation would be ensured.

54. The medium-term plan was of an experimental nature, but the experiment ought to have been based on the many successful United Nations projects and programmes. However, given the limited time available and the lack of data, the existing document represented a useful effort. It was to be hoped that, before becoming operational, the plan would be revised in the light of the suggestions put forward.

55. Mr. HANSEN (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination), referring to the nature and purpose of the plan, said that a plan was the process by which legislative intent was transformed into a set of objectives - if possible, quantified and programmed within a given time framework - and by which those objectives were realized in terms of organizational action. It reflected conceptual goals and the ways in which those goals might be pursued. Thus, the plan encompassed a multitude of functions and involved a large number of legislative and executive bodies. It was a tool used by directors to consolidate the tasks set by various resolutions into programme proposals, by intergovernmental bodies at various levels to review those proposals and interpret legislative intent, by the same intergovernmental bodies to review the usefulness of existing programmes, and by CPC to ensure that plans were well co-ordinated with respect to both United Nations organs and the system as a whole. It was also used to establish priorities and relative growth rates, thereby serving as a framework for the ensuing programme budget. Given the complexity of the planning process, CPC had found the medium-term plan largely satisfactory, but several changes were called for. The plan should contain more information on system-wide activities (A/31/38, paras. 83 and 84), as well as more detailed financial information (A/31/38, para. 4). With respect to the latter, the use of "enveloppes financières" would be advantageous, provided that discussions on ceilings and floors did not give rise to too many disputes. Change was also necessary with respect to programme structure. Although the functional and structural approaches were not mutually exclusive, it was clear that the policy-making function was best served by the functional approach, whereas the managerial function was best served by the structural approach; furthermore, the accounting function was best served by the traditional expenditure approach.

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(Mr. Hansen)

Thus, no single approach could fully satisfy all needs, and the format chosen by the Secretariat was satisfactory. Since the existence of a multiplicity of decision-making centres must be reflected in the structure of the plan, there was a need for presentation on a major programme basis as well as on an organizational basis, and that combination had been achieved. Such an approach was particularly important with respect to the many major programmes composed of separate programmes managed individually at Headquarters and the regional commissions. The sectoral or functional programmes at the regional level were integrated into the multisectoral approach developed by each regional commission, which made co-ordination between Headquarters and the regional commissions particularly important. In that connexion, CPC had called for a more intensive exchange of experience between Headquarters and the regional commissions (A/31/38, para. 98). Further specific recommendations on programme structure were contained in paragraph 5 of CPC's report (A/31/38).

56. As for the amount of detailed information to be included in the plan, there could be no easy answer, since the information required varied greatly according to the different functions served by the plan. Some delegations had called for a short concise plan, while others wanted much more detailed information, but the contradiction was only apparent, since it was a question not of choosing between different formats for a single function but of differentiating information according to needs. CPC would welcome a brief statement by the Secretary-General proposing directives for future activities, but such a statement would not obviate the need for the kind of information contained in the present plan, without which CPC could not perform its functions of checking programme formulation against legislative intent, ensuring intraorganizational and interorganizational co-ordination and analysing programmes with a view to eliminating those which were obsolete or ineffectual. The concise statement by the Secretary-General would provide a useful framework for performing those functions, and in that connexion, the proposal by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago to draw up a two-volume plan (A/C.5/31/SR.5, para. 13) appeared to meet the requirements of both the policy-making function and the review and management function.

57. With respect to the status of the plan, he said that CPC considered the plan presented by the Secretary-General as a proposal or a draft plan, to be reviewed by intergovernmental bodies and changed if necessary before it became the plan of the Organization. As the Advisory Committee had pointed out, the question of the cut-off point was important. As far as the Secretary-General was concerned, the cut-off point was the deadline which he set for submissions by Secretariat units. The cut-off point was less clear in respect of the review of the plan by intergovernmental bodies. Ideally, all programming bodies should consider the programme before CPC met, and CPC's review should constitute the cut-off point, pending further possible changes by the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. Unfortunately however, as the representative of Trinidad and Tobago had noted, that arrangement might be ideal but it was not practicable. CPC had recognized the problem and had decided not to conduct in-depth reviews of programme areas in which major new policy directives were expected. In such cases the cut-off point would be the General Assembly's own final review, but even that would have to be conditional and should allow for activities subsequently authorized by legislative organs or for activities of an unforeseeable nature.

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(Mr. Hansen)

58. The cut-off problem was but one aspect of the basic dilemma of planning. Since the rationale of planning was to introduce some order and predictability into programming, it must constrain decision-making on programmes. However, the reality with which programmes dealt did not always behave in an orderly and predictable manner. The priorities of the international community and the operational activities conducted by the Organization were likely to change. Thus if the plan was considered as nothing more than a catalogue of programmes of which the General Assembly took note, programmes would be allowed to grow more or less spontaneously, making the whole planning exercise meaningless. If, on the other hand, the plan was adopted as a binding authoritative statement, not subject to change, it would become a straitjacket hampering the dynamic evaluation of programmes. Some solution in between those two extremes must be found if the exercise was to be meaningful and useful. Probably the solution outlined by a number of delegations, namely that the General Assembly should approve the plan in the light of the recommendations of CPC, ACABQ and the Economic and Social Council, was the best one.

59. The relationship between CPC and ACABQ had been a recurrent theme in the reports of those two bodies and in the debates of the Fifth Committee. The introduction of planning, and particularly of programme budgeting, had considerably reinforced the functional interrelationship between the two bodies, since the main rationale of programme budgeting was precisely to move away from a situation where programmes were considered in isolation from budgetary implications and vice versa towards a situation where those two aspects of resource management were integrated. While that had meant that the functional tasks of the primarily programme-oriented CPC and the primarily budget-oriented ACABQ had become much more closely interrelated, it did not necessarily mean that they had become identical or overlapping. The ideal structure might well be a single body. But the functions of resource management were so diverse and wide-ranging and the volume of work involved was so great that a division of tasks between the two Committees was undoubtedly justified. A creative division of labour, as outlined by the representative of Austria, already existed and should be developed further. According to the mandates of the two Committees, the Advisory Committee would concentrate on the programme budget and concern itself with the formulation of administrative and budgetary advice and CPC would concern itself with the review of programmes in the medium-term plans and in the programme budget. CPC, as he saw it, had three roles to play - interpretative, analytical and evaluative; it should interpret the relationship between resolutions and programmes, analyse the relationship between programmed action and desired results, and ensure that those results were in conformity with current trends. CPC would continue its in-depth studies of selected programmes along the lines stated at its sixteenth session. While basing its analysis on the format contained in the medium-term plan for 1978-1981, CPC should refine its methods for helping the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly to assign priorities. In order to do so, it would require more systematic internal and external evaluation procedures and better data on the distribution of resources between continuing projects, ongoing projects due to be completed during the biennium, and new projects, so as to have a better impression of the turn-over rate of activities.

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(Mr. Hansen)

60. CPC had been rightly criticized by the Economic and Social Council and the Fifth Committee for not being specific in its programme recommendations and for not tackling the issue of priorities squarely. During the current year, however, CPC had made specific growth-rate recommendations. It had been noted in the debate that the methodologies so far developed for tackling the issue of priorities left much to be desired. Some delegations had maintained that the programme budget could not be a success until the question of determining priorities had been settled. On the contrary, experience had shown that the introduction of programme budgeting and planning had facilitated the determination of priorities by providing Member States with a much better picture of the substance and composition of activities. However, CPC had only just begun to deal with the issue, and several problems remained. First, the share of resources or rate of growth was only one indicator of the importance of the programme. Thus the assignment of relative growth rates by CPC did not imply any judgement concerning the intrinsic significance of the field of activity itself but reflected CPC's judgement on the case made by programme managers for the maintenance or expansion of their activities. Secondly, the assignment of priorities to programmes without distinguishing between programme components was necessarily something of a blunt instrument.

61. The role which CPC and JIU could play in evaluation had already been commented on by several delegations. He would merely add that evaluation should be built into the programme review at each level of consideration by governmental bodies.

62. With respect to system-wide co-ordination, he said that CPC had yet to be effective in carrying out that function. Since CPC could not realistically be expected to conduct a better agency programme review than the expert executive bodies of the agencies, it should focus on programme linkages between organizations with a view to promoting joint planning and productive interagency co-operation.

63. The CHAIRMAN said that since the Committee had now concluded its debate on the medium-term plan, he intended to postpone further consideration of the item until the draft resolution being prepared by a number of delegations was available.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.