



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 38th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Republic)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 96: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY CO-ORDINATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS WITH THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY: REPORT OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS (A/31/75 and Add.1 and 2; A/C.5/31/L.21/Rev.1) (continued)

1. Mr. DAVIDSON (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) recalled that the representative of France had requested a clarification, first, regarding the differences in the level of the expenditure reported for administrative and budgetary control by ILO and UNESCO, on the one hand, and FAO and WHO, on the other, and second, regarding variations in the costs of Professional man-days within the various specialized agencies. In connexion with the first point, the figures referred to were given in document A/31/75 on pages 24, 36, 29 and 50 respectively of the English text. It would be seen that the two agencies (FAO and WHO) reporting markedly higher total expenditure had included costs which were not included in the information given by the other two agencies. Thus FAO had included such items as the costs of its Office of Programme and Budget (\$461,000) and of its Financial Services Division (\$1,243,000). WHO, for its part, had included the costs of servicing its Executive Board (\$431,706) and its Division of Co-ordination (\$1,417,586).

2. With respect to the second point, he drew the attention of the representative of France to paragraph 6 of document A/31/75, where it was stated that the data relating to manpower outlay covered resources other than direct supporting staff. The man-days reported by some agencies therefore represented their best estimates of the manpower resources devoted to the preparation of information for bodies or organs, or consultations with them. However, it was not possible to calculate the costs on the basis of the data given in document A/31/75.

Draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.21/Rev.1

3. Mr. IYER (India), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.21/Rev.1 on behalf of the sponsors, said that the preamble referred to a number of concerns shared by almost all the delegations which had participated in the debate on the item. The operative part, which provided precise guidelines for the Secretary-General, was intended to strengthen AMS in its existing role and functions. The various recommendations and requests to the Secretary-General had been taken from the statements made by delegations and represented the broad spectrum of opinion expressed during the debate. By adding the requests to ACABQ, the sponsors had sought to tighten the control of the General Assembly over the activities of the Secretariat. Since the draft resolution closely reflected the opinions expressed in the discussion, the sponsors hoped that the Committee would adopt it by consensus.

4. He drew attention to an editorial change in part I, paragraph 4, where the word "a" before "highest" should be replaced by the word "the".

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5. Mr. VANDERGERT (Sri Lanka) said that, as a sponsor of the draft resolution, his delegation wished to draw attention to part I, paragraphs 2 (b) and 3, whose provisions were indispensable to ensure that AMS became an effective tool of internal management, and to part II.
6. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that his delegation attached great importance to management improvement. The General Assembly's decision at the previous session to ask the Secretary-General for information on the action taken on the recommendations of AMS had been a result of his delegation's initiative. Draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.21/Rev.1 was sound inasmuch as the Committee was agreed on the necessity of some form of machinery to ensure continuing management improvement. His only reservations related to the second preambular paragraph, which stipulated that such machinery should be internal. In his delegation's view, it might be preferable to entrust management studies to an external unit, which would have greater freedom of action and independence than a unit located within the Secretariat. However, in view of part III of the resolution, which provided that the question of administrative and management control would be reviewed at the thirty-third session, his delegation intended to vote for the draft resolution and to reconsider in two years' time whether an internal unit was capable of discharging the task assigned to it.

7. The CHAIRMAN suggested that draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.21/Rev.1 should be adopted by consensus.

8. It was so decided.

9. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee had concluded its consideration of item 96.

AGENDA ITEM 103: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (continued)

Draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.23 (A/C.5/31/48) (continued)

10. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that his delegation would not insist on the amendment it had proposed to part A, paragraph 2, at the 37th meeting.
11. Mr. KIVANC (Turkey) proposed that the word "fundamental" before "reforms" in part C, paragraph 1, should be replaced by the word "further". It was his delegation's belief that, if there were to be fundamental reforms in the international civil service salary system, the General Assembly should have the prerogative of defining the principles on which such reforms should be based.
12. Mr. AKASHI (Japan) said that the sponsors could accept the Turkish amendment.
13. Mention having been made of the contribution to the draft resolution of the Belgian and other delegations, he would like to pay a tribute to the members of ICSC for their outstanding work.
14. The CHAIRMAN invited members of the Committee to vote on the draft resolution incorporating the amendment proposed by the delegation of Turkey.
15. Draft resolution A/C.5/31/L.23, as amended, was adopted by 78 votes to 11, with 2 abstentions.

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16. Mr. QUIJANO (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) said the Commission was indebted to the members of the Committee not only for their endorsement of most of its recommendations but also for the specific mandate in part C of the draft resolution, which provided a clear picture of how it should carry forward its study of the salary system.

17. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee had concluded its consideration of item 103.

AGENDA ITEM 98: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES (A/31/3 (chap. VIII, sect. G), A/31/32) (continued)

18. Mr. HENČIĆ (Yugoslavia) said that the pattern of conferences involved one of the basic functions of the United Nations, namely, to promote frequent exchanges of views among Member States with a view to solving contemporary world problems. The proliferation of conferences and meetings was directly related to the international situation and reflected the expanded activities of the United Nations and the efforts of Member States to strengthen the role of the Organization in seeking solutions to such problems. Attempts to rationalize the pattern of conferences must not jeopardize the Organization's function of promoting exchanges of views among Member States. Arbitrary measures to limit the number of conferences or the length of meetings would undermine United Nations activities and the efforts of the majority of its Members to find satisfactory solutions through consensus, a procedure which often required lengthy exchanges of views and the convening of numerous meetings. The holding of conferences and meetings was of such importance to the United Nations that every effort must be made to overcome difficulties encountered in convening, preparing and holding them. In order to facilitate the task of the Secretariat in that regard and solve the numerous problems caused by the proliferation of conferences, the General Assembly had decided to re-establish the Committee on Conferences on an experimental basis.

19. The report of that Committee on the second year of its existence (A/31/32) was very encouraging; that was a matter of concern to his delegation, since it might confirm the doubts which a number of delegations had expressed with regard to the advisability of re-establishing a Committee on Conferences. Both the present Committee and the former one had been concerned chiefly with halting the proliferation of conferences and meetings, finding ways to justify shortening the length of meetings and ensuring the appropriate spacing of meetings. As the purposes of the new Committee had not been completely understood, it seemed to be facing the same difficulties which had contributed to the Assembly's decision to abolish its predecessor.

20. In implementing the recommendation of JIU to make more rational and economic use of conference resources, the Committee on Conferences had adopted a restrictive interpretation of its own mandate. That could be seen in the manner in which the Committee had dealt with suggestions regarding the starting time of meetings and the required quorum for the opening of meetings, as well as in its rigid interpretation of the principle that United Nations bodies must meet at their respective headquarters. Despite the fact that some members of the Committee on

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(Mr. Henčić, Yugoslavia)

Conferences had advocated a more flexible approach, stressing the advantages of holding meetings in developing countries, the Committee had seen fit to include in paragraph 6 (f) of its proposed draft resolution (A/31/32, para. 118, recommendation 6), a text which had not won the approval of its members. His delegation, for its part, would not be able to support that paragraph.

21. His delegation welcomed the decision of the Committee on Conferences to defer consideration of the feasibility of a quota system to allocate resources among various fields of activity. In that connexion, his delegation concurred fully in the view of the Advisory Committee that it would be difficult to reconcile the decisions taken by numerous autonomous or semi-autonomous bodies. It hoped therefore that the idea of such a quota system would be abandoned once and for all, since it could only detract from the role played by conferences in promoting the exchange of views and ideas on important questions and undermine the efforts of the United Nations to develop and expand its activities.

22. The Committee on Conferences could serve a useful function by advising the General Assembly on the current and future requirements of the Organization for conference services and facilities in accordance with paragraph 3 (e) of General Assembly resolution 3351 (XXIX). That was an aspect of the Committee's mandate which had been virtually ignored so far. It was a mistake to concentrate on the financial and economic aspects of the question of conferences and to do so would have adverse consequences for the Organization.

23. It was unacceptable for such an important committee as the Committee on Conferences to conduct its work in a manner which did not allow non-members to keep abreast of its activities and the annual report of that Committee, however useful, was no substitute for the provision of information throughout the year. The work of the Committee on Conferences had thus far not had financial implications. Therefore, it should be authorized to have summary records prepared for its meetings.

24. Mr. IYER (India) said that various issues raised by the report of JIU at the twenty-ninth session (A/9795) were still relevant. Those issues included the more rational use of conference facilities to maximize the utilization of the available resources, the possibility of limiting the number of major conferences for a given year and, finally, the proper procedures to be adopted when conferences were to be held away from Headquarters. On the whole, the Committee on Conferences had performed satisfactorily with respect to rearranging conference schedules during the intersessional period. However, there were lacunae in its mandate. The Committee had not been able to consider the request of a subsidiary body for summary records because of technical objections from some Member States, and it had been unable to make any recommendations on purely technical aspects of conference servicing in connexion with the convening of the fifth session of the Third Conference on the Law of the Sea during the intersessional period. Furthermore, the agreement of the Committee had not been sought before the Third Conference on the Law of the Sea had resumed its session in August 1976. The Committee's authority to act on behalf of the General Assembly in dealing between sessions

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(Mr. Iyer, India)

with requested departures from the calendar of conferences had therefore been ignored, and there was a danger that the Committee would become an intergovernmental imprimatur for the wishes of various subsidiary organs and a rather ineffective buffer between those organs and the Secretariat.

25. With respect to the pattern of conferences for 1977, the Committee on Conferences had been unable to eliminate "peaks and valleys", despite the fact that an even distribution of conferences could eliminate most additional interpretation requirements during peak periods. However, the Committee on Conferences was bound by a variety of conventions on the location and timing of meetings, over which it had no control. The Committee had therefore been unable to ask fundamental questions on the acceptability of various meeting schedules. The General Assembly had not implemented the proposals made by JIU (A/9795), and it might become necessary for the Committee on Conferences and the Fifth Committee to tackle the problem. It was to be regretted that consultations between the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and various subsidiary bodies aimed at streamlining their meeting procedures had met with a lukewarm response.

26. The Secretary-General had decided that the volume of conference work would be dictated by the availability of interpreters, and had recommended that a quota system for conferences in various fields be considered. The weak logic of that procedure had been underlined by the constant revision of the desirable upper limit for the number of conferences in any given year. His delegation opposed any measure which, either arbitrarily or on the pretext of effecting economies, would reduce the size of conferences or slow down their momentum. The United Nations should not remain a passive spectator to the development of possible shortages in interpreters which would curtail its activities, and it was to be hoped that the Fifth Committee would provide the Secretary-General with the authority to increase the number of interpreters.

27. It was to be regretted that the Committee on Conferences had been unable to agree to the adoption of a proposal on the holding of conferences in developing countries (A/31/32, para. 93). Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV), the membership of the United Nations had increased substantially and the concerns of the Organization had changed. The proposal in paragraph 93 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/31/32) should therefore be adopted.

28. Mr. ROUSSEAU (Mexico) said that, in considering the report of the Committee on Conferences, the Fifth Committee should also keep in mind the Secretary-General's report on the utilization of office accommodation and conference facilities in the Donaupark Centre at Vienna (A/C.5/31/34).

29. His delegation wished to know why, according to the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1977, the fifteenth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the tenth session of UNCITRAL would be held at Vienna. The meetings of the former should normally be held at United Nations Headquarters, while General Assembly resolution 2205 (XXI) provided that

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(Mr. Rousseau, Mexico)

UNCITRAL should meet alternately at Headquarters and at Geneva. Selecting Vienna as the venue of the tenth session of UNCITRAL would, therefore, involve changing a decision of the General Assembly and would, moreover, be an infringement of the sovereignty of UNCITRAL if it had been done without that body's consent.

30. His delegation would not endorse the draft resolution recommended by the Committee on Conferences unless paragraph 6 (f) of part I were amended by the addition of the words "following consultation with and acceptance by the bodies concerned".

31. Mr. THOMAS (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences), speaking in reply to the representative of Yugoslavia, said that the Committee on Conferences had not intended to be too restrictive in its interpretation of its mandate. Certainly, it had looked at the elements of its mandate singly, not cumulatively, but it had made every effort to examine all suggestions, however trivial, in order to achieve optimum apportionment of conference facilities. With respect to the introduction of a quota system, the Committee on Conferences had been divided, and it was for the Fifth Committee and the General Assembly to decide what future action should be taken. The Committee had merely tried to see to what extent the quota system would promote the optimum apportionment of conference facilities. With respect to part II, paragraph 3 (e), of General Assembly resolution 3351 (XXIX), the Committee on Conferences ought to continue its work in that field, but had been unable to fulfil all aspects of its mandate. As for the question of making reports available to Member States, the Organization was trying to reduce documentation, and the Committee on Conferences had felt that, by dispensing with summary records, it would be setting a good example. The Committee met in open session, and Member States were therefore free to follow the debates. In fact, the elimination of summary records had stimulated debate within the Committee.

32. The representative of Mexico had asked why CERD and UNCITRAL were to meet in Vienna. The members of both bodies had agreed to meet there, after receiving invitations from the Austrian Government. He understood that the meetings were being held under the terms of the General Assembly resolution concerning bodies which met away from their established headquarters.

AGENDA ITEM 99: UNITED NATIONS ACCOMMODATION (continued)

- (a) UTILIZATION OF OFFICE ACCOMMODATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM (A/9854, A/10279 and Add.1, A/10280 and Add.1; A/31/8/Add.4; A/C.5/31/7 and Corr.1, A/C.5/31/17 and Corr.1, A/C.5/31/22) (continued)

33. Mr. KRUMIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said the General Assembly had clearly established that all support costs incurred by the United Nations in connexion with the provision of office accommodation to extrabudgetary staff must be reimbursed in full. However, the report of JIU (A/10280) showed that, as a result of a lack of control on the part of the Secretariat, some organizations reimbursed only part of such costs and others paid nothing. On 1 January 1975, more than 2,000 extrabudgetary staff members had been using United Nations office

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(Mr. Krumin, USSR)

accommodation, and such a situation was absolutely unacceptable. He could not agree with the Secretary-General that the cost of providing office accommodation for extrabudgetary staff was only one of many elements in the question of allocation of "support costs" for extrabudgetary activities, and that it could not, on practical grounds, be dealt with separately from the consideration of those other elements (A/C.5/31/7, para. 3). It was to be hoped that the proposed programme budget for 1978-1979 would contain all the necessary information on the reimbursement of support costs. The question of the accommodation occupied by extrabudgetary staff would be greatly simplified if the cost of such accommodation was borne by the organizations concerned instead of being included in the regular budget of the United Nations.

34. He was pleased to note that the Secretary-General had begun to implement recommendations made by JIU concerning the use of office accommodation at Headquarters. In particular, the liaison offices of the specialized agencies, IAEA and IMF, three missions, the World Federation of United Nations Associations, the Association of Former International Civil Servants and the Women's Guild should be moved from Headquarters, and the rent for the use of Headquarters office accommodation should be fixed at a level comparable to that of the rent paid for similar accommodation on the local market. With respect to the accommodation of staff in Headquarters, long-term policies should be based on reductions in the rate of growth of the number of staff members, the transfer of individual units to alternative accommodation and the leasing of no more than the minimum space in cases of absolute necessity.

35. Some other questions raised in the report of JIU had been unsatisfactorily dealt with in the Secretary-General's report. In particular, the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund occupied 425 square metres of office accommodation in the Secretariat building, but paid no rent. There was no reason why the Fund should not rent office accommodation in a building near the Secretariat. It was also difficult to agree with the Secretary-General that the dissemination of information on United Nations activities would be adversely affected if the news agencies were asked to pay rent. The news agencies in Geneva paid rent, and the arguments put forward by the Secretary-General in paragraph 27 of his report (A/C.5/31/17) were not convincing.

36. The Credit Union, the Co-operative Store and the Co-operative Service Station were commercial concerns and should pay the same rate as the bank and the travel agency. In that connexion, table 6 in document A/9854 showed that the United Nations paid \$12.90 per square foot for office accommodation in the Chrysler Building, whereas the Secretary-General proposed establishing a maximum rent of \$12.42 per square foot. The reason for such generosity was not clear.

37. The report of ACABQ (A/31/8/Add.4) showed that standards for the utilization of office accommodation differed widely within the United Nations system. There was therefore a need for co-ordination in that respect. Furthermore, given the lack of office accommodation in New York and Geneva, the Secretary-General should examine the possibility of a 10 to 15 per cent reduction in the office space allotted to staff members in the Professional category and above and should submit a report on that question to the Fifth Committee at the thirty-second session.