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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME

Thirty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 380th MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 16 October 1984, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. MEBAZAA

(Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

PROPOSED INTRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL LANGUAGES (agenda item 18) (continued)
(A/AC.96/638)

1. Mr. VAN DEN DOOL (Netherlands) said that he appreciated the position of those delegations that did not have the possibility of expressing themselves in their own language, since his own delegation was in the same situation. It was however, concerned about the delays in preparing the documents submitted to the Executive Committee which the introduction of three new languages would certainly involve. There were also the budgetary constraints to which the United Nations and national authorities were subject. His delegation therefore urged the Executive Committee to be extremely careful about adopting a decision in that regard, and not to lose sight of the cause of refugees. It requested the Executive Committee, if it decided to introduce Arabic, Chinese and Spanish, to use them only as official languages, thus cutting down on costs substantially. His delegation would like to know whether the "in-session" documents were drawn up only in the official languages or whether they were also drafted in the working languages. Finally, it would like to know whether the recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit in 1977 and the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination had been duly taken into account.
2. Mr. VOLFING (Director, External Affairs Division) explained that documents drafted in the official languages had to be translated and circulated to delegations in the five languages. Documents formally submitted to the Committee before, during and after the session were reproduced in the official languages. If the Committee decided that Arabic, Chinese and Spanish were also to be working languages, the only additional documents appearing in those languages would be the summary records of meetings.
3. There was no reason for misapprehensions about delays in the production of Executive Committee documentation, which would be distributed six weeks before the session. The Secretariat would simply have to start producing it a month earlier, at the end of May. However, there might well be delays in producing the in-session documentation, which would have to be translated by the services of the United Nations Office at Geneva. What was involved were all documents produced in the course of the session (the draft reports of both Sub-Committees, the draft report of the Committee and all other documents submitted during the session).
4. The Secretariat had endeavoured to take all the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit and the ACC into account, although it had not referred to all of them in the report. The main recommendation had been to restrict as much as possible expenditures on language services, in conformity with the interests of member States, and to produce documents in all languages only when it was necessary for the proper functioning of the organ. It was for member States to decide whether or not a language was essential for their work, and the Secretariat had avoided pre-judging that issue in document A/AC.96/638. For the same reason, it had refrained from suggesting that a UNHCR language service should be established and had stressed that the Committee might decide to adopt the three new languages as official languages only, which would not entail the provision of summary records in those languages, or it might decide not to produce in-session documentation in the three new languages in order to avoid possible delays. The selective solution had also been recommended by the Joint Inspection Unit and by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. An arrangement whereby selected UNHCR documents would be translated in all languages might also be considered; there again, it was for member States to make the decision.

5. Mrs. TU Lifang (China) reminded the Committee that Arabic, Chinese and Spanish were all official languages and working languages of the General Assembly, its main committees and many other United Nations organs and said that her delegation considered that they should also be working languages of the Executive Committee. The participation of the countries speaking those languages would be simplified thereby. Her delegation concurred with the Arabic-speaking countries which considered that the request for the introduction of the three languages should be submitted to the Fifth Committee. Needless to say, if the request for the introduction of Chinese was approved, her delegation would entertain the idea that the decision should be implemented with a certain degree of flexibility.

6. Mr. AREVALO (Colombia) associated himself with the proposal to introduce Arabic, Chinese and Spanish in the work of the Executive Committee. From the technical viewpoint, first, member countries would be much better informed about the Office's work, and would thus be able to take more active part in it and to follow the implementation of assistance programmes more closely. Second, UNHCR's universal mission would be enhanced; everyone was aware that the refugee problem was not a localized one and that it occurred in regions where the three languages were spoken.

7. His delegation was aware of the implications of the proposal, as described in document A/AC.96/638; it thought, however, that the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages in the long-term.

8. Mr. ENDO (Japan) associated himself with delegations of the United States of America, Norway and Switzerland which had put forward very compelling arguments on the issue in question. His delegation appreciated that it would be helpful to introduce the three new languages, in order to disseminate information on the refugee problem as widely as possible, but it could not support an increase in the regular budget of the United Nations. It was a fact that the introduction of the three languages might entail an annual budgetary increase of the order of \$316,000 to \$386,000. Further, the workload of the UNHCR secretariat would become considerably heavier and the Executive Committee's session might have to be extended by one week. For all those reasons, his delegation urged the Executive Committee to take a balanced view of the question.

9. Mr. TRAUTTMANSDORFF (Austria), recalling the argument of principle invoked in support of the introduction of the three new languages, wondered whether the present time, when budgetary restrictions even jeopardized the full implementation of UNHCR programmes for 1985 and when staff costs would increase, was well chosen for introducing new languages which would entail a very considerable increase in costs.

10. The argument of increased effectiveness in the Executive Committee's work had been made, in support of the proposal. However, document A/AC.96/638 made the reader apprehend that technical problems would arise. Such problems would entail delays in the production of documentation, which would merely complicate the Executive Committee's work.

11. The argument that the refugee cause would be strengthened was entirely valid and enjoyed the full support of his delegation, which had already had occasion to stress the importance of alerting the public in order to guarantee the protection of refugees. His delegation therefore considered it essential that as many people as possible throughout the world should be aware of refugee problems and the obligations concerning them. That information was equally necessary for assistance and fund raising. It followed that certain types of documents should be circulated

as widely as possible, and that would only be possible if they were available in all languages. Technical and internal information, however, did not concern readers outside the Executive Committee. In the present period of economies, it would be advisable to be selective in the production of documentation. His delegation therefore proposed that a selective policy should be pursued for the production of documentation in the three new languages proposed and that the Secretariat should provide further information on the criteria that would be applied in order to give priority to documentation and information which it would be useful to reproduce in the three additional languages.

12. Mr. CHAMPENOIS (Belgium) said that the issue of the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish should be approached from the point of view of principles as well as from a practical angle. From the viewpoint of principles, no one would deny the usefulness of the three languages for UNHCR's work. From the practical angle, their usefulness should be looked at from the refugees' viewpoint - and their need to alert public opinion in that regard was undeniable - as well as from the viewpoint of the work of the Executive Committee and UNHCR as a whole. In that regard, the situation was not so clearcut. Some delegations had referred to the very real difficulties that were encountered, particularly during the session, which were due mainly to unavoidable delays and substantial costs.

13. His delegation had approved the principle of zero budgetary growth; the introduction of the three languages would entail additional costs. In view of that dilemma, the easy course might be to recommend that the question should be referred to the Fifth Committee. However, in view of considerations of utility in the field and of the need to publicize as much as possible UNHCR's work, his delegation was willing to agree to the introduction of the three languages as official languages, but it had considerable reservations about their adoption as working languages. It seemed essential to draw on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in applying any decision and his delegation could not go beyond the first option set out in document A/AC.96/638 (para. 10, p.4).

14. Mr. OJANEN (Finland) said that he shared the misgivings expressed by previous speakers concerning the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official languages and working languages of the Executive Committee. Admittedly, the reasons adduced by those who advocated the proposal were understandable, but it was by no means sure that its advantages outweighed its disadvantages, particularly at the practical and financial levels. The question must be considered very carefully, and if changes were made, the solution chosen should have as few negative practical and financial implications as possible. With that in mind, the Executive Committee might, for instance, choose the solution proposed by the Austrian delegation.

15. Mrs. RUESTA DE FURTER (Venezuela) said that she had already drawn attention to the quality of the documentation, while regretting that it was not available in Spanish. In UNHCR, where rapid action was often needed in the field, the use of all United Nations official languages would be most helpful. Further, the use of the three new languages would help to create a better understanding of UNICEF's work and to combat public indifference to the fate of refugees, and which the High Commissioner and the Director of International Protection had deplored. Substantive UNHCR documentation could also be used more easily by universities and other study and information centres. She therefore very much hoped that the Executive Committee would give every consideration to the advantages of the proposal submitted to it.

16. Mr. HILL (Canada) said that his delegation had listened with interest to the statement by the Director of the External Affairs Division and with sympathy to those speakers who had expressed the wish that their languages should be used as official and working languages of the Executive Committee. His delegation considered, nevertheless, that the Executive Committee should give careful consideration to the financial implications of the use of additional languages at a time of budgetary constraint. Further, UNHCR's work frequently focused on emergency situations, and there might be delays while awaiting translations. In that regard, he drew attention to the Joint Inspection Unit's conclusion that new working languages should be introduced to the extent that they contributed to the effective functioning of the organization concerned. In the case of UNHCR, additional working languages should not impair the procedures governing discussion and decision-making which had been developed over the years and which had proved effective. The Director of the External Affairs Division had made a number of pertinent comments on the possible impact of the translation of in-session documents on the length of the Executive Committee's sessions.

17. Mr. LAMBACH (Federal Republic of Germany) said that his delegation's position with regard to the proposal under consideration was based on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit. That report contained the conclusions that the introduction of additional languages should respond to an operational requirement of the organization concerned, that it should also respond to the needs of member States, and, finally that it was necessary to be selective. Thus, the Committee should disregard considerations of mere prestige and also avoid an approach that was too broad. The languages requested had in fact already been introduced into the Executive Committee's work by the use of interpretation. If the idea was that delegations should have better information, a precise list must be made of the documents needed in the new languages proposed. In-session documents would have to be excluded from the list, in order not to slow down work.

18. Mr. AHELMY (Observer for Egypt) endorsed the remarks made on the previous day by the representative of Sudan concerning the introduction of Arabic. That language and the other languages proposed were already official languages of the United Nations, used mainly in the General Assembly and Security Council. The reservations just stated concerning the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish were understandable, but the usefulness of the three languages for the international community must also be taken fully into account. They were languages with important connotations from the point of view of history and civilization and they had an important place in the heritage of mankind. Further, a number of countries using those languages made a substantial contribution to UNHCR's budget. Consequently, the issue should not be viewed from a limited angle. Full account should be taken of the advantages which the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee would hold out for the entire international community.

19. Mr. JOMARD (Observer for Iraq) thanked the High Commissioner for his note on the implications of the proposed introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official and working languages of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/638). He also thanked the Director of the External Affairs Division for his statement. The objections raised by certain countries to the proposal were unfounded. The financial implications had been assessed, but the figures given in the High Commissioner's note concerning translation, revision, typing, reproduction and distribution were low compared with the usefulness of the measure proposed. Neither was the objection concerning deadlines justified: a certain amount of time was needed to make a translation into French or English; translations into Arabic, Chinese or Spanish would merely require a

comparable amount of time. The official language of many of the countries that admitted refugees was neither English nor French. The Committee should appreciate the position of those countries and ask how an English or French-speaking country would react if it was required to transmit instructions to its nationals concerning the refugees residing on its territory in Arabic or Chinese.

20. Mr. SAYADI (Observer for the Syrian Arab Republic) said that the proposed introduction of new languages, submitted in document A/AC.96/638, might be extended to other languages in addition to Arabic, Chinese and Spanish. The issue should be viewed in the general context of information on United Nations activities and more particularly UNHCR activities. A report submitted to the Secretary-General in November 1982 had deplored the fact that the media did not publicize United Nations activities sufficiently. If there was to be a better understanding of what was being done on behalf of 10 million refugees, public opinion must be alerted. An increase in the number of languages used in UNHCR would have such an effect in those countries where the new languages were spoken. He hoped that the members of the Executive Committee would take due account of that aspect and would approve the proposal before them.

21. Mr. PERJAN (Observer for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) also thanked the High Commissioner for his note (A/AC.96/638) and the Director of the Division of External Affairs for his statement. The introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish would enable UNHCR to discharge more successfully the tasks it was called upon to carry out on behalf of 10 million refugees. The initiative would also make for a better understanding in the international community of refugee problems and the role of UNHCR. The misgivings expressed by certain delegations, mainly from western Europe, would certainly be dispelled by the advantages of the measure. The introduction of new languages would enable the High Commissioner to communicate more effectively with the whole world. He supported what the representative of Sudan had said on the previous day. He hoped that the proposal would be adopted by the Executive Committee and would form the subject-matter of a recommendation to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly.

22. Mr. ADAMS (United Kingdom) said that he entirely appreciated the viewpoint expressed by previous speakers and would agree that the amounts involved were not large. However, additional contributions would have to be found to finance such a decision, if adopted. Second, the introduction of additional languages might well cause considerable delays, both in preparing meetings of the Committee and in the field. Paragraph 4 of document A/AC.96/638 also indicated that delays already occurred in the translation and distribution of documents in English and French. Consequently, UNHCR intervention might be less rapid and the information it furnished less recent. In addition, if these languages were introduced, 30 staff members would have to be employed over a 3-month period each year, which seemed extremely difficult, apart from the fact there was little or no reference material. Last, it would be practically impossible to meet the deadlines for the submission of pre-session documents. For all those reasons, his delegation could accept only the first of the three options proposed in paragraph 10 of document A/AC.96/638.

23. Miss GARRIDO-RUIZ (Observer for Mexico) said that she was aware that UNHCR resources should, whenever possible, be spent on actual assistance for refugees. It should be borne in mind, however, that Spanish was a working language of the United Nations, used by a large number of countries, particularly in Latin America, and that it would be extremely useful if UNHCR documentation concerning that region was published in Spanish.

24. Mrs. RUESTA DE FURTER (Venezuela) said that she wished to point out that the request for the introduction of new languages was not motivated solely by a desire for prestige, but by the desire to simplify the task of the decision-makers in the various countries, many of whom could not call upon the structures necessary for translating documents themselves.

25. The CHAIRMAN concluded that delegations as a whole seemed ready to accept the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official languages of the Committee, but not as working languages. In other words, its in-session documents (draft resolutions, summary records, etc.) would appear only in English and in French. However, once they had been adopted, those documents would also be considered as official documents and treated as such.

26. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee agreed to recommend to the General Assembly the introduction of Arabic, Chinese and Spanish as official languages of the Committee.

27. It was so decided.

CONSIDERATION OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (agenda item 14) (A/AC.96/650)

28. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that item 13 of the provisional agenda, published as document A/AC.96/650, should be deleted and subsequent items renumbered accordingly.

29. The provisional agenda of the thirty-sixth session of the Executive Committee (A/AC.96/650), as amended, was adopted.

30. The meeting was suspended at 4.50 p.m. and resumed at 5.10 p.m.

UNHCR ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES (agenda item 8) (continued) (A/AC.96/639 and Corr. 2 and Add. 2; A/AC.96/640 and Corr. 1)

31. Mr. ZOLLNER (Director, Assistance Division), replying to questions by delegations during the debate on UNHCR assistance activities, first of all confirmed that UNHCR obviously needed to have access to the locations where it was implementing assistance projects. A mandatory clause guaranteeing such access appeared in all assistance agreements and was universally applied.

32. The Canadian representative had also proposed that the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters should be requested to examine ways and means of reviewing the procedures for adopting assistance programmes. As he had indicated in his introductory statement, a formula for considering, prior to the Committee's session, technical aspects in that regard had been devised a few years earlier, thus at the end of September 1984, informal meetings had been held, during which the competent UNHCR officials had replied to the written and oral question of member States present. It might be appropriate to widen the scope of the formal meetings and to schedule them for a date closer to the Committee's sessions, so that more representatives would be able to take part in them. However, he felt that their informality was an asset which should be preserved, in connection with the purely technical aspects of humanitarian programmes. Naturally, at the October 1985 session of the Sub-Committee, he would be happy to hear any observations which delegations might wish to make on the subject.

33. Paragraph 3 (b) of document EC/SC.2/18 related to a census of refugees, from the viewpoint of formulating assistance projects. Moreover, the Statute of UNHCR provided in article 8 (f) that the High Commissioner should obtain from Governments information concerning the number of refugees in their territory. The statistics furnished in document A/AC.96/639 were usually official statistics published by Governments. All the same, UNHCR assistance projects very rarely assumed responsibility for all the refugees living in a particular country. The various programme components were intended for specific recipients in a refugee population. The Finnish suggestion that a study should be conducted on the problem of estimating the number of refugees was interesting, and he himself had drawn the Committee's attention at its thirty-second session to the issue of conducting a census of refugees. He had contemplated the possibility of scheduling, after emergency operations and in agreement with the Government, a systematic census of the refugees, stressing that the development of an objective and reasonably reliable system of registering refugees could be useful for all. Since that time, specific experiments had been conducted, and it might well be opportune to draw practical lessons from them.

34. He had taken note of the comments by delegations on evaluation matters. Ongoing efforts focused on ways and means of improving follow-up of the evaluation exercise and a more structured use of the results of mid-term evaluations. Finally, he would give careful consideration to the comments made on the presentation of the report of assistance activities and would make every effort to improve it further.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS (agenda item 10) (A/AC.96/639 and Corr.2 and Add.1 and Add.2; A/AC.96/646; A/AC.96/648; EC/SC.2/19; E/SC.2/22)

35. The CHAIRMAN said that the Executive Committee had completed its consideration of agenda items 8 and 10 and that the time had come to approve document A/AC.96/639 and Add.1 and 2.

36. It appeared to him that the position of the Executive Committee on the reclassification exercise and the creation of new posts had ranged from one extreme to the other. He therefore felt he was correctly interpreting the sense of the Committee in stating that the results of the reclassification exercise should receive further and more detailed study and be submitted thereafter to the Committee for its approval. With respect to paragraph 27 of document A/AC.96/639/Add.1, the High Commissioner should present a report to the Executive Committee in January.

37. While some delegations had felt that the High Commissioner's request for the creation of 11 additional posts should be endorsed, others were opposed, largely on the basis of instructions received from their respective capitals, which would have liked to have more detailed information. He therefore felt that UNHCR should be asked to elaborate further on document E/SC.2/22 of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters entitled "Note on major developments affecting staffing levels" and to submit the resulting analysis to the informal meeting of the Executive Committee in January. In the meantime, the High Commissioner would make temporary arrangements in respect of the most urgently needed additional posts. If the Committee agreed to that formula, the over-all 1985 target submitted for approval at the present session would be reduced by the figure corresponding to the cost of the 11 posts under consideration.

38. Some positive developments could only facilitate UNHCR activities on behalf of refugees. First of all, there was the establishment of a Branch Office in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the appointment of a Chief of Mission to that country. There was also the signing of a Branch Office Agreement between UNHCR and the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria concerning the opening of a UNHCR Branch Office in Algiers. As in all similar situations, the principal tasks of UNHCR representatives would be to ensure the international protection of refugees as well as the promotion of durable solutions, in conformity with the mandate of the High Commissioner as defined in the Statute of the Office. It went without saying that voluntary repatriation was the most desirable durable solution. The UNHCR representatives would be in a position to promote that solution, in co-operation with the Governments concerned and provided that the strictly voluntary nature of the repatriation was guaranteed. The High Commissioner would present a detailed report, in writing, to the thirty-sixth session of the Committee, on the efforts undertaken along those lines.

39. Having heard the views expressed in the debate, he was convinced that it was the general wish of the Executive Committee to adopt the revised 1984 financial target of \$352,267,300 and the initial target of \$374,288,500 scheduled for 1985. The latter figure, which did not include the usual \$10 million for the Emergency Fund, comprised the financial target of \$363,085,000 appearing in Schedule A of the report on UNHCR assistance activities in 1983-1984 (A/AC.96/639, page xxxvii), plus the allocation of \$12,089,000 proposed for 1985 for the Islamic Republic of Iran (see document A/AC.96/639/Add.2), less \$885,500 corresponding to the cost of the 11 posts not approved by the Committee. The statements of certain delegations on individual chapters or specific points would be duly reflected in the report.

40. Mr. IVRAKIS (Greece) noted, in the Chairman's statement, that it was proposed to allow the High Commissioner to make the appropriate arrangements in respect of the 11 new posts, on the basis of the most pressing needs. However, he wondered whether a decision should not be taken on the matter when the Committee met in January, rather than await the next session of the Executive Committee.

41. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the January meeting was an informal one where, in principle, it was not possible to take decisions. That was why the High Commissioner had been given that option.

42. Mr. ADAMS (United Kingdom) wondered whether it would not be possible to authorize the Executive Committee to take the necessary decisions on a number of administrative matters and would like to know whether there was a precedent.

43. The CHAIRMAN said that the Executive Committee's rules of procedure, in principle, scheduled one annual session, in October. Since only representatives stationed in Geneva attended the informal meetings, it would be preferable to defer the final decision to the 1985 session.

44. Mrs. RUESTA DE FURTER (Venezuela) said that she would like to know whether there was an obstacle standing in the way of the interesting idea put forward by the United Kingdom representative.

45. The CHAIRMAN read out rule 1 of the rules of the procedure for the Executive Committee, the last sentence of which stated that the High Commissioner might convene other sessions "if in his opinion such action is necessary or if such a session is requested by not less than eight Members of the Committee".

46. Mr. IVRAKIS (Greece), supported by Mrs. RUESTA DE FURTER (Venezuela) and by Mr. ADAMS (United Kingdom) formally proposed that the Executive Committee should be authorized to examine the question of the 11 new posts and to take a decision on it at its informal session in January.
47. Mr. HARTLING (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the decision taken some years ago to hold only one annual official session of the Committee had been made in the interests of rationalization of work and economy. However, in the last seven years, the Committee had held one or two informal meetings each year for information purposes and discussion, and it had been authorized on one occasion by the Executive Committee to consider a specific question and to take a decision on it. The Committee could therefore be authorized to take a decision at its informal meeting, without such authorization constituting an obligation. He personally hoped that the important problem at issue could be considered at the informal meeting the following January.
48. Mr. TRAUTTMANSDORFF (Austria) and Mr. ENDO (Japan) supported the proposal by the Greek representative to authorize the Executive Committee to take a decision at its informal meeting in January.
49. Mr. BECK (United States of America) said that if the Executive Committee was authorized to take a decision at its informal meeting not simply on the new posts but also on the reclassified posts, he would be able to support the Greek proposal.
50. Mr. de MAIO (Italy), supported by Mr. VAN DEN DOOL (Netherlands), said that he was prepared to endorse the Greek proposal, provided that the relevant documentation was transmitted to Governments in good time, with clear-cut proposals concerning the new posts and the reclassifications.
51. Mr. HILL (Canada) said that he also supported the proposal before the Executive Committee. The documentation relating to the two problems should indicate the budgetary implications of any decisions.
52. The CHAIRMAN noted that nine delegations had expressed support for the idea of authorizing the Executive Committee to consider, at its informal session in January, the question of the reclassification of posts and that of the creation of new posts and to take decisions thereon. If there was no objection, he would take it that the proposal was adopted.
53. It was so decided.
54. The CHAIRMAN said that if there was no objection, he would take it that the Executive Committee was prepared to endorse the statement he had made concerning document A/AC.96/639 and Add.1 and 2 with the exception of the comments concerning the matter on which a decision had just been taken. If that was so, the statement, with the comments deleted, would be incorporated in the draft report.
55. It was so decided.
56. Mr. SKALLI (Morocco) said that his country would no longer stand in the way of the adoption of the part of the report dealing with UNHCR assistance activities in Algeria. It was thus complying with the wish of many friendly delegations, in order to maintain the efficiency and serenity of the Committee's work and the consensus with which its work had always been concluded. His delegation would no longer stand in the way of the UNHCR representative in Algeria having the possibility and means of completing his task. However, his delegation wished to state its reservations concerning the insertion in the 1985 budget of the appropriation of \$3,632,000.