



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/44/486/Add.1
22 November 1989

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-fourth session
Agenda items 12 and 127

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Concluding report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution
32/197 concerning the restructuring of the economic and social sectors
of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Concluding report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197 concerning the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/89/7).

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Concluding report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197 concerning the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system" (A/44/486) is the last in a series of JIU reports concerning the implementation of resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977. As the Inspector indicated in the report, it updates some recommendations presented in earlier reports in the light of the changes that have occurred in recent years.

2. The Secretary-General notes that this JIU report focuses mainly on the functioning of the Economic and Social Council and on secretariat support structure in New York, including the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation. The Secretary-General agrees that the Economic and Social Council has an important and central role to play in policy formulation and co-ordination of the economic and social activities of the United Nations system. The implementation of other aspects of resolution 32/197, including those relating to the Regional Commissions, will contribute to the effective functioning of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors as a whole.

3. Concerning secretariat support in the economic and social fields, the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Director-General, has kept the matter under review for the past few years following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986. The review is closely related to the in-depth study of the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social fields. Since the review of the intergovernmental structure has yet to be completed and is currently under consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session, the Secretary-General intends to return to the matter, taking into account also the secretariat support required for the Economic and Social Council in the light of its resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114 on revitalization of the Council.

4. Bearing the above in mind, the Secretary-General would like to provide the following comments on the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Recommendation 1

5. The Secretary-General agrees with the Inspector that the Economic and Social Council should proceed with the full implementation of the recommendations of resolution 1988/77 on enhancing its effectiveness. The Council, at its second regular session of 1989, adopted resolution 1989/114 containing further measures

for the implementation of resolution 1988/77. The Secretary-General notes that the Council, with the adoption of a multi-year work programme, will focus each year on a number of major policy issues to carry out its responsibilities, particularly in formulating policy recommendations and in co-ordination.

Recommendation 1 (a)

6. The Economic and Social Council in resolution 1988/77 decided that the general debate should be confined to five working days, while the Inspector proposes that this should be further reduced to three working days. The Council considered the question again at its second regular session of 1989 and decided in resolution 1989/114 that its general debate should not exceed four days and that statements made should not exceed 15 minutes in order to ensure that the general discussion is fully effective and substantive.

7. As stated on other occasions, the Secretary-General believes that the general debate of the Council provides a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views among States on the world economic situation and on emerging problems. It also enables Governments and the Secretariat alike to determine what issues are regarded as particularly relevant by all or the majority of participants. The Secretary-General himself takes the opportunity to present his views on the world economic situation and has also utilized the occasion to present ideas and specific proposals to promote international economic co-operation and development. The Council could pay greater attention to the possibility of drawing conclusions from the debate. Another consideration that deserves further attention is the achievement of focus and complementarity between the respective general debates of the Economic and Social Council, the Trade and Development Board and the Second Committee of the General Assembly.

Recommendation 1 (b)

8. While there has been a tendency in the past for the Economic and Social Council to deal with a number of seemingly unrelated reports under the item of the general debate, the situation has been considerably improved since the adoption of Council resolution 1988/77. The Council currently has before it for its general debate the World Economic Survey and summaries of the regional economic and social surveys. The Secretary-General believes that these provide useful background material for the general debate of the Council. Should the Council decide to focus in its general debate in a given year on specific issues, the Secretary-General stands ready to provide the necessary input, either in the context of the World Economic Survey or as a separate background document.

Recommendation 1 (c)

9. The Council in resolution 1989/114 decided to consider at its organizational session for 1990 the establishment, on a provisional basis, of a multi-year work programme identifying major policy themes for in-depth consideration each year. Such a multi-year work programme would enable the Council in the future to focus on a number of major issues and urgent questions in a given year. The Secretary-General, in pursuance to that resolution, will present to the Council at its organizational session a draft six-year work programme for its consideration.

Recommendation 2

10. The Secretary-General concurs with the Inspector that co-ordination remains an important task in the complex and polycentric United Nations system and that the Council should play a central role in this regard at the intergovernmental level.

11. The degree to which the Council may effectively carry out its co-ordination functions depends to some extent on measures adopted by Member States to enable consistent and concerted policies to be pursued in different organizations of the United Nations system. Effective co-ordination and harmonization of policies by Governments at the national level would facilitate concerted action at the international level, particularly in the context of the Economic and Social Council.

Recommendation 2 (a)

12. The Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1988/77 decided henceforth to carry out its co-ordination function as an integral part of its work. The Secretary-General concurs that co-ordination could best be carried out in the context of the consideration of substantive issues. This approach has begun to be reflected in the programme of work of the Council for 1989. This has enabled the Council under the item on co-ordination to focus, in addition to the relevant part of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the annual overview report of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on activities having system-wide implications and involvement that do not fall under other items on the Council's agenda.

13. In the future, thematic analyses to be prepared by the Secretariat for the consideration of the Council under major policy issues will include information and analysis of system-wide activities on those issue. Similarly, issue-oriented consolidated reports to be submitted under various items will also provide the Council with the necessary information to carry out its co-ordination responsibilities. In this regard, attention is also drawn to the statement by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination to the second regular session of the Council in 1989, which, inter alia, suggested that "in future all matters related to co-ordination should be considered by the Council under the substantive items on its agenda, which should be few in number" (E/1989/95, annex I, para. 9).

Recommendation 2 (b)

14. The Secretary-General concurs that the Council could make greater use of existing formal and informal co-ordination mechanisms. In pursuance of its resolution 1988/77, the Council initiated informal dialogue at its second regular session of 1989 to take advantage of the presence of many executive heads of organizations of the system, with a view to addressing key substantive issues, including co-ordinative aspects. While this was generally found to be useful, there is still room for improvement.

15. The Secretary-General also concurs that the Council could make greater use of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation in discharging its functions in co-ordination.

16. The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination remains the central co-ordination mechanism at the inter-secretariat level. Many issues, particularly those which involve a limited number of organizations, could best be addressed in an informal manner. To that end, ad hoc meetings as well as informal consultations have been utilized to address specific matters that require co-operation and co-ordination among concerned organisations of the system.

17. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-ninth session and the twenty-fourth series of Joint Meetings of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination agreed that the latter should play a greater role in co-ordination and that its annual report should be strengthened in order to realize its potential as an effective co-ordination instrument. In the light of these decisions, the role of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination and its secretariat support will be considered during 1990.

18. The Secretary-General fully concurs that greater use should be made of the resident co-ordinator/resident representative for co-ordination at the country level.

Recommendation 2 (c)

19. The Secretary-General concurs that co-ordination mechanisms should remain flexible.

Recommendation 3

20. The Secretary-General attaches great importance to the consultation procedure whereby intergovernmental bodies examine and comment on preliminary drafts of medium-term plan and programme budget proposals, a procedure that is required by the relevant provisions of the programme planning regulations and rules.

21. At the same time, the Secretary-General notes that compliance with this requirement is not without difficulties in view of the fact that the calendar of meetings of sectoral, functional and regional intergovernmental bodies does not always lend itself to the timely review of the relevant programme planning instruments.

22. Nevertheless, since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 41/213 on the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations, in which, in paragraph 3 of section II, the Assembly called for improvement in the consultative process, the Secretary-General has taken a number of steps in that regard. These include:

(a) Submission of the draft introduction to the medium-term plan (A/43/329, annex) to Member States for wide consultations;

(b) Consultations to the maximum extent permitted by the existent calendar of meetings with sectoral, functional and regional bodies regarding the programmes of the next medium-term plan;

(c) Preparation of a calendar of such consultations (A/43/329/Add.1) and its submission to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

23. In that context, the Secretary-General noted the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination at its twenty-ninth session 1/ that the General Assembly request those intergovernmental bodies which consider the work programmes of organizations of the United Nations system to hold their meetings in accordance with a calendar which enables the Secretary-General to take into account their recommendations in the preparations of the proposed programme budget. The Secretary-General welcomes this recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination - also mentioned by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its first report on the proposed programme budget for 1990-1991 2/ - and will endeavour to provide the relevant documentation in a timely manner.

Recommendation 4

24. General Assembly resolution 32/197 provides the basic framework for the clustering of activities in the economic and social sectors, in particular with regard to the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Regional Commissions. More recently, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs has been established as a separate entity as a part of the broader reorganization of social activities at Vienna. Following the adoption of resolution 41/213, the Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, has undertaken a review with a view to defining more clearly the responsibilities and interrelationships of these basic units in the light of experience and current requirements in order to establish a basis for a more efficient, effective and coherent allocation of responsibilities in the economic and social sectors, including such adjustments as may be necessary to eliminate duplication and to enhance complementarity of action.

25. As reflected in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/43/286 and Corr.1), the review had reached a stage where a number of conclusions could be drawn and where possibilities could be envisaged for changing the secretariat structure. Nonetheless, the Secretary-General believes that it is desirable to have a clear view of the changes that Governments intend to introduce in the intergovernmental machinery before reaching definitive conclusions on possible changes. The Secretary-General therefore intends to return to this matter after the completion of the General Assembly's review of the intergovernmental structure.

26. As indicated in his comments on previous JIU reports, the Secretary-General agrees that efforts should continue to be made to achieve greater co-operation between the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development in order to ensure greater cross-fertilization between research and analysis and technical co-operation. Indeed the two Departments have in recent years developed arrangements and mechanisms for exchange of information and expertise and for carrying out joint

activities. The Secretary-General does not share the view of the Inspector that the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs should be restructured along sectoral lines as recommended in paragraphs 77 to 81 of the JIU report. Such a sectoral approach would not allow the United Nations to address effectively the increasingly complex and intersectoral nature of development issues as envisaged in resolution 32/197 and relevant other resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General also does not believe that part of the functions of the Statistical Office should be sectoralized and decentralized. The fragmentation of the Statistical Office and its statistical and methodological outputs and services would not be advantageous to users in all sectors since it would reduce statistical comparability, be less cost-effective and render the co-ordination of international statistical work more difficult. Such a move would also run counter to the pattern of statistical organization existing in most Member States and would complicate the channels of communication and collaboration between the United Nations and Member States in the field of statistics.

27. At the same time, the Secretary-General, in response to paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 42/125 of 7 December 1987, which requested him to strengthen, within existing resources, the United Nations Office at Vienna as nucleus for all issues and reports relating to social policy and social development, including its research capabilities, assigned responsibility, previously assumed by the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs to the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs for work relating to the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, the Report on the World Social Situation and related issues. In that context, he proposed the redeployment, beginning with the biennium 1990-1991, of seven posts (five Professional and two General Service) from the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs to the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

28. With regard to the decentralization of the overall planning, programming and evaluation function, the Secretary-General notes that the programme planning regulations and rules entrusted to him specific responsibilities for proposing to the General Assembly a six-year medium-term plan and biennial programme budgets, derived from that plan, for the Organization as a whole. The same regulations and rules defined the four phases of the programme planning cycle, that is, medium-term plans, programme budgets, reports on programme performances and evaluation, as constituting parts of an integrated management process. In the light of this, the Secretary-General is of the view that the current arrangement, where the overall planning, programming and evaluation function is located in the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Finance, is the most efficacious one for assisting him, through the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board, to discharge the above-mentioned responsibilities entrusted to him.

Recommendation 5

Recommendation 5 (a)

29. The responsibilities of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation were clearly laid down by the General Assembly in resolutions 32/197 and 34/202 of 19 December 1979. Subsequent General Assembly resolutions also assigned specific responsibilities to the Director-General. In addition, the Secretary-General has also entrusted to the Director-General other particular tasks relating to the ensemble of the economic and social activities of the United Nations. Since the responsibilities of the Director-General, to be exercised under the authority of the Secretary-General, were laid down in relevant General Assembly resolutions, the Secretary-General does not believe it appropriate to consult executive heads of the system in order to define the fields to which those responsibilities should apply. The Secretary-General recognizes, however, that the effective execution of the responsibilities of the Director-General would require the co-operation of all organizations of the system. Every effort has been made and will continue to be made to achieve such co-operation.

Recommendations 5 (b) (i) and (ii)

30. As stated in the comments on the earlier JIU report on the Office of the Director-General (A/36/419/Add.1), the Secretary-General agrees that a bulletin containing the terms of reference of the Director-General and of his Office should be issued and that the Organizational Manual of the Secretariat could be revised in order to include a section including the Director-General and his Office and to enable consequential changes to be made in the other sections. This will be undertaken after the conclusion of the current review of the functioning of the Secretariat in the economic and social sectors.

Recommendation 5 (b) (iii)

31. The Secretary-General agrees that the Director-General could prepare an annual plan of work indicating the priority activities to be carried out and the contributions that he expects from other United Nations secretariat entities. The Director-General will utilize meetings of the United Nations senior officials as a principal modality for him to discuss with his senior colleagues such annual work plans. In that context, he will establish monitoring and follow-up arrangements to ensure the effective and timely response by secretariat entities to intergovernmental requirements.

Recommendation 5 (b) (iv)

32. The proposed structure of the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 includes a programme on overall issues and policies, including co-ordination under major programme III: economic and social affairs. As appropriate, the activities of the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation could be reflected in that section.

Recommendation 5 (b) (v)

33. The Secretary-General will attempt to identify, to the extent possible, in future programme budgets the outputs of the Office of the Director-General. The Secretary-General would like to emphasize that since the Director-General is mainly responsible for providing leadership and to co-ordinating much of the work of his Office is reflected in the output of other entities. In addition, it is difficult to conceptualize in advance the output of the Office relating to the responsibilities of the Director-General in addressing emerging and urgent issues that in most instances cannot be anticipated.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/44/16), para. 48.

2/ Ibid., Supplement No. 7 (A/44/7 and Corr.1 and 2, and Add.1 and 2).
