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REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social fields

Note of the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 43/174 of 9 December 1988, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to consult with all Member States and seek their views on ways and means of achieving a balanced and effective implementation of recommendations 2 and 8 of the Group of High-Level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, 1/ taking into consideration all relevant reports, including the report of the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-Depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields (E/1988/75), as well as the outcome of the discussions in 1989 on the revitalization of the Economic and Social Council, and to submit to the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session a detailed report in order to enable Member States to consider and take appropriate action with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of the intergovernmental structure and its secretariat support structures as well as programme delivery in the economic and social fields. The Assembly further decided that it would consider that report, as well as the final report on the implementation of resolution 41/213, under the item entitled "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations" at its forty-fourth session.

2. Pursuant to the above, the Secretary-General addressed a note verbale to all Member States and observer States seeking their views. As of the preparation of the present report, responses had been received from Australia, Austria, the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cameroon, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, the German Democratic Republic, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, Spain (on behalf of the 12 members of the European Economic Community),

Sweden, Turkey, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America, Yugoslavia and Switzerland. The views expressed are summarized in the annex.

3. The fundamental concern in considering the intergovernmental structure and functioning in the economic and social fields and the corresponding secretariat support is to ensure its capacity to respond effectively to the requirements of Member States. One of the important elements in this regard is the ability of the Organization to adapt itself to respond effectively to new and emerging issues.

4. Major intergovernmental deliberations are scheduled to take place in the near future that are expected to develop new approaches, to identify priority concerns of the international community and to indicate the manner in which the United Nations could best respond to them. For example, the General Assembly has decided to convene a special session in early 1990 to consider the question of international co-operation against illicit production, supply, demand, trafficking and distribution of narcotic drugs. Other resolutions under consideration at the current session of the General Assembly suggest an emerging agreement on a wide range of new activities to be undertaken by the United Nations in this field.

5. In the economic field, the General Assembly will convene a special session in April 1990 devoted to international economic co-operation, and in particular the revitalization of economic growth and development in developing countries. It is expected that the special session of the Assembly, to be convened at a high political level, will provide a new framework for international economic co-operation as well as the necessary political impetus for greater international co-operation in addressing many economic and social problems confronting the international community. At the same time, preparatory work is being undertaken on the elaboration of the international development strategy for the fourth United Nations development decade. This strategy, which is expected to be adopted by the Assembly at the forty-fifth session, should also provide a framework for the international community, including organizations of the United Nations system, to promote the sustained development of developing countries in the 1990s. The economic gap between the developed and the developing countries has widened in the 1980s. This applies in particular to the least developed among the developing countries. The Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which is to take place in September 1990, is expected to address this widening gap and to adopt specific measures to address their problems.

6. The importance of the environment and its relation to development is now well recognized by Governments. At its current session the Assembly is expected to decide on the preparatory arrangements for a major conference on environment and development in 1992. The preparation and outcome of the conference will have an important bearing on the work of the United Nations. The same would apply to the preparations for and the outcome of the eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

7. Another aspect of the work of the United Nations that has acquired increasing importance is operational activities for development. It is most likely that the comprehensive policy review being undertaken by the General Assembly at its current

session will have an important bearing on the work of the United Nations both at the intergovernmental and the secretariat levels. The programme of work of the United Nations both at the intergovernmental and the secretariat levels will also be affected by the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997, which will be considered and adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session.

8. The outcome of these deliberations will have critical implications for the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions. The Secretary-General believes, therefore, that it would be appropriate to await the results of those deliberations and to integrate them in his recommendations. In the same spirit, the Economic and Social Council might also consider scheduling, at an appropriate time, a comprehensive review of the United Nations intergovernmental structure in the light of the outcome of the discussions referred to above.

9. The considerations outlined above also apply to the restructuring of the secretariat. As indicated in the progress report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213 (A/44/222 and Corr.1), the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the Secretariat is an ongoing process that must take into account, inter alia, decisions with respect to intergovernmental machinery.

10. However, in its resolution 1988/77, the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals on the structure and composition of a separate and identifiable secretariat support structure for the Council, which would undertake the substantive functions and technical servicing required in relation to (a) the annual preparation of a consolidated note on decisions adopted by the General Assembly in the economic, social and related fields, (b) information from the specialized agencies on steps taken to give effect to the recommendations of the General Assembly, (c) brief analyses on major issues in the medium-term plan and draft proposals on a multi-year programme for such analyses, and (d) issue-oriented consolidated reports.

11. In paragraph 26 of resolution 1989/114, the Council requested the Secretary-General, in order to fully and effectively implement Council resolutions 1988/77 and 1989/114, to take the following points into consideration in providing secretariat support for the Council, as referred to in paragraph 2 (g) of Council resolution 1988/77:

(a) There should be an organizationally distinct and identifiable secretariat structure for providing substantive support in regard to the preparation of thematic analyses and consolidated reports;

(b) The expertise of other organizations of the United Nations system should be drawn upon, as appropriate;

(c) Such secretariat support should be provided, as appropriate, inter alia, within existing resources through inter alia, redeployment of staff and the use of extrabudgetary resources.

12. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977, the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring the provision of effective leadership to the various components of the United Nations system and in exercising overall co-ordination within the system in order to ensure a multidisciplinary approach to problems of development on a system-wide basis, and of ensuring, within the United Nations, the coherence, co-ordination and efficient management of all activities in the economic and social field. In this connection, it is recalled that Member States have emphasized the importance of enhancing the authority of the Director-General.

13. The substantive requirements envisaged in the resolutions adopted by the Economic and Social Council include the preparation of a number of new reports, notably the thematic analyses and the issue-oriented consolidated reports. The preparation of these reports will involve effective management and co-ordination of inputs from the respective substantive offices of the United Nations system as a whole as well as ensuring consistency in their policy orientation. In keeping with the overall responsibilities of the Director-General as outlined above, the Secretary-General has decided to assign to the Director-General responsibility for providing the substantive support as called for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1989/114.

14. It is the intention of the Secretary-General, in the light of the above, to keep the secretariat structures under review.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

ANNEX

Summary of responses

1. In general, comments and views received from Governments reflected a genuine desire to make the United Nations more responsive and effective in addressing priorities in the economic, social and related fields through, inter alia, improvements in the existing intergovernmental and secretariat structures. There seemed to be a general agreement on the following basic principles:

(a) The importance of the United Nations as a forum for addressing economic and social issues and for providing impulse for political action on them was stressed. In this connection, it was considered essential to strengthen and enhance its capacity to deal effectively with the new challenges of the 1990s. Recent progress achieved in the political sphere should provide a basis for similar progress in the economic and social fields.

(b) It was recognized that reform is a continuing process essential for the vitality and effectiveness of the United Nations system as a whole as well as for its activities in the economic and social fields. The purpose of such reform is not to achieve savings but to use available resources better and more effectively. In the mean time, any savings achieved should be reinvested in priority programmes in the economic and social sector, thus making the process "expenditure neutral". It was felt that freezing resources in their present pattern of distribution would, in the long run, have a negative impact on the capacity of the United Nations to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

(c) It was felt that there was a need to define clearly the respective roles of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. In keeping with its prerogative and competence as the supreme body, the General Assembly should focus on policy discussions. The Council should, in particular, ensure co-ordination and harmonization of the activities of the United Nations system, including operational activities for development. The role of the Council as the focal point for the subsidiary bodies, as well as in assisting the General Assembly, was also emphasized.

(d) The work done by the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-Depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields was regarded as a good starting point for the reform effort. The analyses and the in-depth study carried out could assist in drawing up conclusions and recommendations. The ongoing efforts to revitalize the Council were also regarded as an important part of the overall process to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations.

(e) It was felt that the reorganization or restructuring of secretariat support services should respond to the changes in the structure and functioning of intergovernmental bodies. The provision of effective secretariat should include the strengthening of the authority of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation.

(f) Political support at the highest level for the role of the United Nations system in the economic and social fields, as well as for the reform process itself, was considered essential. In this context, the leadership role of the Secretary-General was emphasized.

2. In addition to these general areas of agreement, a number of specific proposals were put forward, including the following:

(a) The need for more substantive consideration by the Council of the reports of its subsidiary bodies to re-emphasize its role as the focal point for relevant activities;

(b) Concern over duplication of efforts and the need to reduce the number of bodies dealing with the same issues and to avoid repetitive debates;

(c) The need to preserve and strengthen the role of the United Nations in dealing with select issues, including human rights, technical and financial assistance, operational activities, regional and subregional co-operation and social development issues, in particular drugs;

(d) The need to reduce the overall number of meetings in the economic and social sectors, including the possibility of reducing the duration of the spring session of the Economic and Social Council. In this context, a stronger role for the Department of Conference Services and the Committee on Conferences was proposed;

(e) The need to follow up the work of the Special Commission with regard to the subsidiary machinery where some changes were identified, which would be helpful for achieving substantive progress in some areas.
