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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VAHER (Canada)

later: Mr. AL-MASRI (Syrian 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 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 121: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued) (A/44/5/Add.1, Add.3, Add.4, Add.5 and Add.7, A/44/356, A/44/537, A/44/541, A/44/543 and A/44/544)

1. Mr. DOMINGO (Chairman of the Board of Auditors) responded to comments and questions arising out of the Committee's consideration of the reports of the Board of Auditors. First, in reply to the representative of Japan who had questioned the soundness of the contention of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) that over-expenditure of allotments (as distinct from appropriations) did not constitute a contravention of the Financial Regulations and legislative authority of UNDP, he said that in its reports on UNDP the Board had always stressed the need for budgetary discipline and insisted that expenditures should not exceed the level of funds allocated, in accordance with UNDP financial rule 111.3.

2. On the proposed submission through the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) to the General Assembly and to the Governing Council of UNDP of a report on the findings of the Board of Auditors resulting from the audit examination of the accounts of UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the first year of the biennium, he wished to assure the Committee that the Board would have no objection. He noted, moreover, in response to a question raised by the representatives of Canada and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, that UNDP was the only one of the various organizations and programmes concerned to have invited a representative of the Board to attend its meetings when it considered the reports of the Board, in accordance with the recommendation in paragraph 17 of resolution 43/216. The representative of Canada had asked for clarification concerning the proposed limited review in the middle of the biennial financial period of the executing agencies of UNDP; the proposal for such an audit was no longer valid since the financial periods of UNDP and its executing agencies would in future be biennial.

3. With regard to the recording of the unliquidated obligations of UNDP and UNFPA, he said that, at the request of the Panel of External Auditors, the Board of Auditors would carry out a review of the nature and extent of any irregularities which might have occurred and would report to the General Assembly.

4. In response to a comment made by the representative of Bangladesh, he explained that the Board of Auditors in no way thought that large-scale projects were necessarily more effective than small ones; it had merely observed that in some cases the latter did not always meet the expectations placed in them and did not always play the catalytic role they had been supposed to play.

5. The representative of Egypt had commented on the scope of the Board's activities and its mandate. In paragraph 11 of resolution 43/216, the General Assembly had requested the Board to study the desirability and feasibility of conducting its reviews as stipulated in regulation 12.5 of the Financial Regulations in a more comprehensive manner and to report thereon to the General

(Mr. Domingo)

Assembly at its forty-fourth session. The Board wished to reiterate that it had never departed from regulation 12.5 and had not expanded the scope of its work. It interpreted that regulation as a mandate to carry out management audits of the organizations and programmes concerned and it felt strongly that in so doing it had not pre-empted the General Assembly's prerogatives. Referring to paragraph 10 of resolution 43/216, which specifically mentioned reviews of peace-keeping operations, he said that the Board conducted its reviews in that area, as in all other areas, in accordance with financial regulations 12.4, 12.5, 12.6 and 12.7 and the additional terms of reference contained in the annex to the Financial Regulations.

6. With regard to the method of presentation of its reports, the Board would continue, in compliance with the request of the General Assembly, to submit separate reports on financial statements and management audits. At the request of the General Assembly, the Board had been trying for several years to make more thorough reviews of the utilization of the resources available to organizations. He noted, however, that such reviews required very specialized skills and thus additional resources which the Board was not in a position to provide.

7. Responding to a comment made on behalf of the Nordic countries regarding the accounts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), he explained that both the funds earmarked by the donors for specific purposes and the unearmarked funds were subject to review.

8. In reply to the representative of the United States, he explained that document A/44/544 had been issued too late to be reviewed by the Board. However, the Board systematically followed up on the implementation of its recommendations and commented in its reports on the efficacy of the corrective action taken by the organizations and programmes concerned.

9. In conclusion, he said that the Board had taken note of the requests made by some delegations that it should keep certain matters under review and report on them to the General Assembly. It also noted the interest shown by some delegations and by ACABQ in the review of the budgetary procedures of UNDP requested by the Governing Council in paragraph 10 of its decision 89/61.

10. Mr. Al-Masri (Syrian Arab Republic) took the Chair.

11. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) asked whether there was a document which provided information on investments in the private sector for the Area Staff Provident Fund of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

12. Mr. NASSER (Egypt) noted that the list of organizations and programmes audited by the Board did not explicitly mention peace-keeping operations and he wondered whether the provisions of resolution 43/216 did not involve an extension of the Board's mandate. Moreover, he observed that in paragraph 11 of resolution 43/216, the General Assembly requested the Board to report to it on the desirability and

(Mr. Nasser, Egypt)

feasibility of conducting its reviews in a more comprehensive manner. It would seem that, instead of reporting to the General Assembly, the Board had itself decided to adopt a new method of presentation for its reports. He would like clarification on that point.

13. Mr. VAHER (Canada) said that, like the representative of France, he was extremely concerned that the financial reports of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNDP would in future be submitted only every two years. If deficiencies were noted, they would be reported only two years later, and explanations of the corrective action taken would be received only four years later. It was clear that it would be much less easy to monitor any irregularities. It would therefore be preferable for the United Nations, UNICEF and UNDP to submit annual reports, despite the costs involved. The question of the submission of the financial reports of UNDP on a biennial basis, announced in the report of the Economic and Social Council, should perhaps be discussed in the informal consultations on that agenda item. Consideration might also be given to the possibility of including a provision regarding the review of certain key issues relating to management control in the middle of the biennial financial period. He also asked for clarification regarding the criteria used by the Board of Auditors to decide whether any irregularity was of a significant nature and to qualify its audit opinion: it would seem that the amount of the sums in question did not form part of those criteria.

14. Mr. DOMINGO (Chairman of the Board of Auditors) said that the accounts relating to peace-keeping operations were included in the financial reports and audited financial statements submitted by the United Nations. He reiterated that the Board had not departed from the provisions of financial regulation 12.5 and had thus not expanded the scope of its activities.

15. The Board was competent to review the UNICEF accounts in the middle of the financial period if UNICEF itself requested it to do so or if it deemed it necessary. A review of that kind had indeed been requested by UNDP, but not by UNICEF. Moreover, as to the criteria followed in deciding whether an irregularity was of a significant nature and whether an audit opinion should be qualified, he observed that many factors were taken into account.

16. Mr. MILES (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that information concerning investments made for the Area Staff Provident Fund was in schedule 13 of document A/44/5/Add.3.

AGENDA ITEM 127: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued) (A/44/34, A/44/129 and A/44/488)

17. Mr. WILKINSON (United States of America) said that his country supported JIU as one of the best means available to Member States to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of United Nations activities.

18. In that regard JIU Note 88/2 on the administration of sick leave in the United Nations was exemplary. The recommendations of JIU concerning that matter should be

(Mr. Wilkinson, United States)

implemented at the earliest possible time and JIU should give the subject a full review in another two or three years.

19. The report on the reorganization of the Department of Public Information (A/44/433) provided the first independent analysis of the changes occurring in that Department since 1987. The general conclusions in the report suggested that the process of reform remained incomplete and that some of the changes which had already been implemented should be reconsidered. The United States was particularly concerned by the conclusion in paragraph 217 that the new administrative machinery seemed no more efficient than the one it had replaced. However, in the same paragraph the report noted that new ways had been envisaged for giving the Department a more dynamic structure. That suggested that further changes might be proposed. The Secretary-General's comments should address in detail that finding of the inspector's report. It appeared that implementation of the recommendations could result in a further reduction in staffing of the Department, particularly at the senior levels where, as the Inspector noted, staff cuts had been disproportionately small.

20. The report on the United Nations Information Centres (A/44/329) confirmed the views expressed by a number of delegations, including his own, that the current structure and operations were ineffective. The recommendations were aimed at a better targeting of audiences and improved distribution of information materials. The information centres would clearly be more efficient within the level of resources currently available if they were not assigned too many tasks, some of which appeared to be of dubious value. His delegation agreed with the Inspector that the information centre network should be streamlined.

21. The concluding report on the implementation of resolution 32/197 provided a number of useful suggestions for restructuring the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. Recommendation 4 of the JIU report suggested that a more rational and efficient division of labour could result in further staff reductions. In that connection, the Secretary-General's budget for 1990-1991 contained a proposal to centralize social programmes in Vienna. His delegation strongly supported the recommendation to formalize the functions and procedures of the Director-General.

22. With regard to the representation of organizations of the United Nations system at conferences and meetings, the United States supported the recommendations in the JIU report (JIU/REP/88/7). In view of the great diversity in the administrative instructions, rules and guidelines, covering the representation of organizations of the United Nations system, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) should devote more serious attention to that topic in order to make the representation function more consistent.

23. Finally, with regard to the role of the JIU and its effectiveness, his delegation felt that the Member States had a responsibility to JIU equal to that of JIU to the Member States. They had an obligation to read the reports of JIU closely and to follow up its recommendations.

24. Mr. BROCHARD (France), speaking on behalf of the 12 States members of the European Community, noted that as part of the United Nations reform process, the Group of 18 had made a certain number of recommendations to strengthen the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). They concerned, in particular, the increased use of ad hoc evaluations, the need to devote greater attention to resource management and utilization and, more generally, topics of concern to the General Assembly, the necessary qualifications of Inspectors and the follow-up of JIU recommendations. The successive reports of JIU gave a good idea of the progress achieved. In general, the in-depth reports were of better quality and more centred on the current concerns of Member States. The Joint Inspection Unit had begun to organize its work on a more collegial basis and it had made efforts to simplify its work programme.

25. Nevertheless, there was still room for further improvement, in collaboration with the Member States and the Secretariat. Above all, the topics of the reports had apparently not all been chosen according to the criteria referred to in paragraphs 4 and 6 of General Assembly resolution 43/221. The Joint Inspection Unit was supposed to reduce and concentrate its programme on more precise and topical questions, and the programme should be more in harmony with the General Assembly agenda. The conclusions and recommendations were sometimes somewhat over-general. They should be presented in a more realistic and concrete manner, so as to be more readily applicable. As far as possible, JIU should undertake a critical examination of the bodies in question and make an external assessment of their activities. In that respect, its role was complementary to that of the central evaluation group and the Board of Auditors.

26. The work programme could be improved to enable the reports to be published before the meetings of the intergovernmental bodies in question, in particular the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC). Once again, unfortunately, the JIU reports and the comments of the Secretary-General had not been available simultaneously for the meetings of that body during the current year.

27. It was not enough to improve the quality of reports. There should also be effective follow-up. The Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, for instance, had not had sufficient time to examine the JIU report properly. The inclusion of a specific agenda item such as "Report of the Joint Inspection Unit" in the agenda of CPC or other intergovernmental bodies was not the way to make the best use of the work of the Inspectors. Their recommendations should be systematically taken into account during the study of the substantive questions to which those recommendations pertained. If the need arose the General Assembly could transmit the relevant reports to other bodies.

28. There were also questions about the action taken by the Secretariat concerning reports and recommendations of previous years. Certainly some of those recommendations came within the competence of the Secretary-General or the heads of participating agencies and there could be no question of encroaching upon their prerogatives. Nevertheless, reforms of procedure, method or organization suggested by JIU should be examined closely by the competent authorities of the Secretariat, including the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), when such measures

(Mr. Brochard, France)

concerned more than one organization. When recommendations fell within the competence of intergovernmental bodies, in particular the General Assembly, they should be put into practice without delay, bearing in mind the views expressed by the States concerned. The delegations of the European Community wished to alert JIU and the Secretariat to the risk of confusion between recommendations addressed to the heads of the organizations in question and those that came within the competence of intergovernmental bodies. In the report on the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) (A/44/206), for instance, recommendation 3 appeared to go beyond the limits of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General alone.

29. In order for Member States to make sure that action taken on the conclusions of the Inspectors met their expectations, the Secretary-General's report should be published sufficiently ahead of time. A clear distinction should also be made between measures within the competence of the Secretariat and those decided by the General Assembly. Above all, the report should concern itself with recent recommendations.

30. The delegations of the States of the European Community approved the proposals contained in chapter VI of report A/44/34, dealing with the improvement of the working methods of JIU. Those delegations urged the Inspectors, intergovernmental bodies and the Secretariat to unite their efforts in continuing support of the quality, authority and independence of that useful body.

31. Mr. KOULIK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the studies of the Joint Inspection Unit had made it possible to shed light on a number of defects in the operation of the various mechanisms in the United Nations system and to make the necessary corrections. There were however some omissions in its work. For example, the topics chosen were not always in accordance with the principal objective assigned to it, namely to make the United Nations system operate more effectively, ensure the rational utilization of material and human resources, and improve management and methods of work. The Joint Inspection Unit should concentrate its attention on matters which concerned the Organization as a whole or on specific fields of activity related to the immediate concerns of both Member States and the participating organizations. In that connection, his delegation noted with satisfaction that JIU had drawn up its annual programme of work in accordance with article 9 of its statute. It would be advisable perhaps, given the latest report of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, to put more emphasis on co-ordination in future programmes of work.

32. The two reports on the representation of organizations of the United Nations system at conferences and meetings (A/44/221 and A/44/135) demonstrated yet again the many savings that could be achieved through stricter discipline. It was unfortunate that the Inspector had not been provided with precise statistics on the costs involved in representation. In any event, the figure of between 2 and 3 per cent quoted as the share of the budget earmarked for such expenditure seemed very high. His delegation whole-heartedly endorsed the recommendations aimed at ensuring strict compliance with the existing provisions in regard to

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(Mr. Koulik, Ukrainian SSR)

representation. However, the recommendation that the Representation Unit of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General should be "strengthened administratively" did not seem to be the most rational solution to the problem inasmuch as the Secretary-General himself had said that it would be difficult to strengthen the Unit given the Organization's current financial situation. If the Inspectors had had something else in mind in referring to administrative strengthening, his delegation would be glad of an explanation.

33. The recommendation that the representation of organizations should be limited to one person was also questionable. The Committee's consideration of the reports of the Board of Auditors, just completed, had shown that to respond to the substance of some questions it was sometimes necessary to call on experts of various kinds. With that reservation, his delegation generally endorsed the recommendations in the reports in question.

34. His delegation noted, from document A/44/433/Add.1, entitled "Review of United Nations public information networks - reorganization of the Department of Public Information", that the Secretary-General disagreed with five of the six JIU recommendations. That was a matter which should be taken up when the Committee considered the corresponding section of the programme budget.

35. The Joint Inspection Unit should give priority to current problems that offered opportunities for important savings, such as, for example, improving the productivity of the Secretariat, eliminating duplication in programmes, or ensuring an equitable geographical representation of Member States in the various secretariats. Its programme of work was already largely oriented in that direction. He had in mind, in particular, the concluding report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197, the report on budgeting techniques used by organizations of the United Nations system, and the study on extrabudgetary resources of the United Nations. The question of practices and procedures aimed at a more equitable geographical distribution of sources of procurement for technical co-operation projects also seemed to him to be of special interest. Some other studies, on the other hand, were less interesting.

36. It was advisable to try to monitor to some extent the implementation of the JIU recommendations. In some cases, it might even be possible to plan for two successive studies of particularly important topics. In that connection, he drew attention to the report on common services at Vienna. The information received seemed to indicate that the machinery advocated by JIU had not worked well; even when the recommendations had been implemented, there had been no substantive improvement.

37. Mr. CHEN XU (China) noted the quality and importance of the work of the Joint Inspection Unit. Its main aim should be to make the organizations of the United Nations system function more effectively. In that connection, close co-operation with Member States and the participating organizations was essential. In drawing up its work programme, JIU should take their comments into account and give priority to matters that were of concern to them. There was a reference to that effect in paragraph 7 of the report, but much remained to be done in order to respond fully to the wishes of Member States.

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(Mr. Chen Xu, China)

38. The Joint Inspection Unit should achieve a better balance between quality and quantity. It knew that Member States and the bodies concerned did not always have time to read and study its reports with care. Closer co-operation in that area would be desirable.

39. Follow-up was an important aspect of the work of JIU, not only because it facilitated the implementation of its recommendations but also because it gave it an opportunity to evaluate its own work, to amend earlier proposals if necessary or to formulate new ones. The report in document A/44/488 provided very complete information on that question and showed what remained to be done.

40. The eight JIU reports for the current year would be considered in connection with the corresponding sections of the programme budget for 1990-1991, but his delegation would like to make a few preliminary observations. With regard to the concluding report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197 (A/44/486), it had difficulty in understanding the analysis and recommendations relating to the division of labour within the Secretariat (Chapter IV). It was known that the division of work between the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCD) and the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA) was based on the principles set forth in resolution 32/197 and that it was the fruit of many years' experience. However, the report recommended the establishment of a more operational division of labour between DIESA, DTCD and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, based on the clustering together of distinct sectors in each of those entities (A/44/34, para. 103). That did not correspond to the division of functions described in resolution 32/197. It would apparently mean a return to the situation that had existed before the resolution had been adopted. His delegation did not see how that formula could contribute to a more operational division of labour.

41. With regard to the review of United Nations public information networks, the Inspectors had concluded that the reorganization undertaken in the Department of Public Information had in fact resulted, in some instances, in the creation of superfluous levels of management and in the displacement and dispersion or consolidation of functions and powers in a somewhat arbitrary way (A/44/34, para. 84). They then formulated some specific recommendations. In his delegation's view, while the study was valid at the economic level, in the practical context of the current reform process in the United Nations, it was out of touch with reality. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 41/213, the restructuring of the Department of Public Information had always posed difficulties. Tangible progress could be made only if Member States and the Secretariat combined their efforts. At the current critical stage of the implementation of the reform process, appropriate measures should be introduced and put to the test. His delegation considered that if the JIU recommendations were implemented, the aim of rationalization would not be achieved: on the contrary, more difficulties would be created.

42. Mrs. BROINOWSKI (Australia) said that the Joint Inspection Unit was more important to the Organization than had sometimes been thought, for three reasons relating respectively to the process of reform, improved performance and the Unit's potential for the future.

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(Mrs. Broinowski, Australia)

43. In the case of JIU, the reform process undertaken since the Organization's financial crisis could be said to be virtually complete. In its twenty-first report, JIU described in detail the benefits of the reform process and its implementation, and where it had not been possible to comply completely with the wishes of the General Assembly the report stated clearly and briefly the reason why.

44. The Joint Inspection Unit had followed the guidelines set out in resolution 43/221 and had limited the narrative content of its reports while expanding their evaluative content. It had also held consultations with participating organizations on both an annual and an ad hoc basis. Her delegation looked forward to the promised implementation by JIU of paragraph 8 of that resolution, in which the General Assembly had invited it to give greater attention to budgetary and administrative, as well as to management, issues.

45. Paragraph 15 of the JIU report drew attention to the two-sided nature of its role: to produce high-quality topical reports and to consult with relevant organizations about them. In that connection, JIU reports ought not to be considered only by the Fifth Committee but should be taken up in other Committees as well.

46. Second, having improved its own performance, JIU could work to enhance the performance of other parts of the United Nations system. The concluding report on the implementation of resolution 32/197 concerning the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system (JIU/REP/89/7) was a good example. That report contained recommendations for greater discipline in the management of meetings, documentation and agenda-setting, which could be applied to good effect to the rest of the system.

47. The evaluative assessment of the technical co-operation activities of the International Maritime Organization (JIU/REP/89/3) also merited commendation. The JIU recommendations contained in that study, which had been requested by the Secretary-General of IMO, met the concerns of the Fifth Committee with regard to resource restraint, inter-agency co-operation and staff development. The note on removal costs (JIU/NOTE/88/1) was also valuable for the potential cost-saving which it offered the United Nations system as a whole, provided always that the Organization was willing to implement the recommendations.

48. A fourth document, the note on the administration of sick leave in the United Nations (JIU/NOTE/88/2), merited particular attention in that the objectives of reform were given practical application. The Inspectors suggested that there were many within the United Nations system who would like to eliminate abuse but who hesitated to do so in surroundings where the application of the rules had fallen into desuetude.

49. The Joint Inspection Unit had focused on particular problems and had made practical suggestions to deal with them. Her delegation hoped that JIU would include brief statements in its annual report updating the progress made in areas on which it had previously reported.

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(Mrs. Broinowski, Australia)

50. With regard to the potential of JIU, it would be appropriate to seek ways of making the best possible use of the services of the Unit, which represented, in a sense, an in-house consultancy. In that connection, the various committees might refer to JIU issues on which it could help. Thus, JIU might be invited to consider questions such as the management and financing of peace-keeping forces in a uniform and cost-effective manner, and the establishment of a uniformly rigorous accounting system applicable throughout the United Nations system, the need for which had been mentioned by the Japanese and French delegations.

51. Mr. GUPTA (India) asked JIU to provide a list of all the reports which it had issued during the previous five years.

52. Mr. GOMEZ (Controller) said that the Secretary-General fully shared the opinion of the Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit that it was important to obtain feed-back from delegations, the Secretariat and the executive heads of the specialized agencies regarding the usefulness of the JIU reports. Only in that way could JIU determine whether its reports had achieved their objectives. In that connection, it was to be hoped that Member States would continue to support the work of JIU by proposing candidates who possessed all the required qualifications.

53. It appeared from the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the recommendations contained in six JIU reports concerning co-operation for development that those recommendations had been followed up in most cases. Further progress was, however, needed. For example, full advantage was not always taken of the procedures regarding communication with Headquarters, a situation which could sometimes create confusion.

54. The importance attached by Member States to the operations of JIU was underlined by the fact that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had recommended the retention in the secretariat of that body of two posts which were to have been eliminated in connection with the implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213.

55. The Secretariat welcomed the work of JIU and hoped to be able to strengthen its co-operation with that body.

56. Mr. HENNES (Chairman, Joint Inspection Unit) said he was happy to note that delegations appreciated the efforts made by JIU to improve the quality of its work by observing the guidelines provided by the Fifth Committee, to which it was responsible. However, more criticism would enable JIU to enhance its effectiveness further.

57. In reply to a question put by the Chinese delegation, he said that the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs had both criticized the JIU recommendations regarding the division of functions between the two departments. In his view, those proposals should be given further consideration.

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58. Mr. KOJIC (Joint Inspection Unit), replying to the request of the representative of the Ukrainian SSR for clarification regarding the strengthening of the Representation Unit of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, said he had noted that that Unit had a very heavy work-load, the results of which were fairly evident. In his report, he had pointed out (A/43/586, para. 61) that 224 travel requests had been reviewed and 78 had not been authorized in 1985, and out of 179 submissions, 27 had been turned down in 1986. That represented net savings of \$US 229,642 in 1985 and \$US 139,147 in 1986. Greater economy might have been possible if the administrative work had been better organized. The administrative restructuring of the Unit recommended in the report could, of course, be achieved whether or not the staff was increased.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.