

## SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION

(Item 16 (b) of the Provisional Agenda  
of the Second Regular Session)

Report of the Secretary-General

## I. DECISION OF THE LAST GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly, during the second part of its first session, adopted resolution 75 (I) concerning the future use of simultaneous interpretation, as follows:

"THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY,

"HAVING CONSIDERED the report of the Secretary-General and the observations made by several representatives in the Fifth Committee:

"1. TAKES no decision, for the time being, on the simultaneous interpretation system, but recommends the continuation of the present practices until the next session of the General Assembly when a final decision should be taken.

"2. REQUESTS the Secretary-General to equip before the next session a second conference room and a second committee room with simultaneous interpretation apparatus.

"3. REFERS the proposal for equipment of a second conference room and of a second committee room to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, which should also examine the advisability, from a budgetary point of view, of installing a wireless system of simultaneous interpretation in preference to the present equipment."

In conformity with this resolution, four rooms have been equipped for simultaneous interpretation and a staff of fifty-two interpreters has been authorized.

In January 1947, preliminary tests were conducted with wireless equipment in connection with the meetings of the Economic and Employment Commission of the Economic and Social Council. These tests were quite successful. Reception on the wireless sets was good, channels clear and distinct and the equipment well adapted to the uses of the Organization. In addition, conferences held in Atlantic City from May to September, though not under the aegis of the United Nations, made possible a prolonged experiment with approximately 1,000 wireless sets, in sub-committee, committee and plenary /meetings.

meetings. As a result of this arrangement, wireless sets have been manufactured in considerable quantities and made available to the United Nations for the tests, at no cost to the Organization.

The experience gained to date leads to the conclusion that the wireless system is efficient and satisfactory from the technical point of view. It offers the great advantage of mobility and eliminates the necessity of complex installation.

Light, portable interpreters' booths have been developed so that it is now possible to set up in twenty-four hours the equipment for a meeting held away from headquarters. The approximate cost of the wireless equipment is \$1.25 per listening unit per month.

The wireless system is particularly useful for servicing temporary conferences held away from headquarters, and should prove very useful in plenary meetings of the General Assembly, in particular during the general debate, because of the ease with which the sets may be moved about and the greater freedom which this permits the members of the delegations.

## II. SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE GAINED DURING THE YEAR

A review of meetings held since 1 January 1947, in which simultaneous interpretation was used, reveals considerable diversity as regards the size and composition of the various bodies, the subject matter dealt with, and the form of the debates.

The following observations were made, and conclusions drawn:

### (a) Form of the Debates

Depending on the subject matter dealt with and the purpose of the discussion, the form of the debates in the various United Nations bodies varies from a succession of lengthy - often prepared - statements in a high-level political discussion, to a rapid exchange of views in a small drafting sub-committee. Of these two types of discussion, the former usually predominates in debates of large bodies such as the plenary meetings of the General Assembly.

The formal type of debate is more conducive to a faultless performance of simultaneous interpretation because such debates are more orderly, the orators taking the floor after recognition by the Chair, thus enabling the operators of the sound-equipment to make the proper adjustments.

On the other hand, difficulties for simultaneous interpreters arise in meetings of the less formal type, when:

- (i) Orators take the floor without being recognized. In such cases their phones may not be immediately connected and the first part of their intervention is lost.
- (ii) Two or more participants intervene at the same time.
- (iii) Speakers succeed each other too rapidly.

/These difficulties

These difficulties can, however, be remedied, and experience has shown that representatives who actually rely on the interpretation and who are aware that the interpretation parallels the debate come to realize in time the necessity, in the general interest, for the orderly procedure required by the system.

(b) Interpreting Staff

The interpreting staff assigned to each meeting, and the services rendered by it, can be adjusted in accordance with the number of participants and the languages spoken and understood by them. A meeting of a group of representatives which has decided to have interpretation into either English or French but not both, and in which statements are made in four different languages, requires the services of no more than three or four interpreters. On the basis of past experience, the normal complement of interpreters, depending on the number of languages interpreted into, and on the number of languages from which interpretation is required, can be fixed as follows:

<u>Number of languages requiring interpretation</u>	<u>Complement of interpreters</u>
5	12 - 15
4	8 - 10
3	5 - 6
2	3 - 4
1	1 - 3

Although many representatives regarded the simultaneous interpretation system favourably from the outset, others showed some scepticism at first, due mainly, no doubt, to the unfamiliarity of the system and certain technical imperfections. However, the frequency with which the system has been used in recent months may be taken as an indication of its present popularity.

It should be noted that all meetings cannot physically use simultaneous interpretation, since only four of the larger rooms are equipped, but there have been several instances of meetings which began their work without simultaneous interpretation and decided later to change over to that system. Among these were the Atomic Energy Commission and its committees, the Committee for the Progressive Development of International Law and its Codification, and the ad hoc Committee on information transmitted under Article 73 (e) of the Charter.

III. RECOMMENDATION

The Secretary-General submits for the consideration of the General Assembly the following draft resolution:

"THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

"HAVING CONSIDERED the report of the Secretary-General on the use of the system of simultaneous interpretation:

"1. DECIDES that simultaneous interpretation be adopted on a permanent basis.

"2. REQUESTS the Secretary-General to provide personnel for four complete teams.

"3. REQUESTS the Secretary-General to acquire wireless equipment for use in the General Assembly Hall and the two Council Chambers, and to service conferences away from headquarters."

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