



Tenth session.
Agenda item 38

BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1956

Section 20. Information Centres

Eighteenth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions to the tenth session of the General Assembly

	\$
Estimate submitted by the Secretary-General	940,000
Estimate recommended by the Advisory Committee	940,000

Budget amounts
(total for section)

\$			
852,978	1954	Posts authorized	74
(actual expense)			
905,100	1955	Posts authorized	74
940,000	1956	Posts requested	77
940,000	1956	Posts recommended by the Advisory Committee	77

1. In reporting during July 1955 on the 1956 budget estimates of the United Nations, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions deferred its recommendations on parts IV, V and VI pending receipt of the Secretary-General's conclusions on the Survey Group's findings. Where part V (Information Centres) is concerned, the Committee has now examined the survey report and a related report of the Secretary-General. Its recommendations for the year 1956, together with general comment on the findings of the Survey Group, are submitted in the following paragraphs.

2. The Secretary-General proposes:

- (a) That the 1956 estimates for section 20 (Information Centres) should be approved at the figure of \$940,000;
 - (b) That pending possible changes in the form of the budget, transfer authority between appropriation sections related to public information should be continued for the year 1956; and
 - (c) That the Secretary-General should be authorized to make, during 1956, minor manning-table adjustments affecting either the Headquarters Department or individual information centres, provided that on a global basis
 - (i) the number and level of Professional posts remains unchanged; and
 - (ii) expenditures are kept within the limits of approved appropriations.
- This is without prejudice to normal transfers to and from other appropriation sections made with the prior concurrence of the Advisory Committee.

Comment on the report of the Survey Group

3. The survey report is based on an inspection of nine information centres, as well as on a review of the information activities undertaken at the headquarters of the Economic Commissions for Asia and the Far East (Bangkok) and for Latin America (Santiago). The centres visited form a representative group of large, medium-sized and small information offices. The Survey Group states that it has "confined its report to a general appraisal of the functions and operation of the centres which might be helpful to a re-orientation of policy as affecting their relationship to Headquarters and as might provide a guide for desirable future budgetary adjustments in connexion with the development of future DPI requirements".

4. There is no evidence that the Survey Group directed its attention, as was done in the case of the Headquarters survey, to the possibility of a better streamlining of the existing organization. In fact, the general tenor of the Group's recommendations is in the direction of increases in staff and expenditures. The Group set for itself a task of wide scope and, while there is much of value in the findings, the Advisory Committee inclines to the view that the survey might have yielded more positive results had it been decided to concentrate on a smaller number of centres and to make a critical and exhaustive

analysis of the organization, staffing and operation of each centre in relation to the basic principles and purposes which the General Assembly has laid down for the guidance of the Secretary-General. Although it is admittedly difficult to make an exact appraisal of the results achieved by a given centre, the principles underlying the information activities of the United Nations themselves provide for the Department of Public Information to make a continuous review of the "extent to which an informed understanding of the Organization's aims and activities is being created by existing information media and by [the] services [of the Department]". Consequently, a combination of this process of continuous review on the part of the Department, and of a detailed analysis (limited to a few centres) on the part of the Survey Group would have proved extremely useful.

5. It is appropriate at the outset to recall that the Advisory Committee has recommended that total expenditure on public information activities should be reduced to \$4,500,000 by means of gradual and progressive adjustments to be effected over a period of some three years (A/2921, paragraph 96^{1/}). While it might be argued that there is a case, from the substantive standpoint, for a virtually unlimited number of information projects relating to the purposes and work of the United Nations, it is no less obvious that approval by the General Assembly of an over-all amount in the annual appropriations in effect carries the implication that, for financial reasons, there must be a selection among a vast number of potential and otherwise desirable projects, even though the distribution of allocated funds, and hence the fixing of an order of priority, are largely left to the judgement of the Secretary-General. On this point, it is to be noted that Sub-Committee 8 of the Fifth Committee, when reporting during 1952 on public information, recommended that the regular periodic review of information centres in terms of the results achieved should not exclude the possible closing down or reduction in size of certain centres and the possible opening of new centres or the strengthening of others (A/C.5/L.172, paragraph 10^{2/}). The Advisory Committee considers that this recommendation is a sound one and should be borne in mind when conclusions are reached on the findings.

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Tenth Session, Supplement No. 7.

2/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes, agenda item 41.

of the Survey Group. The view is expressed in the Group's report that "notwithstanding that major demands on the Department of Public Information for the establishment of additional information centres must necessarily be accompanied by increased budgetary appropriations, nevertheless the greater flexibility in staff management as proposed, combined with the application of some other proposals advanced in this report, will assist to reduce such necessary additional costs as might thereby arise".

6. As regards any such demands, two observations seem pertinent. In the first place, the General Assembly has laid down in the preamble to the basic principles underlying the Organization's information activities that the Department should primarily assist, and rely upon, the services of existing official and private agencies, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to suggest that in the allocation of information funds, the degree of support which such official and private agencies are affording to the United Nations programme should be treated as a determining factor, and particularly as regards those countries possessing extensive information facilities. This consideration does not therefore apply to those areas where, because information media are not sufficiently developed, the Member States are precluded from giving a full measure of assistance. In the second place, any redistribution of resources such as is implicit in the foregoing observation should clearly not be limited to the appropriation section covering the information centres, and on this point indeed the views of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee coincide. The Committee concurs in the request for transfer authority referred to in paragraph 2(b) above.

7. The Survey Group discusses, in paragraphs 398 to 401 of its report, the pattern adopted in 1947 for the staffing of information centres in relation to their size. The number of established posts is limited, in accordance with that pattern, to six posts at the large centres, four at average-sized centres, and two at small centres, these posts being equally distributed among the Professional and the General Service categories. There is evidence in the report that the rigidity of the six-four-two formula has resulted in the unavoidable diversion of funds appropriated under the items for temporary assistance, casual labour, and miscellaneous supplies and services to purposes which those accounts

are not intended to serve. The Advisory Committee agrees therefore that remedial action is necessary in those case where, for example, local staff have been carried for long, continuous periods on temporary assistance; such action is called for both in the interest of budgetary control and in that of a sound personnel administration. As regards the staffing pattern in the Professional category, the Committee notes that the general recommendations made by the Group in this part of its report are largely based on a "re-orientation of expenditures within existing budgetary appropriations". Presumably therefore the considerations advanced in paragraphs 5 and 6 above will be weighed, among others, in any redistribution of Professional posts.

8. The Advisory Committee likewise concurs in the recommendation in paragraph 402 that the existing rigidity in the classification of posts of heads of information centres, which corresponds to the six-four-two formula mentioned above, should also be removed. The principle of personal suitability for such posts, without strict reference to classification levels, is clearly a sound one and, in addition to the supporting arguments put forward by the Group, the Advisory Committee sees no automatic correlation between the size and the importance of a given information centre such as would justify the present method of classifying the posts of heads of centres.

9. The Survey Group refers, in paragraph 403, to the question of the nationality of the heads of information centres, and recommends, wherever possible, a strict adherence to the policy of appointing as director of a centre a national of other than the host country, and as deputy director (where such a post exists) a national of that country. The Advisory Committee believes, however, that, in view of the international character of the Secretariat, it would not be wise to formulate too rigid a principle. It is also to be noted that, since most of the centres serve a region rather than a single country and, in several cases, the region encompasses a variety of languages, the "nationality" principle may not offer an over-riding advantage even from the practical standpoint of language requirements.

10. Valuable recommendations are contained in paragraphs 394 and 395 of the survey report for action which would broaden the scope of United Nations information activities without appreciably adding to costs. More particularly, note may be taken of the suggested use of United Nations offices or senior officials in the field (in addition to those under the direction of the Department

of Public Information) for public relations or for information functions. The degree to which, for example, an Economic Affairs officer or an officer of the Technical Assistance Board can, without prejudice to his principle function, act in such a capacity would need to be explored in each case; with that reservation, the suggestion seems worthy of study as providing for an extension of the policy of the Department in encouraging substantive officials to contact the centres and keep them informed of their operations. The Group has, however, also found that "there is frequently a lack of knowledge on the part of the Centre Director of pending visits except of the most senior officials, and in many cases no knowledge whatsoever of visits effected until after the event with a resulting loss in the public information potential involved". This failure to advise the centres of such visits is difficult to understand. It might perhaps be obviated in future if the External and Specialized Agencies Service of the Department were to be appropriately notified.

11. The Survey Group also draws attention, in paragraph 395, to the advantage of grouping regional information activities around existing United Nations offices, as a means of reducing costs through the sharing of common services and facilities. Apart from the financial aspect, the Advisory Committee sees in such an arrangement the further advantage that it bears manifest evidence of a prudent management and concentration of the Organization's resources; the recommendation is accordingly endorsed on both grounds.

12. On the general question of the inter-change of staff between Headquarters and centres, the Survey Group suggests, in paragraph 387, that the normal tour of duty of a head of centre should be limited to three, or at a maximum four, years, and that there should be a parallel rotation of duties between other information officers in the field and at Headquarters. This suggestion accords generally with the principle of flexibility in the use of staff, but the Advisory Committee considers it undesirable to set a rigid time-limit; in some cases even a three-year term may be found too long, whereas in other cases a tenure of four years may prove unduly brief. It does, however, suggest that a matter of no less importance is that senior officials of the Department of Public Information, as well as those of other departments, should, by means of visits to the centres at regular intervals, maintain the fullest possible contact with information officers in the field.

Recommendations on the 1956 budget estimates

13. As regards the details of the 1956 estimates, the Advisory Committee is not fully convinced of the necessity for the three additional General Service posts, proposed respectively for the Karachi, New Delhi and Paris centres. Subject, however, to the observations in the foregoing paragraphs, the Committee is prepared to recommend an appropriation for section 20 at the figure of \$940,000 as submitted by the Secretary-General.
