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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

Report of the Secretary-General

1. Under the terms of paragraph 6 of its resolution 2609 (XXIV) of 16 December 1969, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General:

"(a) To complete the study provided for in Economic and Social Council resolution 1460 (XLVII) by widening its field of application to the whole area of conferences and meetings held by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly;

"(b) To incorporate in this study, taking into account views expressed in and suggestions presented to the General Assembly as well as other relevant considerations, proposals concerning the calendar of conferences for 1971 and the following years, which would allow for the most rational and economic use possible of the administrative premises and staff assigned to conference and meetings services both at Headquarters in New York and at the United Nations Office at Geneva".

2. The Secretary-General submitted reports to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth 1/ and twenty-sixth 2/ sessions. On both occasions he suggested that, pending the completion of the additional conference facilities in the United Nations Office at Geneva (expected in 1973) and of the study of the optimum distribution of Secretariat functions between United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Office at Geneva and any other location, it would be premature to undertake the study called for under paragraph 6 (b) of resolution 2609 (XXIV). The General Assembly agreed and postponed the study, first to the twenty-sixth session and then, by its resolution 2834 (XXVI) of 17 December 1971, to the twenty-seventh session. By paragraph 2 of the latter resolution, the General Assembly extended the coverage of the study called for under paragraph 6 (b) of resolution 2609 (XXIV) to include "consideration of other

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fifth Session, Annexes, agenda item 75, document A/8138.

2/ A/8448.

locations", and by paragraph 6 it further requested the Secretary-General to include in the study "an assessment of possible measures to ensure that the pattern of conferences is organized on the most effective and efficient basis".

3. The situation that led the Secretary-General previously to suggest deferment of the study requested still obtains, and in view of that fact it would be reasonable to suggest a further deferment. Furthermore, after consideration of the many elements involved, the Secretary-General is of the opinion that the pattern of conferences, including the question of distribution of meetings as between Headquarters, Geneva and other locations, does not lend itself at this stage to long-range analysis and administrative control. The Ad Hoc Committee of Experts to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies tacitly recognized this fact in paragraph 10<sup>4</sup> of its second report 3/ to the General Assembly at its twenty-first session, in which, after making certain recommendations regarding the programme of conferences, it specified:

"Where practical, physical facilities for conferences should not be expanded until it has been possible to evaluate the effect of putting into practice the above recommendations;

"Only the most urgently needed new conference personnel should be added to the secretariats of the United Nations family of organizations until it has been possible to evaluate the effect of putting into practice the above recommendations."

It is not intended in the present report to deal with the implementation of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts. The quotations above are cited only to illustrate the conclusion of the Committee that, at least in the short run, the only practical means of controlling the meetings programme lay in mechanical restrictions.

4. The experience of the Committee on Conferences, established by General Assembly resolution 2239 (XXI) of 20 December 1966 for an experimental period of three years, is also relevant. The Committee reported on its work to the Assembly at the twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions. In the last 4/ of these reports, the Committee observed that it

"could usefully continue its existence only if it was entrusted with responsibilities to take final decisions on all proposals for new conferences and meetings and changes in the approved calendar of conferences when the General Assembly was not in session. Doubts were expressed as to whether the General Assembly would agree to the delegation of such wide powers to the Committee." 5/

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3/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Session, Annexes, agenda item 80, document A/6343.

4/ Ibid., Twenty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 26 (A/7626 and Corr.1 and 2).

5/ Ibid., para. 30.

The Committee concluded that its tenure should be extended only if its mandate could be considerably strengthened and was of the view

"that it would be for the General Assembly to decide, in the light of the considerations mentioned above, as to whether a useful purpose would be served by the extension of the tenure of the Committee, and, if so, what its future mandate might be." 6/

On the recommendation of the Fifth Committee, after it had considered the report of the Committee on Conferences, the General Assembly adopted resolution 2609 (XXIV) in which, among other things, and in addition to calling for the study referred to in paragraph 1 of the present report:

(a) It expressed regret that, for the reasons set forth in the report of the Committee on Conferences, the efforts of the Committee to bring about a more orderly and manageable calendar of conferences had not produced satisfactory results;

(b) It decided to reconsider at its twenty-fifth session the questions of the membership and terms of reference of the Committee on Conferences and in the meantime not to reconstitute the membership of the Committee;

(c) It requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session a calendar of conferences for 1971 and preliminary calendars for 1972 and 1973.

The text of the relevant report of the Fifth Committee 7/ expresses in summary form the considerations which led that Committee to its recommendation.

5. The General Assembly did not take any action, either at its twenty-fifth or at its twenty-sixth session, to reconstitute the Committee on Conferences. It left it to the Secretary-General to submit calendars of conferences and meetings for succeeding years, though at its twenty-sixth session it restricted the request to cover only the two, rather than three, next succeeding years.

6. In the light of the well-known considerations relating to the control of the programme of conferences and meetings of the United Nations, summarily described in the foregoing remarks, the Secretary-General believes that further action on the study requested under paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) should be suspended, not merely postponed for another year. It is doubtful that developments between the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth sessions of the General Assembly will result in a situation which will make it possible to submit proposals that would materially affect the pattern of conferences. Apart from other factors, already referred to, which would have a direct effect on the "most rational and economic use possible of the administrative premises and staff assigned to conference and meeting services" at Headquarters, Geneva

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6/ Ibid., para. 32.

7/ Ibid., Twenty-fourth Session, Annexes, agenda item 76, document A/7914.

and other locations, there is the additional fact that the Secretary-General has no immediate intention of increasing the total capacity of the Secretariat to service such meetings. Accordingly, the annual programmes of meetings that will be presented to the General Assembly will be drawn up with a view to making the best possible use of existing conference servicing capacity at the various locations of United Nations offices. Indeed, regardless of any other procedures, the Secretary-General is required, by virtue of his function as chief administrative officer of the Organization, to ensure the most effective and economical use of the resources at his disposal. The proposed programme of meetings for 1973 has been drawn up by the Office of Conference Services in that spirit. Should particular proposals give rise to needs not covered in the budget, the financial implications will be stated. For reasons which have been explained on a number of occasions - particular reference might be made to the statement of the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services at the 1341st meeting of the Fifth Committee, held on 4 December 1969 (A/C.5/SR.1341) - the degree of flexibility to accept new meetings, or changes in the location of meetings within established capacity is greater at Headquarters <sup>8/</sup> than elsewhere; thus, proposals to hold meetings at other locations are more apt to give rise to unbudgeted expenditures.

7. Apart from the question of the location of meetings, there is the additional request to the Secretary-General, in resolution 2834 (XXVI), paragraph 6, that he assess possible measures to ensure that the pattern of conferences is organized on the most effective and efficient basis. Though there is a direct relationship between the location of meetings and the effective and efficient organization of the conference programme, there remain certain administrative aspects of that programme which, for proper and economical servicing, apply whatever the location of the meeting concerned. These factors have been the subject of consideration and suggestion or recommendation by a number of bodies which have addressed themselves to the question of the conference programme - the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Joint Inspection Unit, the Expert Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat, the Committee on Conferences, the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly, as well as the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies, and notably the Economic and Social Council in respect of the conference and meetings programme in its area of activity. In synthesis, the measures recommended to keep the conference programme within control comprise the following:

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<sup>8/</sup> The Conference servicing strength at Headquarters is predicated, and provided, on the basis of well established experience regarding demands and use; it is, because of the recognized inability of a number of Headquarters-based bodies to schedule defined sessions, somewhat greater than would appear to be required by the conference programme. In the annex, the number of meetings provided for in the known - and "planable" - programme for Headquarters for the first eight months of 1972 is compared with the actual number of meetings held.

(a) Meetings should be held only when there is a reasonable expectation of a positive result;

(b) Meetings should be scheduled well in advance;

(c) Meetings of subsidiary organs should be scheduled so as to provide adequate time for their reports to be available to their parent organs;

(d) Wherever possible, bodies should meet within prescribed sessional periods, so that scheduling will be effective;

(e) Meetings should be arranged so that they begin on time punctually, and make full use of the conference facilities reserved for them;

(f) Standing bodies should maintain under review their need for written meeting records, bearing in mind the fact that their proceedings are sound-recorded.

All these measures have already been commended explicitly or implicitly to commissions, committees and other bodies of the Organization by the General Assembly. These recommendations are known to Member States, and if, on some occasions, the representatives of Member States serving on a particular intergovernmental body do not find it possible to arrange the work of the body within these desiderata, the Secretary-General must, for his part, accept the decision of the body. What he can do, and does, is indicate to the body the possibility of accommodating its wishes within existing facilities, or, alternatively, the additional cost of meeting those wishes if they cannot be so accommodated.

8. In this regard, the Secretary-General draws particular attention to the continuing care given by the Economic and Social Council to its programme of conferences and meetings and to the related question of documentation, exemplified by its actions at its fifty-third session on those subjects. The Secretary-General believes that there would be advantage in the consideration by the Trade and Development Board, the Industrial Development Board and the Governing Council of UNDP of adoption of measures similar to those approved by the Economic and Social Council, always bearing in mind their applicability to the respective methods of work of those bodies. While this is perhaps not a major point, conference planning would be facilitated if these bodies were to adopt a firm pattern for their own sessions, along the lines adopted by the Council in its decision to convene its two yearly sessions on the second Tuesday of April and the first Monday of July.

9. To summarize, the Secretary-General believes that there is not much new to be said on the "possible measures to ensure that the pattern of conferences is organized on the most effective and efficient basis", and that certain undetermined factors inhibit a further analytical study of the optimum location for meetings of United Nations bodies. In this belief, the Secretary-General suggests that the General Assembly might wish:

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(a) To reaffirm its previous resolutions on the pattern of conferences, in particular the provisions of its resolution 2609 (XXIV);

(b) To approve the programme of meetings for 1973 contained in the addendum to the present document;

(c) To request the Secretary-General to continue to present to the General Assembly at each of its sessions, for its approval, the programme of conferences and meetings for the ensuing year, and, for its information, a tentative programme for the second ensuing year;

(d) To request the Secretary-General to remain in close consultation with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the pattern of conferences, with a view to presenting, when conditions warrant, a further report on the specific questions raised under General Assembly resolutions 2609 (XXIV) and 2834 (XXVI).

Annex

NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD AT HEADQUARTERS FROM 1 JANUARY THROUGH  
 31 AUGUST IN 1970, 1971, 1972 AND 1973 (ESTIMATED)

	<u>1970<sup>a/</sup></u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972 Projections</u>	<u>1972 Actual</u>	<u>1973<sup>b/</sup> Projections</u>
January	140	109	108	141	180
February	134	171	76	166 <sup>c/</sup>	196
March	298	185	240	356	250
April	271	141	140	219 <sup>d/</sup>	252
May	210	189	218	245	253
June	179	256	179	187	160
July	128	119	38	78	132
August	109	172	160	183	130
TOTAL	<u>1,469</u>	<u>1,342</u>	<u>1,159</u>	<u>1,575</u>	<u>1,553</u>

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<sup>a/</sup> To date, the year when the greatest number of meetings have been held (2,787).

<sup>b/</sup> As of 5 October 1972.

<sup>c/</sup> Fifteen meetings were held by the Security Council from 20 January through 4 February 1972 at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

<sup>d/</sup> Thirty-two meetings were held in Africa by the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples from 10 April through 28 April 1972.