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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1969

Conferences, documentation and records

Thirty-third report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the General Assembly at its twenty-third session

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the suggestions and recommendations on the question of conferences, documentation and records made by the Committee on Conferences, the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat and also by the Joint Inspection Units.

Suggestions and recommendations of the Committee on Conferences

2. The Advisory Committee has noted from the report of the Committee on Conferences^{1/} that, with regard to the pattern of conferences, that Committee focused its attention on two aspects of the problem - deviations from the calendar of conferences as approved by the General Assembly, and ways and means of reducing congestion in the pattern of conferences itself. The Committee on Conferences also gave further consideration to the definition of the term "major special conference", and decided that the question must be approached pragmatically, and that each proposed special conference should be looked at separately in terms of all its possible implications.

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-third Session, agenda item 75, document A/7361.

3. As regards deviations from the approved pattern of conferences, the Committee on Conferences has noted that the 1968 calendar of conferences, as approved by the General Assembly at its twenty-second session, has been considerably modified during the year; in some cases substantial changes have been made involving the duration, timing and even the venue of particular meetings. While appreciating the need for occasional departures from the approved programme, the Committee on Conferences expressed the conviction that the lines of authority must be drawn more tightly. In particular it questioned the power of subsidiary bodies to depart from the meeting programmes laid down for them by the General Assembly without first seeking the approval of the parent body. To deal with this problem of haphazard deviations from the approved calendar, the Committee on Conferences has recommended that its terms of reference should be defined with greater precision so that it may consider all additions to or changes in the approved programme, made during or between sessions of the General Assembly.

4. With regard to the pattern of recurrent conferences and meetings, and ways in which it might be made less congested, the Committee on Conferences reached the conclusion that before recommending that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should adopt quantitative standards limiting the volume of conferences, it would suggest a "final round of consultation" with the subsidiary bodies concerned. Accordingly, the Committee on Conferences has recommended that:

"(a) The General Assembly should invite the bodies listed below, now meeting more frequently, to review the possibility of meeting only once a year

- (i) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development - Trade and Development Board;
- (ii) United Nations Development Programme - Governing Council;
- (iii) Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development;
- (iv) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;
- (v) International Narcotics Control Board;
- (vi) Committee for Programme and Co-ordination;

(b) The Economic and Social Council should invite the functional and regional commissions listed below, which now hold annual sessions, to consider meeting biennially:

- (i) Commission on Human Rights;
- (ii) Commission for Social Development;
- (iii) Commission on the Status of Women;
- (iv) Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities;
- (v) Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East;
- (vi) Economic Commission for Europe;
- (vii) Economic Commission for Latin America;^{2/}

(c) The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council should request all subsidiary bodies, including the semi-autonomous organs, to exercise more restraint as regards the creation and convening of ad hoc and expert groups, and to relate their requirements in this area to established needs rather than to a contingency forecast;

(d) All United Nations bodies should co-operate in efforts to avoid excessive bunching of meetings at particular periods of the year, especially in the first quarter in advance of the spring session of the Economic and Social Council and in the last quarter during the regular session of the General Assembly;

(e) With respect to these recommendations, the bodies concerned should submit their findings to their parent organs and to the Committee on Conferences in time for the latter to present its relevant conclusions to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth regular session;

(f) The calendar of conferences and meetings submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its summer session each year should be drawn up in close consultation with the Committee on Conferences;

(g) Upon the conclusion of each session of every main and subsidiary organ scheduled to meet in 1969, the Secretary-General should prepare and submit to the Committee on Conferences a brief description of the servicing workload involved, indicating inter alia where the actual burden differed from the estimated requirements."

^{2/} The Economic Commission for Latin America at present meets biennially but in each year in which the Commission itself does not meet there is a meeting of the Commission's Committee of the Whole.

5. In operative paragraph 3 of the draft resolution it has submitted to the General Assembly as part of its report, the Committee on Conferences would have the Assembly approve these recommendations.
6. As regards documentation, the Advisory Committee noted from the report of the Committee on Conferences^{3/} that that Committee considered that, of the many aspects of the question, those concerning the preparation and publication of official records, supplements and annexes of United Nations organs fell most clearly within its terms of reference. In the time available to it in 1968 the Committee on Conferences concentrated upon the matter of summary records. It reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations on documentation approved by the General Assembly in resolution 2292 (XXII), and was informed that a number of bodies had decided that they could dispense with summary records, while many others felt otherwise, and others still had not yet taken any action. The Committee on Conferences noted also that in its resolution 1379 (XLV) of 2 August 1968 the Economic and Social Council requested those of its subsidiary organs which had not yet done so to consider at their next sessions dispensing with summary records for their own meetings and for meetings of their respective subsidiary bodies.
7. The Advisory Committee notes that the Committee on Conferences intends to return to the question in 1969, but that in the meantime, on the basis of information supplied and suggestions advanced during its meetings, it believes that all bodies other than those listed in paragraph 35 of its report should be asked to dispense with summary records. The Report goes on:^{4/}

"The Committee recognizes that the list should be subject to periodic review. Moreover it appreciates that exceptional circumstances could arise in which other bodies might require summary records. However, it is convinced that such exceptions should be examined on their individual merits. It would seem appropriate, too, that such requests should be subject to the concurrence of the Committee on Conferences following consultations with the Secretary-General. In the Committee's view the following bodies should be provided with summary records:

^{3/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-third Session, agenda item 75, document A/7361, paras. 34-35 and annex II.

^{4/} Ibid., para. 35

- (1) General Assembly
 - (a) Special Political Committee
 - (b) Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Committees
 - (c) General Committee
 - (d) Credentials Committee
- (2) Security Council - Committee established under resolution 253 (1968)
- (3) Economic and Social Council (plenary only)
- (4) Trusteeship Council (plenary only)
- (5) United Nations Conference on Trade and Development - Trade and Development Board (plenary only)
- (6) United Nations Industrial Development Organization - Industrial Development Board (plenary only)
- (7) United Nations Development Programme - Governing Council
- (8) United Nations Council for Namibia
- (9) United Nations Children's Fund - Executive Board
- (10) International Law Commission
- (11) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
- (12) Peace Observation Commission
- (13) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (main committee only)
- (14) Ad Hoc Committee to study the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction (main committee only) 5/
- (15) United Nations Scientific Advisory Committee
- (16) Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

5/ On the assumption that the present session of the General Assembly decides to establish a successor to the Ad Hoc Committee to Study the Peaceful Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction.

- (17) Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (plenary only)
- (18) Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations
- (19) Special Committee on the Question of Defining Aggression
- (20) Special Committee on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States
- (21) Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa".

The Advisory Committee notes from annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences that, in that Committee's opinion, fifty-nine bodies should be asked to dispense with summary records.

8. Paragraph 12 of the draft resolution recommended by the Committee on Conferences would have the General Assembly request all organs other than those listed in paragraph 35 of the report of the Committee on Conferences, in response to General Assembly resolution 2292 (XXII) of 8 December 1967, to dispense with summary records for their meetings.

Suggestions and recommendations of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat

9. The observations and recommendations of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat,^{6/} which cover a broader field than those of the Committee on Conferences, are intended to achieve early results in an area where progress has so far been slow.

10. Thus, the Committee has recommended in paragraph 136 (a) of its report that the General Assembly should decide at its current session that the total volume of the servicing requirements for conferences and meetings for the years 1970, 1971 and 1972 should not exceed that of 1967.

11. The other recommendations as regards conferences made by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat are as follows:

^{6/} A/7359, annex paras. 135-146.

"(b) The General Assembly at its twenty-third session should direct the Committee on Conferences, on the basis of suggestions submitted by the Secretary-General, to present to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth sessions respectively, a final calendar of conferences and meetings, within the above limitation, for 1970, 1971 and 1972, including such additional conferences or meetings as may be proposed during the respective sessions of the General Assembly.

(c) No body of the United Nations should be authorized to exceed the number of meetings approved in the calendar. In addition, each organ should be requested to hold meetings of the minimum number and length required and, if possible, below what is provided for in the approved calendar. (The Committee recognizes that such limitations cannot apply to meetings of the Security Council.)

(d) The General Assembly, as appropriate, should instruct the Committee on Conferences, in establishing the proposed calendar, to take into account the need to space out the sessions of various subsidiary and interrelated organs in order to permit adequate preparation and study by the Secretariat and by the delegations.

(e) The Secretary-General should assign a high official on a full-time basis to the task of reviewing the recommendations which have been made over the years on the subject of conferences, meetings and documentation, including those presented by this Committee. Action should then be taken by the Secretary-General or the General Assembly, as appropriate, to implement those recommendations which are likely to produce beneficial results.

(f) The General Assembly should direct all organs holding more than one session a year to meet only once a year except on occasions when there are overriding considerations. In particular the following bodies, in the opinion of the Committee, should hold only one session a year:

- (i) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;
- (ii) Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development;
- (iii) International Narcotics Control Board;
- (iv) UNCTAD - Trade and Development Board;
- (v) UNCTAD - Advisory Committee to the Board and to the Committee on Commodities. 7/

In this connexion the Committee was pleased to note that the Trade and Development Board has examined extensive proposals aimed at streamlining the whole UNCTAD machinery including the periodicity of the meetings of the Board and its subsidiary organs.

7/ Subsequent to the adoption of this paragraph, the Committee was informed of a decision made by the Trade and Development Board at its seventh session, concerning the improvement of the institutional machinery and methods of work of UNCTAD, including the provision that the Board, as well as the main committees, should normally hold one regular session a year (decision 45 (VII), adopted at the 173rd plenary meeting on 21 September 1968).

(g) The Economic and Social Council should decide that all its functional commissions, with the possible exception of the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, meet once every two years.

(h) In the notification to Governments by the Secretary-General concerning a forthcoming conference or meeting, information should be included on General Assembly and other decisions relating to the conference or meeting as well as other suggestions and limitations which if observed will contribute to economy and efficiency.

(i) From 1 September to the end of the year, no meetings should be scheduled at Headquarters except for the General Assembly, its Main Committees, the General Committee, the Credentials Committee, for the resumed session of the Economic and Social Council and for bodies related to the work of the General Assembly such as the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Committee on Contributions and the Committee on Conferences. The Security Council would, of course, meet as required."

12. A comparison between the recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences and by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat as regards the periodicity of recurrent conferences and meetings shows that whereas the former would have the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council "invite" the bodies concerned to review the question, the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat would have the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council take decisions in the matter. On the other hand the Committee on Conferences (but not the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat) has included the Governing Council of UNDP and the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination among the organs which should meet once a year, and the regional economic commissions, the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities among the bodies which should meet biennially (the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat regards the last two bodies as possible exceptions to the biennial rule).

13. With regard to summary records, the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat has recommended that their provision should be limited to the bodies listed in paragraph 137 (d) of its report, it being understood that that list should be periodically reviewed. This list is shorter than the one recommended by the Committee on Conferences and excludes the following bodies: the Committee established under Security Council resolution 253 (1968); the United Nations Council for Namibia; the Peace Observation Commission; the Committee on the Peaceful

Uses of the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction (or its successor, if any); the United Nations Scientific Advisory Committee; the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation; and the Special Committee on the Policies of Apartheid of the Government of the Republic of South Africa.

14. The Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat has also made the following recommendations:

"(a) The Office of Conference Services should advise all Secretariat officials concerned with the advance planning for documentation for each conference or meeting on the standards for the most economical methods for documentation. The situation should also be discussed with the officers of the conference or meeting concerned.

(b) In presenting the required financial implication papers in the most economic and accurate manner, the Secretary-General should set forth possible alternative suggestions which may be less costly and commend their adoption.

(c) No programme for documentation for a conference or a meeting should be considered adopted:

- (i) In the case of subsidiary bodies, until it has been reviewed by the parent body;
- (ii) When funds must still be approved, until it has been considered in the normal budgetary review processes by the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the General Assembly;

(d) ...

(e) Only in truly exceptional cases should summary records be authorized for other bodies, and then only on a case-by-case basis and for a limited period of time. Even then they should be allowed only when:

- (i) Concurred in by the Committee on Conferences after consultation with the Secretary-General; and
- (ii) Subsequently approved by the General Assembly;

(f) Summary records for special conferences should be approved only when the General Assembly has specifically considered each case on its own merits and then authorized them;

(g) Greater efforts should be made to reduce the length of the summary records of the bodies listed [paragraph 137 (d)];

(h) Verbatim records should be limited to the plenary meetings of the General Assembly and to meetings of the First Committee and the Security Council;

(i) Translation should be dispensed with in the process of establishing the final records of bodies whose official records are verbatim records."

In addition the Committee recommended the discontinuance of the present practice of providing verbatim records in provisional form to certain bodies which receive summary records as their official records; and the limitation of the number of copies supplied to Member States and other recipients.

15. The Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat has also made a number of precedural recommendations and also the following recommendations as regards supplements and annexes:

"(a) The concept of supplements and annexes be eliminated;

(b) Only the annual report of the Secretary-General, the reports of the three councils and of the International Court of Justice and the resolutions shall normally be printed;

(c) All other reports and documents be issued internally from typescript except:

(i) Where for technical reasons (large amounts of tabular material, etc.) it is the opinion of the Secretary-General that letter-press or other printing methods are most advantageous; or

(ii) The internal capacity of the United Nations must be supplemented by recourse to external printing;

(d) Special treatment - single-space typing and photo-offset on better quality paper - be given to "important" documents;

(e) In connexion with (d) above, self-identifying cover stock be used when the cost-use ratio warrants it;

(f) After the session, check lists be prepared of the documents pertinent to each agenda item;

(g) The reprinting of documents as annexes be discontinued."

Observations and recommendations by a team of the Joint Inspection Unit

16. The Advisory Committee has received from the Secretary-General a report on documentation prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit, together with the Secretary-General's observations thereon. A number of the inspectors' recommendations relate to points of detail and fall within the sphere of executive action. The Advisory Committee has been informed that it is the Secretary-General's intention to pursue action along the lines suggested by the inspectors. Similarly, the Publications Board will be asked by the Secretary-General to study carefully the recommendations which are addressed to it.

17. The inspectors have recommended that provision of summary records should be limited - save in truly exceptional cases - to a list of bodies parallel to that recommended by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat, except that the inspectors have also included in their list the sessions of the regional economic commissions.

18. Like the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat, the inspectors have recommended that no United Nations organ or related body should be provided with both verbatim and summary records; and that verbatim records should be limited to the plenary meetings of the General Assembly, and to meetings of the First Committee and the Security Council; that the concept of supplements and annexes should be eliminated; and that a limitation should be imposed on the number of copies of documents supplied to Member States and other users.

19. The inspectors have also made the following two recommendations which would require approval by the General Assembly, and which are not covered by the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat:

(a) Reports should constitute a carefully edited summary of deliberations, reflecting in a balanced fashion the views expressed and the decisions taken. In no circumstances should they contain any word-for-word reproduction of texts such as working papers, statements, quotations, draft resolutions or extracts from verbatim or summary records.

(b) The practice of deciding that speeches or statements made by delegates should be reproduced in extenso for organs which do not use verbatim records should not be permitted. If a proposal for such reproduction is made, the delegation whose representative made the statement should be invited to circulate the complete text through its own facilities.

20. The inspectors' recommendations include several which, if applied, would affect the agendas of sessions of the Economic and Social Council. The Advisory Committee has been informed that it would be the Secretary-General's intention to bring those recommendations to the attention of the Council at its next session.

Observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee

21. Over the years, the Advisory Committee has repeatedly drawn the attention of the General Assembly to the problems connected with the proliferation of conferences and documentation. This concern has been echoed by the Secretary-General and has also been voiced by many delegations in the Fifth Committee. The Advisory Committee therefore welcomes the observations and recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences, the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat and the Joint Inspection Unit, all of which are designed to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations and to lighten the financial and administrative burdens imposed upon the United Nations as a whole and on the Member States individually by the ever-increasing volume of conferences and documentation.

22. Of the recommendations before the Fifth Committee this year, those made by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat are the most comprehensive and far-reaching. The Secretary-General has informed the Advisory Committee that, in monetary terms, the proposed reduction in summary records can be estimated at \$325,000 a year (on the basis of the 1967 level, calculated at current prices); the proposal to discontinue recourse to translation in establishing final verbatim records can be estimated at \$400,000 a year; and the elimination of the concept of supplements and annexes can be estimated at \$100,000 a year in printing costs.

23. Consequently, the Advisory Committee is glad that in his note on the report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat,^{8/} the Secretary-General has welcomed recommendations aimed at keeping the conference and documentation workload of the Secretariat to the minimum consistent with the essential needs of the Organization, and has supported the proposal by the

^{8/} A/7359, paras. 16-17.

- Committee that the General Assembly should consider and decide on its recommendations. As the Secretary-General indicates, action in this general field has in the past normally taken the form of urging restraint, calling upon subsidiary bodies to review their needs, etc. These steps have produced some results, particularly this year, but the results have not been sufficient to turn the tide of increasing requirements, or even to stabilize the workload.
24. The Advisory Committee welcomes the fact that the three bodies whose reports it has considered have, broadly speaking, reached parallel conclusions and recommendations. This factor has facilitated its own analysis and should make it easier for the General Assembly to take a decision in the matter. At the same time the Advisory Committee realizes that the implementation of some of the recommendations would require changes in the rules of procedure and practices of both principal and subsidiary organs.
25. The Committee on Conferences has submitted in its report a draft resolution which, if adopted by the General Assembly, would mean that fifty-nine bodies would be requested to dispense with summary records for their meetings (see paragraphs 7 and 8 above). While this would be a major step in the desired direction, the Advisory Committee feels that more can be achieved, even at this late stage in the twenty-third session of the General Assembly, if efforts are also made to implement the recommendations of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat.
26. The Advisory Committee would therefore recommend that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat and of the Secretary-General's comments thereon (A/7359), and that an additional operative paragraph be inserted at the end of the draft resolution recommended by the Committee on Conferences, as follows:

"Considers that, notwithstanding anything contained in this resolution, the recommendations on conferences and documentation made by the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat in chapter VII of its report should be implemented at a very early date."

27. In this connexion the Advisory Committee would draw attention to the recommendation made in paragraph 137 (i) of the report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat that "translation should be dispensed with in

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the process of establishing the final records of bodies whose official records are verbatim records". The implementation of this recommendation would result in an immediate substantial reduction in the workload of the Office of Conference Services and would eliminate the considerable delays that have occurred in the production of the final records. The Advisory Committee notes that the adoption of the proposed procedure would mean that the official records would consist of the verbatim texts of the statements in their original languages and of the interpretation into other languages "after an editorial check of the text of the interpretation for any serious factual errors". In this connexion the Advisory Committee has noted that in his separate opinion on this question, one of the members of the Committee, while supporting the recommendation, entered the proviso that in the case of Russian the present method of translating verbatim records should be retained unchanged.^{9/}

28. The Advisory Committee welcomes the recommendations made in paragraph 144 of the report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat which, if implemented, would lead to considerable economies as regards supplements and annexes. The Advisory Committee has been informed that the Secretary-General intends to take appropriate action at an early date.

29. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 18 of the observations by the Secretary-General on the report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat that he will report to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session on the implementation of the recommendations which fall within the sphere of executive action. The Advisory Committee would recommend that in the same document the Secretary-General should also report on the progress made by the various bodies concerned in implementing the recommendations that are addressed to them.

^{9/} A/7359, annex, appendix, paras. 26-27.