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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Arabic language services for UNCTAD

Revised estimates under section 29B, Conference Services, Geneva

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The General Assembly, by paragraph 3 of its resolution 32/205 of 21 December 1977, requested the Secretary-General to prepare, in close consultation and co-operation with the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, proposals aimed at the full implementation of Conference resolution 86 (IV) of 28 May 1976 and to submit those proposals to the Assembly at its thirty-fourth session.
2. On 3 June 1979, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), at its fifth session in Manila, adopted resolution 115 (V), under the terms of which it recommended that the General Assembly take the necessary steps, at its thirty-fourth session, to ensure that Arabic will have full capacity as an official and working language of UNCTAD with respect to both interpretation and translation facilities and thus be on a par with the other official languages of UNCTAD, with effect from 1 January 1980. It also requested the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in making his contribution to the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to the General Assembly, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 32/205, to make proposals aimed at putting the above recommendations into effect.
3. The present strength of the Arabic language services at the United Nations Office at Geneva under successive arrangements 1/ approved by the General Assembly consists of the following:

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1/ Resolution 31/208, sect. VIII; A/31/8/Add.26; A/C.5/31/60 and Corr.1; resolution 32/205, para. 2; A/32/8/Add.17; A/C.5/32/42/Rev.1 and A/C.5/32/9.

(a) Arabic Interpretation Unit

17 interpreters (1 P-5, 5 P-4 and 11 P-3)

(b) Arabic Translation Section

13 translators/revisers (1  
1 terminologist (1 P-3)  
1 reference clerk (1 G-7)  
3 typists (3 GS)  
1 secretary (1 GS)

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4. It will be recalled that the Arabic Interpretation Unit was established in Geneva at a level that was considered capable of servicing the meetings of the General Assembly and its Main Committees and that the General Assembly was given first call on that permanent staff for the provision of Arabic interpretation services during its sessions. During the remainder of the year, the order of priority for assignment of the permanent staff was as follows: 2/

(a) The UNCTAD Conference, the Trade and Development Board and its main committees, meetings of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Committee for the Integrated Programme for Commodities and preparatory meetings and the Negotiating Conference on a common fund;

(b) Special meetings and conferences for which the General Assembly approves Arabic language services;

(c) Other United Nations bodies, including other UNCTAD bodies, on an "as available" basis;

(d) Other organizations in the United Nations system, when and if available, on reimbursable loan.

5. Under these arrangements, the Arabic Interpretation Unit, supplemented where necessary by free-lance interpreters, has been able to meet all UNCTAD needs under priority (a) and has serviced some other UNCTAD meetings under priority (c). In 1978, the number of assignments of Arabic interpretation provided for all UNCTAD meetings was 1,071, covering 35 per cent of the total UNCTAD meetings in that year. The corresponding workload for 1979 is estimated at 1,848 assignments, covering approximately 60 per cent of the total UNCTAD meetings. Therefore, for the biennium 1978-1979, the total number of assignments of Arabic interpretation is estimated at 2,919.

6. As regards Arabic documentation for UNCTAD, the order of priority indicated in paragraph 4 above has been applied equally to the mandate of the Arabic

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2/ A/C.5/31/60, para. 19.

Translation Section at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The present capacity of the Section is of the order of 2,500,000 words per year; its work, for the most part (about 80 per cent) is devoted to the translation of documents for those bodies of UNCTAD under priority (a) and, supplemented by temporary assistance where necessary, it has been able to meet its obligations to those and other bodies. In terms of pages, the Section, in 1978, translated some 6,500 pages for UNCTAD, though the total of all UNCTAD documentation that year in one language for which full services were provided to UNCTAD, such as Spanish, was of the order of 11,000 pages.

7. During the consultations with the Secretary-General of the United Nations called for in resolution 32/205 and further stressed by UNCTAD resolution 115 (V), as indicated in paragraph 2 above, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD reiterated his earlier proposals for the introduction of full Arabic services for UNCTAD within a period of two years.

8. Under the proposals, in addition to the bodies for which they are already authorized by the General Assembly, Arabic interpretation and documentation would be provided, in 1980 for all standing UNCTAD bodies, all non-commodity conferences, including preparatory meetings of such conferences, and all commodity conferences, and, in 1981, for all other UNCTAD meetings, i.e., working parties, expert groups, study groups and preparatory meetings for commodity conferences.

9. It must be emphasized that the extent to which interpretation and translation services can be extended to other UNCTAD bodies will, in part, be determined by the availability of competent interpreters and translators over the biennium, bearing in mind the increasing demand for Arabic interpretation and documentation in other United Nations bodies, as well as other international organizations and conferences.

10. Should the General Assembly approve the recommendation contained in UNCTAD resolution 115 (V), and should this decision be implemented in two stages as described in paragraph 3 above - and assuming a 10 per cent increase in the volume of UNCTAD meetings in the biennium - it is estimated that the requirements for Arabic interpretation for UNCTAD would rise to 2,688 assignments in 1980 (i.e., 80 per cent of all UNCTAD meetings) and to 3,360 assignments (i.e., 100 per cent) in 1981. This represents for the biennium 1980-1981 a total of 6,048 assignments, or an increase of 3,129 assignments over the 1978-1979 biennium. In order to cope with such an increase, additional resources in an amount of \$887,200 would be required for additional temporary assistance for meetings for the biennium 1980-1981 under section 29B of the programme budget.

11. As noted in paragraph 4 above, first priority for the permanent Arabic interpretation staff is the servicing of the General Assembly. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (A/34/6) has included resources under section 29A to provide replacement for 8 Arabic interpreters of the 17 staff to be detailed to New York during regular sessions of the General Assembly. It is possible that replacement of a larger number might become necessary if more UNCTAD meetings are held with Arabic interpretation during corresponding periods. The Secretary-General intends to review this aspect carefully during the course of the biennium 1980-1981 and to report to the General Assembly in the context of the performance report on the programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981.

12. As regards provision for Arabic documentation, it is difficult to estimate accurately how the workload would increase during the biennium 1980-1981. Moreover, as stated in paragraph 4 above, any increase in the capacity of the Arabic Translation Section in Geneva would be achieved only if qualified staff could be recruited.

13. Consequently, should the General Assembly decide to extend Arabic language services to all UNCTAD bodies, the Secretary-General proposes that the Arabic Translation Section in Geneva should be strengthened by the addition of 10 established posts (2 P-4 reviser posts, 4 P-3 translator posts, and 4 GS posts for typing) to meet an additional workload of 1,250,000 words per year. This would require additional appropriations of \$920,600 under section 29B under established posts (\$731,000) and common staff costs (\$189,600).

14. Further expenses would arise in support services and facilities (editing of official records, proof-reading, reproduction, distribution, library, adjustment of meeting rooms as required etc.), but it is not possible to estimate the net effect of these services at this time. In the meantime, the Secretary-General would endeavour to meet essential requirements in these areas from over-all budgetary provisions for the biennium 1980-1981 as much as possible and request additional resources in this regard when sufficient experience has been gained.

15. In summary, additional appropriations in an amount of \$1,807,800 would be required under section 29B in order to achieve during 1980-1981 full capacity of Arabic services for UNCTAD meetings with respect to both interpretation and translation. A further provision of \$458,400 would be required for staff assessment under section 31, offset by additional income of the same amount under income section 1.

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