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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981

Arabic Language Services

Letter dated 14 November 1979 from the Permanent Representative
of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and Chairman
of the Arab Group addressed to the Secretary-General

On behalf of the Arab Group, I have the honour to call your attention to the question of the provision of Arabic language services to the General Assembly and its main Committees being currently discussed at the Fifth Committee within the framework of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981.

You will be aware that Arabic was included as an official and working language of the General Assembly and its main Committees under General Assembly resolution 3190 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973. As was decided at the time, the costs of implementing the resolution during the first three years were met collectively by the Arab States Members of the United Nations. Beginning from 1 January 1977, these costs have, therefore, been financed by the regular budget.

However, in the six years since the adoption of the resolution, Arabic language services to the General Assembly have been provided in such an inadequate manner that Arab delegations have always found it very difficult and often impossible, to carry out their work in their own language or to participate actively in General Assembly deliberations and decisions.

Documents are often not issued at all until after the session, or after the discussion of the relevant agenda item, or else so close to the date of the discussion that they are useless for all practical purposes. Summary records are invariably issued after the session. The supplements of the major organs are never issued in printed form.

Interpretation from and into Arabic is often of such poor quality that it is impossible to rely on it for any meaningful participation in the deliberations.

The gap between the service that we have a right to expect under the resolution and the service actually provided is so great and persistent that it cannot be ascribed to the occasional breakdowns that could occur, in the normal course of events, in any operation of a certain magnitude.

We cannot, therefore, avoid the conclusion that the cause must be sought in serious structural drawbacks in the arrangements set up for the provision of these services.

Unfortunately, in spite of the repeated complaints voiced by Arab delegations in every session over the past few years, the response has always been less than adequate, usually in the form of reports that have invariably suggested ineffective measures for dealing with the problem. This holds true of the three reports on the question currently before the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/34/L.9, A/C.5/34/28 and A/C.5/33/L.49).

As this state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue further, and as the Arab Group requests that Arabic should in all respects be treated on an equal footing with all the other official and working languages of the General Assembly, I am addressing this letter to you hoping that you personally take up the matter with the responsible authorities at the Secretariat and see to it that all General Assembly decisions on the provision of Arabic language services are fully implemented without delay in such a manner as to do away with all the short-comings and drawbacks that have so far deprived the Arab delegations of the full and timely services they are entitled to under the said resolution.

I would kindly request that this letter be circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under item 98.

(Signed) Mansur R. KIKHIA
Permanent Representative of
the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
to the United Nations
Chairman of the Arab Group
