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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1978-1979

Organizational nomenclature in the Secretariat

Report of the Secretary-General

1. Pursuant to the decision of the General Assembly at its thirtieth session with regard to the adoption of a standardized and uniform organizational nomenclature in the Secretariat, the Secretary-General submitted a progress report to the thirty-first session in document A/C.5/31/8. In that report, the Secretary-General informed the General Assembly that, on his instruction, the Administrative Management Service (AMS) had prepared a report, and he was in the process of obtaining the views of his senior colleagues in the Secretariat on the recommendations of AMS. The Fifth Committee, at its 57th meeting on 20 December 1976, decided to postpone further consideration of the question to the thirty-second session.
2. The Secretary-General has now had the opportunity of reviewing the recommendations of AMS in the light of the comments of his senior colleagues. In presenting this report, the Secretary-General has adopted a flexible and pragmatic approach, taking into consideration, on the one hand, the need for uniformity and, on the other hand, the inherent diversity of the structure of the Organization. Though the criteria outlined below may not be applicable to all situations, he believes that, considering the diversity of the Organization, the implementation of the proposed organizational nomenclature will be a significant improvement over the existing state of affairs.
3. The standardized and uniform organizational nomenclature proposed in the present report is intended to apply to all organizational units fully or partly financed by the regular budget, excluding the International Court of Justice and organizational elements of a non-permanent nature, such as special missions. It should be noted that the proposals which follow were made without the benefit of the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sector of the United Nations system which are due during the course of the thirty-second session of the General Assembly. In the light of these recommendations and

the decisions of the General Assembly, it may be necessary to make certain changes in the organizational nomenclature.

4. The present report covers the background and the historical development of the institutional arrangement for the organization: the present situation; the proposed revised nomenclature; and the implementation of the proposed measures.

I. BACKGROUND

5. In 1945, the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations considered the institutional arrangements for the Organization. 1/ Its recommendations stressed the unified nature of the Secretariat and the special role of the Secretary-General. The report went on to say that "many of the Secretary-General's duties will naturally be delegated in greater or lesser degree, to members of his staff and particularly to the higher officials. But the execution of these duties must be subject to his supervision and control; the ultimate responsibility remains his alone". 2/ In the words of the Preparatory Commission, "the principal reason for setting up the Secretariat as a single working body - though it will, of course, be internally organized so as to deal most effectively with the various aspects of the operations of the United Nations - is that all the organs it serves have their responsibilities in the primary task of maintaining peace and security. This task is the unifying principle of the whole Organization, its organs, and the Secretariat". 3/

6. The General Assembly, during the first part of its first session, adopted a resolution 4/ which, among other things, required the Secretary-General "to take immediate steps to establish an administrative organization which will permit of the effective discharge of his administrative and general responsibilities under the Charter and the efficient performance of those functions and services required to meet the needs of the several organs of the United Nations". The resolution also named the departments/services which were to form the major units of the Secretariat and provided that "at the outset the departments and services should, broadly speaking, conform to the description given in paragraphs 22-40 of Section 2, Chapter VIII of the Report of the Preparatory Commission, but the Secretary-General shall make such changes in the initial structure as may be required to the end that the most effective distribution of responsibilities and functions among the units of the Secretariat may be achieved". In response to the resolution under reference, the Secretary-General approved a plan for the distribution of responsibilities and functions among the major units of the Secretariat. 5/ Those major units were:

1/ Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations (PC/20, 23 December 1945).

2/ Ibid., p. 86.

3/ Ibid., p. 88, para. 28.

4/ General Assembly resolution 13 (I) of 13 February 1946.

5/ See document SGB/32 dated 21 June 1946.

Executive Office of the Secretary-General
Department of Security Council Affairs
Department of Economic Affairs
Department of Social Affairs
Department of Trusteeship and Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories
Department of Public Information
Legal Department
Conference and General Services
Administrative and Financial Services

7. The Secretary-General also stated in the bulletin referred to above that "each Assistant Secretary-General, with the assistance of the Assistant Secretary-General for Administration and Finance, will develop the programme and the internal organization of his department in accordance with this distribution of responsibilities and functions".

8. During the years which followed, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General have tried to deal with the question of the organization of the Secretariat, keeping in view the Secretariat's basic responsibilities as one of the principal organs for the carrying out of the objectives of the United Nations and recognizing, at the same time, the dynamic nature of these responsibilities. However, their attention was, in the main, devoted to measures taken to reorganize the top levels of the Secretariat as a basis for sound administration.

9. Thus, at its seventh session, in 1952, the General Assembly decided 6/ to consider the question of the Organization of the Secretariat at the following session. In response to that resolution, the Secretary-General submitted a report 7/ to the General Assembly during its eighth session indicating its plans for a streamlining of the Secretariat. On 9 December 1953, the General Assembly recommended 8/ that the Secretary-General should proceed with his plans, taking into account the views of the Advisory Committee 9/ and the Fifth Committee. 10/ To assist him in the further elaboration of the reorganization plans, the Secretary-General appointed, early in 1954, a Survey Group composed of six senior members of the Secretariat. Based on the recommendations of the Survey Group, the Secretary-General announced in document A/2731 a revised top structure of the Secretariat at Headquarters, effective 1 January 1955. This structure included the following major units:

6/ General Assembly resolution 681 A (VII) of 21 December 1952.

7/ A/2554.

8/ General Assembly resolution 784 (VIII).

9/ A/2606.

10/ A/2625.

Offices of the Secretary-General

Executive Office of the Secretary-General

Office of Legal Affairs

Office of the Controller

Office of Personnel

Office of the Under-Secretaries without Portfolio

Department of Political and Security Council Affairs

Department of Trusteeship and Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Department of Conference Services

Office of General Services

Technical Assistance Administration

Department of Public Information

10. Since 1955, the role of the Organization has increased considerably, and several additions and revisions have been made to the structure to cope with new and changing activities. These have been indicated in the Secretary-General's bulletins on the organization of the Secretariat issued from time to time. Such additions and changes resulted, in most cases, from isolated decisions rather than from any comprehensive review of the structure. In this connexion, AMS has also made a number of recommendations for revision of organizational structure, including proposals relating to nomenclature, as a result of review of individual major units. However, no review of the organizational nomenclature of the Secretariat as a whole has been undertaken heretofore.

II. PRESENT SITUATION

11. The titles currently applied to the major units and their subsidiary elements are to be found in the Secretary-General's bulletin ST/SGB/Organization. There are, at present, 30 major organizational units. These are headed by officials of the top echelon (i.e., Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General) who report to the Secretary-General either directly or through an Under-Secretary-General. The 30 major units have four different titles, namely, department, office, secretariat and centre.

12. Within each major unit, there are subunits which fall into a number of hierarchical levels with a variety of titles. These hierarchical levels vary in number from none, in the case of the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination, to five, in the case of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. At the first level within major organizational units, the titles in use are centre, division, secretariat, office and service(s). At the second level within major units, the titles used include branch, service(s), section, secretariat, centre and office. At the third level within major units the titles

section, unit, centre and programme are used. In some major units there are fourth and fifth levels of organizational elements with such titles as unit, programme and desk.

13. The field elements of certain major organizational units carry the title of centre (in the case of the Office of Public Information) and office (in the case of the regional commissions).

14. Thus, at the present time, there are up to five hierarchical levels below the major organizational units. The same organizational title may be given to units at different hierarchical levels. Consequently, it is often difficult to identify the hierarchical location of a given unit from its title. Nor does the title, in many instances, give any clue as to the size or level of responsibility of a unit.

15. Since the establishment of the Organization, no attempt appears to have been made to review on an over-all basis the titles of the organizational units. Titles have been established and revised on an essentially ad hoc basis, with no consistent application of any standard policy or criteria, an approach which has no doubt contributed to the confused situation which exists.

16. Some progress has been achieved towards limiting the number of hierarchical levels and standardizing organizational titles as a result of the unit-by-unit review of the organizational structure carried out by AMS since 1969 and the issuance of ST/SGB/150/Rev.1, requiring the prior approval of the Secretary-General for the establishment and revision of organizational structure and functions.

III. PROPOSED REVISED ORGANIZATIONAL NOMENCLATURE FOR UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT

17. In order to secure a rational and understandable system of organizational nomenclature, it is essential to establish certain norms which can be applied throughout the Secretariat. Such norms, while flexible, should include (a) an approved number of hierarchical levels; (b) specific titles applicable to the heads of units at each level; and (c) criteria which should be satisfied for allocating a particular title to a particular unit. The Secretary-General is of the view that "major units" of the Secretariat (i.e., organizational elements headed by an Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General), should constitute the first level and that there should be not more than five subordinate hierarchical levels within each major unit. The suggested standard nomenclature to be accommodated in each of the levels and the criteria that might be used in assigning an appropriate nomenclature for each organizational element are set out below.

Level 1. Department, secretariat or office

Department. This term is reserved exclusively for use at United Nations Headquarters to designate a major organizational element of the Organization consisting of one or more programmes or areas of activity. A department is

responsible for (a) the provision of services to one of the three Councils named in the Charter as principal organs of the United Nations; or (b) the provision of conference or administrative support services required generally throughout the Secretariat. A department is headed by an Under-Secretary-General appointed by the Secretary-General and reporting directly to him.

Secretariat. Apart from its use to describe the entire staff of the United Nations, 11/ this term is reserved for use away from Headquarters to designate a major organizational element of the Organization responsible for one or more programmes or areas of activity. A secretariat is headed by either an Under-Secretary-General, who reports directly to the Secretary-General, or an Assistant Secretary-General, who normally reports through an Under-Secretary-General at Headquarters. The head of a secretariat is also required, with respect to the substantive programmes which he directs, to report to a governing council, board or regional commission created by a resolution of the General Assembly and consisting of member States elected by the General Assembly. The head of a secretariat is usually appointed by the Secretary-General: in some instances, the appointment may require confirmation or election by the General Assembly.

Office. 12/ This term may be used either at Headquarters or away from Headquarters to designate other major organizational units of the Organization whose special importance requires that they be headed by an officer at the level of Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General. An office may be established as a separate organizational component (in which case the head of the office reports directly to the Secretary-General) or it may be a major component of a department. An office is usually somewhat smaller in size and simpler in organizational structure than a department or a secretariat.

Level 2. Centre 13/

In exceptional circumstances (e.g., as a result of a decision of the General Assembly or other organ) an important organizational element of a department, secretariat or office may be designated a centre. A centre is typically a former division of a department, secretariat or office which is established as the focal point of a major programme on which the General Assembly (or other organ) desires to place special emphasis. It usually has a staff of approximately 20 Professionals plus supporting General Service staff. The head of a centre is normally at the D-2 level (exceptionally at the Assistant Secretary-General level) and reports to the head of the department, secretariat or office of which the

11/ The term "secretariat" is also used in a generic sense to apply to the immediate staff providing administrative support services to other bodies (e.g., functional commissions, boards, committees etc.).

12/ The term "office" is also used in a generic sense to apply to the immediate staff attached to a senior officer of the Secretariat.

13/ The title "centre" will also continue to be used in a different sense than described above (para. 13) for field offices of the Office of Public Information.

centre is a part. In the exceptional case of a centre comprising a separate element of the Secretariat (e.g., United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations), the head of the centre reports directly to the Secretary-General.

Level 3. Division

Typically, the largest and most important organizational element within a department, secretariat or office. A division is normally composed of two or more branches or sections (see below) for the integrated total performance of which it is responsible. It consists usually of not less than 15 Professionals plus supporting General Service staff. A division is normally headed by an officer at the Director (D-2) level, with the title of "Director", who reports directly to the Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General in charge of the department, secretariat or office of which the division is a part.

Level 4. Branch

Branch is a term used to describe an intermediate level organizational element between level 3 (division) and level 5 (section). It is used principally in the larger departments, secretariats or offices. It normally combines a number of subordinate organizational elements (sections or units, as defined below) but may, on occasion, consist of a single, undivided organizational element. A number of branches may, in turn be grouped together in a division. A branch consists usually of not less than eight Professionals plus supporting General Service staff and is normally headed by an officer at the Principal Officer (D-1) level, with the title "Head of Branch".

Level 5. Section

A section consists of a single, undivided organizational element or may be composed of two or more units, for the integrated total performance of which it is responsible. A section normally consists of not less than four Professionals plus supporting General Service staff. It is headed by an officer with the title of "Chief of Section" whose grade level varies according to the nature and the complexity of the responsibilities involved, as well as the size of the section, but is usually at the Senior Officer (P-5) or First Officer (P-4) level.

Level 6. Unit

A unit is the smallest element in the organizational structure. It usually has responsibility for one or more administrative or programme functions and consists normally of a minimum of four posts. The head of a unit (who reports to the chief of a section or the head of a branch) may be in the Professional, General Service or other category of post with the title "Supervisor". The actual grade level appropriate for a specific unit supervisor varies according to the size of the unit and the complexity of its operations but is not usually lower than the top level of the General Service category or higher than the Second Officer (P-3) level.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

18. The designation of the major organizational elements of the Secretariat at levels 1 and 2 (department, secretariat, office and centre), on the basis of the foregoing proposed criteria, is shown in the annex to this report. Very little change from existing designations is involved at these levels at this time; however, a number of changes and adjustments of individual organizational elements from one level to another may be necessary in future.

19. The task of "converting" organizational elements at the lower levels to the new nomenclature is a more difficult and time-consuming one. The Secretary-General has established for this purpose, under the leadership of AMS, an interdepartmental working group of seven persons at Headquarters, with instructions to proceed with the conversion of existing organizational elements to the new nomenclature on an office-by-office basis as expeditiously as possible. The working group will report to the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, advising him of any difficulties or problems encountered which may require further examination and, if need be, amendment of the definitions set out in the present report. The working group will concentrate its attention, first, on organizational elements at Headquarters and, then, deal with the major duty stations (Geneva, Vienna and the regional commission headquarters). It is expected that the task of conversion will be sufficiently advanced to enable the Secretary-General to report substantial completion of the undertaking to the thirty-third session of the General Assembly.

20. In order to keep the definitions as general as possible, there is no reference in them to the subprogrammes of the medium-term plan. However, in the course of implementation of the proposals, the working group will attempt to align the sections and branches of substantive units in the economic, social and humanitarian areas with the subprogrammes of the plan.

21. In conclusion, the Secretary-General wishes to point out that it would not be realistic to expect that it will be found possible for every last organizational element to be assigned to a level corresponding precisely to the detailed definitions set out in paragraph 17 above. Exceptions will have to be made and they may be fairly numerous at the outset. It is important, however, that a logical framework be established to which newly created organizational units can be required to conform, and within which existing units can be fitted progressively over a period of time through reorganization, consolidation and in other ways. In this connexion, it will be important to obtain the co-operation of legislative bodies in avoiding decisions on their part to give particular designations to organizational units dealt with in their resolutions which may be inconsistent with the nomenclature here proposed.

Annex

The application of the standard criteria in the case of the two top levels mentioned in paragraph 17 of the present report will result in the following nomenclature:

LEVEL 1

Departments

Department of Political and Security Council Affairs
Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Department of Administration and Management
Department of Conference Services

Secretariats 14/

Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
Secretariat of the United Nations Environment Programme
Secretariat of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization
Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Europe
Secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America
Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Africa
Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Western Asia
Secretariat of the World Food Council
Secretariat of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Offices

Executive Office of the Secretary-General
Office of the Under-Secretaries-General for Special Political Affairs
Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs

^{14/} Any subregional secretariat of a regional commission will be called "area secretariat" of the commission (e.g., Area secretariat of ECLA at Mexico).

Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Special Political Questions
Office for Inter-Agency Affairs and Co-ordination
United Nations Office at Geneva
Office of Legal Affairs
Office of Technical Co-operation (ESA)
Office of Public Information
Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Namibia
Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Office of Financial Services (A and M)
Office of Personnel Services (A and M)
Office of General Services (A and M)

LEVEL 2

Centres

United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations
Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs (ESA)
Centre for Disarmament (PSCA)
Centre for Development Planning, Projections and Policies (ESA)
Centre against Apartheid (PSCA)
Centre for Industrial Studies (UNIDO)
Centre for Natural Resources, Energy and Transport (ESA)
Centre for Housing, Building and Planning (ESA)
Centre for Economic and Social Information (OPI)
