



Eighth session
Agenda item 48

ORGANIZATION OF THE SECRETARIAT

Report of the Secretary-GeneralI. Introduction

1. The question of the organization of the Secretariat has been a matter of debate in the Fifth Committee at the sixth and seventh sessions of the General Assembly and has been repeatedly discussed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions at its sessions over the same period. At its sixth session, the General Assembly, in the course of a discussion on the organization of and relationships among the Departments of Economic Affairs and of Social Affairs and the Technical Assistance Administration, broadened the scope of the review to be made of the Secretariat's organizational pattern and requested the Secretary-General to study the whole structure and functions of the three units concerned, as well as the system of co-ordination between them, within the context of a wider reorganization of the Secretariat.

2. Pursuant to the above request, the first Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly at its seventh session a memorandum on the organization of the Secretariat,^{1/} in which he reviewed its operation, indicated areas in which economies might be made, suggested a re-grouping of activities and proposed a new scheme for the central organization of the Secretariat. The Secretary-General proposed that the present departmental structure should, in

^{1/} See Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventh Session, Annexes, agenda item 69, document A/2214, part I.

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general, be maintained and the departments grouped under three deputy secretaries-general. Thus, under that arrangement, there would have been a Deputy for Political and Public Affairs, another for Economic and Social Affairs and a third for Administrative and Conference Services. The report was not dealt with definitively at the seventh session and the Secretary-General, by General Assembly resolution 681 A (VII) of 21 December 1952, was asked to present a report on the question of reorganization of the Secretariat at the eighth session. In the meantime Mr. Trygve Lie resigned and I took office on 10 April 1953. In my statement to the Fifth Committee on 30 September 1953, based on my experiences during the first months of my incumbency, I expressed my belief that a measure of streamlining could be undertaken, provided a greater degree of elasticity in the use of staff, which alone would make it possible to carry the burden more economically, could be successfully developed. At that time I was not yet ready to make any specific recommendations.

3. The Preparatory Commission, in making its report on the organization of the Secretariat, subsequently accepted by the General Assembly in 1946, was guided in part by the special organizational requirements flowing from implementation of the United Nations Charter, in part by the experience of the League of Nations, and in part by the administrative concepts and practices of various Member States. The Secretariat so organized has now been in operation for nearly eight years. In many respects it has functioned smoothly and effectively. But sufficient time has now passed and adequate experience has been accumulated to permit a re-examination of some of the premises upon which the Secretariat is organized and a revaluation of its structure in the light of the special character of its operation.

4. Article 7 of the Charter establishes the Secretariat as one of the principal organs of the United Nations. The Charter, in Chapter XV, outlines the status and main political responsibilities of the Secretariat and of the Secretary-General as chief administrative officer of the Organization. In the wider context of the bodies which together form the United Nations family the Secretariat has its special place and responsibilities. A good and efficient Secretariat serving as it does on a year-round basis has an important part to

play in advising and assisting the inter-governmental organs of the United Nations in carrying out their decisions, and in maintaining continuous relations with the governments of Members and with the public.

5. The general scope of the activities of the Secretariat is determined by the obligations resulting from the concerted efforts of governments of Members to resolve important short-term and long-term problems of mutual concern with the aid of the agencies at their disposal within the United Nations family. The work of the Secretariat must be carried on in the most efficient and economical way, but it would be against the interest of Members and against the very spirit of the Charter if economies were permitted to become ends in themselves. Economies should result from the greatest possible efficiency and a continuing self-criticism as to the way in which various tasks are carried out. It is incumbent on the governments of Members carefully to consider what balance to strike between tasks to be entrusted to the Secretariat and the desire to keep costs down. In this respect the Secretary-General also has responsibilities. It is his duty to draw attention to tasks that may have become obsolete, with ensuing possibilities for a reduction of the work-load, and to possible objections on administrative or other grounds, to the adoption of new proposals. He has equally the responsibility to draw the attention of Members in the General Assembly and other organs to such essential needs for new action as he sees developing.

6. Thus, an examination of the organization of the Secretariat must be made with full recognition of its basic responsibilities as one of the principal organs for the carrying out of United Nations objectives. It is also necessary to recognize the dynamic character of that task, calling as it does both for efforts in new directions and for a revision of previous decisions the original importance of which has been reduced by later developments.

7. The views expressed and the conclusions reached in the present report accordingly approach the problem of economy not from the financial but from the substantive angle. I am convinced that this approach, which recognizes equally the need for the greatest possible efficiency and the necessity of meeting to the full the requirements of a developing United Nations policy, is the soundest approach also to the problem of budget savings.

8. The special responsibilities of the Secretariat and its place within the United Nations family raise administrative problems for which there is no parallel in a national administration. It is the responsibility of the Secretary-General in his recruitment policy to provide for an equitable and wide geographical distribution within the Secretariat. In carrying out this responsibility, the Secretary-General is inevitably confronted with difficult organizational problems and with the necessity of properly balancing various experiences and approaches. It is also obvious that wide geographical distribution creates many staffing problems not present in national civil service systems. These factors must be taken into account when considering the problem of efficiency and sound administration in the United Nations Secretariat. Basic administrative considerations must shape the policy of the Secretary-General who, under the Charter, is responsible for appointments even of the highest posts in the Secretariat. He must, moreover, in the very interest of sound administration, try to achieve the greatest possible degree of continuity. In making his appointments he is under an obligation to provide for wide geographical distribution, but in doing so he must remember that, while the Secretariat is the instrument of a political organization, the Charter does not intend that political considerations appropriate to other organs of the United Nations should jeopardize the independence and truly international character of the Secretariat or open the door to undue influences on the Secretary-General's personnel policy.

II. General considerations

9. Taking as a basis the report of the first Secretary-General, I started in the early days of my incumbency a study of the organizational arrangements that might be made in order to increase efficiency and achieve economies and to ensure a well-balanced distribution of responsibilities in the interest of sound administration. I soon found it necessary to extend this review of the administration, and for that reason I initiated in July certain detailed studies within each department. In the course of the following months, I have also observed closely the working of the Secretariat, both before and during the General Assembly sessions, thus broadening the personal basis for my review, which is being pursued with the help of a special working group under my chairmanship.

10. The main conclusions to which I have arrived - confirming experiences which I have gathered in other administrations - are first, that a streamlining of the Secretariat leading to substantial economies is not possible without a review of its substantive tasks and, secondly, that no such economies are possible without the development of a wider degree of flexibility in the use of staff, both within and among the various organizational units.

11. In both cases the changes envisaged require time. In the first case, a careful examination must be made of the circumstances under which the various tasks have become responsibilities of the United Nations and of the Secretariat, to what extent the need for special programmes may have changed and how new approaches to various operations might best be undertaken. In certain situations no effective action will be possible without submitting the question to the General Assembly or the other organs responsible for the original decisions. With respect to flexibility, it is obvious that an improvement in administrative techniques must be the result of continuing efforts over a period of time and cannot be achieved simply by decree.

12. In the present report I wish to submit to the General Assembly, in the hope that it will give me its views and guidance, the main lines of policy concerning the structure of the Secretariat which I propose to follow as well as a few of the practical objectives to be attained.

III. General structure of the Secretariat

13. The former Secretary-General, in his memorandum to the General Assembly (A/2214), stated that the organizational plans developed by the Preparatory Commission "were well conceived for the initial period of the Organization's life". The establishment of the Secretariat in eight departments and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General corresponded with the requirements for servicing organs and for generally meeting the needs of the United Nations in other respects.

14. Experience has demonstrated that in one or two areas some adjustments in the organizational pattern could now very well be made.

15. Leaving aside at this stage the question of the central organization of the Secretariat at its top levels, I consider that the following modifications in structure would contribute to the effectiveness of the Secretariat by clarifying the lines of authority, and facilitating the formulation of over-all policy, as well as the planning and co-ordination of programmes and the use of staff.

16. The Secretary-General has at present, directly assisting him, an Executive Office. I consider that three further offices should be given the same position, i.e. as offices under the immediate and personal direction of the Secretary-General. The three offices concerned would be a Personnel Office to replace the present Bureau of Personnel, a Finance Office to replace the present Bureau of Finance and a Legal Office to replace the present Legal Department. The present Department of Administrative and Financial Services as such would disappear.

17. With the suggested arrangement the Executive Office of the Secretary-General would continue its functions of assisting the Secretary-General in the duties described in the Administrative Manual, Volume I, Chapter II. The control of the Secretary-General over personnel and financial matters would become more direct, and the position of the officials responsible for these matters, who would act directly on the Secretary-General's behalf, would be clarified in relation to the substantive and service departments. Similarly the change from Legal Department to Legal Office would reflect more clearly its role in providing legal advice to the Secretary-General and in acting on his

behalf in legal matters. The concentration of administrative responsibility at the centre should lead to a simplification of procedures and have a good effect in the day to day administration. In this way the suggested arrangement should result in economies.

18. Concerning the other departments I suggest the following arrangements. The Departments of Economic Affairs and Social Affairs which already serve under one Assistant Secretary-General, should be co-ordinated as one department to the full extent that follows from this arrangement. The Department of Conference and General Services should be divided into two units, a Department of Conference Services and an Office of General Services. The Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, the Department of Trusteeship and Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories and the Department of Public Information should be maintained on the present basis as separate departments. Finally, the Technical Assistance Administration which has a special position in the Organization, should be maintained as an independent unit. Its close co-ordination with the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs should be supervised directly by the Secretary-General.

19. The many necessary points of contact in the work programmes of the present Departments of Economic Affairs and Social Affairs justify a co-ordination for reasons of administrative efficiency and the most effective servicing of the Economic and Social Council. It is difficult to say at this stage to what extent the changes would lead to economies but in this case also a foundation would be laid for a rational development making possible reasonable economies by a fuller intergration of work. Similar reasons might be advanced for an amalgamation of the Technical Assistance Administration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. If I do not suggest such a change, it is because I consider that the possible gain from the point of view of co-ordination and efficiency would be more than outweighed by the disadvantage of not having an independent unit in charge of this special activity with its widespread operations in Member and non-member countries, and its working relations with other technical assistance programmes, whether inside or outside the family of the United Nations. The present Department of Conference and General Services is of a magnitude leading to certain administrative difficulties.

Now that the Secretariat has settled down at its permanent Headquarters and the pattern of services and the use of space are well established, the desirability of maintaining Conference Services and General Services in a single department has disappeared.

20. The plans set out above would call for certain adjustments of responsibilities among various departments and in administrative controls; they would also call for the transfer of certain units such as the Library and the Field Service. I do not consider it necessary to go into detail concerning these or other changes, as such matters can best be settled in the light of the Assembly's views on the main proposals which I make here.

IV. Changes in the central administration of the Secretariat

21. I come now to the question of the central organization of the Secretariat at its top levels. The present arrangement consists of two top echelons under the Secretary-General, i.e. one echelon of Assistant Secretaries-General and one of Principal Directors. The original intention was to create in the Assistant Secretaries-General a group of officials broadly representative of the Member nations, on the highest responsible level, who, in addition to being heads of departments, would serve the Secretary-General in a representative capacity with individual member countries and groups of countries. Under them the Principal Directors were intended to function as the administrative officials charged with the conduct of operations of the various departments. Experience has shown, however, that the creation of permanent national delegations at the Headquarters of the United Nations has given opportunities for a continuous and close contact between the Secretary-General personally and the various governments; the work of the Assistant Secretaries-General has thus been largely related to the direction of the various departments. I have found the arrangement, as it has developed, difficult to justify.

22. In view of the considerations set out above, I believe that the reconstituted departments should be headed by one echelon of officials instead of two. The responsibilities of the officials occupying the new posts would be essentially administrative, as in the case of the Principal Directors. Such political responsibilities as they may be required to exercise in particular areas or on particular issues would, in keeping with the principles of the Charter, be theirs by delegation from the Secretary-General. Their political responsibilities thus would clearly be exercised on the personal responsibility of the Secretary-General. The new officials may, in the light of their functions as here defined, properly be named Under Secretaries.

23. The basic salaries of the Under Secretaries should be the same as those of the present Principal Directors. However, it may prove necessary to adjust the emoluments of the Under Secretaries by special allowances. These allowances have to be considered in the light of the responsibilities and status of the Under Secretaries in relation to those of the executive heads and senior officers of the specialized agencies in the United Nations family. Account may also have to be taken of the special responsibilities of the heads of some of the departments of the Secretariat. Finally, it may be found advisable to leave to the Secretary-General possibilities of taking into account also the special qualifications of candidates.

24. In the light of experience it may be found necessary, in exceptional cases, as for example in the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to give Under Secretaries the assistance of Deputy Under Secretaries. It may also, in the further elaboration of the organization, be found that there is a need for one or two Under Secretaries without portfolio, serving as advisers to the Secretary-General on special questions.

25. In view of the last considerations it is difficult to say now what reduction of the top staff would result from the proposals made. Some reduction there will be, but the main economies achieved, in this as in other cases, would follow rather from the improvement of the administrative arrangements than from a reduction in the number of posts.

26. As I have already mentioned, my predecessor, in his report on the organization of the Secretariat to the seventh session of the General Assembly, proposed the creation of three posts of deputy secretaries-general to replace the present posts of Assistant Secretaries-General. Each one of the three deputy secretaries-general would have been placed, under the Secretary-General, in charge of a group of departments. After reflection, I have not found sufficient reason for such an arrangement, which, by introducing a new level between the Secretary-General and the departments, might encumber procedures without adding compensating substantive advantages from either the political or the administrative point of view. I would, however, like to reserve my opinion on one point. If experience were to show that the proposed arrangement became too heavy and time-consuming for the Secretary-General, it might be desirable to create one post of Deputy Secretary-General. I make this observation only by way of a general reserve and not as a proposal to the Assembly.

V. Conclusions

27. On the basis of the policies and arrangements set forth above and with the full co-operation of the organs of the United Nations as suggested earlier in the present report, I hope to be able to achieve a reduction in the over-all budget of the United Nations of one million dollars over the coming fiscal year. The incidence of this saving can only be determined as the review of the Secretariat operations proceeds and in the light of the decisions of other organs of the United Nations as they affect the work-load.

28. The abolition of posts involved in the process of reorganization and review need not affect the existing staff to any important extent. Most of the abolitions can be absorbed by the normal turnover of staff.

29. I referred earlier to the special responsibilities of the Secretariat as one of the principal organs of the United Nations, to its place in the United Nations family and to special administrative problems arising because of its international nature. I also stressed that the United Nations

operations are of a dynamic nature, calling both for a cancelling of activities which have become obsolete and for expansion into new fields. An important aspect of the problem of flexibility is the capacity of the Secretariat to adjust quickly and adequately to the changing needs which the United Nations has to serve.

30. The proposals set out in the present report aim at creating the basis for a sound administration with the best possible co-ordination of the various Secretariat activities; thus, the approach is wholly from the angle of substance and efficiency. I have indicated that these proposals, together with a review, with the full co-operation of the organs concerned, of the tasks undertaken by the United Nations and the development, step by step, or increased flexibility in administrative procedures and the use of staff, are likely to lead to considerable economies. This is important, but the economies aimed at and anticipated are the expression not of a policy of contraction but of a policy aimed at fulfilling, at the lowest possible cost, the tasks of the Secretariat, as they arise out of the general development of the United Nations.

31. I have not raised in my report any of the important organizational problems relating to the co-ordination of the activities of the Secretariat at Headquarters with those of, for example, the regional commissions and the High Commissioner for Refugees. The solution to be reached on these questions will be influenced by the attitude taken on the issues discussed here. These questions, and other related problems, thus will be subject to further study, the results of which will be put before the General Assembly at its next regular session.
