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Note by the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. The General Assembly, in paragraph 12 of its resolution 2538 (XXIV) of 11 December 1969, requested the Secretary-General to prepare a short document setting forth in clear terms the policies laid down by the General Assembly regarding the control and limitation of documentation and to make it available to members prior to each session of a council, board, commission, committee or other body. The present note, which has been revised to take into account the additional policy decisions adopted by the General Assembly by resolution 2836 (XXVI) of 17 December 1971, is being distributed to all Member States as a General Assembly information document and will also be made available at the opening of each session of a United Nations body.

2. The General Assembly has on a number of occasions adopted resolutions calling for restraint on the part of delegations in requesting reports, studies and meeting records and has asked the Secretariat to draft documentation as concisely as possible. On four occasions it has adopted resolutions in which it has stated its policy on specific types of documentation, namely:

resolution 1272 (XIII) of 14 November 1958;

resolution 2292 (XXII) of 8 December 1967;

resolution 2538 (XXIV) of 11 December 1969;

resolution 2836 (XXVI) of 17 December 1971.

Resolution 2836 (XXVI) was adopted after consideration of a report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/8319 and Corr.1), section IX of the report of the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly (A/8426) ^{1/} and the comments of the Secretary-General (A/8488) and of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (A/8532 and Corr.1 and 2).

3. These policies have, for the most part, applied to the documentation of the General Assembly and of its subsidiary bodies. However, the General Assembly has invited other United Nations organs, in particular, the Economic and Social Council, the Trade and Development Board and the Industrial Development Board, to apply the same policies to their own documentation and to that of their subsidiary bodies. Those organs have, in general, accepted the policies laid down by the General Assembly with such further detailed instructions to their subsidiary bodies as their particular circumstances required. ^{2/}

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 26.

^{2/} See for example Economic and Social Council resolution 1623 (LI) and decisions taken at the 1810th and 1811th meetings of the Council.

4. The Secretary-General has circulated to all members of the Secretariat regulations on the control and limitation of documentation (ST/AI/189/and Add.1-9). The present note is also being circulated to all members of the Secretariat, together with a further administrative instruction calling for their compliance with the policy decisions of the General Assembly as amended.

5. In accordance with a recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit, up-to-date information on the volume and cost of documentation will be circulated in an addendum to the present document.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

6. The specific recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 2836 (XXVI), together with others contained in the resolutions of 1958, 1967 and 1969 that are still pertinent, are reproduced below. The recommendations based on the previous resolutions are identified by an asterisk.

A. General

The General Assembly appeals to all United Nations organs, bodies and committees to consider ways of reducing documentation and, in particular, the possibility of adopting a form of records less voluminous and less costly than that currently being used.*

The Governments of Member States are invited to restrict both the number and the volume of the documents submitted for processing to what is strictly required by resolutions and other statutory decisions of a United Nations organ or is clearly relevant to agenda items under discussion, and to exercise restraint in submitting lengthy documents to be distributed as documents of the United Nations.*

The Secretary-General is requested to reduce in 1972 the volume of documentation originating in the Secretariat, other than meeting records, by 15 per cent over-all, compared with the volume of such documentation in 1970 and, to that end, to take such administrative action as may be necessary, including the establishment of departmental quotas, to achieve that target (resolution 2836 (XXVI), paragraph 2).

B. Records of meetings

General

No United Nations body or organ shall have both verbatim and summary records.*

Verbatim or summary records shall not be provided for a newly established subsidiary body of the General Assembly - rule 60 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly notwithstanding - or for a special meeting or conference, unless they are specifically authorized in the enabling resolution.* The term summary records in this connexion means any meeting records that are prepared by précis-writers and/or translators (paragraph 8).

/...

The Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the Trade and Development Board and the Industrial Development Board are invited to adopt similar provisions (paragraph 7).

Summary records

The length of summary records for any single two-and-a-half hour meeting should not exceed 15 pages unless exceptional circumstances so require.*

Speeches or statements by representatives, by the Secretary-General or his representative, or by persons presenting reports on behalf of committees or other bodies may be reproduced in extenso in summary records or as official documents only if they serve as bases for discussion, provided that the relevant decision is taken by the body concerned after a statement of the financial implications has been submitted in accordance with regulation 13.1 of the Financial Regulations of the United Nations.*

Verbatim records

The provision of verbatim records should be strictly limited. No extension of verbatim records beyond present arrangements shall be made unless the General Assembly so decides, with full knowledge of the financial implications involved.*

Verbatim records shall not include the texts of routine exchanges of views about the date and place of the next meeting, congratulations, expressions of condolence and the like, but shall merely report them briefly, except that in special circumstances the organ or body concerned may decide otherwise.*

C. Reports

Reports submitted by subsidiary organs or bodies shall be drafted on the basis of the following principles (paragraph 3):

(a) The reports should be action-oriented and concise and should contain precise information confined to a description of the work done by the organ concerned, to the conclusions it has reached, to its decisions and to the recommendations made to the organ to which it is reporting;

(b) Introductions containing background information should, as far as possible, be confined to matters of substance rather than procedure and should contain only what it is essential to bring to the notice of the organ to which the report is addressed;

(c) The account of the deliberations should be concise and should be supplemented, as necessary, by cross references to the meeting records; verbatim or summary records of an organ, or extracts therefrom, should not be included in its report*;

(d) Texts available in easily accessible documents should not be incorporated in or annexed to the report;

(e) Texts which are not easily accessible should not be annexed when their substance can reasonably be incorporated in the main body of the report;

(f) Participants should not be listed by name, unless they are serving in their individual capacity;

(g) Where appropriate, reports should include a summary of the proposals, conclusions and recommendations contained therein.

Reports of subsidiary bodies should be submitted in good time so that the issuance of those reports first in provisional form and later in final form may be avoided.*

The Main Committees of the General Assembly are requested, when considering items on their agenda which involve the submission of annual reports of subsidiary organs or of the Secretary-General, to review whether such reports can be submitted at less frequent intervals (paragraph 9).

Organs of the United Nations are invited to undertake a general revision of resolutions and rules requiring frequent reports, with a view to considering whether such reports could not be issued at longer intervals.*

In the case of the provision, from sources outside the Secretariat, of material for inclusion in a single study or report, the Secretariat would be assisted in its efforts to keep documentation within planned limits if the following procedures were adopted:

- (i) The issuance, by organs in which the request for the report or study originates, of clear directives as to the form and volume it is desirable for the report or studies to have;
- (ii) The casting of such requests, wherever appropriate, in the form of questionnaires, bearing in mind that carefully formulated questions tend to elicit pertinent replies and that the submission of material on the basis of responses to set questions facilitates their incorporation in a single document. This suggestion would be without prejudice to the right of such contributors to present their answers to the questions raised in whatever form would, in their view, be required in their particular case;
- (iii) An appeal to contributors in each case to endeavour to keep their contributions within the requested limits.**

Replies of Governments submitted in response to specific resolutions should, wherever possible, be grouped in one compilation or in periodic compilations, rather than issued as separate documents.*

D. Annexes

The substantive departments concerned should strictly limit the number and length of the documents they select for inclusion in the annexes to those essential for the understanding of the relevant discussion. Further, as a specific point, no document which is already, or will be, printed or reproduced by the internal offset process should be included in the annexes. Equally, the inclusion of a document in an annex should exclude it from any separate printing or reproduction by internal offset later.*

The contents of the annexes and their production costs should be reviewed periodically by the Publications Board.*3/

E. Supplements

The list of documents intended for issue as supplements should be reviewed and approved periodically by the Publications Board.*

All supplements should be considered for reproduction internally by offset printing from typescript, with the exception of reports of the main organs, volumes of resolutions and certain others which, for technical reasons, may not lend themselves to internal reproduction. This should apply to versions in English, French, Russian and Spanish. A study should also be made to determine the extent to which Chinese versions may feasibly be reproduced internally from calligraphy.*

The reproduction of supplements in both a preliminary and a final form should be limited to cases of strict necessity, for example, when a final version of a particular report cannot be produced in time for adequate consideration by the body to which it is submitted.*

F. Technical papers

Bodies concerned with organizing international conferences are requested to bear in mind the desirability of giving careful consideration to employing whenever possible annotated agenda, lists of headings for discussion, and the like, instead of background papers or in conjunction with a reduced number of such papers.*

Technical papers submitted for conferences, seminars and workshops should not normally be reproduced in printed form; wherever possible, only selected papers or summaries should be printed.*

3/ The Publications Board is an interdepartmental body which, within the Secretariat, determines, and ensures the implementation of, the policies governing the preparation, production, distribution and sale of documents.

G. Statements of financial implications

Full use should be made, as regards proposals involving documentation, of regulation 13.1 of the Financial Regulations of the United Nations (General Assembly resolution 456 (V), annex) and of the relevant provisions of the rules of procedure of United Nations organs. To this end, the statement of the Secretary-General on administrative and financial implications, including the documentary implications, should always be submitted to the council, commission or other competent body in good time before this organ takes a decision, and its President or Chairman should duly draw the attention of its members to the existence of the statement.*

Each report on the administrative and financial implications of a proposal for a non-recurrent report, to be submitted in accordance with financial regulation 13.1, shall be prepared in accordance with the following rules:

- (i) It shall set forth the nature of the document, the possible number of pages, and the type and number of copies to be printed;
- (ii) It shall state how much time will be required to reproduce the requested document in all the working languages;
- (iii) It shall indicate whether there is any previous publication on the same subject in the organizations in the United Nations system which would duplicate or substantially overlap the proposed publication;
- (iv) Where, in the light of discussion, delegations consider a particular report so useful that it should be printed and bound, the report on administrative and financial implications shall state the cost incurred in preparing the mimeographed version, including drafting costs, and the estimated cost of the proposed new edition.
