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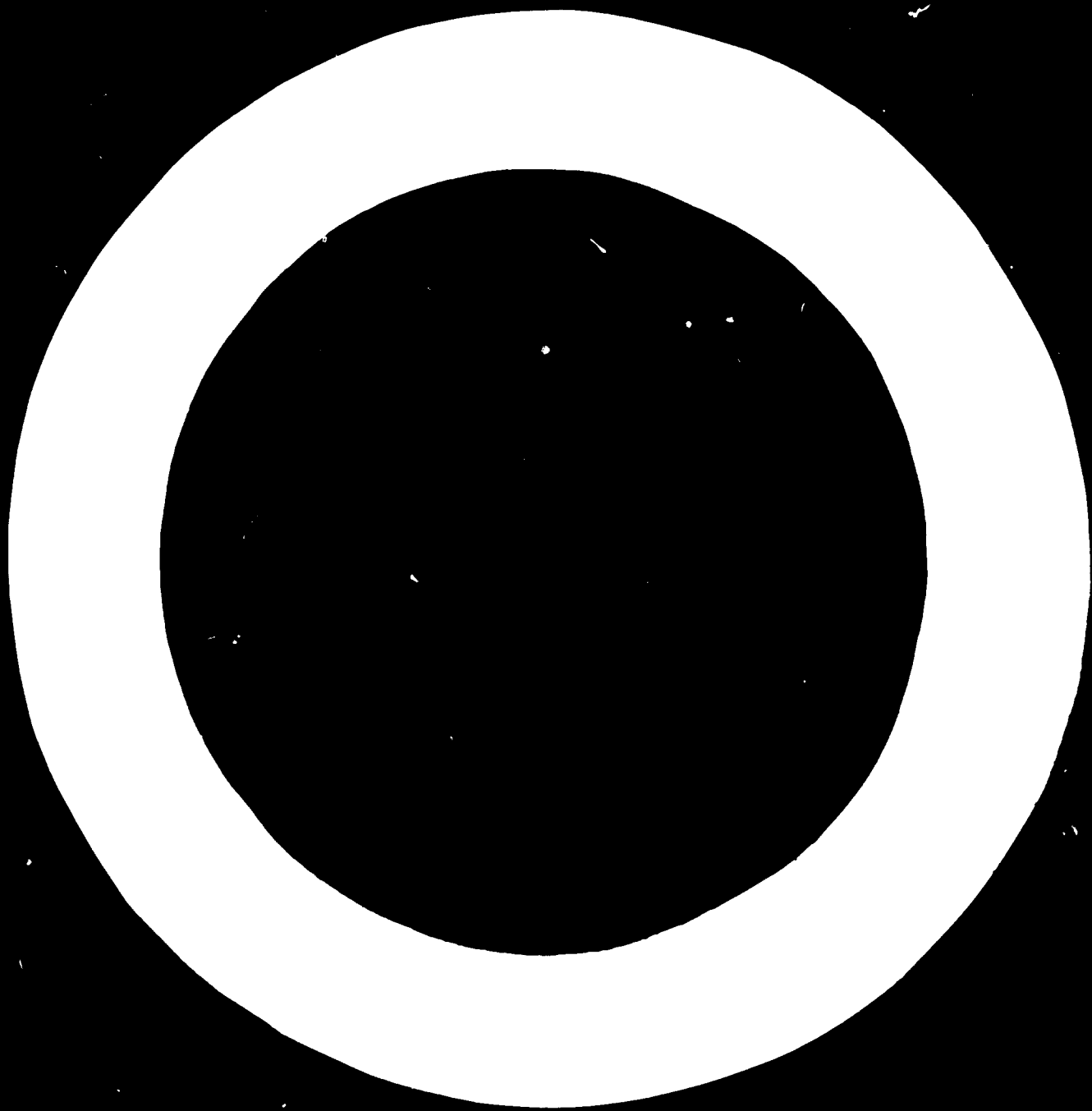
Vienna, 24 April - 15 May 1969

Control of Conferences and Documentation

Note from the Executive Director

Attention of the Board is called to the attached excerpt from the Secretary-General's Note on the Report of the Committee on the Reorganization of the Secretariat (A/7359). The excerpt is from Chapter VII which has special reference to recommendations for the limitation of conferences and meetings and documentation for such meetings.

We regret that some of the pages in the microfiche copy of this report may not be up to the proper legibility standards, even though the best possible copy was used for preparing the master fiche.



BUDGET ESTIMATES FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 1969

Report of the Committee on the Reorganization
of the Secretariat

Note by the Secretary-General
to the twenty-third session of the General Assembly

(Excerpt from document A/7359)

Chapter VII Conferences and Documentation^{1/}

132. The present situation regarding conferences and documentation has unquestionably very serious administrative consequences within the Secretariat as a whole. It has reached a point of saturation which is compromising the efficient working of practically all its organizational units. If the present trend should be allowed to continue, the situation would become truly intolerable as, indeed, it already is in many respects. In the view of the Committee, this must be corrected.

133. Aside from the increasingly disruptive strain on both the substantive and servicing organizational units of the Secretariat, responsible officials of Member States charged with the staffing of delegations complain that this deteriorating state of affairs is creating major problems in finding the financial and human resources necessary for attendance at the innumerable meetings, many of which coincide or overlap in time. Moreover, it has become practically impossible for them to cope with the steadily rising volume of documentation.

134. While the Committee has approached this and other problem areas mainly from the standpoint of organization and management, it must point with great concern to the diminishing returns and even outright waste of resources which cloud the image and reputation of the Organization. If some of its recommendations are far-reaching, they stem from the Committee's conviction that partial and half-hearted suggestions and proposals over the years have failed to arrest or even slow down the demands for more and more meetings and a larger and larger volume of documentation. Over the years the Secretary-General, the

^{1/} For Mr. Morozov's separate opinion, see paragraphs 26 and 27.

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Fifth Committee, the General Assembly, the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies and, more recently, the Committee on Conferences have made it clear that greater control needed to be exercised over conferences and meetings. These actions, including resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, have been largely ignored or circumvented. It is therefore a vital requirement to space out the meetings, eliminate the unnecessary ones, and to avoid production of unessential documentation. The Committee believes that if meetings and documentation are to achieve their full purpose, a more selective approach will have to be adopted. In the last analysis, it is for the Member States, through the appropriate organs and more particularly the General Assembly, to take action investing the Secretary-General with the necessary powers. Only in this way can resources be effectively used both by nations and the Secretariat.

A. Conferences

135. The Committee notes that only the General Assembly, under the Charter and the relevant rules of procedure, has the power to take decisions concerning the regular budget of the Organization and that consequently the convening of any conference, meeting, working group, seminar, symposium, etc. cannot be decided finally by any other United Nations body until the General Assembly has taken the necessary action after consideration of the comments and recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

136. The Committee makes the following recommendations to the Secretary-General, recognizing that the implementation of some of them would require submission to and action by the General Assembly:

(a) The General Assembly at its twenty-third session should decide that the total volume of the servicing requirements for conferences and meetings for the years 1970, 1971 and 1972 should not exceed that of 1967.

(b) The General Assembly at its twenty-third session should direct the Committee on Conferences, on the basis of suggestions submitted by the Secretary-General, to present to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth, twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth sessions respectively, a final calendar of conferences and meetings, within the above limitation, for 1970, 1971 and 1972,

including such additional conferences or meetings as may be proposed during the respective sessions of the General Assembly.

(c) No body of the United Nations should be authorized to exceed the number of meetings approved in the calendar. In addition, each organ should be requested to hold meetings of the minimum number and length required and, if possible, below what is provided for in the approved calendar. (The Committee recognizes that such limitations cannot apply to meetings of the Security Council.)

(d) The General Assembly, as appropriate, should instruct the Committee on Conferences, in establishing the proposed calendar, to take into account the need to space out the sessions of various subsidiary and interrelated organs in order to permit adequate preparation and study by the Secretariat and by the delegations.

(e) The Secretary-General should assign a high official on a full-time basis to the task of reviewing the recommendations which have been made over the years on the subject of conferences, meetings and documentation, including those presented by this Committee. Action should then be taken by the Secretary-General or the General Assembly, as appropriate, to implement those recommendations which are likely to produce beneficial results.

(f) The General Assembly should direct all organs holding more than one session a year to meet only once a year except on occasions when there are overriding considerations. In particular the following bodies, in the opinion of the Committee, should hold only one session a year:

- (i) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space;
- (ii) Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development;
- (iii) International Narcotics Control Board;
- (iv) UNCTAD - Trade and Development Board;
- (v) UNCTAD - Advisory Committee to the Board and to the Committee on Commodities.^{2/}

^{2/} Subsequent to the adoption of this paragraph, the Committee was informed of a decision made by the Trade and Development Board at its seventh session, concerning the improvement of the institutional machinery and methods of work of UNCTAD, including the provision that the Board, as well as the main committees, should normally hold one regular session a year (decision 45 (VII), adopted at the 173rd plenary meeting, on 21 September 1964).

In this connexion the Committee was pleased to note that the Trade and Development Board has examined extensive proposals aimed at streamlining the whole UNCTAD machinery including the periodicity of the meetings of the Board and its subsidiary organs.

(g) The Economic and Social Council should decide that all its functional commissions, with the possible exception of the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, meet once every two years.

(h) In the notification to Governments by the Secretary-General concerning a forthcoming conference or meeting, information should be included on General Assembly and other decisions relating to the conference or meeting as well as other suggestions and limitations which if observed will contribute to economy and efficiency.

(i) From 1 September to the end of the year, no meetings should be scheduled at Headquarters except for the General Assembly, its Main Committees, the General Committee, the Credentials Committee, for the resumed session of the Economic and Social Council and for bodies related to the work of the General Assembly such as the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Committee on Contributions and the Committee on Conferences. The Security Council would, of course, meet as required.

B. Documentation

137. On the subject of documentation the Committee makes the following recommendations which, it believes, deserve special emphasis:

(a) The Office of Conference Services should advise all Secretariat officials concerned with the advance planning for documentation for each conference or meeting on the standards for the most economical methods for documentation. The situation should also be discussed with the officers of the conference or meeting concerned.

(b) In presenting the required financial implication papers in the most economical and accurate matter, the Secretary-General should set forth possible alternative suggestions which may be less costly and commend their adoption.

(c) No programme for documentation for a conference or a meeting should be considered adopted:

- (i) In the case of subsidiary bodies, until it has been reviewed by the parent body;
- (ii) When funds must still be approved, until it has been considered in the normal budgetary review processes by the Secretary-General, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the General Assembly;

(d) The provision of summary records should be limited to the bodies listed below. This list should be periodically reviewed. It is recognized, however, that the principal organs will always retain summary records:

- (i) Main committees of the General Assembly, General Committee and Credentials Committee;
- (ii) Economic and Social Council (plenary only);
- (iii) Trusteeship Council (plenary only);
- (iv) Trade and Development Board (plenary only);
- (v) Industrial Development Board (plenary only);
- (vi) Governing Council of United Nations Development Programme;
- (vii) Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund;
- (viii) Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations;
- (ix) Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (main committee only);
- (x) International Law Commission;
- (xi) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law;
- (xii) Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (plenary only);
- (xiii) Special Committee on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States;
- (xiv) Special Committee on the Question of Defining Aggression;

(e) Only in truly exceptional cases should summary records be authorized for other bodies, and then only on a case-by-case basis and for a limited period of time. Even then they should be allowed only when:

- (i) Concurred in by the Committee on Conferences after consultation with the Secretary-General; and
- (ii) Subsequently approved by the General Assembly;

(f) Summary records for special conferences should be approved only when the General Assembly has specifically considered each case on its own merits and then authorized them;

(g) Greater efforts should be made to reduce the length of the summary records of the bodies listed above;

(h) Verbatim records should be limited to the plenary meetings of the General Assembly and to meetings of the First Committee and the Security Council;

(i) Translation should be dispensed with in the process of establishing the final records of bodies whose official records are verbatim records.

138. The Committee found, in connexion with recommendation (i), that the existing practice of translating verbatim records which constitute official records gives rise to a substantial translation workload (some 36,400 pages for all languages in 1967). The practice also results in undesirable delays in the production of the final records. For example, for the twenty-second session of the General Assembly no final records have been issued. None of the records of the Security Council for 1967 have been even processed.

139. This would mean adopting the concept that the Official Records are the verbatim texts of the statements in their original languages. Interpretation into other languages would continue to be issued in the provisional record and after an editorial check of the text of the interpretation for any serious factual errors, they could be reissued in final form.

140. The Committee also recommends that the present practice of providing certain bodies, which receive summary records as their Official Records, with verbatim records in provisional form only be discontinued. The Committee strongly believes that there is no justification for any organ to require both summary records and verbatim records in any form.

141. Closely connected with the problem of verbatim records is the growing undesirable practice of more and more requests for the issuing of statements by delegates and Secretariat officials in full as official documents. The Committee believes that this trend, aside from the additional work and costs involved, negates to a large extent the concept of requiring only summary records.

142. The Committee further recommends that the Office of Conference Services undertake a thorough review of the number of copies in the various languages at present supplied to each Member State and other recipients, with a view to reducing them to the minimum. This review should cover all major distribution points of United Nations documents and take into account the organs involved and the nature of documents.

Supplements and annexes

143. The Committee finds that the existing costly arrangement with regard to supplements and annexes has been developed by the Secretariat over the years without any instruction from the General Assembly.

144. The Committee recommends that:

- (a) The concept of supplements and annexes be eliminated;
- (b) Only the annual report of the Secretary-General, the reports of the three councils and of the International Court of Justice and the resolutions shall normally be printed;
- (c) All other reports and documents be issued internally from typescript except:
 - (i) Where for technical reasons (large amounts of tabular material, etc.) it is the opinion of the Secretary-General that letterpress or other printing methods are most advantageous; or
 - (ii) The internal capacity of the United Nations must be supplemented by recourse to external printing;
- (d) Special treatment - single-space typing and photo-offset on better quality paper - be given to "important" documents;
- (e) In connexion with (d) above, self-identifying cover stock be used when the cost-use ratio warrants it;
- (f) After the session, check lists be prepared of the documents pertinent to each agenda item;
- (g) The reprinting of documents as annexes be discontinued.

Procedural questions

145. The Committee makes the following recommendations of a procedural character:

- (a) The Secretary-General should issue instructions to the secretariats of all United Nations bodies to exercise continuing attention to ensure that

resolutions or decisions involving expenditures, or likely to involve expenditures, are clearly and unequivocally worded and that the body concerned is fully informed of the administrative and financial implications as required by the provisions of financial regulations 13.1 and 13.2 which, in many cases, are either not implemented at all or are not treated with sufficient seriousness;

(b) With respect to all bodies which meet recurrently, some procedure should be developed whereby the situation on documentation can be reviewed (perhaps by the bureau of the body in consultations with Secretariat) at a date well in advance of a session with a view to considering elimination of agenda items for which the documents cannot become available in the necessary languages. This would help to ensure that delegations would not be called upon to consider items on which they were not adequately prepared, and would also substantially improve the possibility of proper scheduling of work in the Office of Conference Services. In this connexion, the Committee noted that, in spite of the efforts made by the Secretary-General, there were still cases in which documents were not distributed simultaneously in the working languages as required by General Assembly resolution 2292 (XXII), and stressed the need for adequate measures to ensure its implementation;

(c) A senior staff member in each department should be responsible for controlling the totality of demands for conference and documentation services from that department. This would provide a central point for resolving possible conflicting priorities within the same department.

146. The Committee believes it would be useful if, at the time the present recommendations are considered by the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management would produce figures illustrating the reduction which would be achieved in the staff of Conference Services and in other expenditures as a result of the implementation of these recommendations.

Excerpt from Appendix

SEPARATE OPINIONS OF MR. PLATON D. MOROZOV

E. Conferences and documentation

26. Mr. Platon D. Morozov supported the recommendation concerning the method of translating verbatim records into other languages, with the proviso that the following specific feature of the translation of verbatim records from Russian must be taken into account. There was no question that French and Spanish, as Romance languages, differed from each other far less than from Russian; even English differed from French less than Russian differed from all three of the languages mentioned. Experience showed that the largest number of mistakes were made in translation from Russian into the other languages.

27. In the case of Russian, therefore, the present method of translating verbatim records should be retained without changes.





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