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QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Publications policy and practice in the United Nations system

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Publications policy and practice in the United Nations system" (A/39/239).

\* A/39/150.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

Introduction

1. One difficulty that was encountered in considering this report was that an observation that might be true of a small specialized agency in Geneva, which relies on the services of a contractual printer for its publications, did not necessarily apply to an organization such as the United Nations which, at its Headquarters as well as at a number of its other main office locations, has developed its facilities to an extent which makes possible the internal reproduction of publications at considerably reduced cost.

2. Another circumstance affecting the prospects of implementing the many valuable recommendations made by the Inspectors, such as their emphasis on the quality and timeliness of publications, was the relatively low priority that necessarily has to be accorded to publications in the United Nations in view of the more pressing need to produce documentation required for meetings on specific dates. This reality is faced not only by author departments but by the Department of Conference Services, where publications are processed by the same staff, using the same equipment, as those engaged in producing documents. There is every assurance that the publication will be produced sooner or later, but little can be done to ensure that it is issued on a particular date.

3. Finally, in the case of the United Nations, in any event, there are various categories of publications, namely, the proceedings of special meetings and conferences, the official records, recurrent publications, studies and reports, and public information material, each with its specific characteristics and not necessarily lending itself in the same manner or to the same degree to the approaches advocated in the report. For example, the option of whether or not to publish normally arises only in the case of studies and reports.

Specific comments

Recommendation 1: The approach to sales and free distribution

1.1 Organizations must make every effort to gauge the extent to which publications they distribute free are having a positive impact on their readers (110).\*

4. The United Nations distributes a certain number of its publications free of charge to recipients in categories and numbers determined by the Publications Board, as follows:

\* Numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraph numbers in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/84/5) as amended in the text circulated under cover of a note by the Secretary-General (A/39/239).

(a) The Headquarters list of offices away from New York (the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna and the Headquarters of regional economic commissions have equivalent lists which, in turn, include New York) comprises: ministries, embassies and governmental offices; intergovernmental organizations; non-governmental organizations with consultative status; specialized agencies; the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, the regional commissions, UNCTAD, UNIDO and UNEP; and information centres and depository libraries throughout the world;

(b) The Headquarters list for distribution in New York consists of permanent missions and observers, the press, the Secretariat, and meeting and conference rooms;

(c) Departmental lists include persons or organizations who, in the view of the head of the substantive department concerned, have contributed to the preparation of the publication, or who are of continuing and substantial assistance to the department, and persons of eminence in the field of the publication, whose interest it is important to enlist or retain.

5. Governmental recipients might be encouraged to make their views on the quality and utility of specific publications known at meetings of the intergovernmental bodies that originally authorized the preparation of the publication in question or those that perform review functions such as the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination. In addition they, and the other recipients under (a) and (b) above, could be specifically canvassed on their reaction to certain publications, if the General Assembly so decides. Departments, for their part, might poll the readers on their lists, as indicated in (c) above. The Statistical Office of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs (DIESA) recently reviewed its list. Recipients were asked to complete and return a card indicating a desire to continue receiving United Nations publications. Those that did not reply to the initial request, or to a subsequent reminder, were removed from the departmental list. The Department of Disarmament Affairs, agreeing that there were difficulties in the area of feedback, did not have suggestions to offer in that regard; it did note, nevertheless, that extensive and ever-increasing free distribution of its publications to readers in general was specifically mandated.

1.2 At the same time a more positive approach to sales is necessary, which would make organizations more alive to the need to produce publishable and marketable material (133 (1), 110).

6. In contrast to those organizations (ILO, IMO) whose publications programmes are intended to be self-sufficient, the United Nations considers that the widest possible dissemination of information should be the paramount consideration rather than profit. Moreover, the number of cases in which publication is mandatory is considerable: in addition to the official records of the Organization, all recurrent publications and most studies and reports are published in response to decisions by intergovernmental bodies based on programme objectives rather than marketability. These facts, however, do not preclude closer attention being given to the sales potential, along the lines recommended by the Inspectors.

7. The sales activities of the Organization are handled by a Sales Section in New York, staffed by five professionals, and a Sales Unit in Geneva, comprising one full-time professional, supervised by the Chief of the Sales and Distribution Section. The addition of two or three sales officers would make possible giving additional time to sales trips and attendance at exhibits, in addition to the performance of administrative functions, the preparation of advertising and promotional material (such as catalogues and brochures), and the order processing now routinely being performed. The addition of staff might be considered in co-operation with the specialized agencies, so that sales officers could cover key cities on a regular basis for the entire United Nations system, distributing sales brochures and catalogues and undertaking public relations as well as direct sales contacts. Experience has shown that a programme of visits leads to increased orders and vastly enhanced interest in the publications of the Organization on the part of universities and libraries, booksellers and agents.

8. On the departmental level, the criteria for the issue of sales publications discussed in the context of recommendation 1.8 below should play a more active role in the determination of the form in which a mandated study is to be issued. If it is decided by the department, in consultation with the Sales Section, that a sales publication is warranted, the department could contribute to attainment of the sales potential of the publication by giving the Sales Section advance notification of publication. This would also permit the timely solicitation of reviews. The author is now asked to complete a publicity form to assist in designing promotional activities only after the print order is computed. Author departments could also be requested to provide cover copy that would give an abstract of what the publication contains, which could appear on the now blank backs of publications and also be used in promotional material. Greater thought could also be given to the selection of titles, which should be clear, accurate and as interest-provoking as possible.

9. Much of the material included in publications is open to a number of approaches and the temptation, under pressure of time and other work, is often to lapse into specialized jargon or to leave texts as first-drafted rather than refining and clarifying them. Departments could be encouraged to make their material as readable as possible, which would inevitably enhance sales potential. Departments could also bring to the attention of the Publications Board, through the Sales Section, groups of titles that would lend themselves to a "series" approach, such as the language manuals that capitalize on the experience and prestige of the Organization in the linguistic domain (e.g. Lexique général, Editorial Manual, Guide to Writing). Finally, publications should be made as attractive as possible. In the absence of any significant resources for funding external printing and artwork, the Graphic Presentation Unit could be maintained at a level that would permit the staff to give enough attention to enhancing the appearance of publications.

- 1.3 A publications programme must have coherence and reflect the organizations' mandates. Publications boards/committees should satisfy themselves that proposed programmes do not leave uncovered any category of readership or subject matter (57).

10. The Publications Board of the United Nations performs a review function that is devoted primarily to technical and financial considerations. It determines how the publications programme of a department or office, and of the Organization as a whole, can be carried out as effectively as possible within budgetary limits. It also satisfies itself as to the legislative authority for publications and generally oversees adherence to the regulations governing documentation. Responsibility for the substance of publications rests with the author departments. The departmental publications committees described in section 2.3, and similar bodies which could be established in the future, could address the question of programme relevance and coherence and be required to inform the Publications Board that they have done so.

11. However, in establishing such a publications programme, it is simply not feasible to cover all categories of readership or subject matter. Choices have to be made, whether at the departmental level or elsewhere. To this end, the United Nations has established an elaborate programme planning, budgeting and evaluation machinery for the purpose of carrying out precisely the type of screening, co-ordination and selection of programme objectives and outputs which the Inspectors have in mind as far as publications are concerned.

12. The history of a publication begins when a department, on the basis of guidance from the intergovernmental bodies to which it reports, prepares its submission of a six-year medium-term plan for presentation to the intradepartmental Programme Planning and Budgeting Board (PPBB), whence the plan passes to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and, via the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. Once approved, the plan forms the basis of the biennial budget submission, which takes the same route to eventual approval by the General Assembly.

13. ~~It is in the programme budget that publications make their first appearance, as programme "outputs". Before a departmental budget submission is sent to the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board, its publication component is reviewed by the Working Committees of the Publications Board, which subjects it to the technical (production) and financial scrutiny described earlier. It is at the pre-budget stage, therefore, that programme relevance and coherence should be tested, and titles reviewed for duplication or omission of programme goals. That review could be verified by the PPBB and CPC, which, as will be seen in the comments on recommendation 1.4, is taking a greater interest in publications - an encouraging development that would meet the objectives of the Inspectors and that should be fostered.~~

- 1.4 Governing bodies should require their publications boards/committees, before approval of any publication, to require information on the readership to which it is directed and on the proposed marketing concept and sales plan (lll).

14. In paragraph 8 (a) of a recent report (E/AC.51/1984/6) on the dissemination system for documents and publications requested by the Committee on Programme and Co-ordination, it was noted that "instructions for the preparation of the 1986-1987 programme budget estimates will require that proposals for publication of studies and reports ... be supported by evidence that target-users have been identified and are on a mailing list". It was also stated that compliance with that requirement would be monitored by those bodies responsible for programme budget review, which would include the Publications Board.

15. One department, the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, believes that when an intergovernmental body is taking decisions on publications to be issued, it should at the very outset decide on the target readership. Whether the target-users are identified by the organ itself or by its substantive secretariat, that aspect should be communicated to the Publications Board. The marketing concept and sales plan appropriate for each title would be worked out by the department in consultation with the Sales Section, as is the case now. The difference would be the active involvement of the Sales Section, on the initiative of the department, at the earliest possible stage. The Publications Board, in reviewing the publications programme, could satisfy itself that such co-operation formed an active part of the department's plans for its publications.

- 1.5 When a manuscript has been prepared, before its approval for issuance, satisfaction of the criteria on which its approval was based should be verified (lll).

16. It is assumed that the criteria referred to in the case of this recommendation are those specified in recommendation 1.4, namely, targeted readership and an agreed marketing concept and sales plan. This recommendation could best be implemented in the terms of the current procedures for publications by certification by the head of department concerned that the text submitted to Documents Control for processing satisfied the criteria. The certification could be associated with an assurance of quality as discussed below under recommendation 2. This approach would accord with a provision of an existing internal administrative instruction on criteria for the selection of material to be issued as United Nations publications (ST/AI/189/Add.17 of 24 June 1975), to the effect that when a study is completed, it should be subject to critical review and certified by the department concerned as suitable for publication. The certification should give an indication of the degree of interest likely to be shown by Governments, professional and academic groups, and the general public.

1.6 Governing bodies should, at intervals of two to three years, test the validity of the grounds for issuance of publications to ensure that they are meeting the test of publishability. The reviews should be based on information provided by the Secretariat on the extent to which the intended readers were reached and the proportion of printed copies that were distributed free or sold (111).

17. As described under recommendation 1.1, above, there is a pattern of free distribution to official and departmental recipients which has been established by the Publications Board, based on the directives of the General Assembly and on experience with the needs of the different categories of users. This pattern varies according to the type of publication involved: for example, official records are given a different pattern of distribution from studies and reports and the Yearbook of the United Nations is distributed in free copies less widely than in the case of less expensive publications.

18. No general policy has been established for the proportion of copies that should be distributed free to those which should be sold: it varies from department to department. The number of copies destined for sales purposes is determined by the Sales Section, which takes a decision based more on the performance of similar titles in the past than on informed judgement as to the value of the contents of a particular book. The figures for departmental and official distribution and for sales stock are approved by the Publications Board which, in practice, relies upon the guidance of the Distribution Section (for official requirements), the Sales Section (for sales stock), and the department (for its needs). A question is raised if the figure seems too high or too low.

19. Accordingly, governing bodies could, if they so desired, be provided with the means of reviewing a fixed distribution pattern and a fluctuating sales record, for which purpose figures could be provided with growing ease once inventory control is computerized. The Statistical Office recently compared the figures for sales and free distribution of its recurrent publications, as part of a study requested by the Statistical Commission. The question arises whether saleability alone should determine the value of United Nations publications or become the primary consideration of departments. Until now the Secretariat has been guided in the selection of material to be issued as publications by the considerations set forth in ST/AI/189/Add.17, set forth in part under recommendation 1.8, below. Thus greater emphasis has been placed hitherto on advantages to the United Nations in terms of greater public awareness of its work and on practical assistance to Member States than on the prospect of sales revenue which, it is specifically provided, should not be the main determining factor.

1.7 The focus and aim of a publication should be sharp: it should have a clear developmental or other objective in view (112) and be directed to a specific and identifiable readership (55).

20. The programme objective of a publication is arrived at by the process described under recommendation 1.3, above, while targeting of readership is dealt with under recommendations 1.4 above and 3.3 below.

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1.8 Publications in respect of which sales are not a viable proposition should be issued in the form of documents rather than books, so as to effect a saving in production and distribution costs (112).

21. This recommendation presents difficulties for the United Nations because of its own particular understanding of the nature of documents and publications, and the relation between them. Although many documents become publications at a later stage of their existence, and some documents are issued in the form of documents and publications from the start for the sake of economy, the two categories are not always interchangeable.

22. Documents are prepared for United Nations organs at their specific request, for consideration under items on their agendas, and carry the symbol of the organ concerned. A proposed publication that had little sales potential could thus not be converted into a document, since it would not necessarily meet that criterion. Moreover, while a document must be produced in all the working languages of the organ that requested it, publications are frequently prepared in a limited number of languages. Finally, documents have print runs that are usually considerably higher than those of publications.

23. Economies could be effected by issuing certain publications in document format - without covers - although the savings would be minimal. With the technological advances in the fields of word processing, photocomposition and photo-offset, and with the use of the internal reproduction facilities available in New York, Geneva and Santiago, and at certain other office locations, the production of a publication is no longer the expensive proposition it used to be when reliance on contractual printing was the rule.

24. Although publications do not necessarily lend themselves to transformation into documents, the question of whether a text which started its life as a document should be turned into a publication is a crucial one. There are established criteria for such a decision, which are summarized in the apposite standing instruction as follows. A document may be considered for issuance as a United Nations publication if it is of public interest, reaches a standard of intellectual endeavour that reflects credit on the United Nations and does not substantially duplicate material that has already been published. There must also be some reasonable expectation of positive advantage to the United Nations in terms of greater public awareness of the work of the United Nations or of providing practical assistance to the membership of the United Nations, such as by the publication of technical manuals or handbooks. The prospect of sales revenue should not be the main determining factor (ST/AI/189/Add.17, para. 3). ECLA describes the typical case very clearly:

"Only rarely does ECLA know that a study will be issued as a publication when work is initiated on it. The most common situation is that study results are first issued as documents and then those documents of the highest quality and widest potential readership are selected for transformation into publications. As ECLA is making progressively greater use of computer-based technology ... this transformation is relatively simple."



25. However, even if studies meet those criteria, they may be issued as sales publications only if they are judged to have "substantial" sales potential, namely, an anticipated sale of 500 copies or more (in English). Manuscripts having a lower potential are distributed in document form, if that is their genesis, or otherwise are issued as non-sales publications. The latter category is reserved for studies not to be presented to an intergovernmental body (i.e. not documents), but which should be brought to the attention of official and departmental recipients. Having minimal sales potential, the texts are not sold to standing-order customers or offered to agents or, through United Nations bookshops, to the general public. Responsibility for getting such works to the target-users rests primarily with the author departments; official distribution channels are used, of course, for the recipients mentioned in the section on recommendation 1.1 above.

26. Finally, the fourth possibility, in addition to "publication" as a document, sales, or non-sales publication, is co-publication, or, in United Nations usage, "external publication" by a commercial publisher of a study that has minimal sales potential. This process is expanded upon under recommendation 2.5, below.

1.9 Distribution lists should be consolidated and computerized to facilitate their use, to eliminate duplication, to permit easier collaboration among organizations (74) and to assist in planning and rationalizing distribution methods (75).

27. Distribution lists are being computerized, notably at the United Nations offices at Geneva and New York. ECLA in Santiago reports that it has designed and implemented a computer-based distribution system containing over 10,000 names and addresses classified according to the interests of recipients (useful in the targeting of readers).

28. At Headquarters the conversion is taking place from an addressograph system (containing some 83,000 plates) to a computerized system. One feature of the conversion was the review of their lists by departments, resulting in the elimination or editing of many names. At the time of preparation of this report, the keyboarding of all the addresses in an identical format was under way.

29. In a study of the dissemination system requested by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (E/AC.51/1984/6), it was reported that a central inventory of all the mailing lists in use would be introduced. Also indicated in that context was the intention of the Publications Board to review the operation on an annual basis from an administrative point of view.

1.10 More should be done to encourage sales in the developing world, not only because of the financial returns to be expected but also because of the universality of the United Nations system (85).

30. This recommendation would appear to reflect the premise articulated by the Executive Board of the World Health Organization to the effect that "the main importance of sales resides in the fact that only in the case of such publications as are purchased is it possible to have some certainty that they are finding their way into the hands of persons who really need them" (quoted by the Inspectors,

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para. 108). However, the point is made by many offices of the United Nations that the persons in the developing world who need the publications are just the ones not in a position to purchase them even at reduced cost, let alone at full cost.

31. The United Nations therefore relies primarily on free distribution to reach its targeted users in the developing world: the free distribution to official recipients listed in section 1.1, including governmental offices, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations, depository and exchange libraries and information centres, and additional users identified by departments and included on departmental distribution lists. While individuals cannot be reached by these means, those with access to depository libraries or information centres are able to consult United Nations publications there.

32. Perhaps typical of United Nations departments that produce publications targeted to readers in the developing world is the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development (DTCO), which reported that the question of sales as against free distribution was of importance to it,

"... because most, if not all, of its publications are in support of technical co-operation for development, and are prepared for target audiences in developing countries who are concerned with these matters. The ability of members of these audiences to pay for publications is severely restricted. Accordingly, copies of development-related publications are usually distributed free of charge from departmental stock to developing country target audiences."

This system is enhanced by the readers reached through normal sales channels, according to DTCO, and by the distribution of externally published United Nations texts made free of charge to target audiences in developing countries.

33. On the other hand, UNIDO, which points out that it has always given high consideration to producing publications targeted towards the needs of developing countries, has several best sellers among its titles - which are directed specifically to readers in the developing world, with prices maintained at a realistic level for that audience: the Manual for the Preparation of Industrial Feasibility Studies (E.78.II.B.5), the series of UNIDO Monographs on Industrialization in Developing Countries (E.69.II.B.39/vols. 1-21) and Guidelines for Project Evaluation (E.72.II.B.11). This would seem to buttress the assertion that, parallel to a system of free distribution, sales to developing country audiences could be improved upon.

34. One difficulty is the current cost of United Nations publications. In accordance with an administrative instruction entitled "Pricing of United Nations Publications" (ST/AI/189/Add.15 of 26 April 1973), pricing is based on a set formula of the "run-on cost" of production, multiplied by 7 1/2, which results in some prices being too high (e.g. the Editorial Manual, \$US 50) and some too low to be attractive material for handling by United Nations sales agents (e.g. the Industrial Forecast Study, \$US 9). The pricing policy for United Nations publications should perhaps be reviewed with a view to rationalization in general and to finding ways to enhance sales in the developing world in particular. One

possibility would be a systematic programme of market surveys discussed below under recommendation 3.4. If further material and staff resources were to be provided, additional promotional activities and sales trips could be undertaken in the target areas.

Recommendation 2: Quality control and the role of the director of publications

2.1 Efforts to improve the quality of published material need to be taken closer to the unit level of operation (133 (2)), i.e. to the working level of manuscript preparation (50 bis).

35. There is a striking consensus on this recommendation at the United Nations. There is also agreement on the view that the quality of writing in United Nations publications could do with improvement. Various practical suggestions have been put forward for achieving this objective at the unit level, including: the appointment of better drafters; the placement of editors within substantive departments to work with authors from the inception of a publication (or document/publication) to improve its organization and style; and the assumption of responsibility by the head of department for the quality of its publications.

36. Many departments consider that good drafting is the sine qua non of an acceptable publication and that no amount of editing after the fact can make up for initial deficiencies of conception, organization or execution.

37. Editing is an integral part of the processing of documents by the conference services at each main office location. In certain agreed instances, these responsibilities are carried out in other units on a decentralized basis, in the same manner and in accordance with the same rules. Because these editorial units are quite small, and have to give priority to documents required for meetings and other urgent material, the assistance they can give to authors of publications is limited. The editorial function as carried out in the various editorial units created for this purpose consists primarily of measures to achieve stylistic uniformity, and to ensure adherence to the regulations set forth in the Editorial Manual as well as checking the accuracy of references. As far as the appointment of better writers is concerned, drafting ability is only one of many factors that have to be taken into account in the recruitment process. Staff members are and will continue to be recruited for their expertise in a substantive area, along with factors such as geographical distribution and other elements of recruitment policy. Some means should therefore be found to make it possible for editors to work with authors from the stage of conception through execution, to assist them to draft texts as clearly as possible. Since it is doubtful, in the light of budgetary constraints, that there is any prospect of a substantial increase in the number of editors for this purpose in the foreseeable future, the only alternative would be a greater effort in the filling of vacancies arising in author departments by individuals whose skill in the substantive area is matched by drafting ability - a measure that would improve the quality of both documents and publications.

38. In spite of these problems, it is clear that greater priority should be given to improving the quality of writing in United Nations publications and that a commitment should be made to maintaining standards in that area, for which purpose it has been suggested that department heads be required to certify, as part of the certification of suitability for publication envisaged in ST/AI/189/Add.17 (see recommendation 1.5), that the quality of the writing is acceptable.

2.2 The role of the director of publications should be re-examined; he should have the authority to ensure that material being published meets standards of acceptability (or publishability) (114) in the light of the readerships to which it is addressed (133 (2)).

39. There is no existing function at the United Nations equivalent to the role envisaged by the Inspectors for the director of publications. The Director of the Publishing Division at Headquarters and his counterpart at other main office locations have purely technical responsibilities. Thus, at Headquarters, this Director provides guidance and direction to the Printing Section (Costing and Planning, Copy Preparation and Proof-Reading, Graphic Presentation and Cartographic Units), the Reproduction Section and the Distribution Section. It would seem that an entirely new function is envisaged and one that would involve judgement on the substance of proposed publications rather than on the most effective and economical means of producing them. In the case of the United Nations, which deals with a wide range of special subjects, it is difficult to imagine how such a Director of Publications would be able to exercise discretion in the case, particularly, of highly technical subjects. Also to be faced is the fact that the United Nations is highly decentralized on a geographical as well as an organizational basis.

40. Under the circumstances, it is considered more appropriate to rely on a system of local publications committees such as already exist, for instance, at ECLA, UNCTAD and UNIDO. These committees take decisions on the composition of programmes proposed by their department or office, and are in a far better position to concern themselves with substance than any central authority located in New York could be expected to be. Such publications committees could be set up in main office locations and in large author departments where they do not now exist, inter alia, to report to and advise department heads in the certification of suitability for publication when the manuscript is submitted for processing.

41. The contribution of a central authority like the Publications Board, and indeed part of its mandate, might be conceived in terms of drawing up a set of criteria, revised in the light of the subject report, against which suitability for publication could be tested. They would include considerations such as those stressed by the Inspectors with regard to the "target audience". That is, "quality" is not to be considered in the abstract, but rather in the context of suitability to the audience addressed, whether the academic specialist or the village craftsman.

2.3 The director of publications should chair an editorial sub-committee that would assist him to that end by, inter alia:

- (a) Advising those about to prepare texts how best to approach their topics and achieve the readership aims established;
- (b) Advising on the acceptability of texts and arranging, in collaboration with the authors, for peer review;
- (c) Identifying action necessary on individual texts (113).

42. As stated in the comments on recommendation 2.2, it is felt that the functions of the proposed editorial sub-committee could best be decentralized and carried out by publications committees or their equivalents in the author departments, whether at Headquarters or at other main office locations. The functions of such a committee have been described by UNIDO as follows:

"UNIDO has a well-established Publications Committee, which is composed of a cross-section of senior personnel from its various substantive divisions. Its Chairman and members are appointed by the Executive Director and work under his authority. The Committee is empowered to review manuscripts intended for sales, and usually appoints a sub-committee from among its members for this purpose."

43. Several departments agreed with the Inspectors on the value of peer review and, in particular, the use of outside readers as independent arbiters of the soundness of the contents of a publication.

2.4 Departments or units seeking permission to produce publications should be required to state and justify a specific period of time within which each publication must be produced and distributed or sold (53).

44. There are two phases, broadly speaking, in the life of a publication.

45. The first, in the author department, runs from the beginning of work on a publication, whether it begins life as a document or not. This phase consists of the collection and organization of data, through the writing, revising and refining, to submission to the Documents Control Section at Headquarters, or its equivalent away from New York, for processing. As a guide to the appropriate conference servicing units, an estimated date of submission for each title is given by departments in their proposed publications programmes when they are submitted to the Publications Board for approval. The Board has not recently investigated whether those forecast dates were met or what negative effects, if any, were experienced if they were not. Up to now, unless they had a special reason to do so, departments have not been required to state and justify a specific time within which a publication must be produced and distributed or sold. Unfortunately, it would seldom be possible under current arrangements to meet these deadlines even if they were to be set. While timely issuance obviously makes a great deal of difference for some publications - although almost none for others - the various conference services, as in most cases the author departments themselves, must give priority at all times to the production of documents for meetings.

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46. During the second phase of a publication's life, when it is being edited, translated, typed, prepared for printing and reproduced, urgently-needed meeting documents must be dealt with at the expense of whatever publications may be awaiting processing. This situation arises from the principle that existing capacity in terms of staff and reproduction facilities must be utilized as efficiently as possible. When the resources are not being used for documentation, therefore, they are available and used for the production of publications, which in turn is subject to the need to achieve economies wherever possible. Without spending enormous sums on contractual printing, it is difficult to know how to remedy the situation of publications' having to wait until a lull in meeting requirements makes possible their production in internal facilities.

47. A survey requested by the Committee on Conferences is currently being conducted to ascertain how long it takes to produce recurrent publications of the Organization, from inception through issuance.

2.5 If that period does not permit "in-house" production, the services of a commercial publisher should be sought to have the publication appear in time (53).

48. In the absence of existing resources for the purpose, the desirable deadlines for the production of publications that require timely issuance could be met by the allocation of the necessary resources for the engagement of contractual translators and contractual printers.

49. In general the United Nations does not use the services of commercial publishers - which it calls external publication - solely to achieve more timely publication. Rather, when arrangements for co-publication are made with commercial publishers, this is done to achieve better dissemination of its material than the United Nations itself could achieve, or to bring about the publication of a study with minimal sales potential that would not otherwise have been published, or to permit publication in a language that would not have been envisaged for a United Nations edition.

50. DTCD reports its experience in external publishing, suggesting that other departments might wish to give greater emphasis to that possible outlet or mode of publication:

"Since 1976 the Department has co-operated with a commercial publisher in the production and distribution of Natural Resources Forum, a quarterly journal prepared by the United Nations and published by Graham and Trotman, Ltd. This journal has a paid circulation of 700, which has been growing in recent years. In addition, DTCD has had, on average, two books per year published by commercial firms over the past five years at relatively little cost to the Organization. Issuing publications in this fashion broadens the impact of United Nations publications, reduces internal costs, usually results in a better-looking hard-cover edition, and produces royalties. Copies are generally made available free of charge to the Department and these are distributed to the DTCD target audiences in developing countries. In addition, arrangements are frequently made, as with Graham and Trotman, for discounts to be offered to purchasers from developing countries."

51. It should be noted, however, that programme managers, asked whether limitations on free distribution imposed for budgetary reasons impeded their efforts to make an effective departmental distribution to target-users, reported that they did not. An exception was voiced in the case of publication by external publishers, where the number of free copies which the external publisher will furnish is often extremely limited.

52. Timely issuance is a basic prerequisite for the acceptance of advertising. It may be that, if it were seriously to consider the possibility of accepting advertising, as the Inspectors suggest, subject to strict rules and safeguards (para. 100), the Organization might take into account the use of the revenue thus produced to permit the timely production of its publications. The Department of Public Information notes that advertising under United Nations control has been authorized in several external publications contracts, including those for three quarterly publications produced by commercial publishers (which do come out on schedule): the ECE Bulletin, the Statistical Journal of ECE and Natural Resources Forum. It is also suggested that, if advertising were accepted in United Nations publications, Geneva-based organizations might wish to consider establishing a single office that would have advertising agency status, to establish contracts on a collective basis and to achieve economies of scale.

2.6 The rules on citing staff member-authors of publications by name should be made more flexible. The names of staff should be published in the case of publications which call for special creative, scientific or literary effort (54).

53. The current situation in the United Nations is the following. The Publications Board conducted a thorough review of the policy of attribution of authorship in United Nations documents, publications and other official papers in late 1981 and the first half of 1982. It also examined a special procedure that had been in effect, on an experimental basis, since 1970, and whereby, pursuant to the decision by the then Secretary-General, on the recommendation of the Publications Board, heads of departments had been authorized to permit attribution in the case of articles which contained material that could be considered purely scientific or technical and not dealing with questions on which any United Nations organ or body had taken policy decisions or questions on which the Governments of Member States had adopted policy positions.

54. Thereafter, the Board recommended to the Secretary-General, and he accepted the recommendation, that the provisions of the administrative instruction then in effect should be reaffirmed, namely, that (a) publications are issued in the name of the United Nations, and (b) attribution, either direct or indirect, to individual members of the Secretariat, is not permitted in documents, publications or other official papers. The text of the instruction, amended slightly for the sake of clarity and to update terminology, was then issued as ST/AI/189/Add.6/Rev.2 of 14 October 1982. At the same time, the Secretary-General also agreed with the recommendation of the Publications Board that the authorization to department heads to permit attribution in specific circumstances should be withdrawn, primarily because such decentralization had resulted in a growing number of exceptions and in the belief that such exceptions could well become the rule.

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55. The Board was guided in coming to its position by the following considerations:

(a) It was considered unfair to permit attribution to some staff members and not to others, depending on the subject matter or intended destination of what had been written, or the nature of the work itself (many staff members do not write as part of their duties);

(b) It was believed desirable that a similar inequity be avoided in the case of staff of different departments and offices of the United Nations; and

(c) In keeping with the time-honoured tradition followed by Governments, the rule of anonymity had been observed by the United Nations since its inception, and no valid reason existed for any change in this basic concept at that stage.

56. The Board also took into account that the legal responsibility for United Nations documents and publications rests with the United Nations and that it had been found to be in the interests both of the Organization and of the staff, from a juridical and political point of view, that individual staff members should be absorbed within the legal personality of the Secretary-General, to whom the preparation of documents and publications has been entrusted by the relevant deliberative organs or applicable rules.

57. Since then, the Publications Board or its Chairman has been approached by representatives of some departments on the subject of institutionalizing a category of material or a set of conditions in which attribution to staff members in United Nations official papers might be considered. These officials were asked to put forward proposals for such a category of material or set of conditions, and the Board is keeping the question under review until such time as it has a specific proposal to take up. The difficulty resides in delimiting subjects not susceptible to politicization; it was pointed out in the Board's discussion that, however scientific or technical the subject, policy positions had usually been taken by Member States. The criterion suggested by the Inspectors, "special creative, scientific or literary effort", would also be most difficult to identify in a consistent, demonstrably even-handed manner.

2.7 United Nations system publishing should take full advantage of developments in printing technology such as the new techniques for rapid printing and transfer of texts and their economical storage made possible by advanced computer and electronic systems (69).

58. New printing technology is being introduced in the United Nations offices in New York, Geneva and Vienna, as well as at some other main office locations. Advantage is being taken of the computer and data-processing technologies as well as word-processing and related facilities to make possible up-to-date photoreproduction techniques, with ensuing savings of time and monetary resources.

59. In New York, word processing has been installed in the English, French and Spanish ex-typing units and in the English and Spanish verbatim units; the introduction of similar facilities in the units working in other languages is at various stages of preparation. Co-operation was established between the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Editorial and Official Records Division for the



production of a full-text data base on resolutions. As resolutions are typed they immediately become available to provide on-line reference service to Library users. The reproduction facilities have been modified to the extent of increasing the plate-making and offset press capacity to take account of the additional fair copy generated by word-processing systems. Computer output microfiche (COM) is being investigated and the Organization's photocomposition requirements are being evaluated preparatory to requesting authorization to equip the plant. Moreover computerized systems of records management, job scheduling, status reports and production statistics are being introduced in the Reproduction Section.

60. In Geneva conversion to word-processing equipment is in progress and, once the equipment has been installed, additional photocomposition and photo-offset capacity will be required. Storage of material on microfiche is well advanced at Geneva and computerization of the distribution and sales operations is under study.

61. Once word-processing systems are in place at the main office locations, it is envisaged that the individual installations will become part of a network that will eventually cover all duty stations. This will permit far more flexibility in the transfer of text and data from one United Nations office to another.

Recommendation 3: Management information

3.1 It is essential that statistical and other information on the direct and indirect costs of publications and on the effectiveness of publications activities should be available (133 (3)).

62. With respect to the effectiveness of publications activities, reference is made to the comments under recommendations 1.1 and 1.6 above. Direct costs of publications are understood as costs directly related to production: equipment and materials. Indirect costs are understood herein to refer to staff time and overhead expenses.

63. It has been remarked by several departments that a distinction has not been made in the report between work that would have had to be done in any case, even if it were not intended to be the subject of a publication, and work limited directly to the production of a publication. In fact it often happens that resources used primarily for other purposes are used incidentally for publications as well. A striking instance of such a category of material is the whole body of the official records of the Organization and proceedings of meetings or conferences. While issued as publications, the primary purpose of such material is to assist in the work of the intergovernmental body concerned and to maintain an accurate account of its proceedings for the current use of Member States as well as for archival purposes. Another, less extreme example is afforded by the publications of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, which make use of the cataloguing work performed in any case to make the collections accessible to users.

64. The Statistical Office, DIESA, has recently computed the direct (printing) and indirect (staff) costs of its publications for an overall study of its publishing activities to be submitted to the Statistical Commission; in this analysis the computation of staff time has been restricted to the actual writing of the text,

leaving out time spent on the collection and processing of data. The results of this experiment will be studied and consideration given to the introduction of similar cost accounting in other main publication-producing areas.

65. As far as direct printing costs are concerned, at Headquarters the manual cost-accounting system that had been in effect in the Publishing Division, as described in the medium-term plan for 1976-1979 was discontinued and it is intended that the computerization of operations in the Reproduction, Printing and Distribution Sections will substitute a more efficient means of storing and organizing data, including cost information. The system is now at the programming stage and is to be introduced in late 1984. It is recognized that access to such information will facilitate planning and monitoring of costs and should enhance efficiency in the printing of publications and the overall production of documentation.

66. As a final general comment, the United Nations has difficulty in understanding how the Inspectors arrived at their estimate that about 10 per cent of the regular budget was expended on the direct costs of publications (para. 4 of the report). The total budget of the Organization in the biennium 1984-1985 is some \$1.6 billion; the external printing appropriation for the same period is \$9.8 million. Even allowing for the cost of materials and equipment in internal reproduction and for the staff and overhead costs involved, 10 per cent seems far too high.

3.2 All organizations that have not already done so should institute appropriate accounting systems to enable them to distinguish between the direct costs of publications and those of documents (116).

67. The institution of a computerized record-keeping system in the Reproduction and Printing Sections at Headquarters will permit the calling up of cost figures related directly to publications and documents. Difficulty arises, however, in the case of the many documents that are issued concurrently or subsequently as publications, a transformation effected simply by the substitution or addition of an appropriate cover.

3.3 Attention is drawn to the desirability of strict control of stocks of publications and of energetic clearance of surplus stock, by sale for pulping, if necessary (104).

68. There is agreement with the assessment in the report that the problems of inventory control and stock reduction must be tackled and solved with some sense of urgency. There is also agreement that stock control begins with a decision on the press run, which, it is considered, should accurately reflect the past requirements for similar publications of official distribution and for sales purposes. The Sales Section, for its part, has routinely cut down its orders, which, coupled with the monitoring of stocks and reprints, where necessary, has cut down significantly on the storage space required.

69. At Headquarters, the improved inventory control expected to be made possible by computerized record keeping will permit more rational decisions on stock disposal, a question recently reviewed by the Publications Board from a policy

point of view. The Board decided that storage of publications on microfiche should be contemplated as soon as the technology was accessible in cost and permitted rapid enough recall in hard-copy form.

70. The Organization also recently reviewed its policy on pulping out-of-date and overstocked documents and publications for revenue and consultations are in progress in the Office of General Services on the handling of recyclable waste. At the same time, a consultant has been engaged to advise on how best to turn the waste paper into revenue for the Organization.

3.4 Surveys for the purpose of identifying reader receptivity and needs in different countries or regions are necessary to the improved planning and execution of publications programmes (94).

71. Departments generally agreed with the desirability of surveys made with a view to improving their ability to plan publications with the needs of readers in mind.

72. The type of survey mentioned by the Inspectors (para. 95), in which an addressed postcard is inserted in a publication for completion and return to the Organization, has been conducted by a number of departments. It has been pointed out, however, that that method reaches only existing readers and evokes responses primarily from institutional sources, where staff take the time to reply.

73. The sort of market survey that would be required to reach potential readers has also been conducted, by the Statistical Office, which addressed the following questions to a mailing list put together from a variety of sources: Are you aware of United Nations publications? Are you using them? If so, are you satisfied with them? At the same time, the Dag Hammarskjöld Library is conducting a survey of readers of UNDOC: Current Index and Current Bibliographical Information/Information bibliographique courante by means of questionnaires inserted in the serials that seek to determine who is using the publications, how they are being used and how best they can serve their users.

74. DPI points out that it would very much like to be in a position to conduct the second type of market survey itself, but has not had at its disposal the resources that would be required to do so.

3.5 The information gathered by surveys of readers should be communicated to authors and author departments to assist them to address the needs identified (95).

75. Indeed, if market surveys were to be funded and implemented, the results would be communicated to author departments for their information, in addition to being used for analysis by sales and promotion staff. In fact the Statistical Office did report to authors on its survey (see under recommendation 3.4).

Recommendation 4: Reductions in the quantity of published material (redistribution of publications resources)

4.1 Governing bodies should satisfy themselves that publications, on evidence to be produced, are being designed for specific readerships and reaching the clientele for which they are designed (120).

76. The objective of this recommendation would appear to correspond to the formulation of recommendation 1.6, in particular, as supplemented by recommendations 1.3 and 1.4.

4.2 Governing bodies should authorize secretariats, in the preparation of future publications budgets, to increase the proportion of funds to be allocated to quality control, marketing, promotion and distribution at the expense of a reduction in the quantity of material to be published (120).

77. Reductions in the quantity of published material would have to be decided upon by the intergovernmental bodies that call for publications, and that, in practice, solely in the area of studies and reports. Moreover, the funds released by such a decision - which would not be a substantial portion of the budget for external printing, since most studies and reports can be reproduced internally at little extra expense to the Organization: for 1984-1985 the category of studies and reports account for an average of 12.5 per cent of the external printing budget - would not automatically become available for purposes such as quality control, marketing, promotion or distribution without prior appropriation action by the General Assembly based on conclusive evidence. The Sales Section at Headquarters also considers that it would need more staff in order to be able to use additional funds for advertising and promotion intelligently and effectively.

78. One department remarked that quality could be improved indirectly by cutting down on the number of publications, since existing staff could then devote more time to the remaining titles.

79. Decisions on this recommendation, then, rest with the bodies that authorize publications and with the policy-making bodies in the programme planning, budgeting and evaluation area.

4.3 Governing bodies should encourage organizations to collaborate with one another, in small combinations if necessary, for specific activities in marketing, promotion and distribution (120).

80. The Sales Section of the United Nations took the initiative in arranging for shared exhibition space at the Special Libraries Association meeting (June 1984, New York). The Sales Unit in Geneva has made arrangements for shared booths at the Bahrain, Frankfurt, London and other book fairs. Exchanges of catalogues and material on new titles have also been arranged with ILO, IMF and the World Bank, so that each will stock the other's material at the exhibits attended by some but not

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all of the individual organizations. Attempts are also under way to agree on a system of exchange advertising with the specialized agencies; for instance IMF and the World Bank are being offered four advertisements a year in the UN Chronicle in exchange for a like number in their Finance and Development. (This agreement is pending.) Increased co-operation among the bookstores of the specialized agencies, the regional commissions and the information centres, which would sell United Nations system publications on a reciprocal basis, needs to be pursued. The United Nations sells the publications of all the specialized agencies in its bookshops, although the reverse is not done.

81. This recommendation might be referred for discussion to the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, along with the topics under recommendation 5.

4.4 Governing bodies should approve no real increase in publications budgets until such time as they are assured that efforts to improve the diffusion end of the publishing activity are producing concrete results (120).

82. During the last two biennia, the external printing component of the United Nations publications budget has been maintained virtually at the 1980-1981 level, with an allowance for inflation. It is unlikely that any significant real growth will be authorized in the current economic climate. In the event of any proposed increase, it would indeed be appropriate for policy-making organs to satisfy themselves on the effectiveness of the distribution of publications, as suggested by the Inspectors.

Recommendation 5: Co-operation and consultation among organizations

5.1 The Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) should take a keener interest in publications. It should appoint a sub-committee that would explore at least the following subjects:

- (a) Collective arrangements for gathering information. This would include not only the measurement of staff costs, but also, in particular, the separation of documentation and publications printing costs;
- (b) Inter-agency collaboration in the preparation and distribution of publications;
- (c) The quality and appeal of publications;
- (d) Techniques to ensure that publications are directed to the needs of target groups in developing and developed countries;
- (e) Consultations on future publications programmes;
- (f) New production technologies (125).

83. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit was placed on the agenda of the Inter-Agency Meeting, to be held from 27 to 31 August 1984 at the headquarters of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Montreal. The discussion there will be reflected in the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) on the JIU report.

5.2 Organizations of the United Nations system should further examine ways of working together on and sharing the cost of financing publications (58), e.g. the Geneva-based organizations might explore the possibility of setting up a joint printing plant (68).

84. United Nations departments and offices are generally receptive to collaboration in areas of common or overlapping concern. This would have to be the subject of discussion at the inter-agency level (as foreseen in the section on recommendation 5.1 above), perhaps initially at the IAMLADP meeting.

85. The programme planning and budgeting organs may wish to consider measures whereby the costs of financing joint publications could be shared, if any such proposals were to be made in due course.

Recommendation 6: Public information aspects

6.1 The Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) should invite the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to advise on public information aspects of publications, e.g.

- (a) How to make publications more effective in disseminating knowledge and carrying the message of the United Nations system to broad areas of the public;
- (b) How to integrate some audio-visual productions of the Department of Public Information (DPI) with the publications of the system United Nations organizations (128).

86. The Department of Public Information has taken note of the recommendation that ACC should invite the assistance of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC). It believes that JUNIC could respond, should ACC make such a request.

6.2 The Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) should be asked to consider how information media, such as press releases, feature articles, radio and television programmes and information centres, could best be used to promote sales and to convey the salient features of United Nations family publications, in a popular manner, to as many people as possible (96).

87. The current situation is described by the Department of Public Information as follows. DPI customarily promotes major publications of the system in articles in the UN Chronicle and, in addition, plans are under way to develop a book column devoted to recent United Nations publications as a regular Chronicle feature.

88. Information about major publications in the economic and social fields is conveyed through press releases, television, articles in Development Forum and UN Chronicle, and through press briefings.

89. All sales and non-sales publications are received by the United Nations Information Centres, where they are indexed and made available to the public by a reference assistant (librarian). The Centres also promote, through locally issued press releases and other means, those United Nations publications which are of interest to the general public.

90. DPI considers that an increase in such activity with the objective of more actively promoting the publications of the United Nations system would not be possible within existing staff resources.

Notes

1/ Official records of the General Assembly, Thirtieth Session (A/10006/Add.1), para. 1269 et seq.

considered