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REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND
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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL
ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION:
RESTRUCTURING OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL SECTORS OF THE
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM
JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Second regular session of 1984
Agenda item 6
RESTRUCTURING OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL SECTORS OF THE
UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM,
INCLUDING THE REVITALIZATION
OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COUNCIL

Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters

Addendum

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters" (A/39/94-E/1984/60). 1/

Notes

1/ The comments of the Secretary-General were submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session under the symbol E/1984/L.36.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters" is one of a series of studies undertaken, in response to proposals of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, to review the implementation of Assembly resolution 32/197 of 20 December 1977 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. In their report, the Inspectors analyse the performance by the Office in carrying out the tasks entrusted to it under General Assembly resolution 32/197, as set out in the Secretary-General's Bulletin (ST/SGB/163), reproduced in annex I to the report.
2. The Secretary-General appreciates and concurs with the evaluation made by the Inspectors of the performance of the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters and notes their observation that delegations and secretariat entities, in general, are satisfied with the way that the Office discharges its functions and responsibilities. While sharing the overall view of the Inspectors that the Office has met the objectives of General Assembly resolution 32/197, the Secretary-General believes that there remains scope for further improving the services the Office provides.
3. In a relatively brief report, the Inspectors have succeeded in covering adequately the main functions and responsibilities of the Office. In fact, the report constitutes the first in-depth analysis of the functions and performance of the Office since its establishment in March 1978 and presents an important aspect of the work of the secretariat in providing, on an integrated basis, technical secretariat services both to intergovernmental bodies and to the intersecretariat co-ordination machinery. The Secretary-General also shares the observation that the impartiality of the Office in the performance of its tasks constitutes an important aspect, the achievement of which was one of the main objectives of General Assembly resolution 32/197. The underlying premise of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit is that technical secretariat services have been recognized as a separate function among those which are provided by the secretariat.
4. In reviewing the performance of the Office, the Secretary-General believes that note should be taken of the initiatives the Office has taken, in consultation with the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and the Department of Conference Services, in streamlining the calendar of meetings and documentation. The Economic and Social Council has acted favourably on those recommendations, which were also endorsed by the General Assembly. Considerable reduction has also been achieved in the volume of documentation issued by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) as well as in the number of meetings convened under the aegis of that body.
5. Comments on the five specific recommendations contained in section V of the Inspector's report are set forth below.

Recommendation 1

6. The Secretary-General appreciates the confidence shown by the Inspectors in the performance of the Office. It should be noted, however, that making the Office responsible for the provision of technical secretariat services to other General Assembly committees and to some special conferences outside the economic and social sectors implies substantial organizational changes within the secretariat. Such changes, if any, should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, as a first step, consideration could be given, bearing in mind established organizational structures and staff resources, to the possibility of expanding the functions performed by the Office to other bodies within its purview for which it does not currently provide technical secretariat services.

7. In connection with the technical secretariat services to intersecretariat bodies, it should be noted that the Office is responsible for the preparation and monitoring of the calendar of meetings of ACC and its subsidiary bodies; the Office services meetings of ACC and most of its principal subsidiary bodies; it briefs regularly the liaison officers of specialized agencies and programmes; and the Assistant Secretary-General for Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters serves as Secretary of ACC. On the other hand, there are a number of other subsidiary bodies of ACC, not mentioned in paragraph 12 of the Inspectors' report, for which the Office does not provide technical secretariat services because alternative practical arrangements have been agreed upon with the substantive offices concerned.

Recommendation 2

8. The Secretary-General concurs with the Inspectors that substantive entities should be informed of proposed policy modifications to their draft papers before final changes are introduced. The practice of the Office is, in fact, to inform substantive offices of proposed revisions; the Office does not undertake on its own policy modifications to the submitted drafts. The procedures followed are described below.

9. Prior to submitting forecasts of documentation to the Documents Control Section of the Department of Conference Services, the Programme, Calendar and Documents Planning Unit of the Office reviews the proposals received from substantive offices to ensure that each document has legislative authority, that it will be submitted in time and that it will not exceed the mandated page limit, and to determine whether some documents can be amalgamated and whether subsequent decisions of the Assembly or the Council affect the documentation of their subsidiary bodies. The Office then monitors the submission of documents to ensure their timely processing and distribution. Furthermore, in September 1978, the Office instituted a system of documents' clearance in order to achieve a more thorough policy review of documentation. Thus, the attention of the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation is drawn to the policy aspects and recommendations contained in the documentation relating to economic and social matters. Each document is also reviewed to determine whether it raises problems of a political, legal, programme planning or budgetary nature and, if so, to arrange for its clearance by the appropriate departments and

offices. Further, regarding the practice of the Editorial Control Section of the Office, in the event that editorial changes appear to touch upon substantive or policy matters, substantive entities are consulted.

10. With respect to the clearance of draft documents prepared in Vienna, it should be noted that such drafts are submitted to the Office by the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for International Economic and Social Affairs, which is responsible for the work of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs.

11. Since, as the Inspectors note, the Office has acquired an understanding of the various substantive matters and the political implications involved in the documentation, this system of clearance is a valuable instrument for monitoring as well as a coherent and cost-effective approach in the preparation of documentation in the economic and social sectors. The existing close collaboration of the Office with the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation and with the Department of Administration and Management has been an important element in this matter.

Recommendation 3

12. The Secretary-General believes that a study by the Administrative Management Service of the Department of Administration and Management on editorial responsibilities may need further consideration since the overall situation is satisfactory. However, the Secretary-General notes the observation of the Inspectors regarding the workload for editing sales publications and believes that the Office needs to be strengthened in that regard.

13. As noted by the Inspectors in paragraph 26 of their report, editing is an integral part of conference servicing. In certain cases, formally agreed upon with the Department of Conference Services, editing responsibilities are carried out in other quarters based on a clearly defined division of labour and in accordance with the same standards and procedures. At Headquarters, for instance, only the editorial units of the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters and the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs are recognized in this capacity. For a number of reasons, further decentralization is considered unnecessary and inadvisable.

14. A minor problem, as noted by the Inspectors in paragraph 35 of their report, concerns the editing by the Office of sales publications emanating from the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development and the United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations. More than 20,000 pages of sales publications are edited annually by the Office. Because of the relatively small staff resources of the Office and the absence of funds for temporary assistance, priority in editing is given to pre-session and in-session documentation for meetings. This delays considerably the editing of sales publications. In some cases, the delay has exceeded two years. Editing of sales publications, which can be as long as 1,500 pages, requires particular care and style, since they are intended to reach the general public and can affect the image of the United Nations.

15. A number of difficulties have also been encountered in connection with the timely editing and processing of documentation emanating from the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs for meetings held at Vienna.

16. The situation regarding the Editorial Control Section of the Office and the difficulties relating to documentation in Vienna are currently under review.

Recommendation 4

17. At its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly will undertake an overall review of the implementation of its resolution 32/197. The Secretary-General, in implementing the recommendations of the Inspectors, will take fully into account the review undertaken by the Assembly.

Recommendation 5

18. ~~The Secretary-General fully concurs with the observations made by the Inspectors in paragraphs 20 and 22 of their report regarding the increased requirements for secretariat services for informal consultations.~~

19. As may be recalled, the General Assembly, in its decision 33/417 of 14 December 1978, requested United Nations bodies to keep under constant review the possibility of conducting their business in informal meetings, it being understood that this practice could not exclude the provision of services, and agreed that a decision to resort to informal meetings should rest with the body concerned.

20. The Secretary-General believes that the process of informal consultations should be considered as an integral and indispensable part of the proceedings of intergovernmental bodies concerned with economic and social matters.