Fortieth session
Items 12 and 121 of the provisional agenda*

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa

Comments by 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 "Report on the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa" (A/40/633).

* A/40/150.
ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade (JIIU/RBP/85/4) is the first assessment of the Decade undertaken by JIU. It was prepared, as indicated by JIU, for the following reasons:

(a) In addition to the States concerned, the United Nations system and international and intergovernmental organizations are associated with the implementation of programmes for achieving the objectives of the Decade. It, therefore, seemed worthwhile studying in depth the mechanisms and procedures of such an association, which is obviously of a complex nature;

(b) The Decade is itself a priority for African countries, in that their development is dependent on transport and communications. Consequently, it was necessary to determine whether the implementation of the programme had positive effects on international co-operation, bearing in mind the costs of the programme for both Member States and the United Nations system;

(c) Generally speaking, it appeared necessary to reflect on the course of action to be followed after 1988 (and of the Decade) in order to avoid losing the momentum built up through the implementation of the programme.

2. The report, issued just after the completion of the first phase of the Decade, is most opportune coming as it does at a time when the second phase has just been commenced and the greatest concern is to ensure that its results should be considerably better than those of the first phase.

3. In general, the report properly reflects the objectives, strategy, activities and problems of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa. It highlights the difficulties encountered in information gathering and the mobilization of resources. The Secretary-General is satisfied with the comprehensive manner in which JIU has reviewed the activities for the Decade and made recommendations bearing on the future of the Decade.

4. One area in which international co-operation can contribute to the success of the Decade is the financing of the implementation of programmes to achieve the objectives of the Decade. The problems encountered in delivering relief aid to the victims of the food crisis currently afflicting many African countries have once again confirmed the inadequacy of that region's transport and communications services. The report of JIU, therefore, serves a useful purpose in drawing attention to the improvements that can be made during the second phase of the Decade in the methods used to mobilize financial resources for the programme.

5. The Secretary-General notes the systematic manner in which JIU prepared its report. This included review of documents issued on the Decade, collection of information, attending some meetings, and consultations held with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and other relevant organs of the United Nations.
II. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The following specific comments of the Secretary-General on the recommendations of JIU should be read within the context of the above considerations.

Recommendation 1

7. The Secretary-General notes this recommendation which is addressed in the first instance to Member States. Either of the two alternative solutions to the problem of financing regional and subregional projects could be appropriate. It is important that progress be made towards finding a workable mechanism for the financing of these projects which constitute the highest priority in accordance with the Global Strategy for the Decade and the Lagos Plan of Action. The Secretary-General agrees that, when called upon to do so, the ECA secretariat should render secretariat services to the intergovernmental committees set up for regional or subregional projects. The Secretary-General, however, wishes to draw the attention of the General Assembly to the fact that the provision of secretariat services would require additional funds to be provided to ECA. The Secretary-General will, accordingly, draw the attention of the ECA Conference of Ministers and the African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning to this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

8. The Secretary-General agrees in general that the ECA secretariat should assist African Governments in presenting their projects for the Decade in a format acceptable to financial institutions. To this end, the secretariat would attempt to determine the format and guidelines acceptable to most institutions. On the other hand, its ability to facilitate contacts between States and the financial institutions concerned as a means of accelerating the finance mobilization process would depend to a large extent on the availability of funds beyond its current level of regular budget financing.

Recommendation 3

9. In view of the importance of the recommendation, it is the Secretary-General's view that considerable consultations between ECA and other agencies involved in transport and communications would have to take place before a comprehensive medium-term and long-term plan could be drawn up. It is in the light of this that the time remaining before the next Conference of African Ministers of Transport and Communications is considered too short to achieve the objectives of the recommendation. The Secretary-General would, therefore, suggest that the most appropriate time for the consideration of such a plan would be during the Conference of Ministers of 1988. At that time, the plan would be considered together with all the other factors needing to be considered before deciding whether or not there shall be a second Decade.
Recommendation 4

10. The Secretary-General supports this recommendation which reinforces his views mentioned under recommendation 3 that a considerable time of reflection and consultations among all the parties concerned is necessary before deciding on the desirability of a second Decade.

Recommendation 5

11. The Secretary-General notes this recommendation which has as its objective a very precise definition of the roles of various United Nations bodies vis-à-vis the Decade. He will, accordingly, bring this recommendation to the attention of the next Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning and to the General Assembly, to both of which it is addressed. It should be borne in mind, however, that the support activities that would be required of the ECA secretariat, should the recommendation be adopted by the General Assembly, would necessitate the provision of additional resources.

Recommendation 6

12. The recommendation that a monitoring and evaluation unit be established at ECA to carry out the activities suggested by the JIU is important. Indeed, steps are being taken to develop self-evaluation capability within ECA of its regular budget activities in order to overcome the present inadequacy. The P-4 post mentioned in the JIU report and a new post at the P-5 level that is being requested on a non-recurrent basis in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987 would be devoted to that purpose. The only possibility of meeting the requirement of this particular recommendation is the use of one of the current vacant P-4 posts for the necessary length of time. Even if this temporary diversion of the use of a post should be possible, because of the nearness of the next Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning in the first quarter of 1986, it would not be possible to submit a report to that Conference in 1986. It would be more realistic to plan for a report to be submitted to the 1988 meeting. The intervening period could be used for developing the methodology and procedures of evaluation relevant to the Decade programme, preparing a detailed report on problems of evaluating the programme, establishing a programme of work for an in-depth evaluation and initiating consultations with all the relevant agencies as recommended by JIU.

Recommendation 7

13. The Secretary-General notes the recommendation that an institutional framework for co-operation among regional commissions in the field of transport and communications should be set up. This matter will be discussed at one of the Meetings of Executive Secretaries in the near future.

Recommendation 8

14. The Secretary-General supports this recommendation as in-depth consultations should be of benefit to the secretariats of the two Decades. Indeed, these consultations have already started with the visit to ECA in May 1985 by the Chief of the Transport, Communications and Tourism Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
Recommendation 9

15. While the Secretary-General agrees with this recommendation that all vacancies in the Transport, Communications and Tourism Division and in the Co-ordination Unit of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa should be filled as soon as possible, he notes that at present the only vacant post in the Co-ordination Unit is that of the Co-ordinator, who is under recruitment and is expected to assume his duties in September 1985. Furthermore, early action will be taken to return to the Transport, Communications and Tourism Division those posts that have been temporarily redeployed to other Divisions, so that the former Division can effectively carry out its responsibilities in respect of the Decade.

Recommendation 10

16. The Secretary-General has noted and is in general agreement with the observation of JIU that procedures and central services of ECA provided to the secretariat of the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa should be reviewed and improved as necessary.