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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1988-1989

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Problems of storage and its costs in organizations
of the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Problems of storage and its costs in organizations of the United Nations system" (A/41/806 and Corr.1).

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The reaction of the organizations of the United Nations system to the JIU report entitled "Problems of storage and its costs in organizations of the United Nations system" was uniformly positive. The report was considered commendable in its clarity and constructiveness and was thought to have presented a most useful analysis of the problems of storage on a system-wide scale.

2. Moreover, it was believed that the report contained valuable advice on the methods and technologies that the organizations of the United Nations system might wish to introduce, in particular, in respect of optical-disc-based systems of information storage and retrieval. The recommendations were considered pertinent and, as will appear in greater detail below, it was intended to consider them in the light of their applicability and the possibilities of funding.

3. The following points of clarification were made by the International Labour Organisation (ILO):

(a) Regarding paragraph 9 of the JIU report, it was assumed that equipment would be replaced regularly as it wore out or became obsolete so that staff resources could continue to be used as effectively as possible, and that the systematic programme of stock reduction would be maintained to help ensure that space was not wasted;

(b) Regarding paragraph 51 of the report, ILO does have a records retirement scheme, together with unofficial guidelines for stock reduction. Four lines from the end of the paragraph, the phrase "of periodicals" should be replaced by "periodically";

(c) With regard to paragraph 56, the ILO Library was indeed fully computerized and, like that of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), had its own data bases.

4. The World Health Organization (WHO) did not concur with the finding of the inspectors, as stated in the first sentence of paragraph 82, that most systems did not need special air-conditioning. In its experience, air-conditioning was usually required, either for the equipment or for the users.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Recommendation 1: The organizations of the United Nations system should strictly apply the resolutions of their legislative bodies pertaining to the limitation of documentation. Wherever applicable they should also consider the following additional measures so as to reduce initial press-runs and stocks of documentation:

- (a) Sending letters to Member States and other addressees, inviting them to reconsider both the number of items and copies they receive with a view to reducing them

5. Since the issuance in 1980 of the Joint Inspection Unit report on the control and limitation of documentation in the United Nations system (A/36/167), the discussions of the subject that have taken place in the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) have confirmed the keen ongoing interest of organizations of the system in developing workable measures to regulate their documentation on the intergovernmental and secretariat levels. That commitment has been confirmed in response to the recommendation. More particularly, the UNESCO Executive Board (in 116 EX/Decision 5.1.4) and its General Conference (in 22 C/Resolution 48) have made specific reductions in their own documentation requirements and ILO has periodically carried out exercises of the kind proposed in recommendation 1 (a), the scope of which has depended on available resources.

- (b) Introducing two-column printing of documents using smaller print similar to newspapers

6. The organizations of the system, through their representatives in the Inter-Agency Meetings on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications, in 1984 and 1985 considered various methods of reducing the number of pages per document by increasing the density of text per page, for instance, by the use of dual-column format, reduced type size and print reduction frames. It was found, and the finding has been confirmed in respect of the recommendation, that the photo-reduction of pages of standard typewritten or word-processed text, whether in a single block or in two columns, resulted in a lower quality of legibility than could be obtained with a typeset text reduced to the same degree. The level of skill and the amount of time required to set up dual-column pages on word processors, and the problems posed by tabular or non-text material have led some organizations to conclude that it is an impractical or undesirable working method.

- (c) Inserting a note on the covering page of all documents issued, informing delegations of the limited production of documentation for reasons of economy and inviting them not to request additional copies

- (d) Charging Member States and other users of documents for copies requested above the established quota

7. There was no objection expressed to recommendations 1 (c) and 1 (d), which were traced to a proposal made by the United Nations in 1973-1974. The Food and

Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported that its standard policy was identical to the measures proposed. ILO said that a significant reduction in the official free distribution of publications, although not of reports of conferences and meetings, had been approved by its Governing Body at its 234th session, in November 1986.

Recommendation 2: Strict regulations outlining policies for stock review and disposal of surplus of mimeographed documents, official records and publications should be enforced in the organizations where these exist and established and applied where they do not

8 UNESCO, in collaboration with other organizations of the system, has prepared a document entitled "Development of Records Management and Archives Services within the United Nations Agencies: A RAMP study" (PGI-83/WS/26), which provides useful information and recommendations related to the proposed regulations. At ILO the preparation of official (as opposed to unofficial) guidelines will be considered when its computerized inventory control becomes operational. At FAO strict control is imposed at the time of processing so as to ensure that the printing of surplus documents and publications is minimized. At the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regulations outlining policies for stock review and the disposal of surplus printed documents, official records and publications are strictly enforced.

Recommendation 3: Strict regulations should be established and implemented to create common registries in departments. Archives should be sent to a common archives centre, instead of being housed in offices. Such archives centres should be under the jurisdiction of trained archivists

9. ILO has decided to introduce a partially decentralized registry system for specific reasons of policy. FAO has established strict regulations regarding registries and archives and has a common archives centre, located in its Records and Archives Unit. IMF strongly endorses the notion that archives should be sent to a common archives centre, under the jurisdiction of a trained archivist, and this has been the case in the Fund for many years.

Recommendation 4: For financial as well as for safety reasons, the Headquarters warehouses in Long Island City and Park Avenue should be vacated and stocks moved to the United Nations garage

Recommendation 5: The relocation of numerous storage places at the United Nations Office at Geneva, already agreed upon between Publishing and General Services, should be implemented as rapidly as possible

10. Reference is made to paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of the comments of the Secretary-General on the JIU report (A/42/295, annex) in regard to these recommendations.

Recommendation 6: In the organizations where efficiency and cost-savings can be achieved through such means, compactus equipment, microform storage, computer-based systems and other applications of automation should be introduced and utilized for storage purposes

11. It was generally recognized that the introduction of advanced technology was desirable in cases where it could contribute to enhancing efficiency and lead to savings. In fact, organizations had, for example, acquired compactus equipment and were using microform and computer-based systems and planned to continue along the lines suggested in the recommendations, subject to the availability of funds.

Recommendation 7: The optical-disc-based system being most promising in resolving the problems of storage and retrieval of documentation, a test project of this system should be initiated as soon as possible. To achieve maximum efficiency and savings, this project should be authorized for the United Nations Office at Geneva, both in the Publications and Library Services where the storage facilities are the most deplorable

Recommendation 8: The organizations of the United Nations system should temporarily postpone acquiring optical-disc technology, especially in the field of storage and retrieval, so as to see the results of a test project at the United Nations Office at Geneva in order to acquire a system which can interface existing and future technologies and permit using documentation and facilities of other organizations

12. There was a good deal of interest expressed in the possibility of a test project of optical-disc technology being carried out at the United Nations Office at Geneva and it was hoped that the outcome and evaluation of such a test would be shared with organizations of the system. FAO and the World Bank have been looking into the potential applications of various types of optical-disc systems. In fact, the World Bank had prepared a project plan for the transfer of its paper-based records and archival storage to an optical-disc-based system. The project was not implemented, however, because of the high projected cost and ill-defined benefits. At IMF, it is felt that while optical-disc-based systems involve an exciting technology, it is a technology that has not been adequately tested with regard to the uses proposed in the JIU report. In addition, in view of the high cost of the systems, a careful cost-benefit analysis must be done before implementation is considered. IMF also suggests that several small-scale pilot projects be undertaken within the United Nations system, before a decision is made to implement a project of the magnitude of that proposed for the United Nations Office at Geneva.

13. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), however, has been actively considering the installation of an optical-disc system for archiving purposes and is not in a position to await the results of the proposed test project. WIPO is ready to communicate its experience with the installation and functioning of equipment to JIU and to the organizations of the United Nations system.

14. In the light of the interest expressed by several organizations in exploring the potential of optical-disc technology in a variety of applications, it was

decided that information and experience should be exchanged regularly by participants in the Inter-Agency meetings on the progress and evaluation of any pilot projects or installations in their organizations.

Recommendation 9

- (a) For the United Nations Office at Geneva, authorization should be given to finance this test project (acquisition, installation, maintenance and operation of the equipment) by redeploying resources within the 1986-1987 budget and by not applying to the Publishing Service and Library any new cut or deferment in the approved 1986-1987 appropriations, should such measures be deemed necessary again in 1987 to cope with the financial crisis of the Organization
- (b) The agreement should be made with the Park Avenue Warehouse landlord to secure the buy-out money for moving it and the Long Island City Warehouse to the Headquarters
- (c) An appeal should be launched to Member States either to make advance contributions to the regular budget (to be deducted from their future contributions) or voluntary contributions for the purpose of introducing the optical-disc-based system

15. Reference is made to paragraphs 8, 9, 19 and 20 of the comments of the Secretary-General on the JIU report (A/42/295, annex).
