

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/9795/Add.1
4 November 1974

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-ninth session
Agenda items 77 and 76

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the pattern of conferences of the United Nations and the possibilities for more rational and economic use of its conference resources

Comments of the Secretary-General and of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

I. COMMENTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1. The Secretary-General wishes to express his appreciation to the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) for presenting in so well-ordered and well-documented a report a history of the evolution of the present pattern of conferences and meetings, an exposition of the problems - largely those of over-programming and insufficient co-ordination of decisions - that exist at the present time, and a set of conclusions, recommendations and suggestions that, although in some respects tentative or guarded, will, if implemented, be likely to effect a considerable improvement in the present situation.

2. In the discussions at the twenty-seventh session of the General Assembly, which led to the request for the JIU report, the request was originally made that the report should be prepared by the Secretary-General; the Secretary-General was reluctant to do so, because of the emphasis laid on preparing a model pattern of conferences. The Secretary-General believed that his previous reports to the General Assembly had made it clear that from the administrative and financial point of view the model pattern was that in which the meetings of bodies took place at the office at which the substantive secretariat servicing the body had its normal duty station. Recognizing that there are factors of a political nature, of promoting interest in United Nations activities, or of convenience to groups of delegations that might call for derogations from that principle, the Secretary-General believed that the essential problem was, and is, the co-ordination of the decisions of intergovernmental bodies by the General Assembly itself or by a Committee especially established for that purpose. The Secretary-General therefore welcomed an independent inquiry by the JIU.

3. The Secretary-General is not surprised to note that the Inspectors had difficulty in trying to construct a "model pattern of conferences" and have reached the conclusion that the important principle is that the General Assembly, acting on the recommendation of the Fifth Committee, must have the last word with respect to the convening, timing and location of conferences.
4. The Secretary-General endorses the recommendation of the Inspectors calling for the establishment of a standing committee on conferences. In the light of the experience of the past Committee on Conferences, it can be expected to work well only if its terms of reference provide it with the powers of recommendation and decision proposed by the Inspectors and if the members are prepared to exercise those powers and are supported by the General Assembly.
5. The Inspectors have stressed the limitations on the over-all programme of conferences imposed by the current shortage of conference staff, particularly interpretation staff. This is a problem which has become significantly more acute during the period in which the Inspectors were preparing their report and has reached near-crisis proportions this year. The Secretary-General has warned for some years of shortages in trained conference staff, but with some difficulty the essential services have been provided for all major conference activities. However, in the present climate of greater international co-operation and of increased multinational discussion both within and outside the United Nations system, the conference services of the United Nations are under a continuous and severe pressure. Events at the recent sixth special session of the General Assembly are but one indication that it is not practical to expand the conference programmes further at this stage. The Secretary-General concurs with the recommendation of the Inspectors to that effect. Obviously, in the longer term the scale of the United Nations programme of conferences must be determined at the level which the membership, acting collectively in the General Assembly, decide to be of the maximum benefit in relation to the very considerable costs involved. In arriving at this decision, the principle must be recognized that any increase in the level of programmes will have to be matched by a corresponding increase in services and, hence, in costs.
6. In the light of the very practical suggestions made by the Inspectors concerning the placing of a larger proportion of conference staff on a full-time basis and concerning the expansion of training schemes for such staff, the Secretary-General will endeavour to remove existing shortages and expand the permanent conference staff to the degree authorized by the General Assembly in relation to the desired level of conferences. He has already instituted practical steps to expand training schemes and will make further proposals in connexion with future estimates. Discussions have been held with the specialized agencies, which, as the Inspectors have noted, face similar problems. To alleviate the worst shortages, the Secretary-General also seeks the co-operation of Member States whose nationals may have the necessary language skills in providing for United Nations needs in their own training schemes for interpreters and translators. The existing training scheme in Moscow provides an example.
7. In the short run, the Secretary-General sees no alternative to the rationing of the limited conference facilities amongst the various fields of United Nations

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activity. The Inspectors, noting complete non-observance of the rule restricting major conferences to one a year, have recommended that there should be only one conference a year in each of five major fields of activity, and that there should be no more than three such conferences each year until the present shortage of interpretation staff is eliminated. The Secretary-General supports this limitation as far as it goes, while noting that there is much variation in the requirements for particular conferences. More generally, in the light of the situation existing at Headquarters this year, the Secretary-General believes that it would be worth while to consider a quota system for meetings, whether recurrent or special, in each major field. In such a quota system, there would have to be a substantial margin for meetings of the Security Council, because of the relevant provisions of the Charter, and for other unforeseen contingencies, since, in the present condition of the free-lance market, it is no longer practicable to recruit short-term staff in large numbers. The proposed committee on conferences would be well qualified to establish the basic system of quotas on an annual or biennial basis and, in case of emergencies, to assign priorities within the approved programme.

8. In part VI of its report, JIU deals with the question of the inclusion of Vienna in the United Nations pattern of conferences. The Secretary-General has nothing to add to the Inspectors' analysis of the situation. The Joint Inspection Unit recommends that the potential of Vienna as a major United Nations conference centre should be tested by authorizing certain meetings to be held there over the period 1975-1977. The Secretary-General concurs. To determine which of the bodies referred to in the JIU recommendation should meet in Vienna, and when, would require consultations with the bodies and with the Austrian Government, which, with the approval of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General will pursue. In this respect, the Secretary-General notes that, for calculation of the additional costs to be borne by the Austrian Government, Geneva would be the base for the bodies referred to. He further believes that since, for practical reasons, the possibility of any major special conference to meet at Headquarters has become very limited it would be reasonable during this experimental period to assume Geneva as the costing base for any conference of this nature.

9. In this connexion, also, the Secretary-General has noted the estimate of the Austrian Government, in paragraph 17 of its revised memorandum (A/9589/Rev.1), that "in view of the actual growth rate of staff of UNIDO and IAEA the Austrian Government has come to the conclusion that there will be space for the accommodation of about 500 persons in addition to the IAEA and UNIDO staff". He assumes that, in the light of its previous expressions on this point, the General Assembly would wish him to explore with the Austrian Government the maximum possible use of the facilities which are being so generously offered and will therefore consult further with that Government in this regard.

10. There are other more detailed recommendations of the Inspectors on which, as these matters would be subject to examination by the proposed standing committee on conferences, the Secretary-General does not feel it appropriate to comment at

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this stage. He and his representatives will be ready to supply members with additional comments and information during the twenty-ninth session. Certain statistical information, supplementary to that contained in the JIU report, is annexed to the present report. In particular, the information will illustrate current trends not only globally, but by major fields of activity. 1/

II. COMMENTS OF THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

11. The observations of the Joint Inspection Unit concerning meetings of the Governing Council of UNDP have been noted with interest and will be brought to the Council's attention, together with any decision which may be taken by the General Assembly thereon as well as any comments which may be made by ACABQ.

12. The particular passages of General Assembly resolutions 2478 (XXIII) and 2609 (XXIV) relating to meetings of the Governing Council were brought to the Council's attention at its seventh and ninth sessions in January 1969 and January 1970, respectively, in documents DP/L.97 and DP/L.119.

13. Prior to the adoption of General Assembly resolution 2478 (XXIII), the Governing Council, at its sixth session in June 1968, had reviewed the timing and periodicity of its sessions together with the question of the timely distribution of UNDP documents in all working languages, on the basis of a report by the Administrator of UNDP (DP/L.74). At that time, the pros and cons of holding one or two sessions a year, of holding both sessions at United Nations Headquarters, of holding a shorter January session in Geneva or elsewhere, or of continuing to have one session at Headquarters and the major session in Geneva were explored, as reflected in the Governing Council's report to the Economic and Social Council. 2/ After examining the question, the Council agreed to maintain the system of two sessions a year, in January and June as laid down in its rules of procedure, to abide by these rules with respect to the timely distribution of documents in required languages and to request the Administrator, after making suitable arrangements for a period of transition, namely the year 1969, to prepare the appropriate agenda for future sessions, with a view to arranging for a short January session and for a June session lasting approximately three weeks. 3/

14. As noted in the JIU report, the Governing Council again reviewed the question at its June 1973 session.

1/ The annexed material is available in limited quantities only; members of the Committee are therefore requested to bring their copies to the meetings.

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6A (E/4545), paras. 230-235.

3/ Ibid., para. 236.

15. With respect to future sessions of the Governing Council, the Administrator wishes to state that the Working Group on Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 2974 (XXVII), has recommended that the Governing Council establish a sessional committee to meet annually during the January session, commencing from 1976. The Governing Council, at its eighteenth session, held in Manila in June 1974, approved the Working Group's report in general and decided to transmit it to the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session and to consider at its forthcoming nineteenth session in January 1975 specific and detailed issues pertaining to the Working Group's recommendations in the light of the decision to be taken thereon by the General Assembly. 4/

4/ Ibid., Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 2A (E/5543/Rev.1), para. 224.

19 July 1974

Number of meetings held at Headquarters, by field of activity,

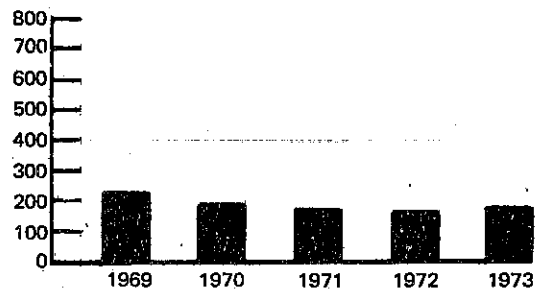
from 1969 to 1973

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973
General Assembly, its Main Committees and other related bodies	646	739	664	561	581
Political and Security Questions	329	226	305	350	545
Economic, Social and Human Rights Questions	571	680	596	668	718
Colonial and Trusteeship Questions	220	199	194	191	197
Legal Questions	105	102	102	128	114
Administrative and Financial Questions	216	206	211	292	212
Others -	<u>596</u>	<u>635</u>	<u>593</u>	<u>495</u>	<u>586</u>
Grand Total	<u>2,683</u>	<u>2,787</u>	<u>2,665</u>	<u>2,685</u>	<u>2,953</u>

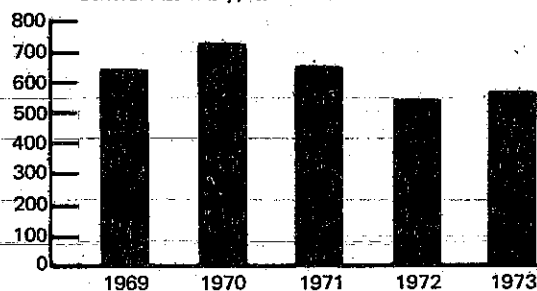
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Number of meetings held at Headquarters,
by field of activity,
from 1969 to 1973

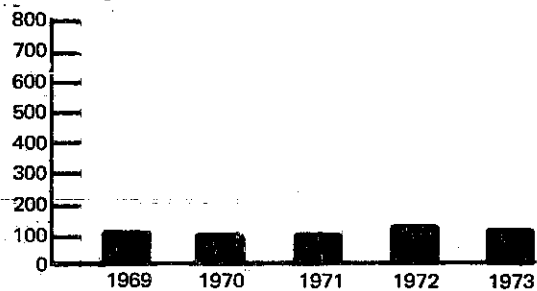
Colonial and Trusteeship Questions



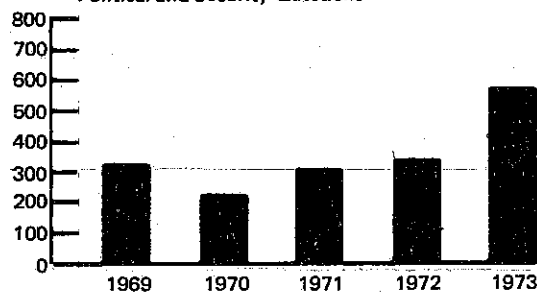
General Assembly, its Main Committees and other related bodies



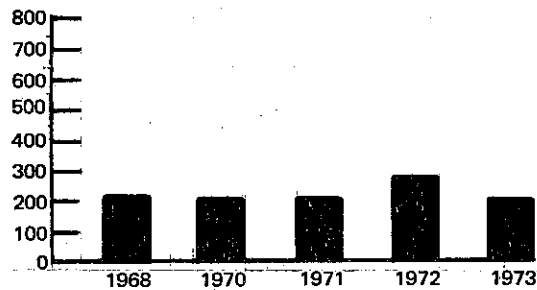
Legal Questions



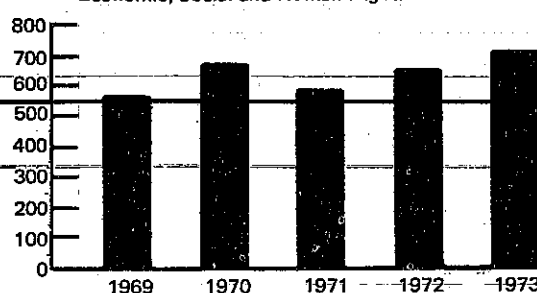
Political and Security Questions



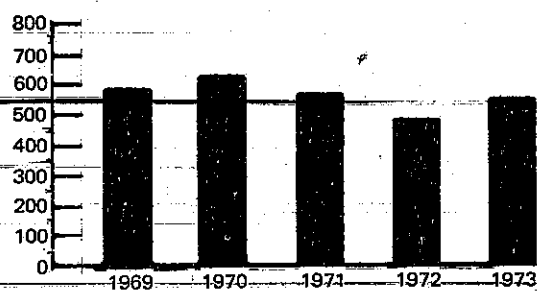
Administrative and Financial Questions



Economic, Social and Human Rights Questions



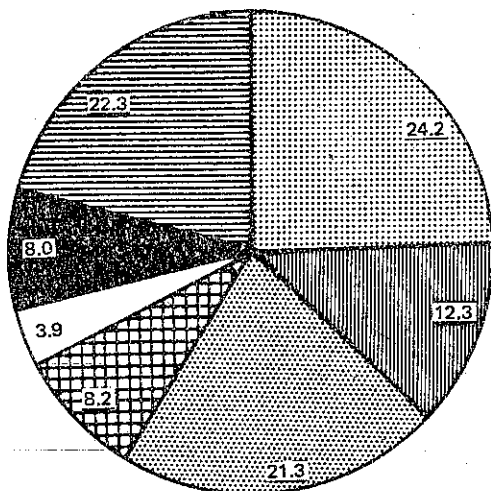
Others —



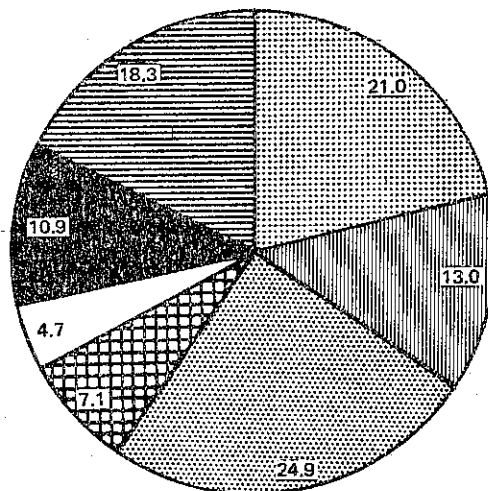
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Comparison of total number of meetings, by field of activity
held at Headquarters from 1969 to 1973

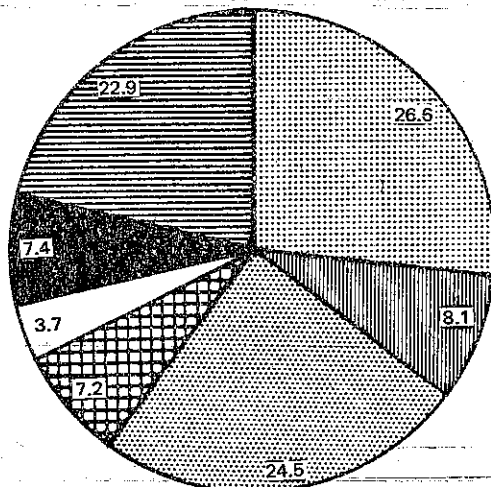
1969



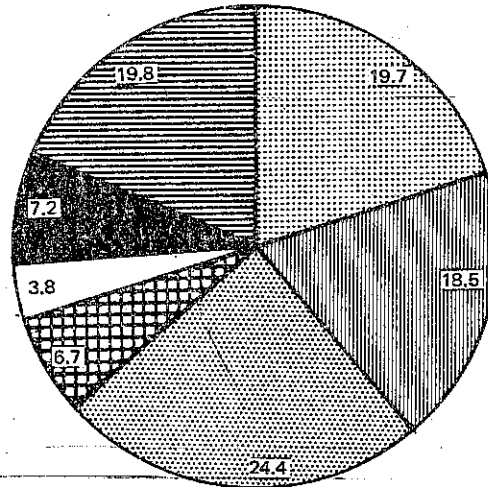
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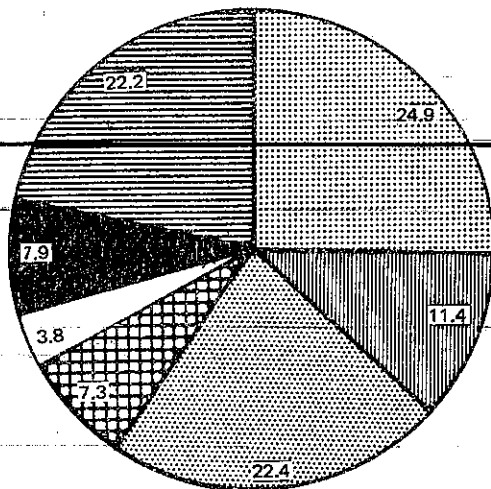
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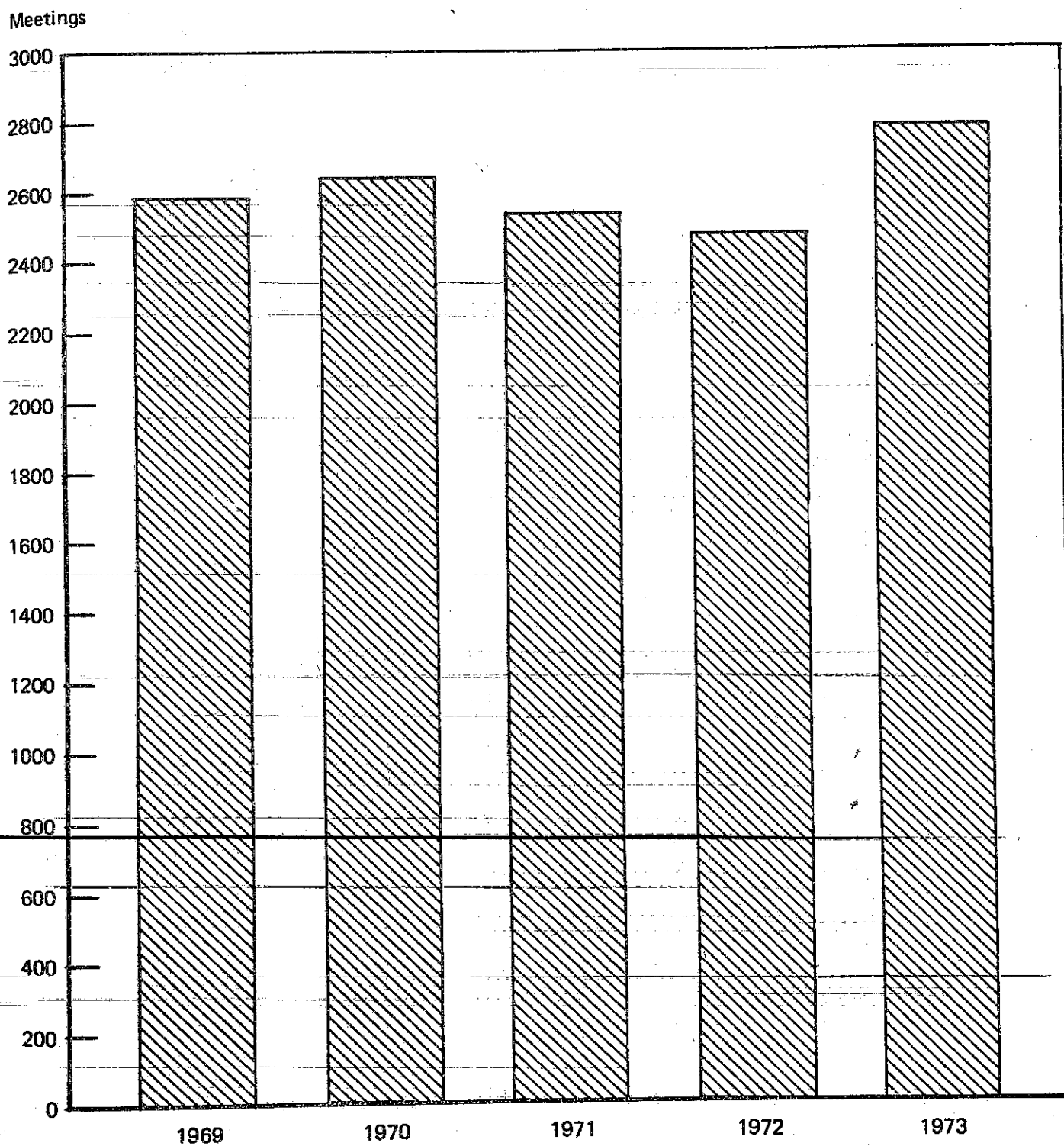


-  General Assembly, its Main Committees and other related bodies
-  Political and Security questions
-  Economic, social and human rights questions
-  Colonial and trusteeship questions
-  Legal questions
-  Administrative and financial questions
-  Other

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COMPARISON OF TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD AT HEADQUARTERS
FROM 1969 TO 1973

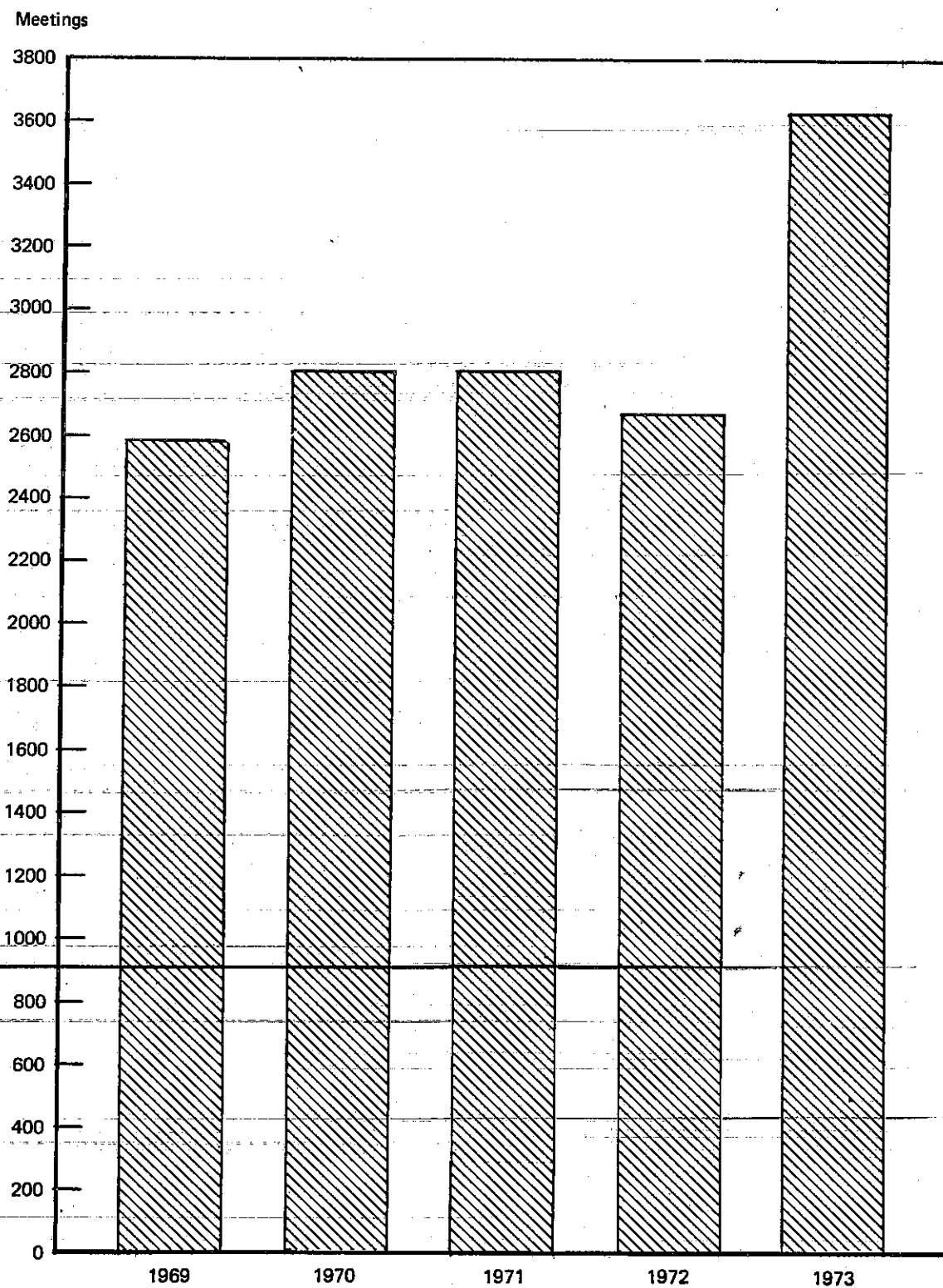
With interpretation service



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COMPARISON OF TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD AT THE
GENEVA OFFICE* FROM 1969 TO 1973

With interpretation service



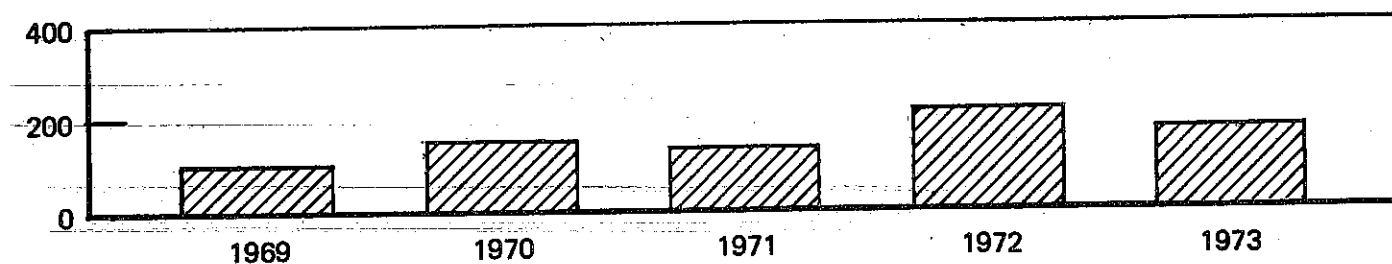
* includes meetings of ECE and subsidiary bodies (794 in 1973)

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**COMPARISON OF TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD AT HEADQUARTERS
FROM 1969 TO 1973**

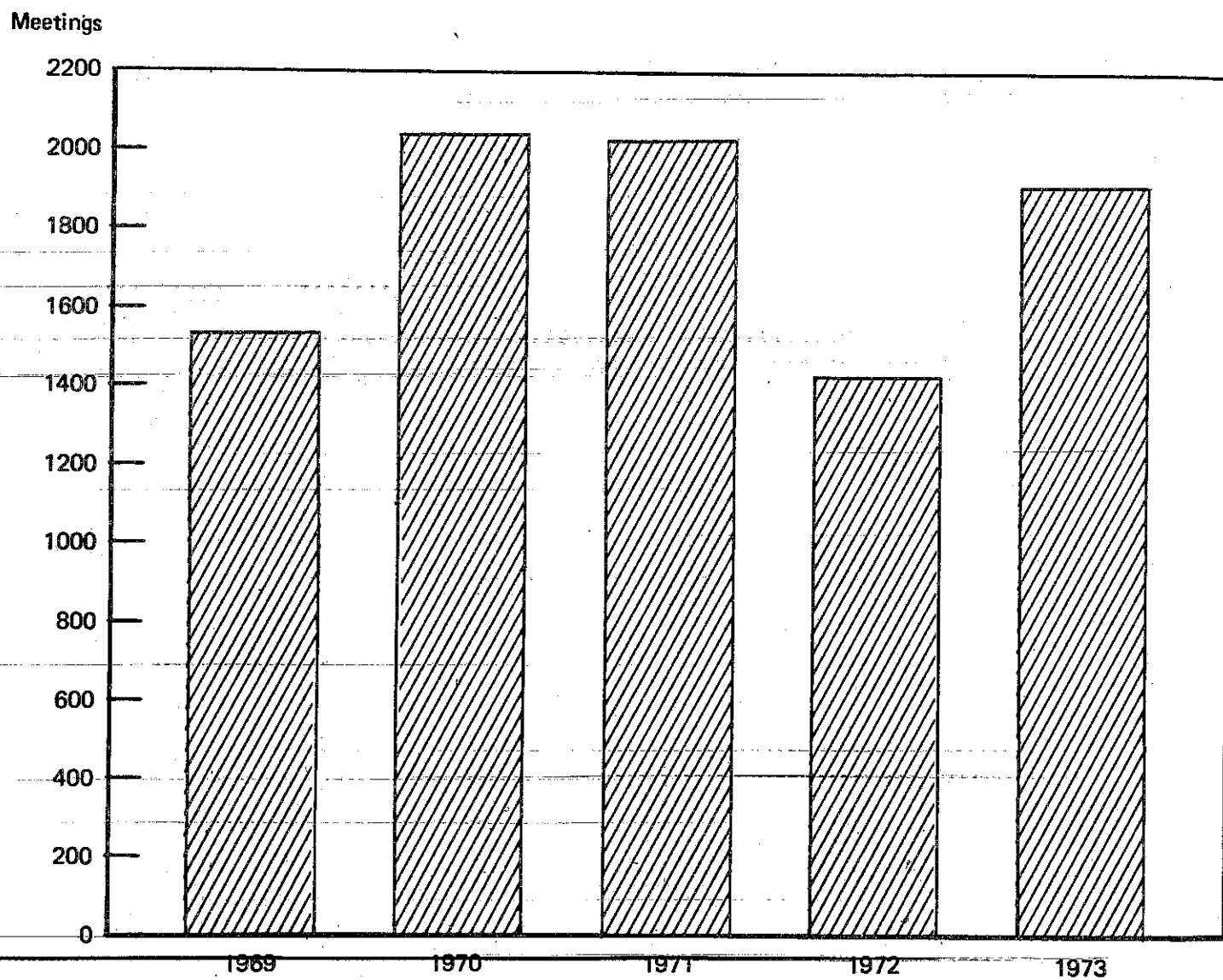
Without interpretation service

Meetings



COMPARISON OF TOTAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS HELD AT THE
GENEVA OFFICE FROM 1969 TO 1973

Without interpretation service



UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/9795/Add.2
4 November 1974

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twenty-ninth session
Agenda items 77 and 76

PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the pattern of conferences
of the United Nations and the possibilities for more rational and
economic use of its conference resources

Comments of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the pattern of conferences of the United Nations and the possibilities for more rational and economic use of its conference (A/9795) and the comments of the Secretary-General and of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme on that report (A/9795/Add.1).
2. In chapter VII of their report (Summary of principal conclusions, recommendations and suggestions) the Inspectors say that, in their opinion, "the United Nations conference programme is dynamic and it cannot be rationalized or controlled for any significant period merely by constructing a model pattern of conferences. It requires close governmental attention and supervision on a continuing basis." Since it is not possible to have a rational conference programme if individual United Nations bodies are permitted to make the final determination as to when, where and for how long they will meet, final determination must be made by the General Assembly, upon the recommendation of its Fifth Committee. The Inspectors recommend that in that task the latter be assisted by a committee on conferences endowed with adequate terms of reference. They also make suggestions on the control of the subsidiary bodies and their meeting programmes.
3. The Inspectors make a number of recommendations and suggestions on how to even out the conference programme at Geneva and solve - on both a short-term and a long-term basis - the problem of providing interpretation services. They express the view that until such time as those efforts bear fruit, the present over-all level of the United Nations conference programme should not be significantly

increased. They suggest, however, that the number of major (in the sense of participation by all Member States) special conferences be limited initially to no more than three a year (given the non-observance of the provision of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV)), and to no more than five a year after the proposed committee on conferences has become operational.

4. The Inspectors suggest that the General Assembly might wish to test during the period 1975-1977 the potential of Vienna to become a major United Nations conference centre, inter alia, by authorizing Headquarters-based bodies which are now authorized to meet in Geneva to meet also in Vienna. They advocate the maintenance of the basic principle that United Nations bodies should normally meet where their substantive secretariats are located, and of the principle governing the payment of extra costs by Governments inviting United Nations to meet in their countries.

5. The Secretary-General endorses the Inspectors' recommendation calling for the establishment of a standing committee on conferences (A/9795/Add.1, para. 4); he also indicates that he will endeavour to remove existing shortages of conference staff (ibid., para. 6); and says that he concurs with the recommendation that the potential of Vienna as a major United Nations conference centre should be tested (ibid., para. 8). While he agrees that the Inspectors' conclusions, recommendations and suggestions, "although in some respects tentative or guarded, will, if implemented, be likely to affect a considerable improvement in the present situation", he refrains from commenting on the more detailed recommendations of the Inspectors on the ground that the matter would be subject to examination by the proposed committee on conferences (ibid., paras. 1 and 9). The Advisory Committee trusts that if such a committee is established the Secretary-General will make his detailed comments available to it; otherwise, they should be submitted to the Fifth Committee.

6. In the Secretary-General's opinion there is, in the short run, "no alternative to the rationing of the limited conference facilities amongst the various fields of United Nations activity". He expresses the belief that "it would be worth while to consider a quota system for meetings whether recurrent or special in each major field". According to him the proposed committee on conferences "would be well qualified to establish the basic system of quotas on an annual or biennial basis and, in case of emergencies, to assign priorities within the approved programme" (ibid., para. 7).

7. ~~The comments of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme~~ are directed to the programme of work of the Governing Council of UNDP.

8. The representatives of the Secretary-General informed the Advisory Committee that the growing volume and complexity of multilateral activity had placed a heavy strain on the conference resources of the United Nations, which had not been expanded proportionately to meet the increased demand for conference services. In recent years, the problem has been compounded by the addition of new languages for which interpretation and translation are required, the diversification of the locations of meetings and, finally, the growing competition from other international and intergovernmental organizations for staff with the requisite skills. The over-all shortage of qualified interpreters is particularly acute.

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9. The representatives of the Secretary-General also referred to the strain on the management capacity of the Department of Conference Services and the strain on Member States, especially those with small delegations. Such delegations have found it increasingly difficult to participate effectively in all the various meetings which have been organized and to assimilate the mounting documentation which those meetings have produced. The Advisory Committee recalls, in this connexion, that in two previous reports on publications and documentation in the United Nations (A/9731 and A/9189), the Secretary-General stressed the interrelationship between the volume of documentation which the Secretariat is called upon to produce in any one year and the calendar of conferences and meetings in that year. Therefore - as the Advisory Committee stated in its related report - "actions to control and limit documentation is inseparable from the decisions to be taken by the General Assembly on the various recommendations before it under agenda item 77 (Pattern of conferences), including the establishment of an over-all quota system for conferences and documentation" (A/9807, para. 3).
10. As shown in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, efforts to solve the problem date back to 1952 (A/9795, para. 29). Over the years, those efforts were directed to slowing the growth of conference activity and to achieving a more effective and rational use of conference resources at Headquarters and at Geneva through the establishment of a "model pattern of conferences". 1/
11. In their discussion of the reasons for the present difficulties, the Inspectors indicate, *inter alia*, that "many Governments appear to believe that there has been too great a proliferation of councils, boards, commissions, committees, working groups, advisory groups, etc. which hold meetings requiring servicing by the Secretariat and participation by governmental representatives" (*ibid.*, para. 33). They further indicate that subsidiary bodies make it difficult to maintain a rational conference programme, "not only by frequently departing from the programme approved by the General Assembly, but also by creating new subsidiary bodies ... which require conference servicing" (*ibid.*, para. 276).
12. The Inspectors note the attempt of the Economic and Social Council, at its fifty-fourth session, to deal with this problem. 2/ They recommend, accordingly, that the General Assembly take a decision similar to that of the Council providing that no subsidiary body of the General Assembly may create, standing or *ad hoc* intersessional subsidiary bodies without prior approval from the Assembly. The Advisory Committee supports that recommendation. The Committee

1/ General Assembly resolutions 2609 (XXIV), para. 6, and 2960 (XXVII), para. 5; also A/8868, para. 9.

2/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 1 (E/5367), "Decisions", item 19, p. 34.

agrees with the Inspectors that "the question whether particular subsidiary bodies should have been created or should continue in existence is both substantive and political and can be answered only by Member States" (A/9795, para. 34). Having regard, however, to the financial burden and strain on staff resources caused by the proliferation of subsidiary bodies, ^{3/} the Advisory Committee considers that their number, size and functions should be reviewed periodically by the parent bodies concerned.

13. Two other factors have compounded the strain on the conference resources of the United Nations. One of them is the proliferation of unofficial meetings: in 1973 this category included 280 meetings of regional groups (total duration 400.15 hours); 61 meetings of the Group of 77 (total duration 84.45 hours); 17 meetings of land-locked and shelf-locked countries (total duration 19.55 hours); 23 informal meetings of committees (total duration 43 hours); and 67 meetings of staff organs under chapter VIII of the Staff Regulations (total duration 111.40 hours). Unofficial meetings and press conferences accounted, in that year, for more than 20 per cent of all meetings held at Headquarters. Requests to the Secretariat to service unofficial meetings are often made at short notice; they are thus particularly difficult to accommodate and service.

14. The second contributing factor is the time lost due to late starting of meetings. In 1973, according to statistics prepared by the Department of Conference Services, 1087.22 hours of conference time were lost at Headquarters in that way. Late starting partly accounts for the 481.50 hours of overtime required during that year; it also leads to an increase in the total number of meetings called to enable the bodies concerned to complete the consideration of their agendas. This practice entails the waste of costly services and valuable resources. The Committee draws attention to the need for all bodies to comply with the conclusions of the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly designed to secure maximum utilization of available time. ^{4/}

15. In the Committee's view, the scarcity of resources and the geographical spread of conference activity greatly enhance the importance of consultations and co-ordination between Headquarters and Geneva at all stages of development and implementation of the programmes of conferences. The JIU report makes a detailed analysis of this problem and recommendations for improvement (A/9795, paras. 191-207 and p. 167, item 6). Where appropriate, such co-ordination should include UNIDO and the regional commissions. Likewise,

^{3/} According to statistics for 1973 provided to the Committee by the Department of Conference Services, meetings of official subsidiary bodies at Headquarters totalled 3,000 hours.

^{4/} Rules of procedure of the General Assembly, annex V, section VI.

co-ordination and consultation on a continuing basis should take place between the United Nations and the various specialized agencies. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit indicates that interagency arrangements for consultations and co-ordination have been defective and that they should be strengthened (A/9795, paras. 214-233). 5/ The representatives of the Secretary-General have informed the Advisory Committee that steps have now been taken to intensify interagency consultations in this area.

16. In paragraph 175 of their report, the Inspectors state that, at least in so far as the United Nations is concerned, the time has undoubtedly come to recognize that reliance on free-lance interpretation staff is not appropriate in the case of a programme of today's size at Geneva. While the Advisory Committee subscribes to that view, it believes that further study is needed of the relationship between the volume and distribution of conferences and meetings and the optimum size of the permanent language staff. The greater the concentration of conference activity during particular times of the year, the more necessary it becomes for organizations to rely on free-lance staff; conversely, a more even spread of the conference workload makes it possible for the organizations to provide a greater proportion of requirements from established resources. Figures furnished to the Advisory Committee by the World Health Organization suggest that unless an organization can provide employment for at least 37 weeks in a year it is more economical to engage free-lance language staff as needed than to add permanent posts. Because WHO's year-round volume of meetings does not provide such a level of employment for interpreters, that Organization is in process of reducing its permanent interpretation staff. Increased reliance on free-lance language staff presents no difficulties for WHO, which can plan its conference schedule well ahead. From the point of view of the system as a whole, however, a policy of co-operative arrangements involving permanent staff may be more advantageous. The Advisory Committee recommends that this question be studied under the auspices of ACC.

17. With regard to a more rational pattern of conferences, the thrust of the proposals put forward by the Inspectors is "to reduce the uneconomic accumulation of meetings during particular periods of the year and to bring about a more effective use of the conference resources of the United Nations" (*ibid.*, p. 168, item 8). They also stress the need for strict adherence to the principle in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) that, apart from certain stated exceptions, "United Nations bodies should plan to meet at their respective established headquarters". They show that non-observance of this principle not only entails additional costs (*ibid.*, paras. 242 and 243), but also often causes "administrative disruption" (*ibid.*, para. 236). According to the Inspectors, these factors were not always accorded their full weight in relevant decisions, and the principle requiring that "the additional costs" should be borne by the host Government was sometimes applied in a manner designed to limit the costs to be paid by the inviting Government (*ibid.*, para. 400).

5/ The Advisory Committee understands that the interagency meeting on language arrangements, documentation and publications held in July 1974 under the auspices of ACC was only the second such meeting and that five years had elapsed since the first meeting in the series.

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18. The Advisory Committee endorses the above approach of the JIU report. It also agrees with the Inspectors' suggestions designed to reduce the accumulation of meetings at particular locations during certain months in the year.

19. Noting the non-observance by the General Assembly of paragraph 11 of its resolution 2609 (XXIV) limiting major conferences to one a year, the Inspectors favour a more pragmatic approach (A/9795, para. 439), namely, to limit major special conferences - i.e. conferences, other than regular meetings, in which all Member States participate - to one a year for each of five major fields of activity, 6/ though for the initial period, until present staff shortages are eliminated, they would reduce the number further to a total of three such meetings a year.

20. The Secretary-General has given qualified support to this proposal, noting, at the same time, the wide variations that exist in the servicing requirements for particular conferences.

21. Paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) limited major special conferences to one a year. As it has not been possible for the General Assembly to adhere to that limitation, a fact which is reflected in the number of major special conferences convened in recent years, 7/ the Assembly may choose to revise the rule. The Advisory Committee is of the opinion that, given the shortage of both financial and staff resources, it is desirable for the present to limit major special conferences to a maximum of three, as recommended by the Inspectors. Moreover, once an upper limit to the number of major special conferences in any one year is set, the General Assembly should insist on its strict enforcement.

22. In the light of the situation existing at Headquarters this year, the Secretary-General believes that it would be worth while to consider a quota system for each of the major fields of activity extending to both special and recurrent meetings, after allowing a substantial margin for meetings of the Security Council and for unforeseen contingencies.

23. The Advisory Committee sees merit in this idea. However, in its view one of the principal difficulties in the way of any system of quotas for individual major fields is the existence of a multiplicity of organs, often autonomous or semi-autonomous and invested with broad and mutually overlapping terms of reference. The question therefore arises how to reconcile the decisions those organs take independently of each other.

24. The Advisory Committee was given to understand by representatives of the Secretary-General that a de facto ceiling on conference activity is imposed in the last analysis by the availability of servicing personnel (including free-lance staff) with the requisite skills. The scarcity of those skills renders some form of rationing inevitable, at any rate in the short run.

6/ The five programme sectors tentatively identified by the Inspectors are: political (including decolonization questions), scientific, economic, social and legal (A/9795, para. 444).

7/ Three in 1970, six in 1971, three in 1972, five in 1973 and four approved for 1974.

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Proposed establishment of a committee on conferences

25. Both the Secretary-General and the Inspectors make their respective recommendations conditional on the establishment of a committee on conferences. According to the former, one of its major functions would be to establish the basic system of quotas on an annual and biennial basis and, in case of emergencies, to assign priorities within the approved programme. According to the latter the new committee's task would be to elaborate and to enforce a calendar of conferences. Both the Inspectors and the Secretary-General recognize the problems attendant on the establishment and operation of such a body. The Inspectors admit that their initial reaction had been to doubt the wisdom of establishing such a committee in the light of experience; but that, having reviewed possible alternatives, they conclude that a committee on conferences, properly staffed and possessing adequate authority, provided the best hope (A/9795, paras. 465-484).

~~26. The Advisory Committee would see merit in the creation of the proposed committee on conferences only if it were properly structured, endowed with real powers and vested with authority, which larger representative bodies are prepared to respect.~~

27. The two alternatives open to the United Nations are to increase the conference-servicing staff (with a consequential increase in budgetary requirements) or to reduce the volume of conferences by deleting those of marginal usefulness. However, it will be impossible for the Organization, at least in the short run, to engage the staff needed to service the expected volume of conferences and meetings. As the Committee sees it, whether a quota system or other forms of rationing are adopted, the critical decisions with which the proposed committee on conferences would be confronted would not relate primarily to the development and formulation of a coherent calendar, but rather to the task of dealing with requests for deviations from the calendar once it has been established and approved by the General Assembly. Given that such requests would often come between sessions of the Assembly, the proposed committee on conferences would be required to act on the Assembly's behalf. To do so successfully, it would require the powers of decision outlined in item 3e of chapter VII of the JIU report (*ibid.*, p. 165). Otherwise, the Committee would quickly become no more than an ineffective "buffer" between the Secretariat and claimants for its services.

~~28. The reasons for the lack of success of the previous Committee on Conferences are contained in the extract from the last report of that Committee, which is annexed to the present report. In the light of that experience, the Advisory Committee would not favour the establishment of a new body with terms of reference similar to those of its predecessor. A necessary precondition for its establishment should be approval in full by the General Assembly of the JIU recommendations as to the powers of the committee. Even then, it is by no means certain that the committee would, in practice, be allowed to exercise its powers effectively by the organs among whose competing claims it would have to mediate, and provision for early review of its effectiveness should be made.~~

29. The Advisory Committee agrees with the Inspectors that, to be effective, the proposed committee on conferences should be compact in size.

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Inclusion of Vienna in the pattern of conferences

30. Under cover of a letter dated 4 April 1974, the Permanent Representative of Austria transmitted to the Secretary-General a "memorandum on the inclusion of Vienna in a pattern of conferences and on the accommodation of additional units of the United Nations Secretariat in Vienna".

31. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions visited Vienna from 27 to 31 May 1974. It held meetings with the representatives of the Austrian authorities - whom it wishes to thank for their assistance and co-operation - and also with the Director-General of IAEA and with representatives of the Executive Director of UNIDO. The Committee had previously been given a preview of the relevant parts of the JIU report on the pattern of conferences and this facilitated its work.

32. Subsequent to and consequential upon the discussions mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the Austrian Government submitted under cover of a letter dated 27 September 1974 the revised memorandum which is now before the Committee (A/9589/Rev.1).

33. As will be evident from the title of the document, the memorandum deals with two questions which, although they are to some extent interrelated, fall to be considered under different agenda items. In this report, the Advisory Committee addresses itself primarily to the use of Vienna as a conference centre. The Committee cannot report on the question of the possible accommodation of additional units of the United Nations in Vienna until after the Secretary-General has assessed the implications of that proposal and has in particular established what security of tenure would be afforded to the United Nations were the offer of the Austrian Government accepted.

34. The international conference centre now under construction at Donaupark is part of the United Nations complex originally designed to accommodate IAEA and UNIDO. The Advisory Committee understands that the area to be provided does not differ significantly from that originally proposed for those two bodies. Its extent is described in paragraphs 11-13 of the Austrian memorandum. The details about the capacity of the conference rooms should, however, be read in conjunction with footnote 78 of the JIU report, since it would appear that if the usual United Nations seating arrangements are retained the number of delegations which could be accommodated is somewhat less than might be inferred from the data given in the Austrian memorandum.

35. In stating the foregoing, the Advisory Committee does not seek to imply that spare capacity in the international conference centre would not exist. Indeed, it is apparent from paragraphs 511-514 of the JIU report that because of the intermittent nature of the meetings of UNIDO and IAEA it would be possible to house conferences and meetings of other United Nations bodies during substantial periods of the year.

36. For the reasons given in paragraph 487 of the JIU report, the basic issue is

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not whether Vienna should be included in the United Nations pattern of conferences; the presence there of UNIDO and United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation makes such inclusion inevitable. What is at issue is, as the Inspectors state, whether Vienna should be placed on a level comparable to that of New York and Geneva. It is to that issue that the Advisory Committee addresses itself in the following paragraphs.

37. During its visit to Vienna, the Committee was impressed by the scale of the Donaupark project, which is only being made possible by the generosity of the Austrian Government. Nothing in the succeeding comments should therefore be construed as calling into question that generosity. At the same time, the Advisory Committee believes that it would be failing in its responsibilities to the General Assembly if it did not examine all the facets and consequences of acceptance of the offer contained in paragraph 15 of the Austrian memorandum.

38. Acceptance of that offer would obviously be dependent on the General Assembly satisfying itself that there is a need for a third conference centre comparable to those now existing in New York and Geneva. Following completion of the new wing at the Palais des Nations, conference rooms in Geneva are not used to capacity. The more immediate need is for conference staff rather than conference rooms, and there is no assurance that such staff would be more readily available in Vienna than in Geneva. As the Inspectors state in paragraph 502 of their report, it is currently necessary to bring in interpreters from elsewhere, especially Geneva, for any sizable meetings in Vienna. The Committee recognizes, however, that it is possible that the situation may change by 1978 (when the Donaupark centre is due to be completed) both as regards the availability of interpreters and the United Nations over-all requirements of conference space. On the other hand, if the present tendency to convene United Nations conferences at places remote from their headquarters persists the existing conference areas available in New York and Geneva could continue to be more than sufficient for some time to come.

39. The administrative and financial implications of making Vienna the third conference centre are difficult to assess at this juncture. The United Nations (as the parent organization of UNIDO) and IAEA will in any event be jointly responsible for the cost of equipping and maintaining the conference centre, which is being provided virtually rent free by the Austrian Government. Acceptance of that Government's offer would not therefore add materially to the over-all cost. It would, however, affect the distribution of the cost between the United Nations and IAEA, as the former would have a proportionately greater use of the centre and presumably, therefore, would be expected to pay a greater share of the cost.

40. As indicated in paragraph 16 of their memorandum, the Austrian Government would continue to pay the additional cost (over Geneva but not over New York) of holding conferences in Vienna pending completion of the Donaupark centre in 1978. Thereafter the matter would, according to that memorandum, be the subject for further consideration in the light of the definitive status of the centre and changes in the United Nations presence in Vienna. Extra costs are therefore ~~xxx~~ likely to fall on the United Nations as from 1978, but there are too many variable factors to permit an assessment of their magnitude at the present time. A realistic basis for such calculations will not exist until it is decided whether and which additional United Nations units should be situated in Vienna.

41. A question concerning the availability of the conference centre for United Nations meetings also needs to be resolved, since the offer contained in paragraph 15 of the Austrian Government's memorandum is conditional upon priority being given to the requirements of IAEA.

42. The recommendations contained in paragraph 521 of the JIU report should be considered in the context of the foregoing remarks. The Advisory Committee accepts those recommendations on the understanding that the consultations between the United Nations and the Austrian Government and IAEA should be of an exploratory nature and should not be considered as an acceptance - explicit or implicit - of the Austrian offer. Only when those consultations have been completed will the Secretary-General be able to provide a proper assessment of the administrative and budgetary conclusions which will flow from the acceptance of the offer.

43. In paragraph 8 of his comments on the JIU report, the Secretary-General concurs in the Inspectors' recommendation that the potential of Vienna as a major United Nations conference centre should be tested by authorizing certain meetings to be held there during the period 1975-1977. In this connexion, the Advisory Committee points out that the experiment would have its limitations because many of the conditions now prevailing in Vienna would be changed after the completion of the conference centre in 1978. Moreover, the Committee notes that, as a substantial number of conferences are already held each year in Vienna, the means of testing the potential of Vienna as a conference centre can already be said to exist. That is not to say that the Advisory Committee opposes the holding of additional conferences in Vienna if the conditions contained in paragraph 501 and discussed in paragraph 502 of the JIU report can be met. The Committee believes, however, that pending clarification of the main issues discussed in the preceding paragraphs of this report such conferences should continue to be the subject of invitation by the Austrian Government and acceptance by the United Nations or other bodies concerned. As to the assessment of extra cost, the Advisory Committee accepts that Geneva should be regarded as the base, not only for Geneva-based bodies but any major special conference held in Vienna. In the Committee's opinion, however, that formula would not be appropriate if for any reason a New York-based body which is not now authorized to meet away from Headquarters were to meet in Vienna.

Conclusions and recommendations

44. ~~Subject to the observations in this report and in particular to the willingness of Member States to give the proposed committee on conferences the requisite powers of decision, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the major recommendations contained in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, more specifically of the following:~~

(1) Governmental supervision of the conference programme on a continuing basis should be reinforced, by strengthening over-all control by the General Assembly upon recommendations by the Fifth Committee.

(2) A new committee on conferences should be set up with powers to recommend
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to the General Assembly an annual calendar of conferences and to act on the General Assembly's behalf in dealing with requested departures from the calendar between sessions of the General Assembly.

(3) The Secretariat, in co-operation with the specialized agencies, should arrange for more effective training programmes for interpreters and translators; should broaden their recruitment policies and intensify their recruitment efforts seeking governmental assistance as necessary.

(4) Co-ordination within the United Nations and with the specialized agencies should be strengthened.

(5) United Nations bodies should normally meet at the location of the headquarters of their respective substantive secretariats.

(6) The United Nations should maintain and strictly enforce the principle requiring Governments which invite United Nations bodies to meet in their countries to defray the additional costs involved.

(7) Major special conferences should be limited to a maximum of three a year.

(8) Steps should be taken to impose tighter control of subsidiary bodies by their parent bodies.

(9) The recommendations on the use of Vienna as a conference centre, contained in paragraph 521 of the JIU report, should be accepted on the understanding that the consultations between the United Nations and the Austrian Government and IAEA should be of an exploratory nature and should not be considered as an acceptance of the Austrian offer. Pending clarification of the issues involved, additional conferences to be held in Vienna should continue to be the subject of invitation by the Austrian Government and acceptance by the bodies concerned, the related extra costs being calculated in the manner stated in paragraph 43 above.

ANNEX

Extract from the report of the Committee on Conferences
to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session a/

22. In its reports to the General Assembly at its twenty-second and twenty-third sessions, the Committee described at some length the nature of the administrative and budgetary problems that face the United Nations as a consequence of the rapid expansion of the conference and meeting programme. With the creation of a number of new bodies, the problem has been seriously aggravated since the Committee last reported to the General Assembly. The Committee does not consider it necessary in its present report to elaborate again the dimensions of the problems created, for Member States and the Secretariat alike, by an unmanageable conference programme. The Committee regrets that it has not been able to make any substantial contribution towards the solution of this problem. In this connexion, it reiterates the view it expressed in its report to the twenty-third session of the General Assembly that it was, in the final analysis, the responsibility of Member States to take decisions, reflecting a sense of discipline, that would halt and reverse the steady trend towards an ineffective and unproductive conference programme. The Committee made a serious effort during its meetings last year to reduce the number and duration of conferences and the volume of documentation. These efforts produced some definite results which are listed in paragraphs 8 to 17 above. It should be possible for further progress to be made in this direction as soon as various subsidiary bodies which have not been able to consider reductions in their meetings programme and their documentation requirements do so and report their decisions under the provisions of paragraph 3 of resolution 2478 (XXIII). However, the Committee wishes to record its view that it would be the ultimate responsibility of the General Assembly to issue clear-cut and far-reaching directives calculated to bring the meetings and programme problems under effective control. It is against the background of such decisions as the General Assembly may wish to adopt that the future role of the Committee on Conferences can be considered. The Committee itself has examined this problem at some length, and its views on this matter are set forth below.

23. In the light of the fact that the three-year tenure of the Committee is due to expire at the end of 1969, and as the General Assembly will review its performance over the experimental period, the Committee considered it appropriate to examine its record over the period of its existence and to submit its views for consideration by the General Assembly.

24. In this connexion, the Committee recalled that it had been established with the aim of rationalizing the rapid and uncontrolled growth of the United Nations conference programme. The Committee is of the view that its efforts to bring about a more orderly and manageable calendar of conferences have not produced

a/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 26 (A/7626), paras. 22-27.

satisfactory results, and that the problem of an overcrowded programme of conferences has become, if anything, more serious since the Committee was first established.

25. The Committee had taken the view in its report to the twenty-third session of the General Assembly (A/7361) that it might be able to accomplish the task assigned to it by the General Assembly, if it could be established that all proposals for new conferences and meetings made during the regular session were subject to the approval of the Committee on Conferences and to final approval of the General Assembly and that such proposals made outside the regular session were subject to the concurrence of the Committee on Conferences. The General Assembly by paragraph 5 of resolution 2478 (XXIII) endorsed the first part of this recommendation but decided that proposals for changes in the approved calendar made outside the regular session should be subject to the recommendations of and not to the concurrence of the Committee on Conferences. In modifying the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences, the General Assembly appears to have been guided by the consideration that it would not wish to delegate authority to the Committee to make final decisions on proposals for changes in the approved calendar made in the intersessional period.

26. The Committee considered the situation arising from its new terms of reference at its meetings held early in the year. It was unable to determine as to which body other than the General Assembly, and specifically its Fifth Committee, might consider its recommendations in the period between regular sessions of the General Assembly. It nevertheless continued to consider communications concerning proposals for changes in the approved calendar received from various subsidiary bodies and to inform them about servicing possibilities at the times and places proposed for new meetings or extensions of existing meetings. In doing so, the Committee was clearly conscious that it did not enjoy the right either to approve or to reject proposals for changes in the calendar. In the light of the comments offered by the Committee, the bodies concerned proceeded to hold meetings on dates proposed and at places indicated without the prior approval of the General Assembly.

27. In regard to proposals for new meetings made during the regular session of the General Assembly, the Committee has merely been able to indicate at what times and places they could be held in the calendar of conferences submitted to the General Assembly for its approval, a function which could be adequately discharged by the Secretariat. Thus, even in regard to these proposals, the Committee has not found it possible to recommend any substantial modification of proposals submitted for its consideration. Factors other than those of an administrative and financial character would normally have to take priority in the determination of whether conferences and meetings should be held.