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Secretariat Organization and Procedures for Preparation of United Nations Special Conferences

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The United Nations offers its members a frame and environment in which they can co-operate in solving international problems and can harmonize actions to attain common goals. Special conferences convened by the United Nations have been an important part of this process since the 1950s. During the 1970s, however, they reached new prominence in focusing on such themes as the law of the sea, environment, population, habitat, apartheid, and water. The Secretariat estimated in April 1980 (A/35/32) that at least 30 such global conferences had taken place within the framework of the United Nations since 1972, at a cost of hundreds of millions of dollars.

2. The vague nature of these estimates is due in part to the lack of an official definition of a "special conference". During the 1960s the general elements of a definition were worked out, but in intergovernmental debates over what constituted a "major" special conference it was determined that a useful working definition relevant to all situations was not possible. More recently, a 1980 Secretary-General's report on special conferences (A/AC.172/28, paragraph 2) noted that no agreed definition appeared to exist. It offered a definition, which the Inspectors also use for this report, of a special conference as

"... a conference that is not part of the regular recurrent conference programme of a biennium, but that is convened in response to a specific resolution of the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council, for whose substantive preparation specific additional budgetary provisions are made and which all States are normally invited to attend. Such a conference usually extends over a period of a minimum of two to a maximum of four to six weeks and requires an intense level of planning and servicing".

3. This same report noted that most such conferences are either (a) legal and codification conferences to negotiate final agreement based on preliminary discussions, or (b) conferences to focus on single issues, usually economic, social and scientific, after preparatory work over a two to four year period. However, other types of special conferences also occur. The International Year of Disabled Persons (1981), with its special secretariat, international seminars and symposia, and plan of action, had many special conference characteristics. The International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa, held in Geneva in April 1981, was a type of special conference devoted primarily to consciousness-raising and pledging. The World Assembly on Aging scheduled for 1982 is a typical special conference, despite its title. Special sessions of the General Assembly and other inter-governmental bodies are a type of special conference.

4. Various informal lists of past special conferences of the United Nations show many other types of conferences, and do not all even include the same conferences. It is perhaps for these reasons that the Secretary-General, in response to a General Assembly request for draft standard procedures for special conferences, provided a report in 1981 on "United Nations conferences" which did not define "special conferences" at all. Instead, the draft rules were deemed "applicable to all conferences convened by the United Nations pursuant to a decision taken ... / by a / convening organ" (A/36/199, Annex, Rule 1).

5. However imprecise the concept, the topic of special conferences has been a concern of intergovernmental bodies for years. The 1963 Annual Report of the Secretary-General noted the growing number of special conferences since 1958, and strongly urged that no more than one major special conference of the United Nations be scheduled in any one year. The General Assembly adopted this limit in 1965 (resolution 2116(XX)) and repeated it in resolutions in 1968 and 1969, but the number of special conferences has continued to increase, with as many as half-a-dozen held in a single year.

6. In their 1974 report on the pattern of United Nations conferences and the more rational use of conference resources (A/9795), the Inspectors observed that this volume of special conferences placed a considerable burden on the limited conference resources of the United Nations. They joined ACABQ and others in searching for more realistic scheduling, programming and control practices for special conferences, and recommended that there should be no more than five "major" (all member governments) conferences in one year, with the regular conference programme cut back if necessary to service the special conferences approved by the General Assembly. The Assembly subsequently established a renewed Committee on Conferences with responsibility for advising it on the calendar of conferences, the optimum use of conference resources, and the co-ordination of conferences in the United Nations system, and asked it to take the JIU report into account.

7. In December 1977 the Assembly passed resolution 32/197 on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system to make it more fully capable of dealing with problems of international economic co-operation and development in a comprehensive and effective manner. Section III of the Annex to the resolution dealt with other forums for negotiations, including "ad hoc" world conferences, and their role in supporting, and being guided by, the overall policy framework established by the Assembly and ECOSOC. Other sections of the Annex established new intergovernmental, co-ordinative and servicing roles for special conferences in the economic and social sectors. These roles are discussed in the following chapters.

8. In 1979 the General Assembly again noted the strains on the capacity of the Secretariat to service conferences and meetings and on member States to participate actively in them, as well as the need to rationalize conference procedures and organization (resolution 34/150). Among other steps, it requested the Committee on Conferences to review the organization and servicing arrangements of past special conferences and their preparatory meetings in order to identify the most effective framework for such conferences in the future.

9. In a March 1980 report (A/AC.172/28) the Secretary-General stated that despite the past resolutions and recommendations on the impact of special conferences on the conference programme, little if any attempt had ever been made by inter-governmental bodies to develop a systematic framework for the most effective organization and servicing of all types of special conferences. The report analyzed the situation and suggested recommendations for the preparatory and conference phases of such conferences, and for their documentation. After detailed discussion, the Committee on Conferences adopted a set of special conference guidelines which it recommended to the General Assembly for approval.

10. In its resolution 35/10C of 3 November 1980, the General Assembly invited "Member States and United Nations organs, when considering the convening of special conferences, to ensure that the objectives of the proposed conference are such that they have not been achieved and cannot be pursued within a reasonable time-frame through the established intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations and the specialized agencies". It also established some new principles for special conferences, approved a brief set of guidelines for the preparation and conference phases, requested the Committee on Conferences to reconsider guidelines for the control and limitation of special conference documentation, and requested the Secretary-General to propose standard rules of procedure for special conferences. In addition, it requested the JIU to

"... undertake a study on the improvement of the Secretariat organization for special conferences, with a view to recommending procedures for reinforcing the efficiency and effectiveness of preparations for such conferences, and to submit its report, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session".

11. In March 1981 the Secretary-General reported on guidelines to control and limit documentation for special conferences (A/AC.172/48 and Corr.1). This report

the Committee on Conferences discussed, revised and submitted to the General Assembly. The Secretary-General also presented to the Assembly in September 1981 the requested report on draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations conferences (A/36/199). The report proposed a comprehensive set of 83 rules for the conduct of all conferences convened by inter-governmental organs, dealing primarily with the conference phase itself but including guidelines for the preparatory phase, documentation, and model conference agreements with host countries. The General Assembly approved guidelines to control and limit special conference documentation (resolution 36/117D), but deferred consideration of the draft standard rules of procedure to its thirty-seventh session in 1982 (decision 36/427).

12. In fulfilling the General Assembly request to the JIU, the Inspectors have taken into account these new reports, resolutions and guidelines. They have also analyzed documents, records, procedures, and experience of a sample of recent conferences: habitat (Vancouver, 1976), water (Mar del Plata, 1977), science and technology for development (Vienna, 1979), women (Copenhagen, 1980); new and renewable sources of energy (Nairobi, 1981) and least-developed countries (Paris, 1981). In addition, they included analysis of two future conferences - aging (Vienna, 1982) and population (1984) - to the extent possible. They interviewed Secretariat and government officials concerned, and attended the two 1981 conferences. Their work thus concentrated on large-scale special conferences in the economic and social areas, but the Inspectors believe the ideas of this report apply as well to other special conferences as noted in the concluding Chapter. They wish to express their appreciation to all who contributed to this study.

II. PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

13. A striking element in the preparation of United Nations special conferences is the many participants involved. There are at least 23 different groups and categories. The chart below identifies these participants, both inside and outside the Secretariat, with the major participants listed first. The roles they play or are supposed to play are discussed in this Chapter, as a basis for analysis of planning and control problems in Chapter III and of related problem areas in Chapter IV.

Participants in the organization and preparation of special conferences

<u>United Nations Secretariat</u>	<u>non-United Nations Secretariat</u>
1. substantive secretariat	1. preparatory organ
2. Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters (OSSECS)	2. General Assembly
3. Department of Conference Services	3. host government
4. Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation	4. national focal points
5. Department of Public Information	
6. regional commissions	5. ECOSOC
7. United Nations substantive entities	6. regional and informal groups
8. Office of Financial Services, DAFM	7. United Nations system specialized agencies
9. Office of Personnel Services, DAFM	8. ACC inter-agency co-ordinating groups
10. Office of General Services, DAFM	9. the scientific community and other institutions
11. Office of Legal Affairs	10. non-governmental organizations
12. Protocol and Liaison Service	11. the media

A. United Nations Secretariat

14. The list of Secretariat participants in special conference preparation - the particular focus of this study - begins (after the Secretary-General himself) with the substantive secretariat of the conference. When an intergovernmental organ calls for a special conference, one of the first steps is for the Secretary-General to name a special representative to be in charge of organizing the conference, in close collaboration with other Secretariat units. In recent years this person has generally been called the Secretary-General of the conference. He and his staff are established in one of two ways: (a) in many recent conferences, new temporary machinery - a special secretariat - has been created for the duration of the conference, whether a substantive department already exists or not; (b) an existing secretariat unit has been designated as the substantive secretariat, usually with temporary strengthening of its staff resources. In resolution 35/10 C of 3 November 1980, the General Assembly decided that the latter option should be used wherever possible. This secretariat is responsible for relations with the host government (if applicable), other member States, other invited participants or observers, other units of the Secretariat, and the organizations of the United Nations system. It also prepares the documentation of the conference and oversees its administrative and financial matters. The issue of special substantive secretariats of special conferences has generated considerable comment and criticism, as discussed further in Chapter IV.A.

15. The restructuring resolution (32/197) called for the Secretariat to provide, as a distinct function in a separate organizational entity, integrated technical secretariat services "for CPC, ECOSOC, the General Assembly, ad hoc conferences and intersecretariat co-ordination machinery". OSSECS was established

in March 1978 to carry out these functions. It provides technical conference expertise and services for a special conference throughout the preparatory, conference and post-conference phases. Its usual functions include making sure that the conference is well-organized, helping to establish meeting schedules, providing the secretary of the conference and his staff and the secretariat for the preparatory committee and ancillary bodies, assisting in planning conference work and conducting the proceedings, planning and ensuring the availability of documentation and other required material, undertaking the major logistical burdens of running the conference, helping draft and co-ordinate conference reports, and helping complete activities after the conference ends.

16. The third major Secretariat participant is the Department of Conference Services (DCS). It provides operating services and facilities, including interpretation; translation; typing; official records; reproduction, control and distribution of documents; and printing. It designates a conference services coordinator to plan not only for harmonization of all these needs but also so that the special conference servicing requirements fit into the regular conference and meetings calendar established by intergovernmental bodies. These special conference services may be provided by DCS from New York or Geneva, or on occasion may involve conference servicing units in UNIDO in Vienna or in the regional commissions: the specific distribution of functions is determined by DCS headquarters in New York, depending primarily on the location of the conference.

17. The restructuring resolution of 1977 also established the post of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation. Among his specific responsibilities is that of providing guidance, orientation, and coordination for the preparation of United Nations conferences in the economic and social fields, so as to ensure conformity with the directives of the intergovernmental bodies concerned and to guide and orient the follow-up to such conferences. For several recent conferences the Director-General has chaired an inter-Secretariat steering committee to deal primarily with substantive issues, to co-ordinate substantive inputs from the various United Nations entities, and to plan for the possible institutional, policy and other outcomes of the conference.

18. The last of the five major Secretariat participants is the Department of Public Information (DPI). A primary purpose of most special conferences is to raise public consciousness or focus public attention on a particular international issue. DPI is responsible for preparing and disseminating information before, during, and after the conference. The heaviest concentration of these efforts is in convening journalists' encounters and panels before the conference, developing special exhibits, encouraging extensive media coverage, issuing press releases, giving briefings, and organizing follow-up activities to disseminate conference results and achievements. DPI often develops detailed plans for these information programmes, and is thus an important and integral part of the preparatory process from its earliest stages.

19. In addition to the above, several other United Nations entities play supporting roles in preparing special conferences.

(a) In recent years, the regional commissions have assumed a greater role in special conference preparation in the economic and social sectors, in a "building-block" approach in which detailed discussions and substantive inputs from the regions contribute to the achievements of the conference. These activities relate to the restructuring responsibilities given the commissions to serve as the "main general economic and social development centres" for their regions, to provide policy inputs for the global policy-making processes of United Nations organs and to participate in implementing their decisions. At times, this has meant extensive and unbudgeted work for the commissions in arranging intergovernmental preparatory meetings in the regions, providing direct substantive inputs to the conference and to the draft programme of action, and implementing new policies and programmes resulting from the conference.

(b) United Nations substantive entities (such as UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDO, DIESA and DTCD) can also make considerable inputs to the preparation of a special conference, depending on the subject matter. Most importantly, this can involve serving as the substantive secretariat for special conferences, as UNCTAD did for the 1981 conference on least developed countries, and as DIESA will for the 1982 World Assembly on Aging. This feature is likely to become more common in light of General Assembly resolution 35/10C urging greater use of existing Secretariat machinery. These entities can also prepare substantive document inputs, conduct surveys and studies, make financial contributions to the preparatory work, convene preparatory conferences and seminars, participate in inter-Secretariat co-ordinating groups as well as in the conference and its follow-up activities.

(c) The Office of Financial Services (OFS) in the Department of Administration, Finance and Management (DAFM) supervises the preparation of budget estimates and administers the funds appropriated by the General Assembly and from other sources for a special conference. OFS is represented at all stages of conference preparation which have financial or administrative implications, including the preparation or approval of statements of financial implications of the conference provided to intergovernmental bodies; establishing appropriate procedures, controls and financial reports for the conference; allotting appropriated funds; handling financial and administrative arrangements with host governments, including the preparation of estimates of the additional costs to be borne by the host government and records afterwards; and providing a financial and administrative officer for the conference itself if needed.

(d) The Office of Personnel Services (OPS) in DAFM assists in the assignment, recruitment, loan or secondment of staff for service with the conference, and in determining their entitlements and benefits.

(e) The Office of General Services (OGS) in DAFM provides appropriate services, supplies and equipment for a special conference. This includes providing security services for the conference or advising a host country on security requirements, setting up and maintaining communications between headquarters and the conference site, arranging travel and transportation for staff detailed to attend a conference, and providing a transportation officer if large amounts of United Nations equipment, supplies and documents must be shipped.

(f) The Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) participates when necessary in the preparatory process to help prepare draft rules of procedure for a conference and draft the agreement with the host country, which covers among other things the question of immunities. The Office provides the Secretary of the Credentials Committee and handles registration as it involves the question of credentials. This Office and the Protocol and Liaison Service are also available as needed to advise the conference organizers on matters within their competence.

B. Non-United Nations secretariat

20. There are four main participants outside the United Nations Secretariat who have particularly important roles in organizing and preparing for a special conference. The first is the preparatory organ. It may be an ad hoc intergovernmental preparatory committee or an existing intergovernmental subsidiary organ. In many cases in the past, a special preparatory organ has been established. However, the General Assembly decided in resolution 35/5 of 1980 that preparatory work for special conferences should henceforth be carried out by existing organs, and reiterated in resolution 35/10 C that special preparatory committees should be established only if this function cannot be appropriately performed by an existing intergovernmental organ. The main tasks of the preparatory organ, however constituted, are to determine a draft agenda, rules of procedure, organizational arrangements, a comprehensive preparatory time-table, the nature of United Nations system participation and other participation in the conference, and documentation requirements. The preparatory organ therefore requires considerable support services from the secretariat to carry out its responsibilities.

21. Wherever proposals for a special conference originate, they require a decision or resolution of the General Assembly to approve and launch them as a special, priority United Nations activity within the overall biennial conference and meetings programme. The Assembly defines the scope of the special conference, specifies the participants, sets a time schedule, and may specify methods of financing, establish or designate a preparatory organ, and determine other procedural elements. The Assembly, its main committees, ECOSOC and the Committee on Conferences can also periodically assess the progress, activities and financial status and implications of the preparatory process. The importance of this direction-setting role is discussed in the following Chapter.

22. Many past special conferences have been held away from established United Nations headquarters facilities (New York, Geneva, Vienna) at the invitation of a host government. Under long-standing practice (Assembly resolutions 1202 (XII) and more recently 31/140), the host government must agree to defray, after consultations with the Secretary General, the additional costs to the United Nations directly or indirectly involved in holding the conference away from headquarters, and must sign a formal conference agreement with the United Nations, specifying their respective obligations and the arrangements to be made. The host government is also expected to establish, at an early date, a national preparatory committee or office for local arrangements in connection with the conference. There are advantages in holding special conferences away from headquarters, but this does create logistical difficulties and added conference servicing burdens, as discussed in Chapter IV.B.

23. National focal points are the fourth major non-Secretariat participant in special conference preparation. They can be very important since the groundwork for many conferences takes place at the national level. If focal points can be established in countries (amounting, say, to as many as 100 to 150) at an early date, they can serve as a preparatory force which grows in strength and utility as the conference develops. They can stimulate national discussion of policy alternatives, co-ordinate all preparations at the national level, submit a report on national activities, and provide a link to the conference secretariat in its preparatory activities - usually via their permanent missions to the United Nations.

24. In addition to these four main participants, other non-Secretariat entities play supporting roles in the preparation of special conferences.

(a) The restructuring resolution of 1977 (32/197, Annex, paragraph 11) gave ECOSOC direct responsibility, as a high priority programme task, "for carrying out the preparatory work for ad hoc conferences convened by the Council itself and, as appropriate, by the General Assembly". While ECOSOC has recently been active on general matters of conference programming, scheduling and documentation, however, it has not yet put its special conference preparatory responsibilities into practice.

(b) Regional and other groups (such as the Eastern European States, Group of 77, or Group B) have a special conference role, as discussed in two 1981 reports (A/AC.172/49 and the Report of the Committee on Conferences, A/36/32, Chapter V). Such meetings, caucuses and working groups add to conference servicing burdens but are important immediately before and during a special conference. They can facilitate consultations and exchange of information and be an integral part of the decision-making process, and thereby lead to more effective special conferences.

(c) Specialized agencies of the United Nations system can provide considerable inputs to the preparation of a special conference, depending on the subject matter. Their activities can include surveys, studies and documents for the conference; participation in interagency coordinating groups; financial contributions or secondment of staff for the preparatory work; holding preparatory conferences and seminars; and conference attendance and participation in follow-up activities.

(d) Interagency co-ordinating groups under ACC play a role by providing substantive interagency inputs to a conference, otherwise assisting in its preparation, or contributing to conference follow-up. The mechanisms used for recent conferences have included ACC's main subsidiary bodies, task forces, steering committees, working groups, and various informal or ad hoc interagency consultations.

(e) The scientific community and various institutions provide preparatory inputs. This can involve the submission of scientific and technical papers, convening technical panels to review the "state of the art" in a particular area, formally setting up scientific advisory committees to the preparatory organ, and organizing symposia.

(f) International non-governmental organizations can be very active in special conference preparation in their respective fields, through the preparation of papers, the formulation of coordinative or supportive committees, and the conduct of preparatory meetings and fora. The restructuring resolution stated that ECOSOC should make recommendations for the rationalization and harmonization of consultative relationships with non-governmental organizations in the context of ad hoc world conferences, but at present the practical arrangements for participation in a particular special conference are usually left to the preparatory organ to determine. Parallel activities such as panel discussions and non-governmental organization forums are increasingly becoming part of special conferences, but budgetary provision has usually not been made in the early conference planning stages for servicing them. For the World Assembly on Aging in 1982, a new approach is being tried whereby a forum of non-governmental organizations will take place before rather than during the conference, to make their contributions available to member States well in advance of the conference and to improve their substantive interaction with the United Nations.

(g) Finally, extensive media coverage is very important to the many special conferences which seek to focus international attention on the conference theme. This requires careful attention by DPI to the media opportunities in the many meetings and activities which occur during the preparatory process and to the working facilities, specialized transmission needs, and public information requirements of the conference.

III. PLANNING AND CONTROL

25. The Inspectors believe that the most critical problems with past special conference preparations have been related to weaknesses in the initial and preparatory planning process, scheduling and control procedures and guidelines, and reporting arrangements. The central fact is that for most past special conferences, no one has been clearly in charge. Responsibilities have been far too diffused. This Chapter discusses these problems and the underlying causes, and suggests a set of corrective measures.

A. Initial and preparatory planning

26. The initial mandate of a special conference as expressed in the resolution of the General Assembly convening it is an important element in the preparatory process. Yet participants in past special conferences expressed much concern that the objectives and nature of conferences were not as clearly stated as they might be. Special conferences are a priority activity undertaken at considerable cost, but their convening resolutions do not often lay down a relative priority, clear objectives, expected impact, and a strategy for achieving these things.

27. Part of the problem is that special conferences can have a variety of major purposes. They can be intended to: (a) discuss selected major subjects of current international concern; (b) promote the development of long-term strategies, policies and activities at all levels of the international community; (c) draw attention of international opinion to problems; (d) provide a framework for negotiating legal texts, agreements and treaties; (e) bring together technical experts or political representatives of governments to promote concerted action. Most or all of these purposes might be combined in a given conference, but for effective preparation of the conference it is essential to know which purposes are most important.

28. There are also problems of priorities and relationships. The specific priority of a special conference relative to the conference and meetings programme may not be clear (as evidenced by the various special conferences scattered among the 370-some conferences and meetings in the United Nations calendar for 1982-83 (A/36/32, Annex III)), even though each such conference places new demands on the limited conference time and resources available for this overall programme. The resolutions calling for a conference do not often indicate how it relates to the medium-term plan and programme budget activities already underway. They do not indicate how its priority relates to other possible special conference topics for the coming two to four year period (a problem recognized in 1968 when a suggested limitation of one special conference a year was objected to as implying that when one special conference was placed in the conference schedule, no other suggestions could be made, even if they were more deserving).

29. Finally, as expressed in a recent report on implementation of the restructuring resolution (A/35/527, II.B. of 21 October 1980) United Nations system specialized agencies question whether the policy initiatives of central United Nations intergovernmental bodies take sufficiently into account the established programmes and responsibilities of these agencies, the relative priority of the special work involved, and the budgetary implications of the substantive and co-ordinative work requested of them.

30. In general the convening resolutions also do not address the impact that a special conference is intended to have and the strategy to attain it, nor what kind of follow-up action is expected, by whom and how. In particular, this involves the question of whether a conference should lead to (a) a new secretariat entity, (b) a new programme (and its size and nature), and/or (c) a new follow-up conference (as, for example, the women's conferences of 1975 and 1980, with another follow-up conference to take place in 1985, and the population conference of 1974, with a follow-up conference scheduled for 1984).

31. In effect, many past special conferences have been very "open-ended", launched to draw attention to an important problem with (more recently) a draft programme of action, but little further clarification. Clear and specific objectives and terms of reference are not easy to establish, but without them major problems arise. First, the Secretariat's task in preparing for the conference is greatly complicated, since it cannot be sure of the aims it is expected to work towards. Second, ambiguity of conference purpose opens up the conference to conflicts of interests and personalities, both inside and outside the Secretariat, which can lead the preparatory process astray.

32. Secretariat processes for planning special conference preparation have also presented problems. The UNESCO "Handbook for Conference Organizers" states that the essential element in the planning and preparation of meetings is time - time to do intellectual preparations, to stimulate interest, to alert participants, and to make logistical arrangements. Since proper planning of major meetings involving high-level governmental officials requires two to four years and the absolute minimum for lower-level conferences is one year, the "Handbook" concludes that it is clear that planning must start well in advance.

33. In past United Nations special conferences, however, the development of a plan for conference preparations has taken much time and generally been a patchwork process. Rather than a comprehensive plan prepared at an early stage, the planning process has usually been considerably delayed while awaiting various other initial steps to be taken (see B. below). A form of a "plan" for the conference does slowly evolve, but tends to follow events, adjustments and changes rather than guide them.

34. The 1980 Secretary-General's report on special conference preparation (A/AC.172/28) suggested that "the Secretariat" should in future submit an indicative outline of the work programme to the organizational session of the preparatory organ, where possible, based on the general goals and objectives pronounced by the General Assembly. A more concrete work programme and work schedule would then be presented to the first substantive session and then adjusted and updated at regular intervals. The Assembly endorsed the idea of an indicative outline (resolution 35/10, Annex, paragraph 5), but did not mention the detailed work programme and schedule, except for a time-table for the actual conference to be presented to the preparatory organ at its last session (paragraphs 7 and 8).

B. Scheduling, control and guidelines

35. Preparation of a large special conference is an elaborate and complex process. Planning and co-ordination mechanisms are established, which then issue guidelines to launch the many participants. They then engage in extensive activities which should build in a cohesive fashion to culminate in the special conference itself. Along the way, however, many delays can occur, which can accumulate in later stages in an "avalanche" effect. The more important delays often found in past special conference preparation, from start to finish, include the following.

(a) Since the two to four years usually allotted for preparation seems a vast amount of time to all participants, a year or more can expire before any activities really get underway.

(b) The appointment of a Secretary-General and special secretariat or augmented staff for a conference can involve considerable negotiation, red tape, and other delays.

(c) Designation and organization of the other Secretariat representatives in the preparatory process may be slow, particularly since they are engaged in more immediately-pressing activities.

(d) The preparatory organ, once established, may devote most of its initial effort to organizing itself rather than beginning substantive deliberations

and providing specific initial guidance to the Secretariat units. A lack of continuity of preparatory organ officers and members can also be a problem.

(e) The whole chain of liaison, protocol, invitation, procedures, credentials and related issues can be a cumbersome process with unexpected delays.

(f) For conferences away from headquarters, an early, informal secretariat mission to discuss conference arrangements with host government officials is very important, as is organization of a national preparatory committee to effectively co-ordinate host government efforts. In many past conferences, however, these steps have been only partially taken or done at a late date.

(g) Following these initial organizational steps, at which point preparations are usually considerably behind schedule, the focus shifts to establishment of the many national focal points. A senior official of a recent conference noted that 18 months are really needed to allow these groups to organize themselves and produce a result, but a late start usually means that their strong potential contribution to conference preparations is only partially realized.

(h) Technical panels, participation of United Nations and United Nations system agencies and the associated interagency bodies, and participation of non-governmental organizations and other organizations and institutions add many more organizational and co-ordinative activities which can produce further delays and complications.

(i) All of these participants then undertake a series of meetings and studies which generate many documents, often voluminous, which develop slowly, are received late, create a heavy documents processing burden, and are difficult to co-ordinate (see Chapter IV.C.). They nevertheless can serve as important "building blocks" for further conference preparation.

(j) The draft programme of action developed for most special conferences by the conference secretariat moves slowly, in part because of a late start and in part because it must await the document inputs from the many other groups noted above. As a result, the time needed to fully develop, discuss, and prepare the political and technical support for an effective conference, particularly through review meetings or other consultations, is often not available.

(k) At any point in this sequence major changes can occur, through inter-governmental or preparatory body decisions to amend the scope, workload or strategy of the conference, or to make administrative, financial or substantive adjustments to respond to problems that have developed along the way.

(l) For conferences away from headquarters a formal agreement between the host government and the United Nations has often been signed only in the last few months before the conference begins. The uncertainty caused by protracted negotiations and lack of an agreement can greatly hamper specific logistical and conference servicing arrangements.

(m) These elements then come together slowly to comprise the basic conference documents, often with considerable pressure on the preparatory organ, a tardy preparatory report and last-minute completion of a draft plan of action.

(n) Specific pre-conference preparatory details and organization can deflect considerable attention away from the substance of the conference at the most critical pre-conference stage.

(o) All of the foregoing steps finally culminate in the conference itself, compressing two or more years of extensive preparatory activity, and the associated cumulative delays, into a two-week or so conference which is itself usually slow to get underway. This prospect has led to concern in several past conferences that the conference session itself might best be postponed. Instead, the conferences have been carried out at a hectic pace, particularly in their closing stages.

36. As this general sequence indicates, the special conference preparatory process is not a simple one. Its problems, however, are exacerbated by the lack of systematic scheduling and control techniques. In part, this is because such techniques must be based on the guiding plan and, as noted in A. above, this often develops in a slow and erratic fashion. The Inspectors found in analyzing past conferences that schedules did eventually emerge and were subsequently adapted or redone in accord with changing situations. However, they did not find any examples of comprehensive and coherent scheduling techniques. Instead of serving as mechanisms to guide and control conference preparation in the most effective and economical manner, these schedules were more a by-product, striving to keep up with a complex organizational and co-ordinative process.

37. In the past, as stated in the Secretary-General's 1980 report, there has been little attempt by intergovernmental bodies to systematically develop a framework for the most effective organization and servicing of special conferences. The Secretariat developed a set of "Guidelines for International Conferences" in 1975-76, but it never attained official status. In 1977 it published a Secretary-General's bulletin (ST/SGB/160) on "The Planning, Preparation and Servicing of Special Conferences" which established guidelines and directives for the various secretariat groups.

38. While the Secretariat believes that this bulletin helped streamline many procedures, the need for further clarification became apparent. In accordance with Assembly resolution 34/50, the Secretary-General's 1980 report for the Committee on Conferences analyzed past experience and suggested improvements, including some actions to deal with the scheduling and control difficulties noted above. A number of these were included in the brief guidelines approved by the Assembly (resolution 35/10, Annex). In 1981 this action was supplemented by an extensive draft standard set of rules of procedure (A/36/199) for the conduct of all conferences convened by intergovernmental organs, including 16 rules for the preparatory phase. The General Assembly, however, deferred consideration of these rules to its thirty-seventh session in 1982.

C. Financial and progress reporting

39. In the absence of formal and comprehensive planning, scheduling and control processes established early in the special conference preparatory process, accountability has been provided largely through occasional reports to the General Assembly, its main subsidiary organs, and the preparatory organ. There are also ad hoc administrative and financial reports when a conference is first approved and when subsequent resolutions are proposed which would have administrative and budgetary implications and require additional appropriations for the conference, and by occasional progress reports as required by General Assembly or other resolutions.

40. It is difficult for the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies to review the evolving administrative and financial aspects of a special conference during its preparatory phase. The initial estimates are by nature very tentative, particularly since standard requirements have not yet been worked out for the secretariat personnel involved, except for Conference Services. Statements of additional administrative and financial implications are often prepared in a very short time during Assembly sessions, in a complex process involving a Main Committee, the Committee on Conferences, DCS, the Budget Division, the Fifth Committee, and ACABQ (as discussed in A/AC.172/63 of 9 July 1981). These statements, once prepared, are difficult to follow, since they may involve half-a-dozen intermediate documents, a great deal of technical discussion and estimation of various cost components, and little reference to previous documents or cost estimates.

41. Programme budget presentations do not help much. For instance, the 1980-81 programme budget section on the 1981 energy conference (A/34/6, Section 4.B.2) had the virtue of being much more concise than the "implications" statements.

However, it stated that some elements were financed from existing resources, that precise estimates for other elements were still not ready, that some element costs were modified and updated but others were not, and that still other element estimates were located elsewhere in the programme budget. These complicated and incomplete figures make it difficult for member States to understand the status and overall cost of a conference, and may also not relate very closely to the final conference costs actually incurred.

42. These various "implication" reports and programme budget statements are also incomplete in a broader way. Although General Assembly resolution 31/140 stated that all United Nations meetings should be carried out within the resources allocated by the Assembly, considerable other costs are not in fact clearly identified or combined in the statements.

(a) Additional specific costs to various United Nations entities, particularly for conference attendance, are scattered throughout the programme budgets.

(b) As noted in the example above, various costs may simply be "absorbed" in other existing approved programmes, which may mean that other work is curtailed.

(c) At times, regional commissions have been responsible for preparatory activities for conferences on subjects in which they lack expertise and therefore have had to use consultants to ensure the success of regional inputs, although extra financial resources were not provided for this purpose.

(d) Costs to host countries (reimbursed to the United Nations insofar as needed to cover additional costs incurred from holding the conference away from established headquarters) are not reported. They can be substantial - as much as \$1.9 million for a recent special conference for reimbursement to the United Nations alone, and perhaps twice as much in total.

(e) Extra-budgetary funds can be a significant but unspecified additional resource input. Several officials of past conferences stated that they provide useful extra funds to compensate for inadequate estimates of conference requirements and costs or for limited appropriations.

(f) The estimates do not indicate financial implications for the specialized agencies. This problem is highlighted by a 1978 ACC report on implementation of the restructuring resolution (E/1978/107), which noted that decisions calling for system-wide contributions to preparation for a special conference should include arrangements which allow the General Assembly and ECOSOC to take into account the financial impact on the specialized agencies concerned.

(g) Finally, the estimates do not give any indication of programme costs subsequently required to allow all the United Nations and United Nations system agencies to follow-up on conference results and decisions. While this is difficult to appraise, it may well be the most substantial special conference cost of all.

43. Because of these complications, the Inspectors were not able to determine the total costs of the special conferences they analyzed, particularly in relation to original cost estimates. Accordingly, in December 1981 they requested OFS to provide data to complete the table below. By late February 1982, however, when the report was sent for final printing, OFS had not responded. In light of the General Assembly's request in December 1981 for a comprehensive analysis of budgetary techniques used in the calculation and presentation of conference-servicing costs (resolution 36/117 A III), and to focus more clearly on the costs, estimates, and funding sources involved for special conferences, the Inspectors believe the Committee on Conferences should request OFS to provide it with data to complete this or a similar table:

United Nations special conference costs

(\$US thousands)

<u>Conference</u>	<u>Original cost estimate and date</u>	<u>Final cost or latest estimate</u>	
		<u>Regular budget</u>	<u>Extra- budgetary</u>
Habitat, 1976			
Water, 1977			
Science and technology for development, 1979			
Women, 1980			
New and renewable sources of energy, 1981			
Least-developed countries, 1981			
Aging, 1982			
Population, 1984			

44. Progress reporting on special conference preparation is also rather ambiguous at present. For instance, the most recent of such reports, the Secretary-General's and Advisory Committee's reports on the 1982 World Assembly on Aging (A/36/472 of 8 October 1981) contain considerable discussion of the preparatory process. While much of this understandably deals with conference substance, various planning, scheduling and financial data and problems are presented only in bits and pieces scattered throughout the reports.

45. These three major reporting documents - programme budgets, administrative and financial implications reports, and progress reports - at present lack "transparency", that is a clear statement of the status, progress, and administrative, time and cost aspects of special conference preparation. This not only makes it difficult for intergovernmental bodies to exercise proper oversight of the preparations for the conferences they have convened, but also blurs and weakens Secretariat responsibility for exercising appropriate control of the preparatory process.

D. A new approach

46. The various planning, scheduling, control and reporting weaknesses of special conference preparation discussed above point to the essential weakness of the present process: for most past special conferences, no one has been clearly in charge. Although the various participants are competent in their respective areas and hard-earned past experience is available, the preparatory process has therefore usually developed in a slow and haphazard way, with many complications along the way that hamper the success of the resulting special conference.

47. The reasons why this situation has developed include the following, with the first two probably most important:

(a) Responsibilities and authorities among the Secretariat units - especially the substantive secretariat on the one hand and OSSECS and DCS on the other - have not been clearly established and co-ordinated.

(b) A comprehensive preparatory plan, with associated schedules and controls, has not been systematically established at an early date.

(c) Because special conference topics are technical and often politicized, intergovernmental and preparatory bodies have concentrated almost all their attention on substantive matters, to the detriment of oversight of planning and management.

(d) Since the conferences are "special", they tend to be outside both the normal programme, budget and control processes and cycles and the overall framework of United Nations programme and conference priorities and relationships.

(e) The extensive past use of special secretariats has meant reliance on staff unfamiliar with United Nations and conference processes, and a need to begin an educational process all over again for each special conference.

(f) Follow-up assessments of past special conference preparation have not been done, so experience of the past is not learned from in an orderly way.

(g) There has been a belief in some quarters that special conferences are just a larger version of the routine conferences and meetings that the United Nations conducts. The many participants (Chapter II) and the complex preparatory process (Chapter III) involved, however, make it clear that administrative control and responsibility cannot be maintained informally.

48. The Inspectors conclude that, while other related corrections are needed (see Chapter IV), the single most important need in special conference preparation is to clarify the basic planning, scheduling, control and reporting mechanisms and procedures. There are five inter-related components to this process.

49. The first component involves the decisions of the General Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies to convene special conferences. In the 1974 JIU report on the pattern of conferences (A/9795), the Inspectors reviewed the many years of discussion of what the "proper" conference and meeting selection process, patterns, and priorities should be. They observed that decisions on the merits of a proposed special conference are political questions for Member States to decide, but noted that intergovernmental decisions and attitudes on how to hold a conference most effectively can be a very constructive aid to Secretariat preparatory efforts.

50. The Inspectors recognize that many elements are involved in building consensus on decisions to convene a special conference. They believe, however, that if member States proposing a conference, subsidiary organs considering the proposal, and the Assembly itself in deciding to convene it can be as specific as possible as to conference objectives, intended impact, machinery, agenda, preparatory strategy, and follow-up on conference results, more orderly and successful special conferences will result. This initial effort should then be supplemented by firm oversight and guidance of the adequacy and timeliness of subsequent preparations, particularly by the preparatory organ.

51. In 1980 ECOSOC (1980/67) and the General Assembly (35/424) adopted guidelines for the United Nations with regard to proposals for future international years, and commended them to the specialized agencies and organizations of the United Nations system. These guidelines provide 27 points concerning the criteria for proclamation of international years, procedures to be followed before their proclamation and for their organization, and procedures for evaluation during and after the years. The Inspectors believe that many of these points could well be applied to improve the formulation and evaluation of future special conferences.

52. Second, improved secretariat organization and procedures must begin with clear designations of authority and responsibility. The 1980 Secretary-General's report stated that inter-departmental working groups would be used for all future economic and social conferences. The Inspectors believe this positive step must be taken further.

53. The Secretary-General should establish a Conference Management Committee for a special conference, immediately after a recommendation to convene it has

been made by an intergovernmental body, to prepare initial planning documents for General Assembly consideration. The group should always include designated representatives from OSSECS (technical servicing), the substantive secretariat (substantive servicing), DCS (conference servicing), the Office of the Director-General (substantive policy, programme and institutional issues and relationships), OFS (budgetary, administrative and financial matters), and DPI (information). For special conferences outside the economic and social fields the responsibilities of OSSECS and the Office of the Director-General should be specifically assigned by the Secretary-General to others.

54. The chairman of the Conference Management Committee should be in charge of the planning and co-ordination of Secretariat preparations for the special conference and assistance in its conduct. While ultimate responsibility for the conference arrangements of course rests with the Secretary-General of the conference, the preparatory committee, other intergovernmental bodies, and the General Assembly, this official should be given the specific responsibility and authority for effectively organizing and preparing it. He should be designated by the Secretary General from among the following sources:

(a) Special conferences in the economic and social fields:

(i) In most cases, the chairman would be the head of OSSECS, reflecting the basic OSSECS responsibilities for providing technical servicing expertise.

(ii) In some cases where substantive policy, programme and institutional issues and relationships are particularly important, the Director-General might be the chairman.

(iii) Where an existing secretariat entity serves as the substantive secretariat and has a proven capability for the preparation and conduct of a major international conference, as with UNCTAD for the 1981 conference on least developed countries, it could provide the chairman.

(b) Other special conferences: The Secretary-General should designate a qualified and experienced official within the substantive secretariat or DCS to serve as chairman.

55. The responsibilities, duties and authority of the chairman and each of the members of the Conference Management Committee should be clearly specified and interrelated. Other offices, departments and specialized agencies should be invited to participate as needed. The Conference Management Committee should report through the Secretary-General of the conference to the preparatory organ and should meet on a regular basis throughout the preparatory period (monthly or more often as needed). When committee members are located at different sites, teleconferencing could be used for these meetings.

56. Third, the Conference Management Committee should be responsible for maintaining control of the preparatory process. In the past several decades a variety of management tools have been developed for scheduling and control of complex organizational projects. PERT (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) and CPM (Critical Path Method) are two such tools which have become widely-used in the private and public sectors, and which have great direct potential for use with United Nations special conferences.

57. PERT is a technique to ensure thorough planning, scheduling and control of projects by providing:

(a) a disciplined basis for planning a project and a clear, understandable picture of its scope;

(b) a realistic schedule for all operations, and a basis for the best possible resource scheduling;

(c) a focus of management attention on areas that are critical from a time standpoint.

58. In its planning phase, PERT requires a thorough job of project planning and analysis, a major benefit in itself. The scheduling phase uses this information, and usually a computer, to schedule project activities, sequence and time required.

The monitoring phase keeps the process under control by following actual status and project performance and the implications of any change proposed or made. PERT is no panacea, but it can provide valuable data for managers to attain project objectives in the most timely and effective fashion. In particular, it signals at an early stage corrective actions that may be required, thus permitting changes to be made without disrupting the overall schedule.

59. The Inspectors have included a generalized model PERT chart of a special conference as the Annex to this report. They believe the PERT techniques should be used as the central management tool of the Conference Management Committee for special conferences. Since OSSECS is the "technical servicing" unit for the economic and social fields, its representatives should be trained in PERT use and maintain the process from inception through completion of a conference. Once developed, this OSSECS technical capability might be made available on a loan or training basis for other relatively complex United Nations conferences as well.

60. OSSECS now provides the Secretaries for most special conferences in the economic and social field. Conference Secretaries perform specialized functions requiring extensive experience, including documents planning, organizational tasks, planning physical requirements in consultation with DCS, assisting the Chair of preparatory meetings and the conference itself in organizing the work and conducting the proceedings, ensuring the application of rules of procedure, assisting in the preparation of draft agendas, assisting rapporteurs in the preparation of reports, co-ordinating the contributions of substantive secretariat units of the United Nations and the specialized agencies before and during the conference, etc.

61. This contribution is required throughout the preparatory stage, at the conference itself and for many aspects of follow-up. However, the small number of professional conference servicing posts in OSSECS makes it impossible for OSSECS to provide full-time services from the beginning of conference preparations. The OSSECS specialists usually work on special conferences on a part-time highly intermittent basis along with their many other technical conference servicing responsibilities. Continuity is usually lacking and they cannot contribute sufficiently to the vital technical preparatory work, particularly planning and organization. Thus, the conference secretariat has to struggle along without the continuing assistance of a qualified conference manager (except in those few cases when the secretariat happened to be an established unit which had extensive experience in organizing major conferences, e.g., UNCTAD for the conference on the least developed countries).

62. This lack of continuing expertise in the conference secretariat is no doubt a cause of the deficiencies in co-ordination that the Inspectors have observed in some conferences. One solution to this problem might be to increase the staff of OSSECS so that it could provide a full-time Secretary for each conference from the beginning of the preparatory stage onward. But this solution would be costly and since the workload of Conference Secretaries is intermittent there would be periods of idleness. Instead, the Inspectors propose another solution which would provide the required specialized knowledge on an assured continuing basis without increasing the budget.

(a) The Administrative or Executive Officer provided for in the budgets for the conference secretariat should be designated as the Conference Secretary/ Executive Officer. He or she should be an outposted member of OSSECS assigned to the conference secretariat and paid from the special conference budget. Since the functions of the Conference Secretary, although required from the beginning of the preparatory period, will call for an intermittent workload, the Inspectors are convinced that they can be combined with the functions of the existing Executive or Administrative Officer, which are complementary and mutually supportive.

(b) The Conference Secretary/Executive Officer would be responsible for the usual administrative functions and, during the preparatory phase, for planning (using PERT), conference management and serving as the Secretary of the preparatory organ. During the conference this official would serve as Secretary. He or she should also be the Secretary of the Conference Management Committee.

(c) The Conference Secretary/Executive Officer should receive instructions from OSSECS on technical conference servicing matters and on substantive and administrative questions from the Secretary-General of the conference. Such persons, before taking up their duties, should have had some conference experience, to be supplemented by basic training in conference management techniques and planning (including PERT). The training should be organized by OSSECS in co-operation with DCS, OPS, OFS, DPI and OLA.

(d) Once they have acquired experience by working with a special conference, the Secretary/Executive Officers would become an invaluable asset to the United Nations. They would possess a rare speciality which is constantly in demand. Therefore, OSSECS should carefully plan their assignments so that upon completion of a special conference they would perform the same functions for another conference.

(e) Because special conferences occur irregularly, however, a new assignment as Conference Secretary/Executive Officer might not be immediately available for an official who has just completed such an assignment. During any such waiting periods the official should be temporarily assigned to a vacant post in OSSECS, DCS, OFS, OPS, or as Conference Secretary for a special conference not in the economic or social field, to ensure that his or her experience is not lost to the United Nations. The experience acquired as a Conference Secretary/Executive Officer would no doubt provide the qualifications required by many vacant posts in these services and the experience gained in the temporary assignment would further enrich the qualifications of the official for a future assignment as Conference Secretary/Executive Officer.

(f) For special conferences not in the economic or social fields OSSECS might if requested advise on the functions, qualifications and methods of selection of the Conference Secretary. OSSECS might also assist in training, as suggested in (c) above.

63. Fourth, all reporting to intergovernmental or preparatory bodies on special conference preparations should include a brief but clear summary of the status of the preparations. A financial summary of total estimated costs should be accompanied by schedule status information drawn from the PERT process, and by a summary of important policy and programme relationships and implications prepared by the Office of the Director-General. These status statements should identify the original plans, any major changes that have occurred, why these changes were made and who was responsible, and their implications. Such statements should be far easier to prepare, even for suddenly-required statements of administrative and financial implications on new proposals, since the PERT process and regular Conference Management Committee meetings would have this information available on a continuing and up-to-date basis.

64. Fifth and finally, this preparatory management and control process should be supported by the establishment of a set of basic guidelines for United Nations conferences, similar to the UNESCO "Handbook for Conference Organizers". Such a handbook could deal with both special and other conferences, and incorporate the 1977 guidelines (ST/SGB/160), the new guidance and procedures recently established or now under consideration by the General Assembly, and the matters discussed in this report. It could make an important contribution by developing a better understanding throughout the United Nations Secretariat of the policies and procedures needed for effective conferences of all types. Also, where standard costing and servicing factors do not exist, they should be developed as soon as possible to facilitate the PERT process, and both the guidelines and standards should be updated as needed.

IV. OTHER PREPARATORY PROBLEMS

65. During their study, the Inspectors found a number of issues which are part of the basic planning and control problems of special conference preparation but are significant enough to merit separate discussion. This Chapter summarizes past experience and current issues of substantive secretariats, host government arrangements, documentation, conference servicing, and post-conference assessments.

A. Substantive secretariats

66. As mentioned in Chapter II, every special conference involves designating a substantive servicing unit, with a special representative of the Secretary-General and additional staff, which is responsible for relations with the various conference participants, preparation of the conference documentation, and oversight of administrative and financial matters. The major organizational question involved has been whether to create a new special secretariat or to use existing Secretariat entities with a temporary strengthening of staff resources.

67. The General Assembly largely resolved this question for the future by stating in resolution 35/10 C (paragraph 3) that secretariats for special conferences should be provided by a temporary strengthening of existing secretariat machinery to the extent possible. The aging conference for 1982 and the population conference for 1984 are already following this "existing machinery" format. The Inspectors offer the following observations in support of this decision.

68. The size and composition of substantive secretariats for past special conferences have varied considerably, as shown by the data below for the conferences which the Inspectors analyzed.

Substantive secretariat staffing

<u>Conference</u>	<u>D and above</u>	<u>Professional</u>	<u>General Service</u>	<u>Total</u>
Habitat, 1976	8	155	153	316
Water, 1977	Not available			
Science and technology for development, 1979	6	9	13	28
Women, 1980	1	2	1	4
New and renewable sources of energy, 1981	1	14	14	29
Least-developed countries, 1981	7	20	19	46
Aging, 1982	Not available	Source: Office of Personnel Services, United Nations		
Population, 1984	Not available			

69. The arguments in favour of creating a special secretariat are that it can concentrate fully on conference preparation, can give greater visibility to a conference theme by its separate existence (and serve as the basis for a new institution afterward), and that it can mitigate bureaucratic jealousies that might arise when an existing unit is given preparatory responsibilities. However, the Inspectors heard and observed many more arguments against a special secretariat than for it.

70. More time is needed to create and staff and organize a special secretariat, which delays the preparatory process. The staff are generally unfamiliar with United Nations programmes, procedures and conference processes, and often must go through a painful learning process. The unit has more difficulty in establishing

coordinative relationships with other secretariat and United Nations system units, particularly where a substantive unit already exists in the same field. Also, the inexperienced staff combined with the "special" priority status accorded a special conference can lead to their making overly ambitious plans and promises for the conference which later prove very difficult to fulfill.

71. Particular stress was placed on the quality of staff in substantive secretariats. The importance of the "Secretary-General" of the conference was emphasized: he should be a person of stature, capability, and skill who can maximise the impact of the conference on governments and world opinion, and ensure a satisfactory outcome through a sound and acceptable plan of action. A number of people also observed that the recent custom of calling the secretary-general's representative the "Secretary-General" was overstated and somewhat confusing, and that "special representative" would better be used as in the past.

72. There were also some sharp criticisms of past special secretariat staffs, both from within and outside them, with the observation that staff were more concerned with securing permanent jobs than with making expert contributions to conference preparation. It was suggested that the specific qualifications of staff to carry out the preparatory tasks of the substantive secretariat should be more carefully examined during recruitment. A senior official of one past conference also said that, if a new institution is to be established as a result of a special conference, it should be made known in advance that the special secretariat will be completely disbanded before recruitment starts, in order to avoid any staff assumption that their temporary jobs will simply become permanent.

73. A final important point, applicable to either special or strengthened substantive servicing units, is that the staff should provide a good mix of technical specialist, administrative and conference skills and experience. The Inspectors endorse this idea, and believe that the Conference Management Committee and expanded OSSECS role discussed in Chapter III would be a strong source of basic support.

B. Host governments

74. In their 1974 report on the pattern of United Nations conferences and rational use of conference resources (A/9795) the Inspectors discussed extensively meetings held away from established headquarters. Briefly stated, the advantages of such meetings are that they can relieve pressure on meetings servicing capacity at headquarters; make the United Nations more of a reality to people around the world; expose delegates to different perspectives, conditions and attitudes; and can be more successful because of the strong support provided by an enthusiastic host government. However, the cost of servicing and holding meetings away from headquarters is substantial, although much of this is taken care of by the long-standing requirement that the host government reimburse the United Nations for the actual additional costs. There is also disruption of both substantive and administrative workloads when secretariat staff must leave headquarters to service and attend a major special conference.

75. When a government's invitation to host a special conference is accepted, close co-ordination with secretariat units is needed throughout the preparatory period. The host government is responsible for assistance with accommodations, for medical facilities, local transport, security, personnel, supplies and equipment, privileges and immunities, and adequate and appropriate conference, communications, media and other service facilities. In the past, however, co-ordination has often been slow and incomplete, and host governments have sometimes been shocked when they finally realize, often only shortly before the conference, the magnitude and cost of the tasks they have taken on. For instance, one recent conference confronted the host government with about 4,500 visitors, including 432 United Nations staff and related equipment at a reimbursable cost of \$1.9 million, and responsibility for some 235 offices and extensive conference facilities - all specified in detail only months before the conference. Such problems, and particularly those of adequate conference facilities, have occurred with many past conferences.

76. Three steps are especially important. First, planning and review missions by secretariat staff are needed to analyze and discuss all the local arrangements for the conference with the host government, but in the past such missions have often been delayed, sporadic, or not specific enough. Second, the host government is often slow to organize an effective national preparatory committee or focal point, in large part because the particular ministry chosen as coordinator may well have little experience with hosting a major international conference and because needed co-ordination and funding arrangements among ministries are slow to develop. Attitude is a key factor, however: if the host government is willing to work hard to make the conference a success, preparations will go much more quickly and smoothly. Third, a United Nations/host government agreement must be signed specifying their respective obligations and the necessary arrangements. In some past conferences, however, this has been a "last-minute" event following protracted negotiations which can considerably disrupt and delay final preparations for the conference.

77. The 1982 aging conference will be held in Vienna, thereby mitigating many of the above problems. If a host government is involved (as will nevertheless be true in Vienna in 1982), the Inspectors believe that its formal invitation should be made at an early date and involve closely planned and prompt coordinative activities. The Secretary-General's 1980 report noted the importance of early planning missions, and resolution 35/10 (Annex paragraphs 9-11) the importance of early establishment of a national preparatory committee.

78. However, rule 15.2 of the Secretary-General's 1981 draft standard rules of procedure (A/36/199) stated that if the host government has not signed a conference agreement at least 6 weeks before the conference begins, it should be transferred to another site. The Inspectors doubt that a conference could be transferred to another site in the last six weeks of the preparatory period, and the proposed rule would therefore in effect mean that the conference would have to be postponed indefinitely.

79. The Inspectors note from the 1974 JIU report (A/9795) that as long ago as 1957 intergovernmental bodies observed that the United Nations should not accept a government's invitation to host a conference unless the government has been fully consulted on the commitments it thereby assumes, and agrees to the amount and nature of the expenditures involved. Further, despite the decision of General Assembly resolution 31/140 and its predecessor resolutions that the host government "should defray ... the actual additional costs directly or indirectly involved," it did not appear in the past or at present that all such costs are being reimbursed (see paragraph 42). In addition and in contrast, the UNESCO conference "Handbook" states that no invitations for its conferences away from headquarters may be sent until the agreement with the host country has been signed.

80. Rather than the "last-minute deadline" approach suggested in rule 15.2, the Inspectors believe that the matter of holding a special conference away from headquarters should be resolved at the earliest possible date. A formal government offer to host a conference preferably should not be made and certainly should not be accepted until a secretariat planning mission has visited the country and discussed all arrangements, including the best possible estimates of the services and costs expected, with particular efforts to carefully identify the additional direct and indirect costs involved. In addition, a national preparatory organ should be agreed on and established and the agreement with the host government should be signed at the earliest possible date. To avoid sending extra staff and to reduce costs for conferences held away from headquarters, efforts should also be made wherever possible to train local personnel in various aspects of conference servicing as part of the preparatory process.

C. Documentation

81. Much dissatisfaction was expressed by Secretariat officials and delegates to past special conferences about the volume and waste of special conference documentation. Post-conference documentation is limited and not a source of major problems unless delayed. In-session documentation is more troublesome, as heavy volumes of statements, resolutions and amendments burden both the secretariat which must prepare them and the delegates who must absorb them in a very short time. But most controversy and concern surrounds pre-session documentation, to some extent for agenda documents but in particular for national papers and other reports prepared as background documents for the conference.
82. The major problem with agenda documents has been their issuance shortly before or actually at a conference, which greatly hampers delegate preparation and conference deliberations. Recent General Assembly and ECOSOC guidance on the volume, timeliness and length of documents, however, if strictly applied, could improve this situation considerably. A number of people also went so far as to suggest that a really effective special conference should have only two documents before it - the agenda and the draft programme of action.
83. The most serious problem, the large volume of national or technical papers and other background documents, has proven harder to control. Some successes have been achieved in establishing firm limits to such documents or to summaries of them. For instance, for two recent conferences a non-negotiable maximum of 10 pages was set for national papers. The texts were reproduced and circulated in the language or languages of submission. At the same time, the practice of submitting both summaries and reports was discontinued.
84. In other cases, however, the rules for documentation failed to specify any quantitative restrictions or, in a few instances, crumbled under a variety of pressures. At many conferences there have been too many such papers, they were too long, their formats were confusing, the manuscripts were received after deadlines, and too many copies were requested for reproduction and distribution. The burdens they placed on already-limited translation, typing, reproduction and distribution services were very heavy. They also tended to overwhelm delegates by their sheer volume, to the detriment of working papers on agenda items. As pointed out by many, they suffered the worst fate of all - despite the considerable effort and cost of preparing them, they were not read.
85. There is also considerable interest in new technologies. For instance, ITU has had success and cost savings by using facsimile equipment to process conference documents at headquarters rather than sending staff to a distant site and the United Nations has also had positive experience with facsimile transmission. The use of microfiche for documents, with reproduction only as needed at the site, has also been advocated. However, the former requires high-quality communication links to be effective, and the latter needs good technical expertise and equipment servicing at the site. While both may improve productivity, cost control and staffing, however, they do not reduce the general volume of documentation.
86. The Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services stated in 1980 that the United Nations services are obsolete in modern documentation technology. He also noted, however, that existing technology is sometimes still quite experimental, involves psychological barriers for secretariat staff and delegates, and has its own costs. He urged the Committee on Conferences to consider the technological communications revolution, and provide guidance and support on those areas which should be introduced into the United Nations.
87. As a result of these control problems, document volume and cost almost always prove to be higher than originally estimated, and costs can run as high as \$1 million for a single conference. One past conference had a total of 259 reports submitted, amounting to some 3,900 pages for delegates to read (see A/AC.172/48 of March 1981 for some comparative documentation data). Another conference had a total of 1,283 documents reproduced in all languages, amounting to almost 3.5

million page-impressions. The partial result of this massive production, not surprisingly, is waste: the Inspectors were informed that more than 50 tons of documents were left behind after the last-mentioned conference, most of which had been flown to the conference site from New York at considerable cost.

88. The Secretariat has been aware of these problems for a long time, and the 1980 Secretary-General's report suggested a series of remedies to meet the "serious need for rationalization" of special conference documentation. The Committee on Conferences developed a set of draft guidelines for documents control and limitation, but the Fifth Committee was unable to agree on the proposed limitation of national or technical papers to the original language submitted or to a 10-page limit. The General Assembly therefore requested the Committee on Conferences to reconsider the whole issue in 1981 and the proposed documentation guidance was removed from the guidelines for special conferences which the Assembly approved in resolution 35/10.

89. In 1981 the Secretary-General reported again on draft guidelines (A/AC.172/-48), including specific suggestions to limit both the number of national papers and the length of the summaries to be translated in the languages of the conference. The Committee on Conferences then discussed these issues and made recommendations to the General Assembly. In July 1981 ECOSOC also recommended that the Assembly give priority attention to the overall problem of documentation and the need to adjust the calendar to servicing capacity in the Secretariat (E/1981/83).

90. In December 1981 the General Assembly, in resolution 36/117 D, decided that, if and when special conferences of the United Nations are convened, particular attention should be given to harmonizing the proposed conference design with documentation needs to help obtain the stated objectives of the conference; that national papers should only be proposed if they are to play an integral part in conference preparations and the conference itself and sufficient time is allowed to meaningfully integrate them; and approved guidelines to apply existing documentation control policies, limit summary records, and establish steps and common formats which might be used to control and limit national papers, summaries and reports. The Inspectors welcome these emphases on integrating documentation matters into the planning and control processes of special conference preparation.

D. Conference servicing

91. The efficient servicing of a complex and crowded programme of conferences and meetings is a persistent problem to which special conferences, especially those held away from headquarters, contribute, as discussed extensively in the 1974 JIU report on pattern of conferences and more rational and economic use of conference resources. Interpreters, translators and conference officers at a distant site cannot be assigned back and forth to other meetings as needs arise, as would be true in New York or Geneva. Free-lance staff used at headquarters may not be willing to travel to a special conference site. The worldwide supply of skilled conference servicing people is limited, so large contingents sent to special conference sites create gaps in the headquarters conference programme.

92. The conference servicing issue is also important because of criticisms that too many Secretariat staff are sent to special conferences and then have too little to do. The Secretary-General and ACABQ have agreed on DCS conference servicing staffing standards, but standards have not been prepared for other entities. However, it has proven difficult to apply such standards precisely, especially to conferences held away from headquarters. The structure and special requirements of a particular conference may vary considerably, as may available local support staff, equipment, and the facilities provided. Special conferences, as noted previously, have become less technical and more political in recent years, and this creates much more hectic negotiating and drafting burdens which make estimates of needs more difficult.

93. In addition, many special conferences begin very slowly and then finish with a rush, leaving the staff largely unoccupied in the first days but with extensive late-night and last-minute work as the conference rushes to its end (or even beyond its established completion date). Servicing units can easily get caught in the middle, arousing criticism from those who see inactivity at one point, and from those who are unaware of the budgetary and servicing limitations established for the conference when they require urgent extra services at another point.

94. The basic logistical challenge also complicates conference servicing away from headquarters. One recent conference had about 200 member states or organizations attending. They required a main conference room seating 1,000 people, 2 main committee rooms for 430 each, 2 working group rooms for 260 each (all of these with simultaneous interpretation facilities in 6 languages), plus 3 small-group conference rooms for 500 people each, and all associated offices and servicing facilities. During the 2-week-plus conference period, 99 meetings were held with services, plus 61 without services. This had all to be built upon the key figure most difficult to estimate accurately in advance - the number of participants - which in this case exceeded 2,000.

95. Servicing requirements add further burdens. Another recent conference involved some 432 secretariat personnel sent from New York, including contingents of 294 people from DCS (with 80 interpreters, 92 translators and 88 typists), 44 from DPI, 42 from the substantive secretariat, and 21 from OSSECS (all at an airfare cost of \$495,000 plus \$135,000 estimated for excess baggage alone). Other substantive Secretariat staff also attended as observers under departmental budget funding. Several tons of supplies, equipment (such as about 160 typewriters with different language keyboards sent at an estimated round-trip airfreighted cost of \$100,000, or more than the cost of the typewriters themselves) and documents were sent. Several hundred local staff, communication facilities, copying arrangements, and press and media arrangements were also required. The conference managers must not only cope with all these elements, but with meeting delays and reschedulings, equipment malfunctions, transportation and hotel accommodation difficulties, and special requirements and emergencies. The entire operation must be quickly brought together in an unfamiliar environment, run its busy course for two weeks or so, and then be dismantled.

96. Although somewhat outside the scope of this study, the Inspectors also wish to note the many criticisms made of the lengthy lists of speakers at such conferences. As many as 140 speakers may be involved in the general debate, which thereby runs on for two-thirds or more of the total conference time and abbreviates the time available for negotiation and discussion of the key issues in the draft plan of action. General Assembly resolution 35/10 (Annex, paragraph 17) called for a normal time limit of 15 minutes for statements by representatives of States and 10 minutes by other participants. However, the 1981 conferences still had some trouble in applying these new rules. The Secretary-General's 1981 draft rules of procedure (Rule 37) further stated that a general debate would not be held unless the conference so decides on recommendation of the preparatory organ. The entities of the United Nations might help to shorten the general debate by contributing to a consolidated statement by the Director-General (for economic and social conferences) or the Secretary-General (for other special conferences) on their behalf.

97. The 1980 guidelines (resolution 35/10C) should help considerably in improving conference servicing for special conferences. Although this complex process will always require a certain flexibility, the Inspectors believe that the improved planning and control processes proposed in Chapter III can make a further substantial contribution, particularly in establishing conference scope and requirements at an early date and planning and adjusting the conference servicing requirements accordingly.

E. Post-conference assessments

98. Throughout the course of their study, the Inspectors found only scattered data and assessments on the details of preparations for the many past United Nations special conferences. Conference final reports devote only cursory attention to this topic, and reliance must therefore be placed on informal assessments, recollections of secretariat officials, and file documents. As a result, learning from the experience of past special conferences has occurred in a haphazard way, especially where special secretariats and special preparatory organs were involved. Each new conference has by and large begun the process all over again.

99. The Inspectors believe, and officials of past conferences strongly agreed, that a comprehensive assessment of preparatory experience should be made immediately after every special conference. The results should be reported briefly to the Committee on Conferences at its next session. The Conference Management Committee would be well-placed for this task. In conjunction with host government officials and others closely involved, it should carefully analyze the preparatory experience of the conference, as a basis for revising conference guidelines, standards and planning and control processes, and for improving special conference preparations in the future.

V. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

100. Special conferences have become a significant feature of the international scene over the years. They can have great value in focusing international attention and encouraging action on important emerging problems. They have also become a substantial element of the conference and meetings programme of the United Nations, requiring considerable expenditure of time and energy and incurring costs of hundreds of millions of dollars. The 30-some global conferences sponsored by the United Nations alone during the 1970s represent a trend that will quite probably continue in the future.

101. Although United Nations intergovernmental bodies have been concerned with special conferences for decades, they have not attempted to develop a systematic framework for the most effective organization, preparation, and servicing of these conferences, nor any official definition of a "special conference". This situation is now changing, as evidenced by the guidelines for special conference preparation and documentation approved by the General Assembly in 1980 and 1981 (resolutions 35/10C and 36/117D).

102. This JIU study, requested by the Assembly, attempts to build on these efforts. While it is concerned primarily with the experience of large-scale global conferences on economic and social matters, the most significant segment of this imprecise field, the Inspectors believe that the following conclusions and recommendations, suitably adapted, can be useful for all other types of United Nations special conferences as well.

103. There are many participants in special conferences (Chapter II), each with its own functions and each with its own particular contributions to make. Harmonizing and encouraging these contributions during an often lengthy and complicated preparatory process is important for two reasons. First, it can produce a much more effective conference. Second, but less obviously, if the various participants are able to play a timely and significant role in orderly preparation and conduct of the conference, they will be well-prepared and motivated to participate fully in the subsequent international, regional, national and local actions which the conference seeks to generate.

104. The most critical problems in past special conference preparation have been in the limited planning and control processes used to bring participants together in a timely and co-ordinated fashion (Chapter III). Initial planning and objectives have often been vague and "open-ended", and preparatory planning has usually been considerably delayed and incomplete. As a result, related scheduling and control processes have also been slow and erratic, and have followed the flow of events rather than guiding them. These problems have been exacerbated by a lack of effective guidelines for conference preparation and confusing financial, administrative and progress reporting which make it difficult to keep track of the status of conference preparation.

105. The lack of general planning and control processes is also reflected in specific aspects of special conference preparation (Chapter IV). Substantive secretariats, particularly when created especially for a particular conference, have been slow to begin work and are usually not well-versed in conference preparatory responsibilities. Host governments for conferences held away from established headquarters are not integrated into conference preparation at an early stage. The control and limitation of documents for special conferences has been difficult and has imposed heavy burdens on delegates and Secretariat staff alike. Conference servicing requirements have proven difficult to establish accurately, and assessments of conference preparation experience to improve future conferences have not been made.

106. The Inspectors conclude that three key changes are needed. First, clear and co-ordinated responsibility and mechanisms for special conference preparation need to be established within the Secretariat. Second, systematic planning and control techniques are needed to guide the preparatory process in a comprehensive, timely and orderly fashion.

107. Third, and as an essential part of the first two points, "special" conferences need to be considered more in the context of the environment in which they are a continuing feature: (a) as part of the overall policies and priorities of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies; (b) as part of the United Nations conference and meetings programme and related conference servicing capacity; and (c) as part of the existing Secretariat machinery and ongoing programmes and responsibilities. The Inspectors believe that the Director-General can be especially important in assessing these relationships for special conferences in the economic and social fields, operating under the objective of the restructuring resolution (32/197) to make the United Nations system more fully capable of dealing with problems of international economic co-operation and development in a comprehensive and effective manner.

108. In the past several decades there have been many exhortations to and from intergovernmental bodies to improve special conferences, and various Secretariat attempts to provide desirable guidance, but not much progress has been made. The Inspectors believe that the new 1980 guidelines from the General Assembly, combined with establishment of the planning and control mechanisms and associated recommendations suggested below, can provide a firm basis for much better special conference preparation. This improved preparation, in turn, should lead to more economical, efficient and effective special conferences in the future.

109. Planning and control mechanisms For most past special conferences, no one has been clearly in charge of special conference preparation, because authority and responsibility are not clearly established within the Secretariat, comprehensive planning and control processes are not established systematically at an early date, and the preparatory process has not received the emphasis and oversight it deserves. As a result, when problems occur, it is not clear why they arise, what their implications are, what should be done, and who is responsible for dealing with them. The Inspectors believe that a new approach is needed, with five inter-related components.

RECOMMENDATION 1

(a) The Secretary-General should establish a Conference Management Committee immediately after an intergovernmental organ recommends the convening of a special conference, with designated representatives from the substantive secretariat, the Departments of Conference Services and Public Information, and OFS; OSSECS and the Office of the Director-General for economic and social conferences; and other Secretariat units as needed. This Committee, and particularly its chairman, should have clear and co-ordinated authority and responsibilities for conference preparation, and should meet regularly throughout the preparatory period (paragraphs 52-55).

(b) The Committee should maintain control of the preparatory process, using PERT techniques as a disciplined basis for planning, scheduling, monitoring and adjusting the complex organizational effort which a special conference requires (paragraphs 56-59 and Annex).

(c) The function of Conference Secretary should be merged with that of Executive or Administrative Officer. The official combining these functions should be an outposted member of OSSECS assigned to the conference secretariat and charged to the special conference budget, without increasing overall costs. OSSECS should ensure that these officials are adequately trained in conference management including PERT and should arrange for their assignment to new special conferences when they complete each assignment (paragraphs 60-62).

(d) All reports on conference preparatory progress or on the implications of proposed changes should include a brief but clear summary of financial, administrative, policy and programme status and relationships, based on data prepared and maintained by the Conference Management Committee (paragraph 63).

(e) This new preparatory mechanism should be supplemented by standard guidelines for the preparation of special and other conferences, and by the development of basic servicing requirements and costing rates where they do not already exist (paragraph 64).

110. Related preparatory problems Within this new planning and control process, several areas have presented specific problems. As an addition to the guidelines which the General Assembly approved in 1980 and 1981 the Inspectors offer the following suggestions.

RECOMMENDATION 2

(a) Special conference preparations should seek new approaches wherever possible to increase the meaningful involvement of the many non-Secretariat participants, both to improve the preparations for the conferences and to increase the international support and follow-up actions which the conferences seek to generate (paragraphs 13, 20-24, 103).

(b) The Inspectors welcome the decision in General Assembly resolution 35/10C to use existing Secretariat machinery as secretariats for special conferences wherever possible. Whether the special representative and his staff are added temporarily to existing units or created as a special secretariat, however, they should be appointed as early as possible, and with careful attention to their specific qualifications for carrying out the preparatory tasks required and to providing a sound mix of technical, administrative and conference skills (paragraphs 66-73).

(c) If a special conference is to be hosted by a government away from established headquarters, a Secretariat planning and review mission should be made to the country and careful cost and servicing estimates made and discussed with the government before the invitation to host the conference is formally made and accepted. A host government preparatory committee or focal point should also be established and a conference agreement signed at the earliest possible date (paragraphs 74-80).

(d) The Inspectors also welcome the General Assembly's emphasis in resolution 36/117D on harmonizing special conference design with documentation needs, closely integrating any national paper preparation with the preparatory process, and controlling and limiting documentation. Specific documentation policy, limitations, and scheduling for a special conference should be established at an early date and closely and continuously monitored thereafter (paragraphs 81-90).

(e) Servicing requirements for a conference should be carefully and realistically established and made known at an early stage of conference preparation, based on the detailed planning specifications for the conference (paragraphs 91-97).

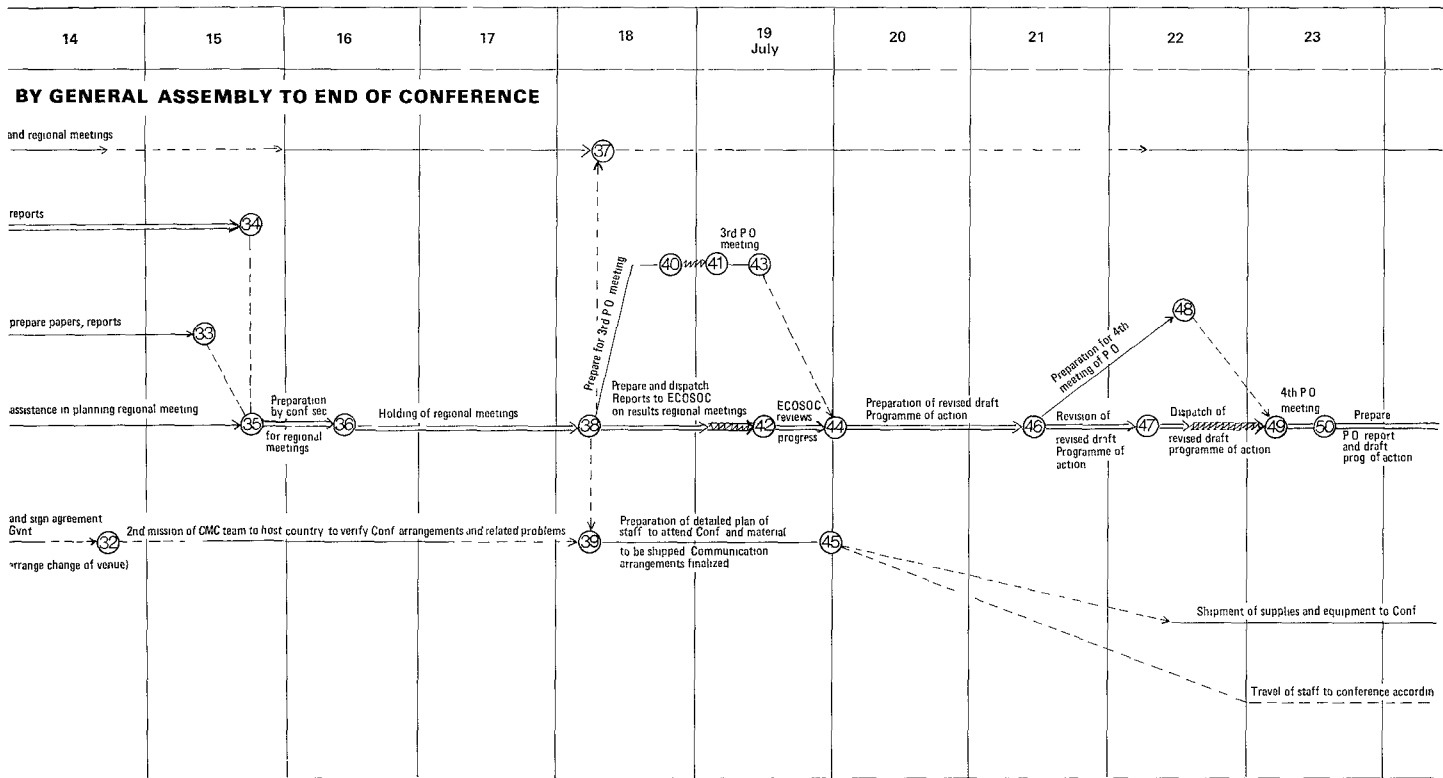
(f) The Conference Management Committee should complete its work with a careful and critical assessment report to the Committee on Conferences on conference preparation successes and problems as a basis for improving future conferences (paragraphs 98-99).

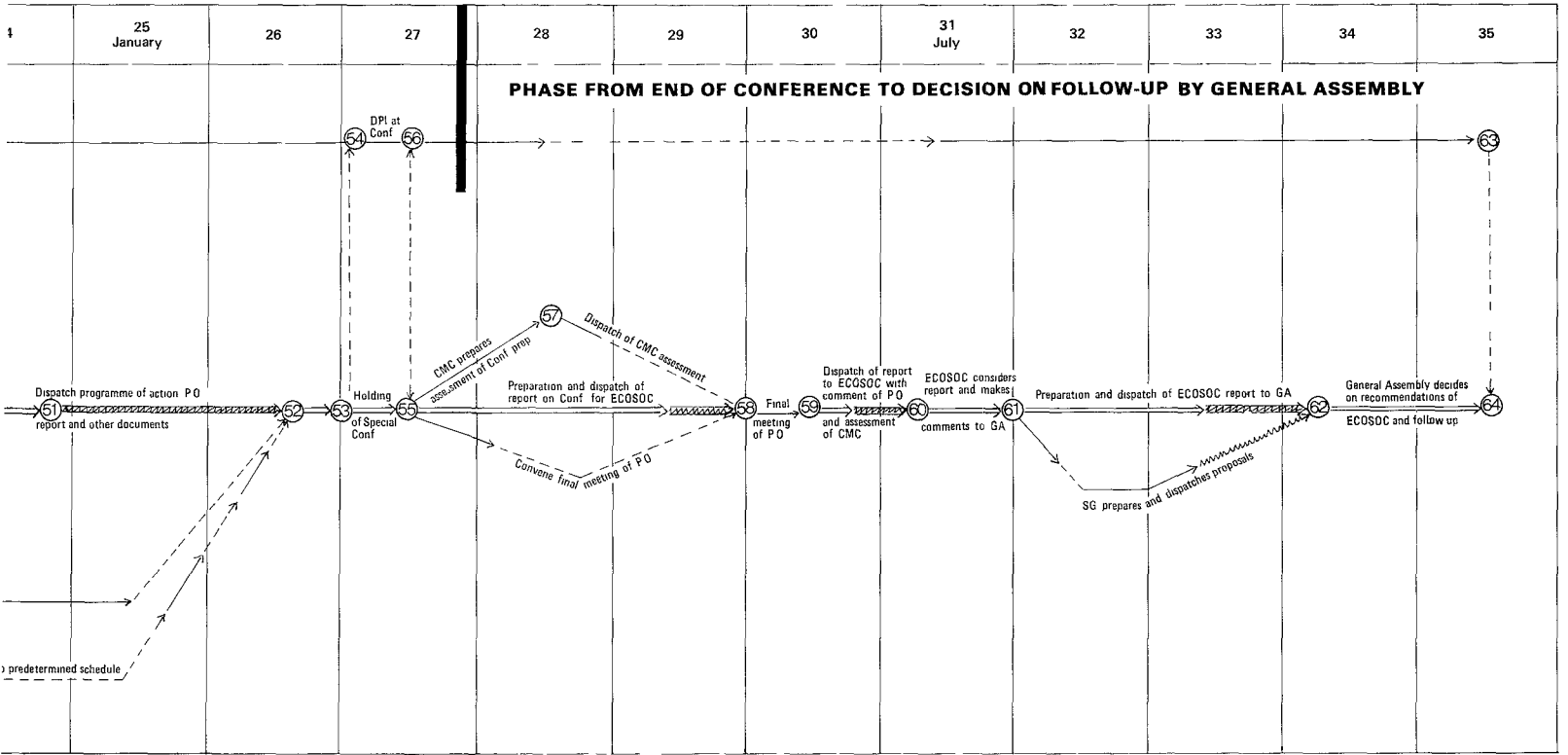
111. Formulation and evaluation of special conferences If member States, subsidiary bodies and the General Assembly can be as specific as possible in stating the objectives, scope, strategy, and intended follow-up of special conferences, the Secretariat can work more systematically to prepare them and more orderly and successful special conferences will result. This formulation

process should be supplemented by firm oversight of the adequacy and timeliness of subsequent preparations, particularly by the preparatory organ.

RECOMMENDATION 3

ECOSOC and the General Assembly should consider developing and adopting guidelines for the formulation and evaluation of future special conferences, similar to those adopted for future international years in ECOSOC resolution 1980/67 and Assembly decision 35/424 (paragraphs 26-31, 49-51).





ANNEX – SUMMARY "PERT" DIAGRAM (MA)

This chart illustrates PERT (Programme Evaluation and Review Technique) methodology rather than the details of any specific special conference. However, certain basic assumptions are made:

- 1 The subject matter of the conference is in the economic and social field
- 2 The conference takes place in a host country away from established headquarters
- 3 The conference takes place 27 months after its approval by the General Assembly
- 4 An existing secretariat unit (temporarily strengthened) and existing intergovernmental body are used to provide the conference secretariat and the preparatory body
- 5 National papers are prepared as an integral part of conference preparations

Many other choices, assumptions and steps could and would be added for a particular special conference, but the general format and scheduling techniques would be the same.

KEY

○ Start and conclusion point of a task. Tasks that follow this point should be begun only after completion of preceding tasks.

→ Task to be completed in the time shown on the scale.

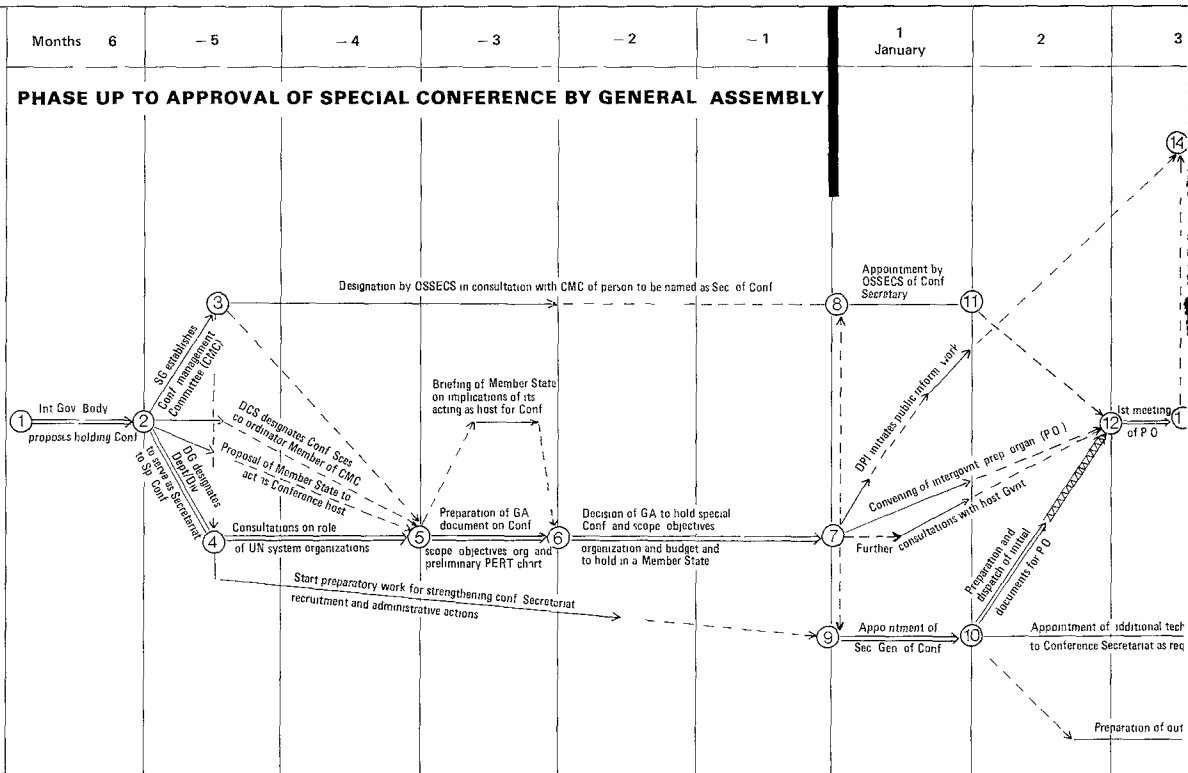
---→ Liaison constraint requiring no time but showing that previous tasks should be completed before following tasks are begun.

—→ Solid line shows tasks and time required.

---→ Broken line shows slack (extra) time available.

~~~~~ Time required between dispatch of documents and beginning of meeting.

====> Critical path. Any delay in tasks on critical path will delay final output unless corrective measures are taken.



# OR STEPS ONLY) FOR A HYPOTHETICAL SPECIAL CONFERENCE

