

MANAGEMENT OF INTERPRETATION SERVICES IN THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

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Table of Contents

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1 - 4	1
II. INTERPRETATION SERVICES	5 - 34	1
A. Nature of the work	5 - 18	1
B. Costs, staffing and workload	19 - 23	4
C. Recruitment, training and career Prospects	24 - 34	7
III. INTERPRETER DEMAND AND SUPPLY	35 - 58	9
IV. COMPARATIVE COSTS: REGULAR STAFF VERSUS FREELANCE INTERPRETERS	59 - 80	14
V. CONFERENCE CALENDARS	81 - 110	20
VI. VIDEOCONFERENCING	111 - 118	26
VII. COMPUTER-ASSISTED MANAGEMENT	119 - 127	27
VIII. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	128 - 137	29

I. INTRODUCTION

1. One of the main functions of the United Nations system is to create a forum for Member States to meet and exchange ideas on ways and means of maintaining world peace and promoting international co-operation to solve economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems. Interpreters play an important role in carrying out the vast and difficult task of communication. They are the link between delegates of many Member States, who speak different languages and have different historical, ideological and cultural backgrounds. An interpreter, therefore, has the responsibility for facilitating communication despite the difficulties and barriers which exist. It is essential that interpreters understand what has been said and transmit it immediately and accurately.

2. The Joint Inspection Unit has issued reports in the past on the pattern of conferences of the United Nations and possibilities for more rational and economic use of its conference services (1974), the implications of additional languages in the United Nations system (1977), and an evaluation of the translation process in the United Nations system (1980). Although these reports, as well as several others on documentation, have dealt in varying degrees with interpretation services, there has been no comprehensive study done on this subject by JIU or others.

3. The United Nations system has been faced for decades with the challenge of providing sufficient and satisfactory interpretation services for its voluminous conference programmes, utilizing scarce interpretation resources which must be shared with other international and national organizations and with an expanding private market. This report, which was requested of the JIU by FAO, analyzes the operation and management of interpretation services in the United Nations system and the possibilities for more effective use of existing resources. It focuses mainly on the cost and nature of interpretation services, the supply of and demand for interpreters, the balance between the use of freelance interpreters and regular staff interpreters, efforts at inter-organizational co-operation and the critical underlying issue of orderly conference calendars, and potentials for use of modern technologies.

4. The organizations responded to a questionnaire concerning costs, staffing and workload, appointment and career prospects, performance, general management and other issues, and the Inspectors visited as many of them as possible. They wish to express their appreciation for the co-operation and ideas which the organizations and officials provided.

II. INTERPRETATION SERVICES

A. Nature of the work

5. Conference interpretation can be done in two basic ways: consecutively or simultaneously. Consecutive interpretation means that the interpreter sits at the conference table, takes notes and reports the full statement in another language after the speaker has finished. This method is only suitable for very small meetings with two or three languages at the most. Simultaneous interpretation means that the interpreter sits in a sound-proof booth where he or she hears the speaker through ear-phones and delivers a running translation, relayed through a microphone to participants in the meeting who wear ear-phones. This method is much more rapid and appropriate for large meetings or meetings at which several languages are used.

6. Because their work generally involves large meetings with multiple languages, the organizations of the United Nations system rely mainly on simultaneous interpretation. (Consecutive interpretation is now used only very infrequently.) Interpreters are identified by the language they work into, i.e. a Spanish interpreter interprets from other languages into Spanish. Spanish would be referred to as this person's "active" or "target" language, while the two or more other languages from which he or she interprets are referred to as "passive" or "source" languages.

7. Where multiple languages are used in a meeting, the particular problem is to provide all the required language combinations. For example, a typical meeting using the six official United Nations working languages requires two interpreters each in the English, French, Russian and Spanish booths. In the Arabic and Chinese booths, however, interpreters work both into and from the language. This means that they are interpreting all the time, in contrast to interpreters in the other booths who are silent when their own "active" language is being spoken. Thus Arabic and Chinese require three people per booth. Since workload standards require another person per booth for meetings lasting five days or more, a total of 20 people may be involved.

8. Any booth should in theory be able to work directly from the other five languages into its one language. However, since Arabic and Chinese interpreters work both into and from their language, only three passive languages are required from the two people in each of the other booths. This generally occurs in the English and French booths, but it is rare in Spanish (very few interpreters have Russian passive) and Russian (not enough interpreters have Spanish passive). There are still many Arabic interpreters with only a second language (English or French, very few with Spanish), and among Chinese interpreters English is predominant.

9. When a passive language is not represented in a booth, the interpreter has to work from a second interpreter who takes the material directly from the speaker. It is widely agreed that this procedure - called the "relay" method - should be avoided at all costs in the "common" or "integrated" combinations (English, French, Spanish, and if possible Russian) because it may lead to the multiplication of mistakes. If a "double relay" is used, where the Chinese booth works only from English and the Arabic booth only from French, for instance, the hazards are those of a rendition twice removed from the original.

10. In specialized agency meetings these problems can be even more complicated. Eight or nine languages can be involved, perhaps adding German, Japanese, and Portuguese to the six mentioned above. The interpreters hired may be required to have at least three passive languages, and may use as many as four or five in order to help provide the necessary language combinations in as efficient a manner as possible.

11. Simultaneous conference interpretation work involves a considerable amount of stress. Interpreters must pay very close attention to what is being said - including nuances, carefully chosen formulations, and statements on sensitive issues - in order to interpret it into another language with speed and precision. Unlike most other professions, interpreters' work is subject to constant, immediate, and very public scrutiny: no supervisory review or revision is possible before their "product" is delivered. Thus they must exercise great concentration to maintain a high standard. To do their work well, interpreters also need to be familiar with the subject-matter and terminology of the particular conference or meeting at which they are working and with the specialized terminology of the organization itself.

12. For these reasons, interpreters have special workload standards which have been established over the years. A June 1974 United Nations Joint Advisory Committee report on the conditions of service of staff interpreters, endorsed

by the Medical Service, recommended that their normal workload should be not more than two meetings per day and seven meetings per week. (A "meeting" is generally defined as a period of 2 1/2 to 3 hours from the time when an interpreter is required to be on duty.) The organizations of the system generally follow this norm. For freelance interpreters hired by the organizations, a system-wide agreement states that the normal workload is no more than two meetings per day or eight meetings on average per seven-day week.

13. An increasing concern of conference service divisions and interpreters over the years has been night meetings, which have become sufficiently frequent in some organizations to seem more of a "norm" than an exception to the agreed workloads. Night meetings occur when (a) speakers become more numerous and agendas longer than originally planned; (b) there is a shortage of conference rooms; (c) protracted negotiations are involved, and/or (d) there is steadily accumulating pressure to finish a conference as the scheduled completion date approaches. Such meetings generate additional costs, such as the need for "relief teams" of interpreters or possible compensatory time off for interpreters for very late meetings. Because of the intense nature of their work and the fact that they are always "on call" for meetings whenever they occur, the major concern of interpreters is the added psychological stress created by a congested programme of day and night meetings as a conference draws to a close.

14. In order to ensure a high standard of interpretation, conference service divisions must make sure that the physical conditions of interpretation booths meet established international standards, including adequate lighting, good air circulation, effective sound-proofing, comfortable chairs, and high-quality and well-maintained electronic sound equipment and systems. Interpreters should be given advance notice of assignments to enable them to prepare for meetings, and be briefed before highly technical meetings. All documents required for the meetings should be given to interpreters in good time, and copies of the texts of statements to be read at the meetings should be given to them in advance.

15. A very important basic framework for the provision of interpretation services is the agreement established between the organizations and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). AIIC was founded in 1953 and presently has about 2,000 members in 63 countries. Its membership includes both short-term conference interpreters (freelance interpreters) and regular staff members employed by the United Nations system and by other international organizations such as the European Economic Community (EEC). Admission to the Association is based on high standards of professional competence. To become a full member, a candidate must complete 200 days of work as a professional conference interpreter and be sponsored by five senior members of the Association.

16. The main functions of AIIC include publishing a Code of Professional Conduct and maintaining ethical standards; negotiating and concluding agreements with large intergovernmental organizations; establishing universal conditions of work; establishing standards for the interpretation booths in which members work together with the International Standards Organization (ISO); recommending criteria designed to improve standards of training; and studying trends in national legislation concerning the status of interpreters.

17. The first agreement between the United Nations system organizations and AIIC was concluded in 1969, primarily to establish stable procedures and rates for the recruitment of freelance interpreters, covering both members and non-members of AIIC. It has been re-negotiated at five-year intervals - most recently in 1984. The Agreement is negotiated directly with the organizations through the Secretariat of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ), which is also responsible for administering the Agreement.

18. The main elements of the Agreement concern freelance interpreter appointment and termination, remuneration, travel conditions, social security arrangements, working conditions, disciplinary matters, and the settlement of disputes. Annexes to the Agreement establish specific salary rates for freelance interpreters and guidance concerning both Group I (experienced) and Group II (beginner) interpreters. The Agreement provides specific daily "headquarters rates" in local currency for freelance interpreters having their professional domicile in Austria, France, Italy, Switzerland or the United Kingdom when they work in that country. Work elsewhere in Europe is at a "European rate" and work outside Europe at a "world rate", both in \$US. The salary rates are adjusted as necessary by the CCAQ in consultation with AIIC, to reflect cost-of-living changes, relevant exchange rate movements, and any real-income increases granted to regular staff interpreters. AIIC, however, does not negotiate the working conditions of regular staff members. And while it negotiates basic agreements on behalf of freelance staff, it does not serve as an employment agent for them.

B. Costs, staffing and workload

19. The total estimated expenditures of the organizations of the system for the 1984-85 biennium for interpretation services amounted to about \$78 million, as shown in Table 1. This figure represents only about 2.3 per cent of the total estimated regular budget expenditures of \$3.4 billion system-wide for this period, but it is a significant amount nonetheless, particularly as a component of total conference servicing costs. The expenditures include interpreters' salaries, their travel and per diem costs when on mission, direct administrative costs of interpreter units, and common staff costs (pension contributions and other benefits). The expenditures are almost entirely from the organizations' regular budgets, although occasionally a government will pay or share the cost of interpretation into a non-official or limited official language for particular meetings.

20. The expenditure data show two significant patterns. First, most of the total United Nations system interpretation costs are incurred by the United Nations itself, and the two largest interpretation services by far are those of United Nations headquarters in New York and the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). Second, there is a major difference in the use of regular versus freelance interpretation staff: the United Nations relies predominantly on regular staff interpreters, while the specialized agencies, with a few exceptions, rely mostly or entirely on freelance interpreters. This issue is discussed more fully in Chapters III, IV, and V.

21. Established professional posts have been even more heavily concentrated in the United Nations, as shown in Table 2. During 1984-1985, more than 40 percent of the regular staff interpreters in the entire system were located at United Nations headquarters in New York, and 76 percent were at this Headquarters and UNOG combined. Only one of every five staff interpreters worked for a specialized agency, and even most of these posts were in only three agencies: ICAO (24, all of whom serve as both interpreters and translators), FAO (13), and UNESCO (12). IAEA had only seven posts, and ILO, WHO and WMO only three or four each. ITU, IMO, UPU, WIPO and all the United Nations regional commissions except ESCAP (with six) had no regular staff interpreters at all. The average grade level for both the United Nations and specialized agency posts was P-4, although the United Nations had proportionately more P-5s (21 per cent of its total) than the specialized agencies (9 per cent).

22. The second part of Table 2 shows the same interpreter posts by language. The staffing differences are due to differing patterns of official languages and their use among the organizations. The six official languages of the United Nations itself are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. The specialized agencies generally also use these six languages for most of their worldwide conferences, but with some individual variations because of different membership and varying additional use of German, Japanese and Portuguese. For

Table 1

ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES FOR INTERPRETATION SERVICES
(for the biennium 1984-1985, \$US million)

<u>Organization</u>	<u>Regular staff \$</u>	<u>Freelance staff \$</u>	<u>Regular/ Freelance Percentages</u>	<u>Totals \$</u>	<u>Percentage of system- wide total</u>
United Nations:					
UN/NY	16.9	6.3	73%-27%	23.2	29.7%
UNOG	11.7	2.0	85%-15%	13.7	17.5%
UNOV/UNIDO	0.5	3.2	14%-86%	3.7	4.7%
ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP	3.9	1.7	70%-30%	5.6	7.2%
Sub total	33.0	13.2	71%-29%	46.2	59.1%
Specialized agencies:					
FAO	2.2	6.0	27%-73%	8.2	10.5%
IAEA	0.8	0.4	67%-33%	1.2	1.5%
ICAO	1.4	0.6	70%-30%	2.0	2.6%
ILO	0.6	4.3	12%-88%	4.9	6.3%
IMO	-	0.7	0%-100%	0.7	0.9%
ITU	0.2	4.6	4%-96%	4.8	6.2%
UNESCO	1.6	3.4	32%-68%	5.0	6.4%
UPU	-	0.8	0%-100%	0.8	1.0%
WHO	0.7	2.1	25%-75%	2.8	3.6%
WIPO	-	0.5	0%-100%	0.5	0.6%
WMO	0.5	0.5	50%-50%	1.0	1.3%
Sub total	8.0	23.9	25%-75%	31.9	40.9%
TOTALS	<u>\$41.0</u>	<u>\$37.1</u>	52%-48%	<u>\$78.1</u>	<u>100.0%</u>

Table 2

INTERPRETATION STAFF
(1984-85, Established Professional Posts)

<u>By Grade Level:</u>	<u>United Nations</u>					<u>Specialized Agencies</u>	<u>Totals</u>
	<u>UN/NY</u>	<u>UNOG</u>	<u>UNIDO</u>	<u>a/</u>	<u>ESCAP</u>		
D-1	1	1	-	-	2	-	2
P-5	31	22	1	-	54	6	60
P-4	69	56	2	-	127	40	167
P-3	31	20	1	6	58	21	79
P-1/2	6	7	-	-	13	-	13
TOTALS	138	106	4	6	254	67	321
Percentage of totals	43.0%	33.0%	1.2%	1.9%	79.1%	20.9%	100%
<u>By Language:</u>							
Arabic	25	25	-	-	50	6	56
Chinese	23	9	-	2	34	2	36
English	23	18	1	2	44	15	59
French	24	20	1	-	45	17	62
Russian	18	20	1	2	41	14	55
Spanish	23	12	1	-	36	12	48
Others	2	2	-	-	4	1	5
TOTALS	138	106	4	6	254	67	321

a/ For 1986-1987 the new joint UNOV/UNIDO interpretation service has added 16 additional permanent posts (8 P-4, 8 P-3) to the 4 former UNIDO posts.

meetings at regional levels, both the United Nations and the specialized agencies also generally use varying combinations: English and French in every region plus Spanish and Portuguese (in Latin America), Russian and often Spanish or German (in Europe), Arabic (in the Middle East and Africa), and Chinese and Russian (in Asia).

23. Total estimated interpreter-days system-wide for 1984-1985, including both regular and freelance staff, amounted to about 280,000 or the equivalent of approximately 637 full-time interpreters (assuming 220 work days per year and that all regular staff posts are filled). Of this equivalent of 637 interpreters, 321 would represent regular staff and 316 freelance interpreters. The United Nations share would be 371, and that of the specialized agencies 266. By language, the totals would be: Arabic (110 work-years annually), Chinese (78), English (126), French (122), Russian (88), Spanish (96), and others (17).

C. Recruitment, training and career prospects

24. The general requirement for staff interpreters is a university degree in the mother tongue/active official language, combined with an excellent knowledge of at least two passive official languages. Most new interpreters have some degree of specialization in a field which the United Nations system conferences deal with, and have attended graduate schools of interpretation. Most are also former freelancers, and if they are AIIC members they have already accumulated at least 200 working days of freelance conference interpretation experience.

25. Because the specialized agencies have small permanent interpretation staffs, normally at the P-3 and P-4 levels, their recruitment and training procedures are relatively limited and informal. New staff interpreters are recruited only infrequently, and may often be former freelance interpreters with whose performance the agency is already very familiar. Training for these new staff is also generally informal, on-the-job training with assistance from senior staff. The professional capabilities of freelancers are assessed through brief initial testing and on-the-job performance to decide whether they should be used on a continuing basis.

26. The United Nations, with its 254 professional posts, has more extensive recruitment and training arrangements. However, it still organizes recruitment campaigns only when several vacancies occur in a particular language combination. Although recruitments are in theory competitive, the number of qualified candidates rarely exceeds the number of available posts. It also appears that sometimes cumbersome worldwide recruitment procedures tend to discourage potential recruits, and New York - where all new United Nations staff interpreters must begin their service - is considered a less attractive place of employment than Geneva or other duty stations in Europe.

27. When certain language combinations become especially hard to find, or outside opportunities make permanent employment unattractive to candidates, the United Nations recruits a few Arabic, English, French and Spanish trainees at the P-1 level, who are chosen through aptitude tests. Following a three to eleven month training period, they and other new candidates must pass an examination before they are appointed as staff interpreters. From 1980 through 1985, the United Nations recruited 34 interpreter trainees (20 of whom were for the special Arabic training effort discussed below): 29 were subsequently hired and all but two are still on duty.

28. Arabic was added as an official United Nations language in 1974, but because it was a "new" international conference language and there were many attractive opportunities in the freelance market, it proved difficult to staff an Arabic section. In 1979 the United Nations decided to bring the number of Arabic interpreters up to the level of other official languages, and began a special recruitment and training effort. This training programme is now almost complete.

It has succeeded in substantially reducing, but not fully eliminating, the shortage of Arabic staff interpreters. However, Arabic interpreter programmes have been increasing in interpreter schools and universities in the Middle East and Europe.

29. In the early 1960s the United Nations launched a pre-recruitment training programme in Moscow, which normally trains up to 30 Russian translators (who translate actual United Nations documents as part of their training) and interpreters annually. The ten-month course is administered by the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages under the general supervision of the United Nations, which partially finances the programme (staff costs in roubles and a small amount of equipment in dollars) under an annual agreement. The trainees are required to be fluent in Russian and two other official United Nations languages. After course completion they take the United Nations recruitment examination, and those who pass are hired. The course has proven successful over the years. It has been particularly useful for the United Nations and for occasional loans to the specialized agencies, since qualified freelance Russian interpreters are becoming more and more difficult to find.

30. In 1979 the United Nations began a similar programme in Beijing to train up to 25 Chinese translators and interpreters annually. The twelve-month course is administered by the Beijing Institute of Foreign Languages using a curriculum and syllabus similar to that used in Moscow. The United Nations made a one-time contribution of equipment and pays a fixed fee of \$6,000 per trainee. Trainees who subsequently pass the United Nations interpreter recruitment examination are hired and expected to work for the United Nations for a period of at least five years. Trainees are expected to have a perfect knowledge of Chinese and one other official language, with a knowledge of a third official language considered highly desirable. The United Nations considers that the supply of Chinese interpreters for both normal and peak periods has become satisfactory, although more will be needed if the conference programme expands further.

31. Career prospects appear reasonable for most United Nations staff interpreters. Most are recruited at the P-2 or P-3 level, although some start higher and some Russian or Chinese interpreters on a second or third tour of duty may be appointed at the P-5 level. The P-2 recruitment does permit up to three levels of advancement to more senior grades. Most staff interpreters at junior levels have in fact had at least one promotion, and those at senior levels have had two or three, although the average number of promotions is considerably higher in New York than in Geneva. In the specialized agencies, career advancement is more restricted because of the small size of the services, but they also generally have a P-3 to P-5 range to offer as well.

32. A conspicuous problem area exists in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). ESCAP has minimal two-person interpretation teams in Chinese, English, French and Russian, which allows no back-up or relief during lengthy meetings schedules, particularly since there are few if any freelance interpreters available in Bangkok. Moreover, interpretation into French has traditionally been provided by volunteers from the French Translation Unit of ESCAP, although these staff members are not officially recognized - or necessarily professionally qualified - as translator/interpreters. Conversely, however, interpreters in the other three units, which were established in 1982, do not work as translators during non-meetings periods. In addition, while other staff interpreters throughout the United Nations system are at the P-4 level on average, all six ESCAP interpreter posts are at P-3.

33. Action should be taken to correct these discrepancies and ensure high-quality interpretation services, at least modest possibilities for career advancement, and better use of scarce ESCAP language resources. A formal two-person French translator/interpreter team could be established from among existing translator posts, at least one post in each of the four language teams

could be upgraded to P-4, and formal translator/interpreter functions could be extended to the other three units as well. Recognition should be given to the added requirements and constraints of the dual translation/interpretation function and some incentive (such as accelerated steps within the grade) provided to attract qualified candidates and facilitate recruitment.

34. In addition, as noted above, the general language requirement for staff interpreters is at least two passive official languages (paragraph 24), but in some specialized agencies the requirement may be three or even more (paragraph 10). At present in the United Nations, however, Arabic and Chinese interpreters are still required only to interpret both into and out of their mother tongues and one other official language. In order to (a) increase the capabilities of these two units now that they are established, (b) help overcome the problems in finding various "difficult" language combinations, (c) more efficiently meet conference servicing requirements with the same number of staff, and (d) encourage beginning staff interpreters and freelance interpreters to maintain additional official languages which they may have mastered, the United Nations might consider the feasibility of gradually increasing the number of passive languages it requires or offering incentives or priority in recruitment to people with demonstrated extra language competence.

III. INTERPRETER DEMAND AND SUPPLY

35. The essential prerequisite for effective interpretation services for United Nations system conferences and meetings is a steady supply of well-qualified conference interpreters. They are needed not only as permanent staff, but also as freelance interpreters who are conveniently based in the organizations' headquarters cities in adequate numbers and the needed language combinations to readily provide the freelance services which all the organizations use.

36. Unfortunately, there are no readily available data on the worldwide demand, supply and location of conference interpreters. This is because the profession is still a relatively new and small one, its practitioners serve many diverse public and private sector clients in many languages, and their total number includes an unknown but apparently substantial number of non-members of AIIC who cannot be surveyed and identified as can the AIIC membership. Past JIU reports on conference services and material gathered for this study, however, provide the following brief overview of past and present demand and supply trends.

37. During the 1950s and 1960s, there was a steady but modest and manageable growth in United Nations system conferences and the associated interpretation services. By the mid-1960s, there were about 40 permanent staff interpreters in the United Nations in New York, and another 40 among the United Nations agencies in Europe (plus interpreter/translators in ILO, ICAO, and WMO). A considerable number of freelance interpreters were being used in both locations as well, with the demand in Europe varying from as few as 20 freelance interpreters during slow periods to as many as 150 at peak conference seasons.

38. While it was felt that demand and supply for interpreters were relatively in balance at this time, concerns were beginning to emerge about the expansion of conference programmes and the need to even out meetings schedules to avoid shortages of servicing staff during peak periods. In 1963, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) warned that the United Nations was in competition with the specialized agencies and other organizations for a limited supply of interpreters, and that a lower standard of servicing would be unavoidable unless demands for meetings were reduced.

39. During the 1970s there was a great increase in meetings and heavy new pressures on the available interpreter supply because of a strong emphasis on multilateral diplomacy. The United Nations held 30 global conferences on environment, population, water and other topics between 1972 and 1980 (and multi-year negotiations on the law of the sea treaty in particular), which placed heavy burdens on conference servicing resources. At United Nations headquarters in New York, extra servicing was required for special sessions of the General Assembly, for new subsidiary bodies and units, and for a considerable increase in unofficial meetings of regional groups. In Geneva, there was a substantial expansion of UNOG conference facilities and meetings, particularly to meet the negotiating responsibilities of UNCTAD. Arabic and Chinese were added to the four other official languages of the United Nations and other agencies. Outside competition increased as well: in addition to the private sector and continuing expansion of EEC activities, conferences such as those on Security and Co-operation in Europe and on Mutual Balanced Force Reduction placed heavy demands on interpretation services.

40. In the face of these many new international conferences, the supply of interpreters was inadequate. The results were a growing scarcity of freelance interpreters, increased competition for their services, and heightened concern about the quality of interpretation services which could be provided. These shortages were increased by problems in finding certain language combinations, particularly relating to the new official languages. In addition, most of the permanent and freelance staff used by United Nations system agencies were 45-60 years old, raising doubts about the adequacy of interpretation supply in the years to come.

41. A 1974 JIU report on United Nations conference patterns and the use of conference resources (document A/9795) concluded that there were not enough qualified interpreters to service peak conference periods, and in some languages and some situations the organizations could not find anyone at all. The Inspectors recommended that the United Nations give serious consideration to the regular/freelance interpretation staff mixture, to new longer-range recruitment and training programmes, to better conference scheduling and control, and to more attractive grade levels and career prospects for regular staff. The Secretary-General agreed that the limitations imposed on the conference programme because of the shortage of conference staff, particularly interpreters, had reached "near-crisis proportions", and that a re-thinking of policies, control mechanisms and future strategies was needed.

42. In the 1980s, in contrast, the situation appears broadly to have reversed itself. There are now about 2,000 members of AIIC and, although precise figures are not known, it has been estimated that there are more than 3,000 competent conference interpreters in all worldwide. Rather than aggressive competition for a limited group of interpreters, overall supply now exceeds demand and young interpreters in particular are having difficulty in establishing themselves in the profession. This shift has multiple causes. On the demand side, there have been fewer multilateral negotiations; system organizations have made some progress in reducing (or slowing the increase in) the number, frequency, and duration of meetings; and zero-growth budgets and governmental austerity programmes have reduced conference programme expenditures in both the international and commercial sectors. On the supply side, the heavy demands and competition for interpreters of the 1970s predictably attracted many new people to the profession, which resulted in a belated expansion of the supply at a time when demand had already diminished.

43. While overall conference interpreter availability has thus improved, several specific problems remain. One major problem continues to be the geographic locations of freelancers. In general, conference interpreters have been and continue to be concentrated in Western Europe. Geneva, with its United Nations system organizations (UNOG, ILO, ITU, WHO, WMO, WIPO and UPU in

nearby Bern) and many other international organizations and conference activities, has attracted the largest pool of local freelance interpreters. Because of the steady growth in the languages and activities of the European Economic Community (EEC) including the European Parliament, Brussels and Strasbourg/Luxembourg have become major centres of activity. Paris is important because of UNESCO activities and an active private market. However, other United Nations system locations in Europe - Rome (FAO), Vienna (IAEA, UNIDO, UNOV) and London (IMO) - have only small interpreter pools available.

44. In North America, in particular New York (United Nations) and Montreal (ICAO), local freelance interpreters are often difficult to obtain. Conference interpretation activity in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East has gradually been increasing in recent years, in part as United Nations system organizations decentralize more conference activities to regional offices and hold more conferences away from headquarters locations, but freelance interpreter availability is still quite limited in these areas. As rough measures of global expansion, however, AIIC presently has 25 regional branches and members in 63 countries, and it is estimated that there are now at least 60 qualified freelance conference interpreters located in sub-Saharan Africa.

45. A second very important problem is that of language availabilities and combinations. There is a continuing difficulty in finding qualified conference interpreters in some of the newer official languages. As an example, a 1981 United Nations worldwide recruitment effort for Arabic interpreters resulted in more than 700 applications. Yet only 38 of these people met the initial requirements of a minimum of 200 days of conference interpretation experience and the ability to interpret from English or French into Arabic and from Arabic into English or French, while an additional 35 candidates were recent graduates of interpretation schools but had no direct interpretation experience.

46. Much of the current difficulty, as this indicates, is to find qualified people with the right language combinations: that is, two (or three) particular passive languages combined with a particular active language. Several organizations, for example, reported having trouble recruiting qualified freelance interpreters who can work from Russian into Spanish or Russian into English. In addition, new requirements alter these language combination problems. The entry of Spain and Portugal into the EEC will unleash strong new demand pressures for interpreters who can work both from and into Spanish and Portuguese.

47. A third factor is seasonal fluctuations in demand. A fairly extensive "conference industry" has evolved in the private sector which concentrates on summer conferences in the Northern hemisphere. The United Nations system organizations have more of a year-round schedule, but tend to have their major governing body meetings in the same summer and fall months. As a result, the period from May to mid-July and September to November is generally the most crowded and competitive one for obtaining interpretation services, while January and February tend to be particularly quiet.

48. The overall demand and supply situation is further complicated by the many other users and kinds of interpretation services. The largest single employer of conference interpreters is not the United Nations or perhaps even the United Nations system, but the EEC. In recent years the EEC has employed about 300 regular and probationary interpreters in its seven working languages, plus freelance interpreters for about one-third of the total workload, amounting in peak periods to as many as 520 interpreters at one time. This scope of activity will now increase further, since Spanish and Portuguese also became official EEC languages in 1986.

49. There is also a significant and very diverse demand for interpreters from commercial firms, national governments, and governmental and other inter-governmental organizations. Interpretation wage rates are generally higher than those established for freelancers working for United Nations system organizations,

but the conference work is also generally much more short-term and ad hoc. Nevertheless; bilingual and multilingual interpretation markets increasingly exist in all regions worldwide, and special events - such as the summit meeting held in Geneva in late 1985, or national elections which attract international media attention - can create a very heavy and disruptive short-term demand for interpretation services.

50. In addition, conference interpreters may engage in many related kinds of activity. Some like the freedom and variety of choosing their own employers, while others like to work only part-time for personal or family reasons. Many freelance interpreters may spend part of their time doing translations; interpreting for travelling businessmen or officials; serving as "whispering" interpreters for meetings between national officials; working in language combinations other than those of the United Nations system; doing "consecutive interpretation", which is still a significant activity in some sectors; or in new interpretation roles developing as a result of the emigré or refugee populations now found in more and more countries - particularly in bridging language gaps in courts of law, hospitals, or government social service bureaus. All these various interpretation activities provide alternative sources of income for interpreters, but they also make it difficult to determine the true supply and distribution of qualified conference interpreters worldwide.

51. The basic source of supply of conference interpreters is the training institutes and related university programmes around the world. In recent years, the number and output of these programmes has grown too rapidly in response to the heavy 1970s demand for interpreters, helping create the current over-supply and producing young interpreters whose qualifications vary widely. The contacts between the organizations' officials and these basic supply sources have been rather limited, informal, and ad hoc.

52. AIIC provides a major unifying framework for understanding this rather chaotic pattern of interpreter deployment and activity, because of its worldwide membership (including both regular staff as well as freelancers), code of professional conduct and practice, formal agreements on freelance wage rates and working conditions with international organizations, and directories of interpreter training institutions, conference facilities, and AIIC members worldwide. The agreement of the organizations with AIIC (outlined in paragraphs 15-18) produces some restlessness on both sides, as in any agreement. Some officials in the system organizations feel that AIIC has too much market power and bargaining strength. Some members of AIIC, on the other hand, believe that the agreements still have not succeeded in giving freelance interpreters full parity of salary and allowances with regular interpretation staff in the organizations.

53. The clear advantage of the agreement, however, is to provide stability for both groups. It gives individual freelance interpreters an understood and agreed rate structure and working conditions in dealing with the major steady employers, in contrast to the erratic schedules and rate bargaining they find elsewhere. At the same time, the organizations have an orderly process of hiring freelance staff worldwide, and do not have to constantly negotiate with freelancers and compete with the outside markets at what would probably be considerably higher short-term rates.

54. Nevertheless, the major risk which now exists, and which goes beyond the agreement process, is that the current oversupply of young interpreters in most language combinations might result in another over-reaction and a renewed shortage of interpreters during the 1990s. As already stated, effective United Nations system conferences and meetings require a steady supply of well-qualified interpreters to avoid the disruption of conference schedules and the provision of poor quality services. The organizations also have larger mandates to expand and facilitate international understanding and exchange of information,

and should therefore help ensure that the linguistic resources necessary for such interchange - such as interpretation services - will be available. At present, too little is known about future interpretation demand and supply relationships and changes.

55. The Inspectors believe, however, that the organizations can make a significant contribution to improving this situation. In 1969, a meeting of officials concerned with conference servicing was arranged under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC). In 1974 this procedure was formalized as an Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP). The group has subsequently met for a week every even numbered year to consider, inter alia, the increasing demands for language services and how the organizations can ensure their optimum overall use.

56. The Inspectors recommend that future IAMLADP meetings include a regular agenda item analyzing current and emerging demand and supply problems and trends for language services. An official from one of the organizations could solicit each organization's assessment of current problems and trends over approximately the next five years several months in advance of each biennial meeting. The issues examined could include

- (a) overall demand and supply problems;
- (b) the geographic location and adequacy of interpreter pools worldwide;
- (c) shortages and difficulties in particular languages and language combinations;
- (d) continuing seasonal fluctuations and conflicts in demand; and
- (e) the shifting and expanding demands of other interpretation customers and in related forms of interpretation work.

57. The designated official could then synthesize these views as a document for discussion at the IAMLADP meeting, which would hopefully arrive at some consensus. Since the organizations also make use of a considerable volume of contract translation services, this process could include not only interpretation services, but translation and other language staff (verbatim reporting, editing) needs and patterns as well.

58. The resulting analysis and forecast would clearly be tentative and informal. It would, however, be a very useful and low-cost way for the organizations to help overcome the current lack of knowledge of worldwide supply and demand conditions and trends for language services. It would afford them a good opportunity to consider co-operative rather than competitive actions which they might take to deal with the problems identified. It would also provide data which they could convey informally to (a) interpretation and other language training institutions, so that they might be more responsive to United Nations system and other organizations' changing needs; (b) individual freelancers considering where they should locate and which language combinations they should maintain or develop; (c) other organizations, such as the EEC, for consideration of possible joint approaches to problems encountered.

IV. COMPARATIVE COSTS: REGULAR STAFF VERSUS FREELANCE INTERPRETERS

59. A dominant and unresolved issue concerning interpretation services over the years has been whether it is more economical to rely primarily on regular staff interpreters or on freelance interpreters. This Chapter attempts to clarify the major factors involved in this staffing decision and suggests a way to better review the actual deployment and use made of interpreter resources.

60. Studies made by CCAQ in the 1960s in Geneva first raised the basic questions of appropriate interpreter staffing. They concluded that clear policies had not been established regarding the proper mix of regular staff and freelance interpreters, appropriate entry-level grades for regular staff, inter-agency staff sharing, and interpreter workloads. Subsequent analyses by knowledgeable officials and individual organizations have almost all found that, as stated in an inter-agency analysis in 1978, there was a "quite clear" tendency of costs to decrease as the proportion of freelance interpreters increased. The 1978 study observed, however, that it could not recommend that all organizations use freelance interpreters instead of regular staff, since in some headquarters cities local freelancers were hard to obtain.

61. Currently, as shown in the third column of Table 1 on page 5, most of the specialized agencies rely primarily on freelance interpreters to meet their conference servicing needs, and some have no staff interpreters at all. In contrast, the United Nations relies heavily on regular interpretation staff at its New York, Geneva, and Bangkok conference centres. In addition, in 1985 the Secretary-General requested, and the General Assembly approved, the establishment of 16 new interpreter posts in Vienna, converted from temporary assistance funds and joined with four existing UNIDO staff posts in a joint UNOV/UNIDO interpretation service for 1986-1987 and beyond (documents A/C.5/40/7 and /48).

62. The Inspectors believe that the following basic cost considerations determine the relative financial merits of using regular versus freelance interpreters in any of the organizations:

(a) Cost unit: Cost analysis should not be based on total costs, average costs, or wage rates, but on cost per product: in this case, interpreter-days. IAMLADP meetings in 1976 and 1978 accepted this measure as a basic "workload indicator" and "unit of output".

(b) Days paid versus days worked: Freelance interpreters are paid only for the days for which they are recruited. Regular staff interpreters, however, are paid a year-round salary whether they are assigned or not: thus, calculations of their cost-per-day should be based only on the number of days when they are actually assigned.

(c) Common staff costs: The freelance wage rates established in the agreement with AIIC make freelancers somewhat cheaper than regular staff, since these rates do not include certain benefits paid to regular staff, such as employer pension contributions, annual "step" promotion increments, home leave, maternity leave, dependency allowances, and education grants.

(d) Duration of freelance contracts: Freelance interpreters are paid a full day's salary for each calendar day of employment, including weekends, holidays and travel days. Their per-day cost therefore gradually increases as their contracts lengthen: a freelancer working at a Monday-Friday week of meetings would be paid for 5 days, but for two such weeks the salary would be for 12 days, and for three weeks for 19 days. (A freelancer employed for a continuous period of more than 60 days is paid at a monthly rate, which is about 27 times the daily rate).

(e) Travel: The organizations provide interpretation services for conferences and meetings held not only at headquarters but around the world. Yet regular staff are based at headquarters and freelancers are scattered among various locations and in varying concentrations. In order to deploy both these groups at conference sites as needed, travel is often required, and travel and per diem costs can become a significant portion of total interpretation costs.

(i) Where qualified freelance staff are not available locally, the cost of using them increases, since they must be paid travel and per diem expenses.

(ii) When non-local freelance staff must be recruited, it is cheaper to recruit them from as near a location as possible to cut travel costs.

(iii) When a headquarters unit services a conference held at another location, it may well make sense to hire qualified freelancers from that location if possible rather than sending regular headquarters staff who would incur considerable travel and per diem costs.

(f) Direct administrative costs: The administration costs for freelance interpreters are normally included under regular staff cost totals, but are a relatively small component. ITU, for instance, relies totally on freelance interpreters and on a fairly large scale. However, as shown in Table 1, the ITU direct administrative costs for interpretation administration amount to only four per cent of the ITU total cost.

63. From among the many possible interpreter staffing situations, the following hypothetical example illustrates some of these major cost factors. In order to provide interpretation services for a two-week meeting in three languages in Addis Ababa in April 1986, the United Nations could:

(a) hire local freelance interpreters in Addis Ababa (if available) at a total cost of \$23,976 (nine people for 12 days at the established daily "world rate" of \$222).

(b) if freelance interpreters were not available in Addis Ababa, hire freelance interpreters (for example from Geneva) for a total cost of \$51,138 (nine people for 13 days at the world rate, plus air fare of \$1,600 each and 13 days of per diem at \$92).

(c) If UNOG staff interpreters are available, send them on loan for an apparent out-of-pocket United Nations cost of \$25,164 (9 people, air fare and per diem costs only). While it would make sense to send these regular staff rather than have them sit unassigned in Geneva, this "inactivity factor" itself would raise their true per-day costs even higher, as discussed further below.

(d) As an illustration of the complex assignment tasks which Chief Interpreters continually face, the press of other meetings in Addis Ababa and Geneva and the availability or non-availability of the required language skills might in fact force the United Nations to patch together some combination of these three alternatives to service the Addis Ababa meeting.

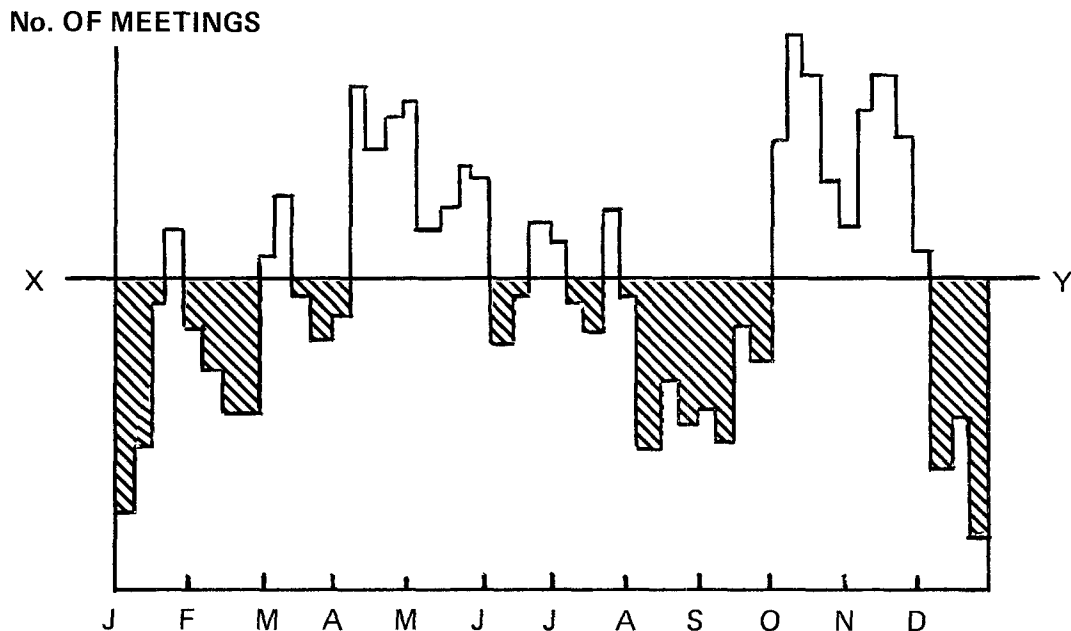
64. A key consideration in staffing decisions, of course, is not just cost but quality and cost-effectiveness. A JIU report on translation services in 1980 (A/35/294 and Add. 1) recommended that the organizations expand "freelance" translation beyond its 20 per cent share because it was cheaper than regular staff, but the organizations felt that greater use was not possible because freelance translation quality was often lower and required much revision.

For interpreters, this situation appears different. Most organizations have already decided to rely mostly or entirely on freelancers, and only one smaller organization expressed concern that freelance interpretation work is of a lower quality than that of regular staff. And while the organizations prefer interpreters who know their specialized terminology and procedures, they can generally obtain the best and most experienced freelancers well in advance if their meetings calendars are firm and orderly ones.

65. In addition, over the years the major staffing concern has been that regular staff salaries were not competitive with job opportunities in the open market. In 1974 the IAMLADP meeting urged a general upgrading of posts "to retain the best staff", and in 1980 the United Nations made a major upgrading of interpreter posts from P-3 to P-4/P-5 to better compete with the "attractive" and "more rewarding" freelance interpreter market (report A/C.5/35/75). Both regular and freelance interpreters are now on average at the P-4 level.

66. Overshadowing these cost and quality factors, however, is the problem of conference and meetings schedules. If an organization's conference schedule is orderly, predictable, and carried out in a disciplined way, interpretation service costs will be less and efficiency higher, because regular staff interpreters can be kept fully occupied year-round, freelance interpreters hired for peak periods, and the best-qualified and nearest freelance staff recruited because meeting needs are known well in advance.

67. Unfortunately, the conference schedules of the organizations are rarely smooth and disciplined, despite years of corrective efforts, as discussed more fully in the following Chapter. This creates many problems for conference service units in their attempts to efficiently and effectively deploy interpretation resources. The following diagram shows a hypothetical pattern of meetings over a calendar year, as an approximation of the actual conference schedules of the organizations of the system, when both regular staff and freelance interpreters are used to service meetings. The vertical columns represent the number of meetings with interpretation week-by-week, and the horizontal line X - Y gives the level of meetings coverage provided by the regular staff interpreters. The white areas below the X - Y line thus represent meetings covered by regular staff, while the meetings represented above the line are covered by hiring freelance interpreters.



68.. This uneven calendar presents two major problems for the managers of this hypothetical organization's interpretation services. First, the shaded areas under the X - Y line represent considerable periods when the number of meetings falls below the level of servicing which regular interpretation staff members provide, and thus wastes their specialized skills and salaries. At the same time, the columns above the X - Y line represent the "extra" meetings for servicing by freelancers. Even the best freelancers, who would be hired first by this organization, might be discouraged because they would have only at most half-a-year's work from the organization. Unless they can find other work in or near the city where this hypothetical organization is headquartered, they might well decide to work elsewhere and thereby diminish the local pool of available freelancers.

69. JIU requested those organizations with a significant number and proportion of regular interpretation staff for information on the number of work days per year when regular staff are not interpreting, and what tasks are given to them in this situation. FAO and UNESCO provided data on the percentage of total work days spent unassigned to meetings (28 per cent and 10 per cent respectively) and analyses of the other tasks then given: routine updating of glossaries; training and testing activities: "stand-by" interpretation duties; and general preparation for future meetings. FAO observed that its experience and analyses show that staff interpreters are much more costly than freelance interpreters. However, since the supply of freelance interpreters in Rome is limited, a relatively strong nucleus of FAO staff interpreters is needed, inter alia to service meetings convened with little advance notice.

70. IAEA estimated unassigned time for its smaller interpretation staff at 45 per cent, but noted that (like FAO) it confronts a limited supply of freelancers in Vienna. The current objective of IAEA is to reduce the overall number of staff interpreters where possible, while still effectively meeting IAEA's specialized interpretation needs. ICAO stated that total time spent not interpreting amounts to some 20 to 25 per cent, but (as already noted) the ICAO staff are interpreter-translators who then do translation work (a staffing pattern which almost all other agencies avoid, arguing generally that the skills and temperament needed are so different that the two functions cannot be successfully combined).

71. The two largest staff interpreter units - United Nations headquarters in New York and UNOG - compute staff interpreter workload in a different way, based on the average number of meetings actually worked per week per interpreter per language. In New York, from the beginning of 1982 through mid-1985, the average staff interpreter workload was 5.4 meetings per week, as compared to the established normal workload of seven meetings per week. There were considerable fluctuations around this average, however. On a monthly basis, interpreters in certain languages averaged from as low as 1.1 meetings per week to as high as 7.6 meetings: on a weekly basis the variation was even more severe, from a low of 0.1 meeting per week to a high of 8.8. The UNOG statistics show an average of 5.95 meetings per week for the full 1982-1985 period, with monthly averages ranging from a low of 2.1 to a high of 7.6. Translated into percentage terms as for the other organizations, the percentage of staff interpreter work-time not assigned to meetings would be about 23 per cent for United Nations headquarters in New York and 15 per cent for UNOG.

72. United Nations officials stated that they try to move interpreters between meetings as scheduling changes arise and to schedule interpreter leave during slack periods, but that they must keep staff available for the many bodies which meet "as required" and for informal meetings, often on very short notice. The officials also noted the 10 to 30 per cent staff interpreter vacancy rate maintained in UNOG. This allows flexibility to (a) meet changing language needs (most recently a recommendation to convert several posts to Chinese to avoid recruiting non-local freelancers for substantial periods) and (b) recruit from among the many Geneva freelancers as needed, which is cheaper than filling the vacant permanent posts.

73. Because of these complex cost, logistical, scheduling and workload factors, the Inspectors did not prepare detailed interpretation cost comparisons by organization and geographic location for this report. The different scope of conference services, varying travel and per diem costs, and continuously changing cost-of-living and exchange rate factors would make specific comparisons difficult and doubtful. The apparent direct link between number of meetings and number of interpreter assignments is also not possible to establish, most importantly because meetings requiring no languages ("without services"), with two or three languages, and with 6 or more languages can and often do occur in the same organization side-by-side.

74. The data gathered for this study, however, does permit a generalized cost comparison which confirms the findings of the many past partial studies by individual organizations and on an inter-agency basis: freelance interpreters, and particularly local freelancers, are much less costly than regular staff interpreters. For freelancers, the total system-wide estimated expenditures for 1984-1985 of \$37.1 million, divided by actual freelance interpreter days of 139,000 yield an average system-wide cost per interpreter day of \$267. For regular staff interpreters, the total 1984-1985 estimated expenditures of \$41.0 million, divided by estimated interpreter days of 112,800 (321 staff interpreters, assigned on average 80 per cent of the time, as derived from the percentages in paragraphs 69-71 above), yield an average system-wide cost per interpreter day of \$363.

75. The relative cost advantage of using freelance interpreters is probably even greater than this \$100 daily difference, for two reasons. First, the calculation for freelancers includes a considerably higher proportion of travel and per diem costs than for regular staff, since except in Geneva the organizations normally must pay extra to "import" freelancers from other, sometimes distant, locations. Thus the actual cost of local freelancers would be much lower than the \$267 per day figures. Second, the calculation for regular staff assumes that all staff interpreter posts were filled for the entire biennium, which is definitely not true (see for example paragraph 72). Thus, the actual per day cost of staff interpreters would be even higher than \$363.

76. The above discussion shows that it is very much in the interest of all the organizations to attract and use a local pool of freelance interpreters. Given the hundreds and often thousands of interpreter days for each organization each year, the reduction in conference servicing costs can be considerable. Most of the specialized agencies, with relatively modest and sporadic conference calendars, have already chosen to rely on freelance interpreters as needed, either entirely or together with a small group of staff interpreters who provide a basic cadre, continuity, and administrative oversight functions. In addition, ICAO and WMO achieve a full workload balance by using staff interpreters as translators during slack periods, along with freelance interpreters.

77. The challenge for the other organizations, with larger and more uneven conference programmes and/or limited local freelance interpreter supply, is more difficult. They need and can justify a group of regular staff interpreters as long as they are utilized year-round (as indicated in paragraph 62 (d), even a local freelancer employed on an almost year-round basis would gradually come to cost almost as much as a staff interpreter). The crucial management problems come "at the margin", when meetings schedules fluctuate at or above the level of permanent interpreter staffing (as shown in the diagram in paragraph 67), and the organizations must somehow decide how best to staff a meetings schedule marked by constant changes.

78. To obtain the best possible staffing balance, and the flexibility and lower cost which the use of freelance interpreters can provide, these organizations need support and action in two critical areas. First, there must be an orderly conference calendar and firm discipline in adhering to the schedule agreed

upon, to allow conference service units to recruit and deploy interpretation resources in the most efficient way. This difficult and enduring problem is the topic of the following Chapter. Second, these organizations need to consider actions which could be taken to attract and use a larger pool of local freelance interpreters who would reside in their headquarters cities. Given the current general oversupply of interpreters worldwide, the present period is a particularly appropriate one to consider what might be done to expand these organizations' local freelance interpreter markets.

79. A very important tool for attracting freelancers - which was in fact argued during the 1960s to be the best staffing solution for interpreter services system-wide - is the "contrat-cadre" system. Under this arrangement, the organization secures the services of highly-valued interpreters over longer periods by offering them a minimum number of days of work (perhaps 100) during a given calendar year. The organization is obligated to notify the interpreter well in advance (perhaps a month) before each engagement, while the interpreter for his part must check with the organization before accepting other employment. Many of the organizations have occasionally employed this system for freelance interpreters, but in recent years its use appears to have been very limited. It has much to commend it as a way of flexibly employing interpreters without wasted periods of inactivity, while also retaining high-quality, experienced, and stable interpretation skills.

80. The Inspectors therefore recommend that the agencies with a significant group and/or proportion of regular staff interpreters - FAO, IAEA, UNESCO, UNIDO (in conjunction with UNOV for the new joint interpretation service in Vienna), and most importantly the United Nations for each of its New York, Geneva, Vienna and ESCAP conference locations - prepare and regularly include in programme budget presentations to the programme, finance, or conference committees that review their conference servicing activities summary data analyzing actual staff interpreter workloads. This data should include:

(a) statistics, whether as a percentage showing interpreter days assigned to meetings relative to total days available, or as actual average meetings per week. The intention would not be to increase the normal workload beyond the established seven meetings, nor to reduce the unassigned interpreter days to zero (which is impossible), but to review current levels and trends in these interpreter workload figures.

(b) a summary of types of work given to interpreters when they are not assigned to meetings. The preparation of glossaries, translation, staff loans to other organizations or sites, training work, stand-by assignments and even general preparation for meetings are appropriate alternative tasks, but only within reason (for instance, freelance interpreters are expected to prepare for meetings on their own time).

(c) information on the current situation, problems and steps taken to better attract and use an adequate supply of local freelance interpreters at headquarters locations, including in particular greater use of contrat-cadre arrangements.

V. CONFERENCE CALENDARS

81. The efficient and effective management of interpretation services is inextricably linked to the degree of order and discipline which Member States, meetings chairmen and secretaries, and substantive secretariats apply to the organization's underlying calendar of conferences. The organizations have struggled to overcome problems in this area for more than three decades, both individually and on an inter-agency basis. Recently, new concerns with careful use of limited budgetary resources are bringing renewed attention to conference calendar issues. This Chapter briefly summarizes past efforts, identifies the major problems involved, and suggests some further possibilities for improvement.

82. In its resolution 534(VI) of February 1952 the General Assembly dealt for the first time with the issue of co-ordination and planning of the programme of conferences of the United Nations and the specialized agencies. The Assembly noted the importance of fixing a basic pattern of conference activities to effectively use available facilities in Geneva and New York and limit total expenditures. It requested the Secretary-General to undertake inter-agency consultations and then prepare an annual conference pattern. Subsequent related resolutions over the past 30-plus years have been summarized in a recent United Nations report (A/AC.172/10 of 1 May 1985). In general, they represent increasingly complex and detailed extensions of this first resolution.

83. During the 1950s, the organizations attempted through the CCAQ to establish joint conference servicing standards, planning, and pools of temporary staff. Efforts to maintain a composite conference calendar on a worldwide basis, however, proved impractical. More modest efforts were made in the late 1960s to establish local conference calendars, especially in Geneva. Yet these also proved largely unsuccessful because of the difficulty of providing accurate information on the numerous small expert meetings held.

84. The CCAQ efforts did make some progress. The first inter-agency agreements with the respective freelance interpreter and translator associations were established in 1969, and the first inter-agency meeting on language arrangements was also held in that year. But attempts to establish a small inter-agency interpreter training programme (English, French, Spanish) and an inter-agency pool of "contrat-cadre" freelancers in Geneva gradually faded out. The organizations' permanent staffs (except for the United Nations) were not large enough to absorb the trainees, freelancers were still readily available, and the joint administrative arrangements were considered too cumbersome for the small joint programme and its limited benefits.

85. In 1974 JIU reported on the pattern of United Nations conferences and the possibilities for more rational and economic use of conferences resources. (A/9795 and Add. 1 and 2), at the request of the General Assembly. The study found that extensive advice and recommendations over a 20-year period to rationalize the United Nations conference programme had had little or no effect, and the conference calendar had grown steadily more crowded, complex and chaotic. The Inspectors felt that the appropriate level of meetings was an issue for Member States to decide. They concentrated their attention on possibilities for better co-ordination, planning and use of available conference resources, including in particular interpretation services.

86. The Inspectors observed that the most important co-ordination needs involved the two largest conference centres in the system - those of the United Nations in New York and Geneva. Both centres had accomplished much in meeting heavy conference demands. However, they did have policy, communication and co-ordination problems which were reflected in uncertainty over who controlled the Geneva programme, minimal exchange of conference staff resources, differing

perceptions of interpreter supply and training needs, and confusing and inconsistent reporting to governing bodies on conference workloads.

87. JIU found that each agency was letting the others know of the recurring meetings of its principal organs, but not of the many small and special meetings each had, nor of major special conferences which could greatly disrupt the availability of overall conference service resources. Despite the CCAQ co-ordination efforts, the organizations were increasingly competing with each other for freelance interpreters, and sharing of staff had been largely a one-way flow from the large UNOG service to the small specialized agency contingents.

88. The JIU report concluded with a detailed analysis of possible changes in the complex pattern of United Nations conferences. It recommended that the United Nations re-establish a Committee on Conferences as a central point for close governmental supervision of the conference programme on a continuing basis. (An earlier, experimental, committee was established in 1966 but not renewed in 1969 due to a "widespread belief" that it had "little chance" to help rationalize the conference programme.) The General Assembly re-established this committee in its resolutions 3351(XXIX), and later in 32/72, to propose the annual calendar of conferences, recommend ways to use conference resources in an optimal fashion, and advise on improved conference co-ordination in the United Nations system. The Inspectors also recommended that the serious problem of providing adequate interpreter services be dealt with through careful assessment of interpreter recruitment, salaries, training, and freelance versus regular staff issues. They recognized, however, that much would depend on the success of smoothing out the Geneva conference programme.

89. Since 1974, inter-agency efforts have not progressed much. Interpreter training has become essentially a United Nations issue, since it has some 80 per cent (254 of 321) of the regular staff interpreters in the system. It administers, or helps to administer, the Arabic, special, and Chinese and Russian training programmes discussed in Chapter II.

90. Similarly, because of its large regular staff, the United Nations is the only significant source for short-term loans of interpreters. The organizations report, however, that loans of interpreter staff continue to occur only infrequently, on a reimbursable basis, and are most important for Arabic and Chinese. The major flow is from UNOG to others: to New York for the General Assembly, occasionally to Vienna and field locations in Africa, Europe and the Middle East; and sometimes to several European-based specialized agencies. The specialized agency staffs are too small to really reciprocate this loan process. Furthermore, more extensive loans of interpreter staff from the United Nations are hampered because peak conference periods occur together, the overlapping duration of longer meetings restricts loan possibilities, and the lengthy and often-changing United Nations conference calendar makes orderly, advance loan arrangements difficult.

91. The major problem, as the above indicates, continues to be uneven conference scheduling which hinders efficient use of both regular and freelance interpretation staff. The ACABQ recommended in 1974 (A/9795/Add.2) that the ACC further study the relationship between the volume and distribution of conference workloads and the optimal size of permanent language staff (and noted that WHO's modest but well-planned meetings programme allowed it to rely primarily on freelance interpreters with no major difficulties). A 1977 JIU report on the implications of additional languages in the system (A/32/237) analyzed the large administrative and financial costs of language services, and concluded that more co-operative and efficient use of interpreter staff would require more firm control of meetings programmes, which did not appear likely in the foreseeable future. A lengthy discussion of conference planning and language services issues at the 1984 IAMLADP meeting indicated that these difficulties continue.

92. The basic servicing problem of conference patterns has long been recognized. If the conference servicing workload is not even throughout the year, regular conference servicing staff will be overworked at some periods and under-employed at others. In fact, however, sharp fluctuations in meetings levels can occur not only monthly, but on a weekly or even daily basis in crowded conference calendars such as those of the United Nations. The main conference servicing cost - translation and documentation - can be smoothed somewhat by postponing lower-priority work to quiet periods. Interpreters' work, however, is tied directly and immediately to meetings (and their availability is in fact a critical element in defining overall meetings capacity), so that such workload adjustments are not possible. The main method of evening out the conference workload, therefore, must be for Member States and meetings chairmen to rationalize the calendar of conferences and meetings by planning them so as to ensure an even flow of work and maintaining the established schedules in a disciplined way.

93. Inter-agency co-ordination of meetings varies according to the types of meetings involved. There is already a fairly well-developed liaison process and stability for recurrent, regular, major meetings in the system (assemblies, governing bodies, full commissions, etc., although some difficult peak period conflicts continue to exist). Information on these meetings is readily available in the large Calendar of Conferences and Meetings chart published by the United Nations each year for meetings in New York, Geneva, Vienna, and "other locations" including major specialized agencies.

94. The real problems arise from the hundreds of recurrent but non-periodic sessions (usually of smaller technical committees in the various organizations which often meet as and when studies or experts become available), informal or regional group meetings, and the non-recurring "special conferences", large or small, which almost all the organizations hold from time to time. Ideally, a conference calendar should allow selection of the most favourable and economic dates and locations in a firm, coherent pattern which then allows servicing commitments to be made well in advance. The dynamic, constantly shifting nature of these many smaller irregular meetings, however, makes it almost impossible to "fix" firm dates for them for advance planning purposes on an inter-agency basis.

95. Over the years, two broad opinions about inter-agency interpreter "pools" or sharing have evolved. A formal pool of regular staff or "contrat-cadre" interpreters, it is recognized, would inevitably favour its largest customer - the United Nations - and its priorities over the smaller specialized agency demands, and/or would result in endless arguments over priorities. Alternatively, the pool could operate on a simple "first come, first served" basis. This arrangement in fact describes the present situation, where local freelance interpreter markets already serve as the "pools" available to the organizations of the system.

96. The specialized agencies benefit in recruiting freelancers, since their relatively orderly meetings schedules generally permit them to recruit the best qualified and most experienced freelance interpreters well in advance and year after year. Conversely, the United Nations suffers, because its complex, changing conference schedules only permit it to recruit freelancers at a much later date. It therefore must often settle for lower-quality local freelancers, or recruit more costly freelancers from far away. This situation also encourages keeping a "reserve" of permanent interpretation staff available to service meetings because no freelance staff are available on short notice.

97. The experience summarized in this Chapter shows that a struggle of more than 30 years to improve conference scheduling and conference resource use has made little progress. The long-term underlying issue of greater control of conference calendars and meetings programmes can only be resolved by Member States.

98. However, one specific problem area which often came to the Inspectors' attention during this study is the need for actions to better control changes in agreed meetings schedules. A "normal" daily meetings pattern is usually considered to be based on a morning and an afternoon meeting of up to three hours each. Scheduling problems arise, however, with cancelled meetings, "late" meetings (those beginning after, say, 6.00 p.m.), meetings which start late, sudden unscheduled meetings, night meetings, very short meetings (which do convene but are then quickly adjourned), and extended meetings (which run beyond the normal three hour period). Each of these involves either a waste of interpretation and other conference service resources which are provided but not used, or extra pressures which can complicate or disrupt meetings planning and workload management (and result in additional costs because they require relief interpretation teams, compensatory time off, or compensatory payments to freelance staff for the additional workload).

99. A number of officials in the system cited these continuing problems of meetings discipline as fundamental factors which hamper effective interpreter resource deployment and waste scarce conference resources. The Inspectors believe that - as with percentage of staff interpreter-days actually assigned in Chapter IV - some simple statistics on meetings not held or deviating from established schedules could be very useful to help increase cost-consciousness and effective use of conference servicing activities. Governing bodies and secretariats could regularly assess such data, not only in toto but for major subsidiary bodies and major substantive units. These statistics, compiled by the servicing secretariats, would allow governing bodies to better assess difficulties encountered in holding meetings as planned, identify particular areas where problems exist, and develop appropriate improvement actions as needed. FAO officials observed that they already submit a report each year to their Council, covering not only cancelled meetings but unscheduled meetings as well.

100. The Inspectors therefore recommend that each organization's appropriate programme, finance, or conference committee regularly request and examine summary statistics, organized by major subsidiary organs and major organizational units, on the proportions of meetings with services which were cancelled, started late, ran overtime, were unscheduled, were evening sessions, or ended early. The purpose of this effort would be to identify and analyze significant problem areas and waste incurred, and consider possible actions to improve meetings discipline and the efficiency of use of conference resources.

101. The problems of the United Nations conference calendar deserve special attention because they are much greater than those of the specialized agencies. The thousands of meetings which the United Nations services each year in New York, Geneva, Vienna and around the world lead to total conference service costs for 1986-1987 of more than \$240 million, or some 15 percent of the total United Nations regular budget for this period. Conference services are thus a significant area for possible cost savings to cope with the current United Nations financial crisis.

102. Among the major scheduling problems that the United Nations Secretariat continually encounters in planning are an overall calendar which is only approved by the General Assembly just before the new year begins, thereby greatly restricting lead-time for planning freelance interpreter recruitment. Many individual United Nations units have their own meetings programmes, but they vary widely in the order and discipline with which they manage them. Many subsidiary bodies must maintain certain meetings schedules in order to fulfill reporting requirements to meetings of parent bodies.

103. There are also many different United Nations conference locations, both at and away from headquarters sites, among which servicing staff and meetings dates must somehow be efficiently allocated. Many meetings changes and extensions occur in negotiating bodies such as UNCTAD, in unofficial meetings, in consultations, and in regional group meetings, as shown in the many meetings designated as "to be determined" or "as required" in the annual conference calendar chart.

104. The General Assembly has increasingly stressed (a) the need for meetings to be carried out within the resources allotted (resolution 31/140); (b) guidelines to reduce "the continued waste of resources through the cancellation of meetings" and to make bodies aware of their use of conference resources (resolutions 32/71 and 33/55), and (c) the need to achieve maximum efficiency and effectiveness in conference resource use and to develop data on meetings resources by category of subject matter (resolution 38/32).

105. The United Nations has also undertaken two specific efforts to cope with its conference calendar problems. In 1977, the General Assembly noted that about 30 percent of meetings were being consistently cancelled, and approved an "over-programming" or "underrecruitment" of interpretation services to reduce the negative impact of these cancellations, make maximum use of staff interpreters, and reduce over-recruitment of freelancers. The technique used is a reduction of the planned level of interpretation services on the assumption that a predictable part of the meetings scheduled will not in fact be held. Selecting the specific reprogramming factor (which was originally established at 20 percent) is the crucial element. The Secretariat reported in 1980 (document A/AC.172/29) that overprogramming had brought better use of interpreter resources and cost savings, but required careful and continuous adjustment, yielded results only when permanent staff levels were not sufficient to service all planned meetings (allowing flexible freelancer use as needed), and might lose its effect if the number of meetings continued to grow. The General Assembly has since continued to endorse this concept and the Secretariat continues to apply it.

106. In 1978 the General Assembly requested that the Secretariat prepare statistics on planned and actual use of conference resources by its subsidiary bodies, for review by the Committee on Conferences. A first such report was prepared in 1980 (A/AC.172/30) and subsequent reports have been prepared annually since 1983, showing for each such body meetings planned, held, and cancelled and the total unused services (A/AC.172/88 and Add. 1-3). The Committee on Conferences has engaged in a dialogue with those bodies indicated by these reports as having a particularly low utilization of the conference resources made available. The Committee is also continuing to review guidelines to reduce wastage from cancellation of scheduled meetings, and the Secretariat has sought to implement them through an "exhortative approach". While the Committee's discussions have helped refine the statistics used and have led to new measures to encourage more efficient conference resource use in General Assembly resolution 39/68B, however, the annual statistical reports presently review only a small fraction of the thousands of meetings in the United Nations conference calendar.

107. Both these techniques have undoubtedly helped improve the use of United Nations conference resources, but serious difficulties remain. The Inspectors noted, for example, the following problem areas:

(a) United Nations officials explained that they cannot compute a net number of meetings "scheduled" in a year, because the meetings are in a constant state of week-by-week change caused not only by cancellations but by additions and last-minute requests from informal, ad hoc, working and regional groups. Nevertheless, the total number of meetings with interpretation cancelled in New York during the biennium 1984-1985 (2,567) amounted to 37 percent of the total such meetings held (6,862).

(b) UNOG statistics show that even the "best" disciplined bodies which met in Geneva during 1984-1985 lost 10 to 20 percent of their planned meeting hours, while those with the lowest utilization of resources lost from 60 to 80 percent of planned meeting hours. One body, for example, planned 206 meetings over a three-month period. Ultimately, however, it cancelled or did not schedule 98 of the meetings, lost an additional 53 hours of time in late meeting starts, and lost an additional 98 hours of time in meetings which ended early, thus not using fully 72 percent of the conference service resources originally planned.

(c) UNOG data also show that during 1984-1985, 220 "late" meetings (starting between 6:00 and 7:00PM) and 94 "night" meetings (starting between 7:30PM and 1:00AM) were scheduled in Geneva. These meetings, predominantly those of UNCTAD, usually required relief teams of interpreters. Subsequently, however, 142 of the late meetings (65 percent) and 35 of the night meetings (37 percent) were cancelled, and in all cases the cancellations came too late to reassign the interpreter teams. (In addition, almost none of these meetings, or those cited in (b) above, were included in the annual statistical reports on conference resource use to the Committee on Conferences).

(d) United Nations staff interpreters were not used up to their normal workload of seven meetings per week during the 1982-1985 period: as discussed in Chapter IV, utilization was about 77 percent in New York and 85 percent in Geneva, with monthly fluctuations by language from as low as 1.1 average meeting per week to as high as 7.6. Geneva statistics show, however, that this problem also existed for freelance interpreters, even though they are hired "as needed." During 1982-1985 freelancers in Geneva averaged 6.9 meetings a week, or 86 percent of their established normal workload of no more than 8 meetings on average per week, with monthly fluctuations by language from as low as 2.7 meetings per week to as high as 9.3.

108. United Nations officials observed that, because the conference programme is in a constant state of change, a considerable (but unknown) portion of the resources cited above are not really wasted. Meetings planners and chief interpreters can often redeploy resources from a cancelled meeting to an unscheduled one. (As discussed in a 1981 report (A/AC.172/49), the many informal and regional group meetings within the United Nations use interpretation services and other resources on an ad hoc basis). The officials also stressed that conference service units must service meetings as directed by the General Assembly, and that good or poor use of conference resources does not imply success in performing a body's mandate.

109. In early 1986 the Secretary-General of the United Nations reiterated the many General Assembly exhortations to inter-governmental bodies and Member States to take full advantage of United Nations meetings facilities in the headquarters cities, strictly control the number and duration of meetings, and ensure optimum use of allocated conference resources. He observed that time and facilities were too often wasted, and conference servicing expenditures unnecessarily increased, by meetings which start late and end early or are cancelled at the last minute. He also recommended (A/40/1102) special measures to reduce and smooth out the 1986 calendar of meetings to better use regular staff in servicing meetings, reduce temporary staff recruitment, and thereby achieve considerable savings.

110. The Inspectors share the General Assembly's and Secretary-General's concern with problems of meetings discipline and effective use of conference resources, particularly in light of the pressing financial situation. They therefore recommend that the Secretary-General and the General Assembly consider the following measures to achieve more efficient use of conference resources:

(a) The annual report to the Committee on Conferences on conference-servicing resource use should be restructured to provide summary statistics for all major subsidiary organs and secretariat units (as recommended for all organizations in paragraph 100) rather than detailed data on only a few organs, as a basis for more comprehensive and systematic consideration of problem areas and actions to improve overall conference resource use.

(b) To help prevent the many cancelled meetings, the Committee on Conferences should plan the number of meetings for each body equal to its actual average of meetings held during the past two or three years.

(c) The Committee on Conferences, together with representatives of the specialized agencies, should devote renewed attention to possibilities of overcoming long-standing scheduling conflicts among the organizations' major conference activities, particularly in the June and September-November periods.

(d) The number of sessions of main and subsidiary bodies should be re-examined to see if they could hold one session a year instead of two, or meet biennially instead of annually.

(e) Sessions should be held only at the most economical sites, with sessions at sites away from Headquarters locations held to the minimum, and all additional expenses including administrative costs borne by host governments and paid in advance.

(f) More discipline should be exercised concerning the beginning and ending of meetings, with no additional resources allocated to extend them except under very extraordinary circumstances.

VI. VIDEOCONFERENCING

111. A major area of long-range but potentially revolutionary impact on United Nations system interpretation services is the new telecommunications advances which permit televised conferences between groups at different locations worldwide (videoconferencing), and the "remote servicing" of such conferences (or of conferences held away from headquarters) by staff based at headquarters sites.

112. Experiments with remote conference servicing began in the 1970s, in recognition of new international telecommunications advances and networks, their increasing reliability and high quality, and the substantial cost savings which might be achieved if language staff could remain at headquarters sites rather than incurring heavy travel and per diem costs to go to a distant conference location. A United Nations conference in Argentina in 1978 used satellite links with interpreters in New York, and demonstrated that technical requirements could be met and high quality interpretation could be achieved from video images.

113. In 1982 the United Nations made a more extensive test of improved equipment for remote translation and interpretation for a conference in Vienna. Once again, the technical and managerial processes functioned quite well. The test indicated, however, that a full-fledged remote interpretation service was not yet financially viable, since equipment rental and satellite transmission costs were much higher than those of sending interpretation staff to the conference.

114. While remote video links can thus allow high-quality interpretation, they do create additional interpretation pressures. Early attempts at remote interpretation using only audio links left interpreters struggling "like a motorist in fog". More recent innovations are helping to overcome these problems: higher-quality video and sound transmissions; split screens showing the speaker, the podium and the hall; dedicated phone lines for immediate operational co-ordination; and facsimile transmission of speech texts before meetings begin.

115. Interpretation from video images, however, is still a very demanding effort, not least in the difficult working hours which can be demanded: interpreters in New York worked from 4:00 to 7:00AM local time to cover the opening session of the 1982 Vienna meeting. AIIC has developed a set of guidelines for remote conferencing which emphasize careful co-ordination among conference sites, revised working hours in view of the stress involved, high standards of video and audio quality, and adequate communication channels.

116. Despite current difficulties, the new telecommunications technologies will eventually have far-reaching impact on the ways in which conference programmes and language services are deployed and managed. For interpreters, the shift from conference interpreting to videoconference interpreting may be as drastic as that which occurred in 1947 when the General Assembly decided to change from consecutive interpretation to simultaneous interpretation in order to save time and allow delegates to more closely follow debates. It may eventually be possible to use videoconferencing so that all United Nations meetings could be serviced by interpreters at a single location, with related substantial savings on present per diem and travel costs.

117. Within the United Nations system, JIU reported in 1982 on new communications developments and applications, and possible lines of future action (A/37/372 and Adds. 1 and 2). In 1984 the United Nations reported on a plan and actions to upgrade the reliability and linkages between its main offices, inter alia to create "important opportunities" for reducing conference servicing costs and improving services (A/C.5/39/39). An inter-agency Technical Panel of the Advisory Committee for the Co-ordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) has also been reviewing present telecommunications use, plans and resources to consider new co-operative approaches.

118. In the private sector and in governmental telecommunications ministries, rapid strides are being made to improve worldwide information services through integrated digital networks and increased use of communications satellites. A modest but steady growth in specific videoconferencing facilities, linkages, and activity is also occurring. These developments indicate that the point at which videoconferencing will prove more economical in certain situations for the United Nations system agencies might be closer than previously assumed, particularly since increasing activity should eventually lead to significantly lower satellite transmission costs and since the last specific videoconferencing test was conducted in 1982. Because it has by far the largest conference and interpretation programmes and the most technical experience in this area, the Inspectors recommend that the United Nations reassess the latest cost relationships and technical developments in the videoconferencing area to determine whether remote conference interpretation is now financially feasible.

VII. COMPUTER-ASSISTED MANAGEMENT

119. Another important application of modern technologies to interpretation services is computer-assisted management systems. The 1980 JIU report on translation services observed that a considerable portion of translation staffing (166 professional and general service posts) was devoted to management and administration. However, almost all management information was gathered in cumbersome manual/clerical processes which tied up costly staff resources, led to errors, produced tardy information, and hampered management analysis. The Inspectors cited the potential for better planning, scheduling, control, analysis and workload reporting through computer assistance, and recommended that the organizations designate a lead agency to assess possibilities for a computerized translation management system which other agencies might adapt and use. The agencies, however, were cautious about the cost-benefits of such a system, and its applicability to differing agencies. The United Nations did state that it had started a pilot project in this area.

120. Progress has been made in several related fields, and inter-agency discussions continue in IAMLADP meetings. IAEA uses a computerized cost-accounting system for printing jobs, based on a UNIDO/IAEA computerized documents control system. The World Bank has developed a similar printing cost system, which could be used to charge costs back to user departments. The United Nations has begun a microcomputer project to streamline distribution charts, production control and supply status in its Publications Division in New York. Several organizations have also been developing computerized terminology databases to increase accuracy and consistency, improve overall productivity, and reduce repetitious clerical work.

121. Interpretation services would seem to be particularly well-suited for computer-assisted management. A service must keep track on a continuing basis of a large number of freelance interpreters - their continuing availability, domicile, languages, and past experience - and recruit them, prepare contracts, and calculate pay rates, adjustments, and often travel and per diem for multiple, varying periods of short-term employment. Availability of staff for loans and exchanges must be considered, and reimbursement calculations made where they are used. Both regular and freelance staff must be assigned through efficient forward scheduling which also provides day-by-day adjustment to a dynamic and fluctuating meetings schedule. This process must take into account the needed languages and combinations for each meeting, varying and often distant geographic locations, general and specialized interpretation skills, agreed workload levels and patterns, and especially scheduling disruptions and overruns.

122. Despite this potential, however, little has yet been done. The EEC has developed a computerized system for such functions as meetings forecasting and programming and for the assignment, invoicing and payment of interpreters. Yet within the United Nations system only UNESCO has made progress, designing a programme to record freelance interpreter availability and considering other functions such as weekly assignment statistics or printing of freelancer contracts. Many of the organizations, however, feel that computerized systems could be quite useful to maintain a record of interpreter availability (both staff and freelance), forecast recruitment needs, make interpreter assignments, and produce statistics on actual programme implementation.

123. The present process of administering interpretation services is still characterized by voluminous paper-and-pencil worksheets, bar charts, schedules, and calculations. The United Nations in New York and Geneva has to use senior interpreters to assist in this time-consuming process, and it appears that senior interpreters in other organizations must bear similar administrative and work scheduling burdens. But filling out elaborate schedules and making laborious calculations is not an effective use of interpreters' highly-specialized skills, nor does it seem appropriate that the system-wide interpretation services - representing \$78 million of biennial expenditures and 140,000 annual interpreter-days - should be managed in this tedious fashion.

124. During the past several years United Nations officials have cited the need to make "optimum use" and attain "flexible and economic management" of conference services, and pledged progress through the introduction of modern management techniques and new technologies. Member States have also called for better administration and use of conference service resources available. In addition, in 1985 the ACABQ expressed its concern with the adequacy and comparability of conference service statistics in Geneva and Vienna, and cited an "urgent need" for closer consultation and co-ordination between New York, Geneva and Vienna conference service units, especially to harmonize nomenclature, data-gathering methods on workloads, and the use of new technology.

125. The 1986-1987 United Nations proposed programme budget requested an additional General Service post and micro-computer to computerize New York interpreter assignments. The ACABQ felt the proposal was premature, however, because related software needs and other complexities had not been fully considered, and the General Assembly concurred.

126. In its 1985 report on changing computer use in the United Nations system (A/40/410), JIU observed that computers are a "productivity-enhancing" device, which can greatly speed up and simplify administrative tasks and allow better analysis and improvement of operations and services to Member States, by substituting computer power for expensive staff time. The size and complexity of interpretation services administration; the potential for more efficient staffing, scheduling, and operational analysis; and the possibilities that the specialized agencies could adapt computerized systems for their own use, all underscore the importance of further efforts in this area.

127. The Inspectors therefore recommend that the United Nations continue its efforts to develop and use computer-assisted administrative functions for its interpretation services in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Bangkok, not only to replace cumbersome and costly manual routines, but to improve the analysis, statistics and reporting on actual interpretation operations. The actions already taken in this sphere by the EEC and UNESCO may point the way. Rather than attempting to develop a custom-designed system for all phases of interpretation services management, the United Nations might concentrate on using staff talents and existing computers in New York and Geneva, plus available commercial software packages, to at least computerize some of the most time-consuming and repetitive routines, such as determination of recruitment needs, interpreter availability, and freelance contracts and payment calculations.

VIII. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

128. Although simultaneous conference interpretation is a relatively new profession, it has now accumulated some 40 years of experience within the United Nations system and elsewhere. Conference interpretation is a demanding, often sensitive and highly public activity, yet it now seems to be largely taken for granted as a routine part of the process of promoting international co-operation, negotiation and understanding. This calm acceptance appears to be a modest tribute to the fact that those who provide interpretation services do so with a high degree of general effectiveness.

129. The dominant trend in interpretation services of the United Nations system has been a tremendous growth. The handful of interpreters who began in New York in the late 1940s grew to the equivalent of roughly 100 regular and 70 freelance staff during the mid-1960s. Now, however, the equivalent of about 640 regular staff and freelance interpreters provide year-round and worldwide services to the organizations at a total cost of some \$78 million per biennium.

130. The challenge over the years has been to efficiently and effectively manage available interpretation resources to service the large conference calendars which Member States have established. The system-wide agreements on the employment of freelance interpreters with AIIC, which began in 1969, have been a particularly important factor in establishing stability and order in what would otherwise be a rather chaotic worldwide market. Nevertheless, each organization needs to keep track of the qualifications, language combinations, and availability of dozens or hundreds of regular staff and freelance interpreters, in competition with other international organizations and extensive international conference programmes in the private sector. They must then assign them - in a process involving about

140,000 interpreter-days a year system-wide - to a constantly changing programme of worldwide conferences and meetings.

131. The Inspectors believe that the interpretation services have done a good job over the years in meeting these complex responsibilities. However, since the services of an interpreter average more than \$300 per workday and \$2,000 for a six-language team per normal three-hour meeting, firm management control is needed to utilize existing resources as cost-effectively as possible.

132. Interpreter demand and supply. The demand for conference interpreters has increased rather relentlessly over the years as conference programmes have grown, but supply has alternated between periods of shortage and over-supply. Difficulties have arisen as new official languages were added, and problems have always existed in finding certain required language combinations. Freelance interpreters (whom all the organizations use) are scattered worldwide, but are not necessarily located in the cities where the agencies need them.

133. There are few available statistics on demand and supply conditions worldwide. The organizations, however, can work co-operatively to help fill this information gap, ensure the steady, well-balanced supply of interpreters which they need, and encourage interpreter training institutions and freelance interpreters to better respond to changing conditions and local market needs (paragraphs 35-55).

RECOMMENDATION 1: The biennial Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications should include a regular agenda item to jointly consider the organizations' perceptions of current and emerging demand and supply problems and trends for interpretation and other language services (paragraphs 56-58).

134. Regular staff versus freelance interpreters The specialized agencies rely predominantly on freelance interpreters, while the United Nations, with its much bigger and more complex conference programme, primarily uses regular staff interpreters. An analysis of the relevant considerations indicates that use of regular staff interpreters, supplemented by freelance interpreters for peak periods, makes sense for larger conference programmes when the staff interpreters can be kept working year-round. However, wide fluctuations in conference schedules make a full-time workload difficult to achieve, indicating the benefits of using freelancers who are only paid for the days they are recruited, and cost about \$100 less per day on average system-wide (paragraphs 59-79).

RECOMMENDATION 2: The organizations with significant use of regular staff interpreters - FAO, IAEA, UNESCO, UNIDO and especially the United Nations for each of its four major interpretation staffs - should regularly present to the appropriate oversight committee of their governing bodies summary data analyzing actual staff interpreter workloads, and consider actions to better attract and utilize local freelance interpreters (paragraph 80).

135. Conference calendars. The biggest interpretation services management problem has always been uneven and constantly changing conference schedules, involving the major conferences, many small expert meetings, and informal and special meetings which each agency holds. The long-term issue of greater control of meetings programmes is one which Member States must decide. The Inspectors do feel, however, that actions can be taken within approved meetings programmes to better control the waste of conference resources which occurs (paragraphs 81-99).

RECOMMENDATION 3: Each organization should regularly provide the appropriate oversight committee with summary statistics on the proportion of late, cancelled, and unscheduled meetings - grouped by major subsidiary organs and organizational units - to identify problem areas and consider needed actions to improve the efficiency of conference resource use (paragraph 100).

136. United Nations conference costs The pressing financial crisis of the United Nations focuses particular attention on the difficulties in implementing its vast conference programme, the continuing waste of conference resources despite recent control efforts, and the need to ensure optimum use of conference resources allocated (paragraphs 101-109).

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Secretary-General of the United Nations and the General Assembly, in their current review of the financial crisis of the organization, should consider certain review, control and scheduling measures to improve conference resource use and cut costs (paragraph 110).

137. Other matters Because the United Nations has by far the largest conference and interpretation programmes, the Inspectors believe that it should undertake certain actions that could also eventually benefit the specialized agencies, as well as certain steps specific to its own interpretation operations.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Secretary-General of the United Nations should:

(a) reassess the latest cost factors and technical developments in the videoconferencing area to determine whether it has now become financially feasible to begin using remote conference interpretation servicing (paragraphs 111-118);

(b) attempt to develop and apply, using the recent experience of other organizations, computer-assisted management processes for at least the most time- and cost-consuming interpretation management functions, which are now often performed on a laborious manual basis by senior interpretation staff (paragraphs 119-127);

(c) review the low grade levels of staff interpreters in ESCAP and their differing translation/interpretation status and duties (paragraphs 32-33).

(d) consider gradually increasing the number of passive languages required of Arabic, Chinese and other interpreters to increase interpretation service versatility (paragraph 34).

