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FEASIBILITY OF INDEXING THE DECISIONS OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL

Report of the Administrator

Summary

The Administrator's report describes the results of consultations held with United Nations officials with respect to the feasibility of indexing the Governing Council's decisions and contains a proposed course of action to give effect to the conclusions reached.

The Administrator recommends that the Council approve the decision to proceed with the indexing exercise.

I. BACKGROUND

1. In its request to the Administrator to consider the feasibility of issuing an index (decision 79/33, paragraph 4(e)), the Council envisaged two alternatives: an index of decisions alone, or an index of both decisions and the discussions of the Council, along with the relevant documentation submitted. It is also to be noted that the Council foresaw the issuance of an index in all the working languages.
2. Since its first session in January 1966 through its special meeting in February 1980, the Governing Council has adopted 633 decisions relating to all aspects of the Programme's administrative and operational activities and affecting both policies and procedures. Until 1978, the decisions were neither numbered nor titled, nor were they distinctively set apart from the main body of the Council's reports to the Economic and Social Council. The decisions, in fact, were simply additional paragraphs of the Council's reports and, as such, were so referred to when cited.
3. At its twenty-fifth session in June 1978, the Council adopted decision 25/30 which, inter alia, requested the Administrator "... to introduce a code system, in the manner customary in other United Nations organizations for the identification of Governing Council ... decisions, the system being so designed that it could be applied retroactively to all Governing Council decisions." Accordingly, a first step was taken at the twenty-fifth session itself: decisions were grouped according to respective agenda items and numbered consecutively from 1 to 34, the number being prefaced by the number of the session (e.g., 25/1, 25/2 ...25/34). This system was to have been similar to that used for the General Assembly (e.g., resolution 34/213). In the light of experience, however, it was deemed preferable to adopt a system similar to that now used for ECOSOC: decisions would be numbered consecutively throughout an entire calendar year, with the number of the year replacing the number of the Council session. Accordingly, beginning at the meetings held in January 1979 and continuing through the Council's twenty-sixth session, decisions adopted during 1979 have been numbered 79/1 through 79/49.
4. The reports of all Governing Council sessions, both regular and special, held since the inception of the Programme, have been reviewed and a checklist of all decisions, now numbered and titled, has been prepared. Should it be decided to publish an official index to Governing Council decisions, the numerical checklist would be incorporated in it.
5. The issuance of a numerical checklist of the Council's decisions with appropriate titles would be useful, but would not alleviate the main difficulties experienced by delegations and the Secretariat in locating the texts of relevant decisions on a subject matter basis. At present a simple card index of decisions based on broad subject matters is maintained by the Secretariat of the Governing Council. While useful for officials familiar with the Council's decisions, it is not the type of

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index which could be reproduced and distributed without considerable revisions and even recasting to take into account the evolution in the terminology and the need for extensive cross-referencing. Thus, an enhanced indexing system would not only meet the envisaged request of the Governing Council but would also be useful to UNDP's Secretariat.

II. ACTION TAKEN BY THE ADMINISTRATOR

6. In accordance with the Council's directive to consult with the United Nations, a series of meetings was held with officials of the Dag Hammarskjold Library. It was agreed that, in general, an index should be as comprehensive and as detailed as possible in anticipation of future users' needs and demands. It was recognized, however, that in the present circumstances an index of both decisions and discussions of the Council dating back to 1966 would entail a considerable amount of work and relatively high cost in view of the voluminous documentation involved. Moreover, the frequency of the need for an index of such detail was judged as not justifying the cost and effort required. The consultations, therefore, focused on indexing only the Council's decisions.

7. The United Nations officials initially suggested that the complete texts of all Governing Council decisions might be extracted from the Council's reports on the sessions and compiled in a single volume. The suggestion to produce and distribute a 400- to 600-page volume of decisions in each working language and recommendations regarding the format and content of the proposed index were carefully evaluated. Considerations of cost (\$100,000 estimated) and of the questionable utility of having available the texts of hundreds of decisions of limited interest or current applicability, and therefore infrequently referred to, led to a decision to seek some other method than the publishing of a printed volume in order to preserve the complete texts in a unified form. The United Nations' recommendations as to the format and content of the proposed index, though, were judged suitable.

III. ACTION PROPOSED BY THE ADMINISTRATOR

8. The Administrator supports the conclusion to index the Council's decisions and to have their complete texts centrally stored and easily accessible. The imminent acquisition by UNDP of word-processing equipment and the recent leasing of new computer hardware offer new opportunities and considerably more flexibility in this regard. Essentially, what is envisioned is that the texts of decisions will be coded according to the subject or subjects dealt with and then entered into an electronic medium for storage and retrieval. Also entered will be such data relevant to the decision as number and title, date adopted, session or meeting at which adopted and pertinent documentation symbols. References to relevant General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions could also be entered. The main element, though, would be the subject classification code which would employ key words established after consulting such existing United Nations classifications systems as those in use by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), the Inter-Organization Board for Information Systems (IOB) and the United Nations Bibliographical Information Service (UNBIS). In this connexion, it should be emphasized that compatibility with United Nations indexing systems would be of prime importance, and it is expected that

reciprocal transfers of data will be facilitated. UNDP, certainly, would be in a position to transfer compatible data by a simple, low-cost electronic process to the appropriate indexes of the United Nations or other bodies.

9. After the texts of the decisions have been stored and the index established, users wishing to identify a Council decision or group of decisions relating to a particular subject (e.g., the Operational Reserve, Women in Development, etc.) would direct their requests to a unit to be designated within UNDP. Following appropriate processing of the request, the user would be provided with the complete texts of all decisions relating to the subject, including the additional relevant information stored. It is also envisaged that a hard copy of the index could be made available to Council members on request. The desirability of producing the index as a document, with updated additions issued annually, should be evaluated at a later date. Also to be determined is which equipment would be most suitable and cost effective in carrying out the exercise. In addition, an alternative to be considered with respect to the actual texts of the decisions is the production from the stored data of microfiche which could be made available for sale.

IV. WORK PLAN

10. It is the intention of the Administrator to utilize existing staff resources to the extent possible. Certain activities, however, will require additional assistance. The main preparations in establishing the subject index will be the analysis of what will soon be close to 700 decisions of the Governing Council in order to establish an authority list of terms reflecting subject classifications. Subsequently, each decision will be coded and cross-referenced as necessary. It is estimated that the services of a skilled indexer will be required at a cost of about \$12,000, including translation services.

11. A software programme will be required in order to enable the selected equipment to handle the index inputs. The co-operation of UNBIS officials in designing a programme, compatible with their own computerized index, has been generously offered. With this assistance the cost of establishing the software package would be negligible.

12. Extracting the texts of decisions from existing documents and making consolidated volumes in all working languages by photocopy will cost an estimated \$1,000. The clerical costs associated with the data entry for this exercise (approximately 600 standard pages of decision texts plus the index) is estimated at \$12,000.

13. The total supplementary cost of the exercise to establish the index and store the texts of Governing Council decisions dating back to 1966 is estimated at \$25,000 which can be met from existing resources. The cost for maintaining and operating the index will be very modest and will be met without additional charges to the regular administrative budget.

14. Should the Council concur with the recommendation of the Administrator in paragraph 15 below, the proposed system could become operational by June 1981.

V. RECOMMENDATION

15. In the light of the above, the Administrator recommends that:

The Governing Council,

Request the Administrator to proceed with indexing the Council's decisions, in accordance with the actions described in paragraphs 8 to 12 above, at an estimated cost of \$25,000 which will be absorbed within the existing appropriation for the Programme Support and Administrative Services Budget for the biennium 1980-1981.
