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DEVELOPMENT
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GOVERNING COUNCIL
Twenty-seventh session
June 1980Note on the streamlining of the Council's agenda
and on the organization of the Council's sessionsNote by the secretariat

1. Consideration of this question should take into account decision 79/33 which was adopted by the Council at its last session. As the decision was adopted late in the session, not all of the provisions of that decision could be implemented with respect to the agenda of the twenty-seventh session. If strictly applied significant progress could be achieved with regard to the twenty-eighth session, particularly in connexion with the agenda and the related documentation (see Annex I).

2. In addition to the provisions of decision 79/33, the following comments and suggestions may also be taken into consideration in the continuing effort to rationalize the Council's proceedings:

(a) The Administrator has proposed to streamline the agenda by identifying at the present session those questions which will require decisions at the next session. For other items, consolidated progress reports on several related questions would be presented to the Council but not discussed, unless specifically requested by one or more delegations. This proposal assumes that the decision on the documentation adopted last year will be fully implemented. In particular, a biennial system of reporting would have to be followed with respect to several items (see Annex II).

(b) While supporting proposals to reduce the documentation, the United States delegation also proposed a reduction in the length of the Council's session to two weeks. This was supported by the Swedish delegation, which also suggested that the Council decide what questions should be for its consideration and what questions

should be left solely to the Administration. The delegation, in addition, suggested that some questions could be disposed of by informal meetings of delegations in New York or through correspondence. The Netherlands delegation proposed that short, subject-oriented sessions should be convened (see Annex II).

(c) Some delegations have expressed the view informally that although the streamlining of the agenda and the related documentation of the Council was necessary, further measures should be taken concerning the organization of the work of the Council if significant improvements were to be achieved. These measures should aim at strengthening the role of the Council with respect to policy matters while shortening the length of its sessions.

3. In this connexion, several informal suggestions have been made either recently or at previous sessions:

(a) According to one suggestion, the Council would establish a Programme Committee which, together with the BFC, would meet for two weeks before the Council itself convenes. The Council would meet for about one week to consider the Committee's recommendations and to provide delegations with an opportunity to review at a high level the Programme's activities as well as to give general policy guidance to the Administration. (This organizational pattern would be similar to that of banking institutions. Its main advantage would be that by the time the Council met the various decisions would have been well prepared and the representatives on the Council could focus on major policy questions. The drawback would be that the Committees would have worked without broad policy guidance. If there were any differences of view by the time the Council met, there would be too short a period for detailed consultation with a view to reaching a consensus. Controversial matters would tend to be referred back to committees and final decisions postponed to a subsequent session.)

(b) Another alternative would be for the Council to hold a three or four-day meeting with representation at a high level, for general policy statements and subsequent referral of the various items to a committee on programme matters, and a committee on budgetary and financial matters. These committees would meet for two weeks and report to the Council which would reconvene for one or two days for final decisions. (This organizational pattern is not significantly different from the present one, as the Council after the first week performs the type of work which under the proposal would be done by the Programme Committee. It would, however, differentiate more clearly the policy role of the Council from its more routine responsibilities.)

(c) A variation on this alternative would be to set up two Committees and distribute the work equally between them, without one of the Committees dealing only with financial matters. The main advantage would be to use more fully the time available. The drawback would be to have an artificial allocation of the items with, at times, difficulties for delegations to cover simultaneously - say programme matters - in two different committees.

4. Among other suggestions have been those concerning the strengthening of the role of the President and the other members of the Bureau with respect to the organization of the work of the Council. One such suggestion is that the Bureau meet for one or two days after the Council's session and, in consultation with the Secretariat, identify the policy items requiring discussion, review the documentation required and plan the organization of the next session accordingly. Another suggestion is for the Bureau to meet at other times during the year to consider whether matters could be disposed of either without reference to the Council or by correspondence. (A practical difficulty with this later alternative is that bureau members are not always in the permanent missions in New York, and that their responsibilities are such that it would be difficult for them to devote a significant amount of time to Council matters between sessions.)

5. When considering the various alternatives mentioned above, it must be kept in mind that the United Nations conference services cannot accommodate longer or more frequent meetings during a given year, whether such meetings are called Council sessions, committee meetings, subject-oriented sessions, Working Groups of the Whole, or the like. In addition, by providing for meetings, even if short, at different times of the year, particular account must be taken of the travel cost to delegations which may be considerable. Thus preferably any subject-oriented session should immediately precede or follow the regular Council session. Finally, any proposal involving three simultaneous meetings on any one day would put additional strain on smaller delegations which already find it difficult to cover the numerous meetings organized by the United Nations relating to economic and social matters.

ANNEX I

1. At its twenty-sixth session in June 1979, the Council in its decision 79/33 on the control and limitation of documentation decided, inter alia:

(f) Provisional agenda of the Governing Council

(i) The provisional agenda of the Governing Council should be streamlined ... and the content and presentation of the documentation should facilitate comprehensive reviews of the issues before the Council.

(ii) The provisional agenda for the next session should be presented for approval by the Council at the previous session on the following tentative lines:

- I. Programme Implementation
- II. Programme Planning
- III. Programme and Projects for consideration and approval
- IV. Other forms and programmes
- V. Matters arising out of action taken by other organs of the United Nations
- VI. Financial, budgetary and administrative matters

With respect to the documentation, the Council decided:

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(ii) Each document should have a brief summary on its covering page, which should also include an indication where action is called for by the Governing Council, the nature of such action and its financial implications.

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(v) If the document is intended for information purposes only, that should be clearly stated.

(vi) Whenever a document relates to a proposal for a new programme or project, or, for any reason, has financial implications, a statement of the costs involved should be included or attached to the document, as well as an over-all view of the item affected.

With respect to recurrent documents and requests for new documents, the Council decided that:

(i) At each session the Governing Council should review in connexion with the consideration of each item, the need for the documentation presented and should consider in regard to such recurrent documents as annual reports, the possibility of requesting biennial reporting with, if necessary, a short report in the other year.

(ii) The information needed for the consideration of each item should normally be considered in a comprehensive document, and support documents should be prepared only if the matter requires special attention.

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(iv) When the Council requests new documentation, the financial implications of the document should be brought to its attention at the time of approval.

ANNEX II

COMMENTS MADE DURING THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

In opening the General Debate the Administrator stated:

"Indeed I believe that for the Council to exercise more meaningful supervision of the over-all activities carried out by the Programmes and Fund, it must determine which are the relatively few items on which it needs to provide real policy guidance. It is most likely that a number of questions which are at present the subject of separate documents and separate debate could be in the future briefly reported to the Council for information, and discussed only if Council members felt that policy issues appear to be involved. This streamlining of the Council's agenda would, I am convinced, enhance the Council's role in providing over-all guidance for the administration of the funds and programmes under its control, and would lead to a welcome shortening of the Governing Council's sessions."

Several delegations, including Sierra Leone, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States of America referred to the difficulties experienced because of the volume of documentation or to the need for a reorganization of the Governing Council's work.

The representative of the United States stated:

"I fully endorse his [the delegate of Sierra Leone] views. My feeling is that our present organizational framework wastes time and resources - that the work of this Council could be organized for a conference lasting no more than two weeks and generally leave every participant with the feeling that there was ample time for debate and careful review. In our present arrangement there is too much paper ... Something has to be done, not only in UNDP but throughout the United Nations system. ... It would be a welcome step in this direction for interested delegates to meet as an informal working group, open to all, which would make recommendations to streamline the future agenda of the Council and other matters related to the effective functioning of this body ..."

The representative of the Netherlands stated:

"A serious look needs to be taken at increasing the effectiveness of the work of this Council. I have suggested a short session of a working group on the questions related to investment follow-up. It is our impression that the

experience with a one-week meeting limited to one subject - such as the one in February on the Third Development Cycle - points to the usefulness of such subject orientation in the work of the Council. We invite other delegations to reflect on this suggestion and are open to any other suggestions to improve the working methods of this Council."

The Observer of Sweden stated:

"We will all agree that it is now necessary to streamline the work of the the Council. What can be done to render it more effective? Are the present demarcation lines between the function and tasks of the Council and those of the Administrator reasonable and practical? Could we develop a practice of meetings in New York between delegations and the Administrator to take on some of the burden now put on the Council?

We wish to support the US proposal of one Council session a year lasting no more than two weeks. The Dutch proposal made yesterday of having short subject-oriented meetings merits further attention. ...

I would like to suggest that he [the Administrator] consider this matter further and report back to the Council at its twenty-eighth session."