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STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997

Letter dated 17 March 1997 from the Secretary-General
addressed to the President of the General Assembly

17 March 1997

Upon assuming the office of Secretary-General, I undertook to lead a thorough and wide-ranging review of the activities of the United Nations and the manner in which they are conducted with a view to reconfiguring the Organization to meet the changing needs of the world community as it moves into the next millennium.

I am now in a position to bring to the attention of Member States my immediate management and organizational measures as described below. This is in keeping with the wish of the General Assembly that there be a timely dialogue between Member States and the Secretary-General on the process of the restructuring of the Secretariat. I do not intend this as a comprehensive review of the overall reform process, which will be the subject of a report I intend to complete in July for submission to the Assembly.

I am determined that change be accomplished in a manner that renews the confidence of Member States in the relevance and effectiveness of the Organization and revitalizes the spirit and commitment of staff.

A. Management reform measures taken to date

I already have taken measures within the Secretariat toward meeting these goals.

First, I have created a Policy Coordination Group, which I chair, to assist me in the executive direction of the work of the Organization. Its composition includes the heads of Departments and Offices within the Secretariat, as well as the heads of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Group has a dual purpose. It is intended to ensure that the Organization as a whole is managed as an integrated entity and that management and policy decisions by the Secretary-General systematically benefit from advice from all senior programme managers. This is particularly important in meeting the growing number of challenges before the Organization that cut across traditional sectors and organizational boundaries and call for comprehensive responses.

Second, all United Nations Departments, Offices, Funds and Programmes have been grouped in four principal sectoral areas of the Organization's work - Peace and Security, Economic and Social Affairs, Development Operations and Humanitarian Affairs. Executive Committees have been set up in these areas, each with its own designated Convenor, to facilitate more concerted and coordinated management of the work of the Organization. In this context, I have determined that the designation of a Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development is no longer required. These Executive Committees have executive decision-making and coordinating powers. The Convenors will bring to my attention issues that require my personal decision. Some 30 United Nations Departments, Offices, Funds and Programmes and other entities are thus brought together in these four groups by substance rather than by the source of financing. The initiative is intended to sharpen the contribution that each entity is called upon to make to the overall objectives of the Organization and

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to help each entity avoid duplication and build on the work and capacities of other entities in furthering that contribution. Human rights issues will cut across the four sectoral groups. The incorporation of a gender perspective within the programmes of the Organization will be an important dimension of the work of the groups.

To support me in my reform efforts, I have appointed an Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform to advise and assist me in overseeing all aspects of the process that come within my purview. The Executive Coordinator also chairs a Steering Committee on United Nations Reform whose membership includes senior officials representing the span of activities of the Organization, including the Convenors of the Executive Committees.

While most reform changes will be accomplished within the current available financial resources, there will be a need, in some cases, for special external technical and professional expertise that will require extrabudgetary funding. Accordingly, I will be establishing a special trust fund for this purpose.

A Management Reform Group, focusing on furthering management reform measures cutting across the Organization, is being established within the Department of Administration and Management to replace the Efficiency Board and its working group. This will be complemented by reform groups, to be established in each Department, Fund and Programme, to assist in pursuing internal reforms in each United Nations entity. The Management Reform Group in the Department of Administration and Management, in concert with the other reform groups, will constitute a network upon which the Executive Coordinator and the Steering Committee can draw. The status of the efficiency process and of these managerial reforms will be described in a separate report that I will send to you shortly.

The overall aim in the establishment of these mechanisms is to involve, on a continuing basis, all United Nations entities in the challenge presented by reform, while organizing and accelerating the reform process through the identification of a clear locus of action.

B. The two-track reform process

The reform agenda is being implemented on the basis of a two-track process. The first track relates to those managerial initiatives and decisions which fall within my authority and that can be taken immediately. The second track involves the preparation of a longer-term programme of reform, which will incorporate: (a) those further measures within my authority, including those which I believe should be subject to consultations with and guidance from Member States; and (b) my proposals in respect of the more fundamental issues, which can only be decided by Member States.

In developing my plans, I am taking careful account of the considerable body of knowledge and analysis that is now available as a result of the deliberations of Member States in the General Assembly and its relevant working groups. Account has also been taken of proposals made by groups of States and by individual States, recommendations emanating from independent commissions and

other bodies, and from the valuable reports prepared by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Board of Auditors.

C. Further management reform measures

Transfer of resources from administration to programmes

It is estimated that up to 38 per cent of the resources of the regular budget are devoted to administration and other non-programme costs. This figure includes the budget, finance and personnel components of the Department of Administration and Management, the administrative support costs of Conference Services, public information activities and other programme support costs. I am convinced that this figure is too high and that Member States would welcome an effort to redistribute resources to the programme areas. In this regard, **Member States have made clear that resources saved should be made available for development activities.** I would therefore expect this principle to guide the process of redistribution.

A major aspect of my management reorganization will be to empower programme managers to act decisively in their areas of responsibility and to reduce the layers of centralized administration. This will entail the review and streamlining of relevant financial and administrative rules and regulations. In short, I intend to delegate responsibility and authority, while insisting on full accountability. The increased application of information technology throughout the house and the simplification and speeding up of administrative processes provide the means to facilitate this decentralization. **The aim is an absolute reduction of resources devoted to administration.**

The achievement of this goal will require substantial work across the entire Organization, streamlining processes, sorting out the distribution of resources and staff between departments and the Department of Administration and Management, consolidating and/or outsourcing where appropriate, and recasting the Department of Administration and Management as a Department of Management. The implementation of this effort will require the full participation and cooperation of all Departments and Offices, as well as of Member States and intergovernmental bodies. It will also require consultations and agreement with Member States on the modality by which the funds will actually be reallocated to programmes.

I have directed that a plan be prepared for presentation to Member States for a reduction of at least one third in the proportion of resources devoted to administration and other non-programme costs in the regular budget to be achieved by the year 2001 - and I will make every attempt to go further.

Consolidation of Departments in the economic and social fields

Since taking over as Secretary-General, I have stressed that the promotion of development must remain central to the mission of the Organization and that the work of the United Nations in the economic and social fields must be strengthened.

At present, development activities are conducted primarily by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department for Development Support and Management Services; the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat); the five Regional Commissions; and the four Funds and Programmes, as well as the Office for Project Services. UNCTAD has recently carried out a comprehensive reorganization, the Regional Commissions are in the process of undertaking broad reviews, the Funds and Programmes have undertaken extensive reforms and Member States continue to pay close attention to their operations with a view to stimulating a closer integration of their activities.

The Secretariat has a central role in integrating substantive support to the concerned intergovernmental bodies, but this role is now diffused among the three Headquarters Departments mentioned above.

I am convinced that integrating support for policy formulation, analytical and normative functions and relevant technical cooperation activities will serve to reinforce the necessary critical mass available at Headquarters for this indispensable aspect of the work of the Organization and the overall effectiveness of the Secretariat. It will also facilitate a further rationalization of economic and social work throughout the Organization and vis-à-vis the other organizations of the system. I also anticipate that appreciable administrative savings would accrue from the consolidation. **Accordingly, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department for Development Support and Management Services will be merged into a single Department. Some of the functions and activities of the Department for Development Support and Management Services will be redistributed.** The new structure would maintain a distinct capacity for economic and social data gathering and analysis, consolidate capacities for policy analysis and policy coordination and strengthen support in the key areas of sustainable development, social development and the advancement of women, bearing in mind the importance of sharply enhancing substantive support for the intergovernmental processes of the United Nations in the economic and social spheres. The new Secretariat arrangements should serve to bolster support for Africa's development, South-South cooperation and the sustainable development of small island developing States.

Streamlining and strengthening of services for intergovernmental processes

A priority in the reform effort should be to strengthen the coherence, quality and efficiency of the technical support services provided by the Secretariat to intergovernmental bodies. In this regard, there is a need to streamline and strengthen technical support for intergovernmental processes. The functions involved relate, in particular, to technical support for the General Assembly and its main and subsidiary bodies, and similar support for the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies in the economic and social fields, as well as the functions of the Conference Services machinery. I believe that integrating these activities into one Department will markedly strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat to provide efficient and

integrated technical support services to Member States while providing opportunities for significant administrative savings.

I therefore intend to establish a Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services integrating the major technical support services for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies currently provided by the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, as well as Conference Services. The new Department will lead in establishing a new way of operating conference services in the Secretariat with increased accountability for performance against clear norms and standards of quality and timeliness and increased flexibility to deploy resources to respond quickly. While consolidation is an important means of achieving cost effectiveness, there are some functions that need to be decentralized to locations where they can be performed much more economically. Particular examples are translation, printing and publications.

Reorientation of public information

We must ensure that the tale of the activities of the United Nations is told with more vigour and purpose and to greater effect. To that end, I have concluded that a sweeping revamping of the United Nations public information capacity is an urgent requirement. Revamping these services would be in line with intergovernmental recommendations that have already been made. Action to implement these recommendations has not kept pace, however, with the urgent nature of the problem. There is a need to go further.

The reorientation of public information will be designed to have three principal effects. First, United Nations information activities will in future be geared to providing communications and outreach services to the media, non-governmental organizations and other re-disseminators, utilizing the latest media technologies and techniques. Second, the information capability of the Secretariat will be more intimately linked with and directly supportive of the activities of the substantive departments. Third, resources will be decentralized and refocused to the country and regional levels and greater use made of local resources. The process of integrating those United Nations information centres serving developing countries into the Resident Coordinator's Office will be completed. I would also hope to see information coverage of all Member States that desire it as a result of these changes.

To that end, I intend to transform the present Department of Public Information into an Office for Communications and Media Services and will initiate a detailed review and consultations with Member States.

Streamlining and consolidation of administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and other services

The United Nations and its Funds and Programmes have different but related administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and other services arrangements. Common services arrangements exist in a few areas. In support of the principle of devolving responsibility to the most effective managerial level, experience demonstrates that, in some carefully defined areas,

consolidation produces considerable cost savings and other administrative benefits.

I have therefore decided to initiate a close examination of existing arrangements throughout the Organization with a view to extending common services wherever this can result in more effective services, including the possible establishment of a common services facility.

United Nations at the country level

Member States have made clear their wish to see arrangements put in place to secure greater integration of United Nations activities at the country level, which, nonetheless, will preserve the special characteristics and distinctiveness of the various Funds and Programmes.

A common goal of the United Nations presence at the country level should be to ensure optimal support for national capacity-building: (a) to assist countries to realize their national development goals; and (b) to facilitate the coherent and coordinated implementation of the goals and programmes of action arising from the series of recent international conferences and General Assembly resolutions. This calls for common understanding, policy coherence, coordination and collaboration at both the headquarters and field levels.

In order to achieve greater coherence of planning, programming and implementation at the country level, I have directed that the following steps be taken:

First, the position of the Resident Coordinator as my designated representative for development cooperation and Leader of the United Nations Country Team should be further strengthened and enhanced. The team approach to operations in the field, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, must be acknowledged without reservations. An expanded functioning of the thematic groups within the Resident Coordinator system should be pursued. The thematic groups should not only function as avenues for information exchange but as mechanisms to review programmes and projects, prior to funding decisions. Governments must know that they are dealing with an integrated United Nations and not one with disparate parts.

Second, all United Nations Funds and Programmes conducting development activities in a particular country will be requested to join together, under the Resident Coordinator as the Leader of the United Nations Country Team, in the preparation of a common programme and programme-resource framework at the country level in full consultation with and in support of the Government concerned. A common United Nations Development Assistance Framework should maximize United Nations collaboration in support of country priorities. For this purpose, a common database should be developed in each programme country. Within a single framework document agreed upon with the country, individual Funds and Programmes would retain their discrete programme components.

Third, the drive to establish common premises and common services arrangements at the country level will be intensified. A common location will save on administrative costs to the benefit of the programme countries and will

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serve to encourage a daily habit of coordination, cooperation and consultation. Implementation of common services arrangements at the field level will release resources for programmes, as will further harmonization of current procurement, personnel, financial and administrative procedures.

Fourth, I am asking the heads of the United Nations Funds and Programmes, through the Executive Committee on Development Operations, to assist me in ensuring that the selection of the leaders of their country staff result in a mix of skills in the United Nations Country Team compatible with the needs and priorities of the United Nations country activities as determined by the country concerned.

United Nations Code of Conduct

I expect a total commitment to excellence from the managers and staff of the United Nations. This includes adhering to the highest standards of conduct. **A draft Code of Conduct has now been completed. Staff representatives have been asked to review it expeditiously so that I may submit it to the General Assembly for consideration.**

The Code of Conduct lays out in clear form the expectations for conduct and performance and requires the highest standards of efficiency, competence, independence and integrity of United Nations staff as stipulated in the Charter. It consolidates and updates rules, sets out a framework for accountability for performance and sets standards of conduct designed to avoid real or apparent conflict of interest, including requiring financial disclosure by the senior officials of the Organization.

Reduction in documentation

It has become urgent to stem the tide of documentation, which threatens to overwhelm the productive capacity of the Secretariat and the absorptive capacity of delegations. To take one example, for the forthcoming substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, which lasts for 20 working days, it is estimated that the Council will have documentation consisting of 2,874 pages before it for consideration (an average of 140 pages a day).

I have therefore set a target of 25 per cent for the reduction in documentation produced by the Secretariat to be achieved by no later than the end of 1998. I will review options for streamlining reporting methods and propose further measures to Member States in the near future for reducing documentation and eliminating unnecessary paperwork.

D. Regular budget and staff levels

Regular budget

The actions described above will find reflection, in due course, in the structure and content of the regular budget of the Organization. In this regard, it will be recalled that the regular budget has shown a zero nominal growth since 1994. The 1994-1995 regular budget appropriation was

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\$2,608 million. The current appropriation for the budget for the biennium 1996-1997 is \$2,603 million. The overall decline of \$5 million was achieved through real resource reductions of \$210 million offset by output cost pressure from inflation and foreign exchange fluctuation.

For the biennium 1998-1999, the General Assembly has approved a budget outline of \$2,480 million based on the same price levels used in the latest reading under the 1996-1997 budget. Accordingly, **my proposed budget for the biennium 1998-1999 will contain proposals that will be around \$123 million less than 1996-1997 at comparable prices and will represent a real resource reduction.** Assuming the continuation of present inflation and exchange rates, **my goal is for the United Nations to achieve a negative nominal growth budget for the biennium 1998-1999.**

Staff levels

The question of an appropriate level of staff for the Organization has become a matter of preoccupation for many Member States. It is equally an issue uppermost in the minds of the staff.

The present staff level is a product of historical forces involving the mandates conferred by Member States and estimates at particular moments in time of the resources, in particular human resources, required to implement them. It must, however, be constrained by expressions on the part of Member States of their sense of the burden they are willing to bear to support the activities of our Organization. It is a determination that rests on a mix of political, managerial, programmatic and financial requirements.

In considering this issue, it is important to define what is within my responsibility as Secretary-General and what is not. The majority of the staff of the United Nations system work in the specialized agencies, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other organizations, and do not come under my responsibility. Within the United Nations itself, 10,021 posts are authorized under the regular budget of the Organization and are under my direct responsibility. **I have decided to propose for the consideration of Member States a reduction of approximately 1,000 of these posts in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 when it is finally submitted.** The proposed reduction in posts would contribute to a decline of approximately 25 per cent from the peak of 11,994.

Over time, with adjustments of mandates and the impact of new methods of work, further reductions could be possible. Qualitative improvements could produce an efficiency dividend that might result in further reductions. These would be undertaken in a predictable and orderly manner that will not compromise staff morale or performance.

In this context, heads of Departments and Offices will be required to keep the targets set by the General Assembly on gender balance as a guiding factor in their staff decisions. For my part, **I will continue to work together with Member States to ensure that qualified women are given the opportunity to serve in senior positions in the Secretariat.**

E. Action processes

I am initiating a number of action processes to implement each decision with a specific timetable and a designated action manager. The Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform will assist me in overseeing the setting up and functioning of these arrangements. A more detailed description is in the annex to the present letter.

Although I will deal more fully with institutional issues in my July report, the situation of UNEP requires a more immediate focus in the light of the forthcoming nineteenth special session of the General Assembly for the purpose of an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21, to be held in June. I have, therefore, asked the Executive Coordinator to undertake consultations with Member States on this question as soon as possible.

Different Secretariat units are often involved in issues that flow from the mandates assigned by Member States. I believe it is vital for Secretariat units to work together across organizational and sectoral lines to reduce overlap and duplication in dealing with those issues and ensure more effective focus and utilization of Secretariat capacities. I have asked the Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform to design an "issue management system" on which I will report more fully in my July report.

I will keep you and Member States fully informed on these and additional measures that will be taken during the next few months.

F. Conclusion

The reform measures I have initiated are designed to contribute to the transformation of the Organization into a more effective, modernized and relevant instrument at the service of the international community. They represent first steps in my reform programme. Resources will be reallocated; departments integrated; administrative costs reduced; functions streamlined; new methods of work introduced; and maximum performance demanded of all staff. **The intention is to strengthen the Secretariat's capacity to deliver programmes and to redeploy resources judiciously for this purpose.**

As I have stated before, reform is not an end in itself. It is a means to achieve a more effective United Nations system that better serves the Member States; a leaner and more efficient United Nations Secretariat, including the Funds and Programmes, with simplified structures, that avoids duplication and achieves greater impact; and a United Nations Organization that is well-managed and more accountable for results.

I am aware that a number of these actions will require the review and concurrence of Member States, in particular where there are implications for the content and structure of the programme budget. In such instances, I will bring them for consideration to the relevant bodies at the earliest practical opportunity. I will seek to ensure that the changes I propose contribute to the full implementation of mandated programmes. Indeed, these proposals are intended to increase the overall capacity of the Organization to implement

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programmes. In the event that programmatic adjustments are required, I will seek the necessary authorization from the competent intergovernmental bodies.

Enhancing the performance of the United Nations means, above all, investing in its most important resource - its staff. Over the next several months, I shall be considering a series of initiatives to strengthen further the professional formation of our staff to equip them with new skills and techniques, and to create work-related incentives. A United Nations staff college is being established to foster management excellence and to provide staff with refresher training over the course of their careers. It is essential that the nature of the training and incentives provided be in line with the core competencies required of our staff. I shall outline my plans in this area in my report to be issued in July.

I will make the present letter available to all Member States and Observers.

(Signed) Kofi A. ANNAN

ANNEX

Action processes

Transfer of resources from administration to programmes

Action

The proportion of resources of the regular budget devoted to administration and other non-programme costs will be reduced by at least one third by the year 2001.

Follow-up and implementation

The United Nations spends too much administering itself. In 1995, up to 38 per cent of the Organization's regular budget was spent on administration and other overheads. Less onerous administration means better service for Member States and increased productivity throughout the Organization. Greater use of modern information technology makes possible a wider sharing of information, greater transparency and accountability, and reduced administrative costs. Administrative rules should be reviewed and obsolete and unnecessary rules abolished, thus contributing to better compliance. Rules and procedures should translate the intent of the General Assembly into action in a timely and expeditious manner.

Resources released will be redirected to substantive programme areas in the economic, social and related fields on the basis of proposals to be submitted to Member States. This will be done progressively over the next two bienniums.

The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management will be in charge of preparing a plan with a precise timetable for accomplishing this goal.

Consolidation of Departments in the economic and social fields

Action

A single Secretariat department at Headquarters in the economic and social fields will be established.

Follow-up and implementation

A close scrutiny will be made of the programmes of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department for Development Support and Management Services in order to determine whether all of their activities are of high priority, which areas may need strengthening and which could be better carried out by other entities or in partnership with them. As regards the Department for Development Support and Management Services, the analysis will provide the basis for the redistribution of those functions of the Department for Development Support and Management Services which have continued

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relevance in accordance with legislative mandates. The expected relationship of the new consolidated entity to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will be a subject of special focus, with a view to identifying areas for closer cooperation and possible consolidation. The analysis should also incorporate the issue of rationalizing appropriate activities with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the form any such rationalization should take. At the same time, consideration will be given to the research and normative activities being undertaken in certain areas by the United Nations Funds and Programmes, which may be inconsistent with their core functions, especially now that there will be one central Secretariat Department at Headquarters responsible for economic and social matters.

The Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development will be the senior official responsible for leading this analysis through an appropriate mechanism established for this purpose. As regards the technical cooperation programmes of the former Department for Development Support and Management Services, he will work together with the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of the Office for Project Services in order to prepare recommendations for action. Further details of the planned rationalization will appear in the report to be submitted to Member States in July.

**Streamlining and strengthening of services
for intergovernmental processes**

Action

A Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services will be established.

Follow-up and implementation

The technical Secretariat support services of the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development will be integrated into the new Department. The conference service functions of the Office of Conference and Support Services will be transferred to the new Department in order to provide integrated technical support to intergovernmental bodies. Responsibility for providing substantive support to intergovernmental bodies will continue to reside in the programme Departments. The support service part of the former Office of Conference and Support Services will remain in the Department of Management. The function of control and limitation of documentation will also remain in the Department of Management through the budgetary process.

The senior official appointed to head the new Department, at the Under-Secretary-General level, will take the necessary steps to prepare recommendations for the establishment of the Department, which will be reported on in July.

Reorientation of public information

Action

The Department of Public Information will be transformed into a new Office for Communications and Media Services, which will incorporate the latest media technologies and techniques.

Follow-up and implementation

The new Office will reorient its approach to the delivery of communications and outreach services to Member States, the media, non-governmental organizations and other re-disseminators, taking advantage of advances in electronic means of communication.

The Executive Coordinator for United Nations Reform will be responsible for establishing a task force to conduct an examination of the Department's current activities and to make specific recommendations on the architecture of the new Office following consultations with Member States. The task force will conclude its work in time for the publication of the July report.

Streamlining and consolidation of administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and other services

Action

An analysis of the feasibility of extending common services facilities will be initiated.

Follow-up and implementation

At the United Nations, organizational arrangements have tended to derive from the source of funding rather than functional and substantive considerations. By establishing sectoral groups, this approach to the management of the operations of the Organization is being revised.

The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management will initiate an examination of the feasibility of extending common services, including the possibility of establishing a common services facility.

United Nations at the country level

Action

The coherence, coordination and collaboration of the United Nations operational activities at the country level will be enhanced.

Follow-up and implementation

Fragmentation of the work of United Nations entities engaged in operational activities for development at the country level must be replaced by an integrated approach to planning, programming and implementation under the authority of the Resident Coordinator as Leader of the United Nations Country Team. Coordination should shift from information sharing to goal-oriented United Nations collaboration.

The Administrator of UNDP, in his capacity as Convenor of the Executive Committee on Development Operations, will take the lead in working out the necessary arrangements for this new orientation. He will advise on which proposals need to be brought to the attention of intergovernmental bodies and the executive boards to obtain their concurrence.

United Nations Code of Conduct

Action

A Code of Conduct will be completed.

Follow-up and implementation

Staff representatives have been asked to provide their comments on the draft Code of Conduct by the end of March. Following further consultations within the context of the Staff Management Consultative Committee in April, the Code of Conduct will be submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration. Once completed, it will be brought to the attention of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to foster system-wide consistency in this area.

The Legal Counsel, in cooperation with the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Management, will be responsible for bringing this initiative to completion.

Reduction in documentation

Action

A target for an early reduction in the documentation produced by the Secretariat has been set in order to achieve a 25 per cent decrease by no later than the end of 1998.

Follow-up and implementation

Every action taken by the United Nations is reflected, sooner or later, in a document, press release or publication. As a result, the Secretariat produces an enormous amount of paperwork. In the biennium 1994-1995, there were 43 million more words or 130 thousand more draft pages translated than in 1988-1989, a 25 per cent increase; 200 million more pages were printed to reach

a total of 1,570 million pages per biennium, a 14 per cent growth in printing output.

The challenge to be tackled in this area goes beyond the question of numbers. The Secretariat must aim to improve the quality of the documentation it produces by making it more concise, readable and action-oriented. Member States, for their part, should be careful not to request reports that are unlikely to contribute substantially to the body of knowledge already available on the subject in question. They should also show restraint in submitting letters and other similar material for circulation. These changes will take time, however, and should not inhibit attempts to reduce the totality of the present documentation overload.

For a start, it has been decided that, as a rule, all documents produced by the Secretariat should be no longer than 16 pages, a reduction from the present standard of 24 pages. Proposals will be presented shortly to intergovernmental bodies in order to secure approval for a reduction in the length of reports produced by those bodies from the standard 32 pages to 20 pages.

The Under-Secretary-General of the new Department of Management will take the lead in devising all necessary measures to meet the target of a 25 per cent reduction in documentation as rapidly as possible.
