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Programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Standards of accommodation for air travel

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/59/523). During its consideration of this report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.
2. The report of the Secretary-General was submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 42/214 of 21 December 1987 and 45/248 A of 21 December 1990 and decisions 44/442 of 21 December 1989, 46/450 of 20 December 1991 and 57/589 of 18 June 2003, in which the Secretary-General was requested to submit a report to the General Assembly on a biennial basis. The report provides information on exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel authorized for the period ended 30 June 2004.
3. The standards of air travel at the United Nations are governed by a series of General Assembly resolutions and decisions, including decision 40/555 of 18 December 1985, resolution 42/214, decision 44/442, resolution 45/248 A, decision 46/450, resolution 53/214 of 18 December 1998 and decision 57/589. Exceptions to those standards authorized by the Secretary-General are indicated in paragraph 6 of A/59/523.
4. **The Advisory Committee notes that the number of exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel and the additional costs incurred for the reporting period from 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2004 increased significantly from those reported for the period from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2002. For the period 2002/04, 236 exceptions representing an additional cost of \$442,482 were reported, as compared with 161 exceptions at an additional cost of \$320,791 for the period 2000/02 (see A/59/523, tables 1 and 2).**
5. With reference to exceptions authorized for first class and business class listed in annexes I to VII of A/59/523, the Advisory Committee reiterates its request that in future the additional information provided to the Committee

include the date of booking, travel dates, itinerary and number of travel days as well as the nature of the event being attended (see A/56/7, paras. 127-129). The Committee points out that in strict conformity with existing procedures, travel should always be by the most direct and economical route; itineraries should not be manipulated to provide for a higher standard of accommodation than would otherwise be allowed.

6. The Advisory Committee notes that exceptions to the normal standards of air travel include exceptions authorized by the Secretary-General because the traveller is considered an eminent person. As indicated in paragraph 6 (c) of A/59/523, an eminent person for the purpose of the exception is a traveller, "such as a former head of State, or a prominent international figure in the political, humanitarian or cultural arenas". The Committee notes that this definition is fairly broad and that the list of eminent persons travelling first class continued to increase in the reporting period (see A/59/523, annex III).

7. The Advisory Committee notes that exceptions authorized for prominent persons donating their services free of charge to the Organization continued to increase in the reporting period. In the period 2002/04, 48 trips were authorized at an additional cost of \$96,007, as compared with 16 trips at an additional cost of \$53,618 in the period 2000/02 (see A/59/523, tables 1 and 2, and annex IV).

8. The Advisory Committee was provided with information on exceptions authorized for first-class travel by personal aides and security officers for the reporting period, including itineraries.

9. The Advisory Committee has noted what appears to be a blurring of categories; sometimes the same person is listed under different categories for different trips. Moreover, there appears to be an increasingly broad application of the various exceptions to the normal standards of air travel. **The Committee is of the opinion that definitions need to be tightened and that they should be consistently applied.**

10. Notwithstanding what has been stated above with regard to the need to tighten existing definitions and procedures for the application of travel standards, the Committee is of the opinion that the time has come for a reconsideration of the whole question of first-class travel. The Committee observes that in recent years, many airlines have significantly cut back, if not entirely eliminated, first-class sections on aircraft. Instead, several varieties of enhanced business-class travel have been developed, and it appears that differences in the level of accommodation between these classes and first class are minimal. Taking these developments into account, the General Assembly may wish to give further guidance on the future use of first-class travel with a view to its use in only the most exceptional circumstances.
