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REPORT OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE ON UNITED NATIONS
PUBLIC INFORMATION (A/3928)

Comments and recommendations of the Secretary-General

1. Paragraph 2 of the operative part of the General Assembly's resolution 1177 (XII) of 26 November 1957, establishing an Expert Committee on United Nations Public Information, reads as follows:

"2. Invites the Secretary-General to present to the General Assembly at its thirteenth session the report of the Committee of Experts, together with his comments and recommendations thereon."

In accordance with the above, the Secretary-General presents the report of the Expert Committee (A/3928) to the General Assembly. His comments and recommendations are contained in the present document.

2. The policy of the Office of Public Information is provided by the Basic Principles enunciated by the General Assembly in 1946^{1/} and revised in 1952.^{2/} Both sets of Principles assumed that the Secretariat, as one of the principal organs of the United Nations under the Charter, had a special international function to perform in promoting "an informed understanding of the work and the purposes of the Organization among the peoples of the world". In an Organization based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members, the function of the Secretariat, as the only principal organ of an "exclusively international character" (Article 100 of the Charter), was to serve the United Nations as a whole in support of its aims and the decisions of its principal organs.

1/ See Resolutions Adopted by the General Assembly During the First Part of its First Session (A/64), pp. 17-18.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixth Session, Annexes, agenda item 41, document A/C.5/L.172, annex.

Of course this function should be and has been exercised with discretion and impartiality by the Secretariat as well as with common-sense and realism.

3. In the performance of this function the revised Basic Principles of 1952 stated that:

"... The Department of Public Information should primarily assist and rely upon the services of the existing official and private agencies of information, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations. It should not engage in 'propaganda'. It should undertake, on its own initiative, positive informational activities that will supplement the services of existing agencies."

In so far as assistance to and reliance upon the existing official and private agencies of information are concerned the General Assembly and the Secretary-General have acted on the assumption that the primary duty of the Office of Public Information under the Basic Principles was to give objective assistance to all the media so as to help them to report fully and freely on the aims and activities of the United Nations. As to the "positive informational activities that will supplement the services of existing agencies", it has been accepted that these activities should not consist of "propaganda" but that they should reflect the role of the Secretariat as defined in Article 100 of the Charter. It has also been accepted that the Secretariat should be able to speak directly to the peoples of the world.

4. The Committee's report seems to raise basic questions of principle in respect to these assumptions. For example, it states in paragraph 217: "The best way in the opinion of the Committee for reaching the peoples of the world at this time is that of working through the Governments of Member States and through a select group of individuals and organizations". In paragraph 226 it proposes: "a shift of emphasis in the method of dissemination of information from 'mass approach through media of mass communication' to the selective approach of public relations".

5. The view hitherto taken by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General has been that assistance to "existing" agencies does not minimize the productional role of the OPI, whose initiative is to be exercised side by side with assistance to and reliance on existing agencies.

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6. Circumstances vary considerably in different areas. While in some parts of the world official channels may be so important as to be almost the sole method of communication, in others, direct availability of information material from OPI's own sources would be normal and, indeed, would be regarded as essential on account of its impartial origin.

7. In recommending a new outlook by which national Governments and organizations would increasingly become filters and transformers between the OPI and the peoples of the world, the Committee has undoubtedly been inspired by the recognition of the fact that modifications of the presentation of the United Nations aims and methods of approach are necessary in the light of different cultural traditions and reactions. However, this justified consideration of differences in the national idioms may lead to a tendency to adjust information on United Nations activities in a way which would mean that the objective and international approach would be lost. If that were to happen this would deprive the Office of Public Information of its exclusively international character. It might leave it to each nation to emphasize the purposes and to communicate the decisions of the Organization to the people in a way adjusted to the requirements of its interests. Obviously this would not be in keeping with the principles for the work of the Office of Public Information which have been established by the General Assembly.

8. . Whatever the view taken, this type of concern takes us into an area of discussion which involves matters of basic policy. In entering it, the Committee has not, it is felt, kept the discussion on this question in the Fifth Committee fully before it. For, the Rapporteur's report of the proceedings of the Fifth Committee at the twelfth session states^{3/} (A/3741, para. 4):

"There are two distinct, though complementary, stages to any inquiry into the working of the Department of Public Information: first, to set up an expert committee of inquiry which would concern itself with a factual appraisal of the existing work and methods of the Department and, second, should that committee's findings warrant such a course, to appoint a further group to review the existing public information policy".

^{3/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twelfth Session, Annexes, agenda item 41.

9. It seems that the Expert Committee, in its recommendations, has taken stands, the justification of which lie in a new policy, rather than in economy and efficiency. The Committee itself has stated in its transmittal letter that it "has recommended some significant changes in policy", and in paragraph 226 that "all its recommendations are predicated upon", inter alia, some new or newly interpreted set of principles.

10. This makes it difficult in some cases, especially in the field of media operations, to comment on the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee, without transgressing the scope of the question, as outlined by the General Assembly resolution. "Unrelayed broadcasts" are a case in point. On the one hand, the Committee believes (para. 84) that "authentic news about the activities of the United Nations can best originate through its own broadcasts". On the other hand, it recommends (para. 260) that the United Nations should not undertake short-wave broadcasts except when national radio systems agree to relay such programmes. (This, if followed, would have the immediate effect of suspension of broadcasts in Russian, Chinese, Hungarian and Arabic.) The Committee's reasoning for its recommendation in this case would seem to be that where national radio systems are not willing to relay, the broadcasts should be deemed to be unwanted by an adequate number of listeners, and therefore waste of so much effort. This reasoning, however, seems to be inconclusive. The unwillingness of a national radio system to relay the broadcasts may be due to its lack of resources or of air-time. Nor are the radio systems in all cases government-owned. In other words, the United Nations may have, if the Committee's recommendations are to be followed, to suspend a broadcast not because a Government, but because a privately-owned radio system is unwilling to relay it. Most of all, there may be international considerations before the OPI which may not be equally important to the national systems. There is, for example, a special point of international significance in broadcasting in all the five official languages. This gives Russian and Chinese a special position which, along with English, French and Spanish, the OPI would like to maintain. Against all these, the considerations of economy seem to be comparatively minor; for the total cost for the above-mentioned two languages, including staff costs, is \$61,000, the operating cost of the other thirty-one languages being \$690,000.

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It would appear more likely, therefore, that the Committee, in recommending the suspension of the above-mentioned broadcasts, was thinking more in terms of its conception of "target" than in terms of economy. But, since the new conception of target is linked up with the Basic Principles, it is difficult fully to comment upon this suggestion without over-stepping the limits of discussion.

11. Again, in the Committee's recommendations on television (para. 262-268), economy does not seem to have been kept in the forefront: the proposal for a new television studio (in spite of the fact that all the out-of-pocket costs of television operations are recovered, and the Secretary-General has given the assurance that the cost of the new studio would be recovered out of revenue during a five-year period) has been rejected by the Committee because "at present 90 per cent of the usage of the United Nations television facilities is confined to the North American continent" and "the vast majority of the Member States will not derive any benefit from such a studio". In fact, forty-five countries now have television transmissions and the potential audience for television is 63 million receivers.

12. In the field of publications, the Committee's belief (para. 127) "that the United Nations and its activities ought not to be given a featurized treatment in authoritative United Nations publications. An element of opinion inevitably enters into feature writing" does not seem to be co-ordinated with the Committee's later view (para. 210) that the OPI's purpose "should be to project an idea rather than to disseminate unrelated items of information material". Nor can it be agreed that the Committee should have found "a measure of reasoned support and, indeed, demand for the French edition of the Review" (para. 122), when its paid circulation is 1,793, and "singular lack of positive support for either the English or the Spanish editions of the Review" (*ibid*), whose corresponding figures are given as 10,633 (actually 11,913) and 1,364, respectively. For reasons of economy, the Reviews might be published quarterly as the Committee has recommended (paras. 247-248) instead of monthly, but without changing their contents so drastically as to transform them from magazines to pure reference manuals; for such periodicals are amenable to experiment, and subscribers, not necessarily the same or as many, will no doubt be found for whatever form and shape are given to the contents.

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13. The Secretary-General also wishes to place on record his view that the OPI in its activities has served well the purposes of the United Nations in the relations of the Organization with the representatives of the press accredited to Headquarters. This view is corroborated by reactions from the representatives of the press themselves who often, without the assistance of the OPI, would not have been in a position to cover the complex and extensive work of the Organization. It is obvious that the character and significance of this assistance cannot be evaluated only in terms of press releases, as it equally depends on current and intimate personal contacts.

14. Throughout its report, the Committee has attached much importance to the system of information centres and has stressed the need for "decentralizing" to the regions as much of the production work now carried out at Headquarters as is possible and economical. With both these views the Secretary-General is in full accord. In actual fact, of recent years, direct expenditure for information centres has been increased by \$500,000, while that for Headquarters has been reduced by \$350,000 in the same period. This reflects OPI's appreciation of the significant role that can be played by the network of information centres; also of the impact of information material produced regionally by using local resources of talent, colour or technique. Both these have, of course, obvious limits. If, in some cases, Headquarters cannot provide material which would have the freshness of home-grown produce, in other cases the research and technical facilities and the talent available at Headquarters cannot be matched in the field. There may therefore be difference of opinion as to the scope and the rate of change suggested. The Committee's aims that a centre director should (para. 191) "possess basic understanding of the region and knowledge of the country where the centre is situated ... must have special aptitude for developing and maintaining a wide variety of contacts", must be interchangeable with "officers at high levels of responsibility [at Headquarters], holding the posts of Directors or Principal Officers" (para. 198), and that the staff at the (twenty-seven and more) centres should be strengthened, are desirable aims to be sought through such gradual development as circumstances may permit.

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15. This leads to consideration of the administrative and organizational changes suggested by the Committee. The Secretary-General agrees that the Office of Public Information should be made up of three divisions. Indeed, steps have been contemplated and are now being taken which correspond with the general recommendations of the Committee in this respect. It involves the transfer of units from the Division of Public Liaison to the Division of External Relations and to the Press and Publications Division. Under this arrangement, the Sales and Circulation Section would be joined with the Press and Publications Division, while the Visitors' Service, the Non-Governmental Organizations Section, the Education Section, the Interns and Fellowship Programme Unit, and the Overseas Desk of the Press and Publications Division would be placed in the Division of External Relations. These are the recommendations of the Committee and with these the Secretary-General concurs.

16. It may, however, be doubted that there is an advantage in placing the responsibility for over-all planning in a single division, replacing constant and joint consultation between the Under-Secretary and the directors at the policy and planning level. The responsibility for policy, co-ordination and planning inescapably belongs to the Under-Secretary in consultation with his senior directors. This principle of sound administration is followed in all other offices and departments of the Secretariat.

17. Flexibility in organizational and administrative matters would be desirable, especially as the Committee is anxious "to ensure that the responsibilities vested in the Secretary-General as the chief administrative officer of the Organization for the execution and administration of programmes are fully preserved"

(para. 280). It is assumed that it is the intention of the Committee that its detailed recommendations as to the structure and staffing pattern of the Press and Publications and External Relations Divisions should be interpreted in the light of the above statement. For the same reason and in view of the assurances given, it would, the Secretary-General hopes, be considered superfluous that the Secretary-General should submit "to each regular session of the General Assembly (the Fifth Committee) a brief statement embodying an assessment of the previous year's work together with a plan of work for the following year"

(para. 280), or that the Secretary-General should "refer to an advisory group

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more detailed periodic plans of work including a listing of special projects". The principal function of this advisory group as envisaged by the Committee would be to advise the Secretary-General on such points as "the usefulness and suitability of individual projects and suggest modifications as appropriate", including their "urgency, the time and manner of their implementation" and the emphasis in terms of "regional needs" (para. 280). The Secretary-General is of the view that consultation and assistance sought by him from an advisory body in matters of public information will be useful and appropriate. He then assumes that such a body would be of the same general character as the Advisory Committees for the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy and for UNEF matters.

18. In paragraph 279 of the report, the Committee has requested the Secretary-General "to prepare a detailed statement, on the basis of the Committee's recommendations, of the organization, staffing, and budgetary costs of the OPI". Since many of the recommendations leave too much room for interpretation as to the Committee's precise intentions, a precise over-all financial statement is difficult to prepare. But an attempt has been made in the annex to this document to interpret the Committee's recommendations and to assess, as far as possible, the additional expenditures and the savings involved. It will be seen that, on this basis, the net savings would be \$107,500. Since OPI's project estimates for 1959 are \$5,086,600, it is difficult to accept the Committee's view in paragraph 278 that \$4.5 million may be taken as "a reasonable basis" for planning.

19. In paragraph 211 of its report, the Committee has expressed the view that "the processes of co-operation and co-ordination between the United Nations and specialized agencies would be helped if the information services of the United Nations and the specialized agencies were to enrich one another by exchange of personnel". With this view the Secretary-General is in accord, but it is obvious that the specialized agencies should first have an opportunity to express their views in this matter. The Secretary-General therefore proposes to place this question on the agenda of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination for discussion, and to report the outcome to the General Assembly in due course.

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20. Finally, the Secretary-General takes note of the Expert Committee's wish, expressed in their transmittal letter, "to place on record the high opinion it formed of the devotion to duty and professional skill of the staff of the Office of Public Information at Headquarters and in the field" and thanks the Committee for their contribution to the development of this important part of United Nations activities.

ANNEX

PUBLIC INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement of administrative and approximate financial implications
of the recommendations of the Committee of Experts

1. Pursuant to the request of the Expert Committee, the Secretary-General has endeavoured, in the present statement, to provide the General Assembly with an indication of the administrative and financial implications of the Committee's recommendations to the extent that they permit of assessment in those terms.
2. The recommendations for a change of emphasis in the pattern of operational activities do not provide the elements for a precise costing. However, an attempt has been made to indicate those areas where implementation of the recommendations would bring savings, or additional expenditures, as compared with current budgetary proposals.
3. The present statement has been prepared under two headings: "Organization" and "Operations". Whenever the situation permits of detailed costing, the facts are given together with a reference to the specific recommendations as set out in the relevant paragraph of the Committee's report (A/3928).

ORGANIZATION

4. The existing structure of each main unit of the Office of Public Information is compared below with the organizational proposals outlined in chapter VII, section II, of the Committee's report.

Existing organization

I. OFFICE OF THE UNDER-SECRETARY

- (a) Executive Office

II. EXTERNAL RELATIONS DIVISION

- (a) External and Specialized
Agencies Service
(b) Information centres

III. PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

- (a) Office of the Director
(b) Central Press and Editorial
Services
 (i) Press Liaison Office
 (ii) Press Documents Counter
 (iii) Editorial Services
 (iv) Central News Desk
 (v) Source Materials Unit
(c) Overseas Service
 (i) Overseas Desk
 (ii) French Language Service
 (iii) Arabic Language Service
(d) Publications Service
 (i) English Language Service
 (ii) Spanish Language Service

Proposed organization

I. OFFICE OF THE UNDER-SECRETARY

(Para. 228)

- (a) Office of the Under-Secretary
(b) Executive Office
(c) Planning and Co-ordination Bureau

(Paras. 230-231)

- (i) Office of the Director
(ii) 4 regional sections
(iii) Overseas Press Service
(iv) Visitors' Service
(v) Interne Programme
(vi) Information centres

The new Bureau would, inter alia,
undertake the functions currently
performed by the units shown under
the existing structure as II (a) and
(b); III (c), (i), (ii) and (iii);
and IV (b), (c), (e) and (f).

II. PRESS AND PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

(Paras. 224-235)

- (a) Office of the Director
(b) Editorial Section
 (i) General Assembly
 (ii) Security Council
 (iii) Economic and Social Council
 (iv) Trusteeship Council
 (v) Specialized agencies
 (TAB and UNICEF)

(c) Sales and Circulation Section

The reconstituted Division would
undertake the functions currently
performed by the units shown under the
existing structure as III (a), (b)

Existing organization

Proposed organization

IV. PUBLIC LIAISON DIVISION

- (a) Office of the Director
- (b) NGO Section
- (c) Education Section
- (d) Sales and Circulation Section
- (e) Visitors' Service
- (f) Interne Programme

Under the recommendation of the Committee the functions of the Public Liaison Division would be absorbed by other divisions.

V. RADIO AND VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION

- (a) Office of the Director
- (b) Radio Services
 - (i) Radio News Desk
 - (ii) Features Service
 - (iii) East Asia Service
 - (iv) English Language Service
 - (v) European Service
 - (vi) Latin-American-Iberian Service
 - (vii) Middle East Service
 - (viii) South East Asia Service
- (c) Film Services
- (d) Television Services
- (e) Photographic and Exhibition Services
- (f) Operation and Facilities Service

III. RADIO AND VISUAL SERVICES DIVISION

(Para. 237)

The Committee makes no recommendation for any basic alteration in the structure of this Division.

VI. INFORMATION CENTRES

IV. INFORMATION CENTRES

5. The following indication of estimated total staffing needs under the organization and functions recommended by the Committee is compared with the initial 1959 budget proposals of the Secretary-General (A/3825, annex 1, p. 73).^{1/}

	<u>1959 Estimates (A/3825)</u>	<u>Estimated requirements based on the Committee's recommendations</u>
Professional posts:	169	158
General Service posts:	<u>213</u>	<u>208</u>
	<u>382</u>	<u>366</u>

^{1/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirteenth Session, Supplement No. 5.

6. The above comparison relates to those posts which would be financed from appropriations. There are, in addition, other posts which would be financed out of revenue, viz., 6 Professional and 22 General Service posts in the Visitors' Service (A/3825, page 61, table D-4), and 3 Professional and 13 General Service posts in the Sales and Circulation Section (A/3825, page 62, table D-6. Of the 17 General Service posts noted in table D-6, 4 are attributable to the Office of the Controller). Since the Committee recommendations would not affect the proposed level of staffing for these units but only their organizational placement, the posts in question have not been included in the totals shown.

7. The estimated total staff requirement, noted in paragraph 5 above, is analysed by main organizational units:

	Estimated requirements based on the Committee's recommendations			1959 estimates (A/3825)		
	Profes- sional	General Service	Total	Profes- sional	General Service	Total
Office of the Under-Secretary	6	10	16	6	10	16
Planning and Co-ordination Bureau <u>a/</u>	22	20	42 ^{b/}	17	18	35
Press and Publications Division	21	20	41 ^{c/}	31	24	55
Radio and Visual Services Division	56	50	106	66	53	119
Information Centres	<u>53</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>161</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>161</u>
	<u>158</u>	<u>208</u>	<u>366</u>	<u>169</u>	<u>213</u>	<u>382</u>

a/ For purposes of this comparison posts in the existing Divisions of External Services and Public Liaison and Distribution and the Overseas Press Services Unit are included.

b/ Excludes the Visitors' Service.

c/ Excludes the Sales and Circulation Section.

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8. Assuming implementation of the Committee's recommendations, savings of some \$135,000 might be anticipated in direct staff costs as compared with the 1959 estimates initially submitted. Further, savings in common staff costs estimated at \$30,000 would increase this figure to \$165,000. There would, however, be a reduction of some \$20,000 in staff assessment income.

OPERATIONS

9. Under this general heading, adjustments in the estimates would be related in the main to the activities of the two service divisions and the information centres. The following summary indicates either the possibility of reductions as compared with the initially proposed level of expenditure for 1959, or alternatively, of possible increases. The assumptions on which the relevant estimates have been made are also given, although it should be noted that in some cases they are in fairly broad terms.

		Estimated	
		Decrease	Increase
		\$	\$
<u>Press and Publications</u>			
(i)	<u>Para. 246</u>		
	Discontinuance of the monthly Reviews (See also para. 119 and annex IV)	85,500 ^{a/}	
(ii)	<u>Paras. 247 to 251</u>		
	Publication of a quarterly Review		45,000 ^{b/}
(iii)	<u>Para. 252</u>		
	Annual publication in the official languages of the <u>United Nations</u> <u>Yearbook</u> and <u>Everyman's United Nations</u>		102,500 ^{c/}

a/ Currently produced in English, French and Spanish. Savings on contractual staff (\$12,000) and on printing costs (\$73,500).

b/ Represents printing costs (\$37,000) and contractual editorial costs on French edition (\$8,000). It is assumed that the quarterly will be published in English, French and Spanish.

c/ Printing costs only. Assumes annual production in five official languages: United Nations Yearbook (\$80,000); Everyman's United Nations (\$22,500). Full production in all languages would probably require additional editorial staff not taken into account in the report and, therefore, not provided for in these estimates.

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		Estimated	
		Decrease	Increase
		\$	\$
<u>Press and Publications (cont'd)</u>			
(iv)	<u>Para. 255</u>		
	Discontinuance of production of some of the United Nations Day and Human Rights Day material (See also paras. 129 and 130)	26,600	
(v)	<u>Para. 256</u>		
	Discontinuance of production of United Nations posters (See also para. 132)	9,500	
<u>Radio and Visual Services</u>			
(vi)	<u>Para. 259</u>		
	Reduction in radio broadcasts	31,500 ^{d/}	
(vii)	<u>Paras. 260 and 261</u>		
	Discontinuance of unrelayed broadcasts	37,000 ^{e/}	
(viii)	<u>Paras. 270 and 271</u>		
	Discontinuance of the photomat service	7,500	
(ix)	<u>Paras. 272 to 274</u>		
	Production of feature films by outside agencies and field coverage at reduced level (see also (xii) below)	32,500 ^{f/}	

- d/ Provides savings for English broadcasts (\$9,500) and for Spanish broadcasts (\$21,700) assuming that (i) during the General Assembly period such broadcasts would be maintained; and (ii) during the non-Assembly period there would be a weekly programme.
- e/ Assuming there would be no relays in Eastern European, Middle-East and Chinese Services, savings would be \$15,500, \$11,000 and \$10,500 respectively, after allowance is made for continuance of transcription service at the existing level.
- f/ Revised estimate of \$150,000 would compare with budget provision of \$182,500, but there would be additional expenses included in the provision under item (xii).

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		Estimated	
		Decrease	Increase
		\$	\$
<u>Information centres and decentralized activities</u>			
(x)	Para. 258		
	Additional library facilities (See also para. 195)		50,000 ^{g/}
(xi)	Para. 242		
	Increased travel provisions		10,000 ^{h/}
(xii)	General emphasis in the report as a whole		
	(a) Covers <u>inter alia</u> :		
	Local adoption of Headquarters material (para. 189); decentralization of radio production (para. 259); facilities for non-governmental organizations (para. 244); development of the network of centres through the existing facilities of United Nations Offices or those of a specialized agency (para. 238); and production of finished documentary or feature films through outside agencies (para. 274).		85,000 ^{i/}
	(b) Estimated reduction in general expenses at Headquarters	25,000 ^{i/}	
		<u>\$255,000</u>	<u>\$292,500</u>

g/ Provides a minimum requirement of \$33,500 for (i) Rental of additional space at eight centres (\$3,500); (ii) recruitment of local librarians at eleven centres (\$26,500); and (iii) provision of some 300 basic reference collections to universities, colleges and research institutions (\$3,500, including freight costs). The building up of adequate reference centres would also involve additional non-recurring expenditure for facilities and equipment. The total estimate of \$50,000 indicated is believed to be a much more realistic figure.

h/ Provides a 100 per cent increase for centres at Bangkok, Karachi, Rio de Janeiro, Bogota, New Delhi, Cairo, Geneva, Buenos Aires and Mexico City.

i/ No firm basis exists for precise estimates. The figures given are deemed reasonable.