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Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council

Thematic cluster I: special and personal envoys, advisers and representatives of the Secretary-General¹

Twelfth report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019

I. Introduction

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council that contains the proposed resource requirements for 2018 for thematic cluster I ([A/72/371/Add.1](#)). During its consideration of the report, the Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 26 October 2017.

2. The main report of the Secretary-General ([A/72/371](#)) provides an overview of the proposed resource requirements for 2018 for special political missions and related cross-cutting issues. As in previous years, five addenda to the main report cover the specific requirements for thematic clusters I to III and the two largest missions, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).² The Advisory Committee's comments and recommendations of a cross-cutting nature pertaining to all special political missions are contained in its main report ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)), while the

¹ The Advisory Committee was informed that the title of the report of the Secretary-General, which in previous years had read "special and personal envoys and special advisers of the Secretary-General", had been amended to reflect developments in recent years.

² [A/72/371/Add.1](#), [A/72/371/Add.2](#), [A/72/371/Add.3](#), [A/72/371/Add.4](#) and [A/72/371/Add.5](#).



budget proposals for thematic clusters I to III, UNAMA and UNAMI are covered in its related reports.³

3. The budget proposals of the Secretary-General for the Panel of Experts on Mali (cluster II), the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia and the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (both under cluster III) are contained in separate addenda⁴ and the comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee are contained in its related reports.⁵

4. The Advisory Committee recalls that a biennial provision of \$1,109.6 million for special political missions was included in section 3, Political affairs, of the proposed programme budget for 2018–2019, representing a reduction of \$14.8 million compared with the amount of \$1,124.4 million provided for in the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2018–2019 (see General Assembly resolution 71/274). The Secretary-General attributes the reduction of \$14.8 million to planned efficiency gains across all special political missions, as part of the reductions of \$58.9 million under “other changes” in the proposed programme budget. The Committee recalls that it requested, but was not provided with, a consolidated list of the reductions categorized under other resource changes across all budget sections, along with an explanation of how they were to be achieved and the extent to which they could be considered efficiencies. The Committee made comments in this regard in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2018–2019 (see A/72/7, chap. I). In this connection, the Committee notes that no reductions pertaining to Umoja (the enterprise resource planning system) or other efficiencies are reported for the special political missions for 2018, except for an amount of \$698,900 for UNAMA (see A/72/371, para. 111). The comments and recommendations of the Committee on the level of the biennial provision proposed by the Secretary-General will be included in its main report (A/72/7/Add.10).

II. Budget performance for 2016–2017 and resource requirements for 2018

5. Table 1 provides information on the proposed resources for 2018 for the 10 continuing special political missions under thematic cluster I, compared with the approved resources for 2017, and the biennial provision and projected expenditures for 2016–2017, which is also presented in the report of the Secretary-General (A/72/371/Add.1, table 1).

³ A/72/7/Add.11, A/72/7/Add.12, A/72/7/Add.13, A/72/7/Add.14 and A/72/7/Add.15.

⁴ A/72/371/Add.6, A/72/371/Add.7 and A/72/371/Add.8.

⁵ A/72/7/Add.16, A/72/7/Add.17 and A/72/7/Add.18.

Table 1
Summary of resource requirements for thematic cluster I

(Thousands of United States dollars)

Category of expenditure	2016–2017			Requirements for 2018			Variance
	Appropriation	Estimated expenditures	Estimated variance	Total requirements	Non-recurrent requirements	Approved budget 2017	Increase/ (decrease) 2017–2018
	(1)	(2)	(3)=(2)-(1)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)=(4)-(6)
Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus	5 511.6	5 782.2	270.6	2 858.5	5.8	2 810.5	48.0
Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide	4 375.0	4 321.1	(53.9)	2 143.7	–	2 201.0	(57.3)
Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara	1 083.2	904.6	(178.6)	462.8	–	545.3	(82.5)
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)	909.1	729.8	(179.3)	403.0	–	489.2	(86.2)
Office of the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions	3 913.7	3 698.2	(215.5)	1 772.6	–	1 976.0	(203.4)
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria	31 252.3	31 252.3	–	16 706.2	128.4	16 351.8	354.4
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan	2 837.5	3 165.3	327.8	1 418.0	2.3	1 387.3	30.7
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region	8 715.2	8 509.9	(205.3)	3 742.6	10.3	4 332.5	(589.9)
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen	21 159.9	21 202.8	42.9	13 777.2	54.5	13 243.5	533.7
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Burundi)	15 312.4	14 353.3	(959.1)	6 699.6	45.0	7 763.7	(1 064.1)
Total	95 069.9	93 919.5	(1 150.4)	49 984.2	246.3	51 100.8	(1 116.6)

2016–2017 performance

6. For the biennium 2016–2017, expenditures through 31 December 2017 are projected at \$93,919,500 for the 10 missions under cluster I, compared with the appropriation of \$95,069,900 for the biennium, leading to a projected unencumbered balance of \$1,150,400. A summary of significant variances between the 2016–2017 appropriation and projected expenditures for the missions continuing into 2018 is provided in table 4 in the main report of the Secretary-General (A/72/371).

Overall requirements for 2018

7. The resources proposed for 2018 for the 10 missions under thematic cluster I amount to \$49,984,200 (net), representing a decrease of \$1,116,600, or 2.2 per cent, compared with the resources approved for 2017. A summary of the main factors contributing to the variances between the approved resources for 2017 and the proposed resources for 2018 for continuing missions is provided in table 6 in the main report of the Secretary-General (A/72/371).

A. Comments and recommendations on staffing requirements

8. Table 2 presents positions approved for 2017, vacant positions as at 30 September 2017 and the proposed staffing requirements for 2018 for the 10 missions under thematic cluster I. The Advisory Committee was informed that a total of four positions were vacant for two years or longer under cluster I (see paras. 23 and 24 below).

Table 2
Thematic cluster I: staffing requirements

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Approved for 2017</i>	<i>Vacant positions as at 30 September^a</i>	<i>Proposed for 2018</i>	<i>New positions</i>	<i>Abolishment</i>	<i>Reclassifications</i>	<i>Relocation/ redeployment</i>
Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus	21 (1 USG, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 5 P-4, 1 P-3, 4 FS, 1 GS (OL), 5 LL)	3 (1 USG, 1 P-4, 1 GS (OL))	21 (1 USG, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 5 P-4, 1 P-3, 4 FS, 1 GS (OL), 5 LL)				
Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide	10 (1 USG, 1 ASG, 1 P-5, 3 P-4, 2 P-3, 2 GS (OL))		10 (1 USG, 1 ASG, 1 P-5, 3 P-4, 2 P-3, 2 GS (OL))				
Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara	2 (1 USG, 1 P-3)	1 (1 P-3)	2 (1 USG, 1 P-3)				From Washington, D.C. to Berlin (1 USG); From New York to Berlin (1 P-3) ^b
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)	3 (1 USG, 1 P-4, 1 GS (OL))	1 (1 USG)	3 (1 USG, 1 P-4, 1 GS (OL))				
Office of the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions	7 (1 ASG, 1 P-5, 2 P-4, 2 P-3, 1 GS (OL))	2 (2 P-4)	7 (1 ASG, 1 P-5, 2 P-4, 2 P-3, 1 GS (OL))				
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria	94 (1 USG, 1 ASG, 1 D-2, 3 D-1, 8 P-5, 16 P-4, 12 P-3, 1 P-2, 10 FS, 9 GS (OL), 32 LL)	34 (1 D-1, 4 P-5, 9 P-4, 9 P-3, 1 P-2, 2 FS, 5 GS (OL), 3 LL)	94 (1 USG, 1 ASG, 1 D-2, 3 D-1, 8 P-5, 16 P-4, 12 P-3, 1 P-2, 10 FS, 9 GS (OL), 32 LL)				
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan	9 (1 USG, 1 D-1, 2 P-4, 1 P-3, 2 NPO, 2 LL)	1 (1 D-1)	9 (1 USG, 1 D-1, 2 P-4, 1 P-3, 2 NPO, 2 LL)				
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region	27 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 1 D-1, 4 P-5, 6 P-4, 4 P-3, 1 FS, 1 GS (OL), 1 NPO, 7 LL)	8 (1 D-2, 3 P-5, 1 P-4, 2 P-3, 1 LL)	27 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 1 D-1, 4 P-5, 6 P-4, 4 P-3, 1 FS, 1 GS (OL), 1 NPO, 7 LL)				

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Approved for 2017</i>	<i>Vacant positions as at 30 September^a</i>	<i>Proposed for 2018</i>	<i>New positions</i>	<i>Abolishment</i>	<i>Reclassifications</i>	<i>Relocation/ redeployment</i>
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen	95 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 1 D-1, 7 P-5, 14 P-4, 12 P-3, 24 FS, 1 GS (OL), 8 NPO, 26 LL)	31 (2 P-5, 1 P-4, 6 P-3, 6 FS, 1 GS (OL), 4 NPO, 11 LL)	97 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 2 D-1, 7 P-5, 15 P-4, 11 P-3, 25 FS, 1 GS (OL), 8 NPO, 26 LL)	1 D-1, 1 P-4		1 P-3 to 1 FS	From Sana'a to Aden (1 P-4, 2 P-3, 1 NO); From Sana'a to Amman (1 LL) ^c
Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Burundi)	33 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 2 D-1, 6 P-5, 6 P-4, 2 P-3, 7 FS, 1 GS (OL), 2 NPO, 5 LL)	9 (1 D-2, 4 P-5, 3 P-4, 1 FS)	33 (1 USG, 1 D-2, 2 D-1, 5 P-5, 6 P-4, 2 P-3, 8 FS, 1 GS (OL), 2NPO, 5 LL)	1 FS	1 P-4	1 P-5 to P-4	From New York to Ouagadougou (1 USG, 1 P-5, reclassified to P-4); From New York to Bujumbura (1 P-5, 1 P-4); From Nairobi to Dar es Salaam (1 P-5, 1 P-4); From Bujumbura to New York (1 P-3); From the Office of the Special Envoy to the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs, New York (1 GS (OL)); From Dialogue Support Unit to Head of Office in Burundi (1 P-5) ^d

Abbreviations: ASG, Assistant Secretary-General; FS, Field Service; GS (OL), General Service (Other level); LL, Local level; NPO, National Professional Officer; USG, Under-Secretary-General.

^a Four positions were vacant for two years or longer (see paras. 23 and 24 below).

^b 1 P-3, Political Affairs Officer.

^c 1 P-4, 1 P-3 and 1 NPO (Political Affairs Officers) and 1 P-3 (Security Officer) from Sana'a to Aden; and 1 LL (Driver) from Sana'a to Amman.

^d 1 P-5 reclassified to P-4 (Special Assistant) from New York to Ouagadougou;
1 P-5 (Senior Political Affairs Officer) and 1 P-4 (Political Affairs Officer) from New York to Bujumbura;
1 P-5 (Senior Political Affairs Officer) and 1 P-4 (Political Affairs Officer) from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam;
1 P-3 (Political Affairs Officer) from the Dialogue Support Unit in Bujumbura to the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs in New York;
1 GS (OL) (Team Assistant) from the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, New York to the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs in New York;
1 P-5 (Senior Information Analyst) from Dialogue Support Unit to Head of Office in Bujumbura.

9. Staffing changes for 2018 are proposed for three missions under cluster I, namely, the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen (see paras. 10–13 below), the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Burundi) (see paras. 14–17 below) and the Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara (see paras. 18–20 below).

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen

10. The staffing changes proposed by the Secretary-General include the following (see [A/72/371/Add.1](#), para. 210):

(a) Establishment of two new positions: a new position of Principal Security Sector Reform Officer (D-1) in Sana'a to oversee the Security Sector Reform Section and to provide a timely and efficient response in supporting the return to a cessation of hostilities; and a new position of Political Affairs Officer (P-4) to provide backstopping support in the Department of Political Affairs in New York;

(b) Reclassification of one position of Movement Control Officer (P-3) to Movement Control Assistant (Field Service);

(c) Relocations/redeployment of five positions: four positions of three Political Affairs Officers and one Security Officer (1 P-4, 2 P-3 and 1 National Professional Officer) from Sana'a to Aden, since the Government of Yemen has declared Aden the temporary capital; and one position of Driver (LL) from Sana'a to Amman, to provide dedicated support to staff in that location.

11. With respect to the proposed establishment of a new position of Principal Security Sector Reform Officer (D-1) in Sana'a, the Advisory Committee recalls that, while the General Assembly decided not to establish the position for 2017,⁶ the Committee had been informed in March 2017 that the position had already been funded under extrabudgetary resources, since June 2016, and authorized by the Controller for a period of less than 12 months (and was subsequently extended until 14 June 2017). In May 2017, the concurrence of the Committee was requested for the extension of the position for an additional period of 12 months, from 15 June 2017 to 14 June 2018, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [35/217](#). The Committee was further informed at that time that the D-1 position was the only position in a special political mission that was funded through extrabudgetary resources and that the continuation of the position beyond 2017 was essential in view of the current state of the crisis in Yemen. Consequently, the Committee concurred with the extension of the position, funded from extrabudgetary resources, up to 31 December 2017. Furthermore, the Committee expressed the view, in its letter to the Secretary-General, that should the Secretary-General consider that there is an ongoing need for the functions provided by the Principal Security Sector Reform Officer over the longer term, the Secretary-General may wish to seek the approval of the Assembly for the establishment of the position. The Committee makes comments on the proposed conversion of positions from extrabudgetary resources to regular budget in its main report on special political missions ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).

12. Concerning the functions of the existing P-5 position of Senior Security Sector Reform Officer in the Office, should the D-1 position be approved for 2018, upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the establishment of the D-1 position would redefine the role of the current P-5 position, as the incumbent of the D-1 position would focus on strategic and technical advice on security sector reform issues and on military issues, while the P-5 Officer would work under the supervision of the D-1. **Subject to the approval of the D-1 position of Principal**

⁶ Resolution [71/272](#), sect. XIX, para. 21.

Security Sector Reform Officer by the General Assembly and the subsequent redefining of the functions of the existing P-5 position of Senior Security Sector Reform Officer, the Committee recommends that a P-4 position be established for 2018, instead of the P-5 position, pending a proper review and downward reclassification exercise.

13. With respect to the capacity for backstopping in the Department of Political Affairs, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that 15 posts are funded from the programme budget for 2016–2017 in the Middle East and West Asia Division (1 D-2, 1 D-1, 3 P-5, 5 P-4/3, 2 P-2/1, 3 GS (OL)). In addition, there are a total of 11 positions approved for backstopping support in 2017 under three special political missions, as follows: 5 positions for UNAMA (1 D-1, 1 P-5, 1 P-4, 1 P-3, 1 GS (OL)); 3 positions for UNAMI (1 P-4, 2 P-3); and 3 positions for the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria (1 P-5, 1 P-4, 1 GS (OL)). The proposed new P-4 position of Political Affairs Officer would support the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, ensuring appropriate communication and coordination with the Department and other entities at Headquarters.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Burundi)

14. It is indicated in the report of the Secretary-General that the proposed staffing changes are mainly related to the appointment of the new Special Envoy in May 2017 and the proposed relocation of the immediate office of the Special Envoy from New York to Ouagadougou. The proposed changes, by location (Ouagadougou, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and New York), are presented in the annex to the present report (see [A/72/371/Add.1](#), paras. 216, 228–232).

15. As for the rationale for the planning of the Office in multiple locations in 2018, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that while the Office in Bujumbura is tasked with the good offices work mandated in Security Council resolutions [2248 \(2015\)](#), [2279 \(2016\)](#) and [2303 \(2016\)](#), two staff (1 P-4, 1 FS) would be based in Ouagadougou to support the Special Envoy. As for Dar es Salaam, two staff (1 P-5, 1 P-4) would support the East African Community facilitation, as mandated in Security Council resolutions [2248 \(2015\)](#), [2279 \(2016\)](#) and [2303 \(2016\)](#). It was indicated to the Committee that this was particularly important in the light of the current progress, which is expected to see a resumption of the inclusive dialogue. In addition, the two proposed positions (1 P-3, 1 GS (OL)) in the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs in New York would provide backstopping support for the Office.

16. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the two positions (1 P-4, 1 FS) were proposed to be based in Ouagadougou to support the Special Envoy (Under-Secretary-General, on a when-actually-employed contract) and to ensure effective coordination between the Special Envoy, the other locations of the Office and Headquarters. **While the Committee has recognized that the special envoys and advisers on “when-actually-employed” contracts may have other obligations and are therefore unable to be with the missions full-time ([A/69/628](#), para. 66), it is nonetheless not convinced of the requirements for two positions (1 P-4 and 1 FS) to be located in Ouagadougou to provide support to the Special Envoy and therefore recommends against the proposed establishment of a position of an Administrative Assistant at the Field Service level. Related operational costs should be reduced accordingly. Furthermore, the Committee is of the view that the location of the Special Assistant (P-4) warrants a review during 2018 in order to assess how best the position could contribute to the implementation of the mandate in the most effective manner (see also para. 19**

below). The Committee makes comments on the locations of mission personnel in its main report ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).

17. Concerning the costs for facilities and services for the offices in Ouagadougou and Dar es Salaam, upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the two offices would be located within the United Nations Development Programme offices in both locations through cost-sharing arrangements to be finalized by the offices involved, and that the proposed budget for 2018 included a total of \$72,000 for office rental in Ouagadougou and Dar es Salaam, which was based on an estimated cost of \$3,000 per month for a period of 12 months at each location.

Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara

18. It is indicated that, with the appointment of the new Personal Envoy,⁷ who is on a when-actually-employed contract, it is proposed that the Under-Secretary-General and the P-3 Political Affairs Officer positions be relocated to Berlin. Those positions were previously located in Washington, D.C. and New York, respectively ([A/72/371/Add.1](#), para. 76).

19. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that based upon a request by the Department of Political Affairs in August 2017 to meet urgent operational needs and with the understanding that the associated costs would be absorbed within the 2017 budget for the Office of the Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, the Controller approved, on an exceptional and temporary basis and without any prejudice to the decision that the General Assembly may take on the proposed relocation, the temporary change of duty station to Berlin for the P-3 Political Affairs Officer, until 31 December 2017. There was no relocation cost for the P-3 as the position, which had been vacant, was not advertised until the appointment of the Special Envoy was confirmed. **The Committee is of the view that the location of the Political Affairs Officer (P-3) warrants a review during 2018 in order to assess how best the position could contribute to the implementation of the mandate in the most effective manner (see also para. 16 above).** The Committee makes comments on the locations of mission personnel in its main report ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).

20. The Advisory Committee was further informed, upon enquiry, that while the arrangements for setting up an office in Berlin were still under way, it was anticipated that the initial costs of the office setup, including costs of furniture and equipment, would be covered from existing resources. The Committee was also informed that, as the actual costs for the office were not yet available, the proposed budget had been prepared on the basis of certain assumptions. For 2018, the anticipated costs relating to the change in duty station from New York and Washington, D.C. to Berlin would reflect (a) a decrease of \$26,400 in international staff costs, owing due to a lower post adjustment rate for Berlin (37.7 per cent) compared to New York (66.1 per cent) or Washington, D.C. (45.7 per cent); and (b) an increase in office rental costs of \$10,500, resulting from a total of \$26,400 for 2018 for two persons in Berlin compared with \$15,900 for 2017 for the P-3 position in New York (no provision was provided for the Special Envoy in New York). The Committee was informed that a lower rate of \$13,200 had been applied for 2018 in anticipation of lower rental costs in Berlin than the standard rate applied in New York (\$15,900). **The Committee expects that actual expenditures to be incurred for the office in Berlin will be reported in the proposed budget for 2019.**

⁷ On 16 August 2017, the Secretary-General appointed the former President of Germany, Horst Köhler, as his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara (see [A/72/371/Add.1](#), para. 64).

Vacancy rates and vacant positions

21. The Advisory Committee was provided with information on the budgeted and actual vacancy rates for 2017 and proposed vacancy rates for 2018 for the 10 continuing missions under cluster I. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the proposed vacancy rates for 2018 took into account the actual average vacancy rate during 2017 and reflected, in general, the actual average vacancy rate for the period from January to July 2017. Furthermore, in cases where the actual average vacancy rate for the period from January to July 2017 was zero per cent, a vacancy rate of 5 per cent was proposed for 2018, taking into account possible turnover of existing staff.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen

22. For the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen, the Advisory Committee notes that while the actual average vacancy rate for the period from January to July 2017 and the actual vacancy rate as at 31 July 2017 were 37 per cent and 30 per cent for international staff, respectively, the proposed vacancy rate is 25 per cent for 2018. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that for the international staff of the Office, the proposed vacancy rate for 2018 further took into account the significant improvement in actual vacancy rates during 2017 and the anticipated onboarding of additional staff before the end of 2017. **Taking into account the vacancy rates experienced during 2017, the Committee recommends that a vacancy rate of 30 per cent be applied to the cost estimates for international staff for 2018.**

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria

23. With respect to positions vacant for two years or longer, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as at 30 April 2017, there were three such positions (1 P-5, 1 P-4 and 1 LL) in the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria. While the selected candidates for the P-5 and P-4 positions had accepted the offer and the onboarding process was ongoing, the recruitment for the Local Level position was in process. Upon clarification, the Committee was informed that as at 31 August 2017, the job opening for the Local Level position (Field Language Assistant) had been advertised. **The Committee reiterates the view that, as a matter of overall policy, the continuing requirement for posts that have been vacant for two years or longer should be reviewed and justifications provided for their retention. Otherwise, they should be proposed for abolishment (A/71/595, para. 22). Taking into account that the Local Level position (Field Language Assistant) has been vacant since 1 February 2015, with no justification provided for its retention, the Committee recommends that the position be abolished. Related operational costs should be reduced accordingly.**

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region

24. In addition, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that one P-3 position of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Officer had been vacant since 1 January 2015 in the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region, and that following the selection of a candidate, an offer letter was being prepared by the Regional Service Centre at Entebbe. **The Committee trusts that an update on the recruitment status for the P-3 position will be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the proposed budget for special political missions for 2018.**

25. Subject to its recommendations in paragraphs 12, 16, 22 and 23 above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's staffing requirements for 2018.

B. Comments and recommendations on operational costs

26. The Advisory Committee was provided with information on the operational costs for cluster I, which is shown in table 3, including the appropriation and estimated expenditure for the biennium 2016-2017 and the projected requirements for 2018.

Table 3

Thematic cluster I: operational costs

(Thousands of United States dollars)

	2016-2017			Requirements for 2018		Approved budget 2017	Variance
	Appropriation	Estimated expenditures	Estimated variance	Total requirements	Non-recurrent requirements		Increase/(decrease) 2017-2018
	(1)	(2)	(3)=(2)-(1)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)=(4)-(6)
1. Consultants	1 475.1	1 692.5	217.4	489.6	—	646.8	(157.2)
2. Official travel	12 152.2	10 810.6	(1 341.6)	5 526.1	—	6 229.0	(702.9)
3. Facilities and infrastructure	15 329.6	12 772.4	(2 557.2)	8 738.8	104.8	9 459.7	(720.9)
4. Ground transportation	2 645.5	2 545.7	(99.8)	1 151.9	—	1 944.1	(792.2)
5. Air transportation	1 048.6	1 305.4	256.8	349.7	—	260.0	89.7
6. Communications	2 760.0	1 977.8	(782.2)	1 081.9	30.6	1 497.8	(415.9)
7. Information technology	2 016.1	1 955.6	(60.5)	1 076.6	110.9	997.1	79.5
8. Medical	471.5	325.2	(146.3)	246.7	—	248.8	(2.1)
9. Other supplies, services and equipment	4 678.7	5 090.2	411.5	2 572.3	—	3 024.5	(452.2)
Total	42 577.3	38 475.4	(4 101.9)	21 233.6	246.3	24 307.8	(3 074.2)

27. The proposed resources for operational costs for the 10 special political missions under thematic cluster I for 2018 amount to \$21,233,600, reflecting a decrease of \$3,074,200, or 13 per cent, compared with the appropriation of \$24,307,800 for 2017 (see table 3). Upon request, the Advisory Committee received information on actual expenditures for 2016 and 2017 (as at 31 August) for the missions under cluster I.

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

28. The Advisory Committee notes, from the information it received upon request, that the actual expenditures under operational costs for 2016 and 2017 (as at 31 August) amounted to \$68,900 and \$49,300, respectively, against the approved resources amounting to \$183,000 for 2016 and \$231,600 for 2017. The Committee further notes that the resources are estimated at \$152,600 for 2018. **Taking into account the significantly lower expenditures incurred during 2016 and 2017 (as at 31 August), the Committee considers that the resource estimates for 2018 continue to be unrealistic and therefore recommends a reduction of 20 per cent (\$30,520) to the proposed resources of \$152,600 under operational costs for 2018 for the Office.**

Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara

29. In the case of the Office of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, while there was no expenditure under consultants for 2016 and 2017 (as at 31 August) against the approved annual resources of \$48,800, an amount of \$39,900 is proposed for 2018 (\$24,800 for two consultants for 31 days each at a daily rate of \$400 per person, and \$15,100 for three trips to Berlin). In addition, the Advisory Committee notes that the reasons provided for the engagement of the consultants have been identical since the proposed budget for 2012⁸

30. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that it was planned to task the consultants with supporting the preparation of a revised political strategy; however, consultations in the region could not take place owing to the limited progress in the political process and that as a result, it was not possible to contract consultants for this purpose as planned. The Committee was informed, upon enquiry, that the Department of Political Affairs was instructed to develop a political strategy with concrete options for 2017 and 2018 with a view to strengthening United Nations efforts to relaunch the negotiation process. It was indicated to the Committee that this strategy would also require input from the new Personal Envoy and expertise from consultants who would support the development of the roll-out plan of this strategy in 2018. **Considering that the Department of Political Affairs, rather than consultants, should be responsible for the development of the political strategy, the Committee is not convinced by the justification for the overall resource level proposed for 2018 under consultants and therefore recommends a reduction of 25 per cent (\$9,975) to the proposed requirements of \$39,900.**

Communications*Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria*

31. Upon enquiry regarding the reduced requirements for communications for 2018 for the Office, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as of 1 October 2016, the United Nations Office at Geneva had entered into a new mobile service contract, which provides more flexibility of usage with lower rates. Whereas the previous contract charged the United Nations on a pay-as-you go rate with recovery of private calls, the new contract provides for an unlimited number of calls in Switzerland and France as well as a provision for monthly data use for official purposes. As a result of that change, lower costs for mobile services were realized in 2017 and the savings are expected to continue. **The Committee notes the lower costs for the Office derived from the new mobile service contract signed by the United Nations Office at Geneva and expects that similar savings should be achieved by all offices covered by the new mobile contract in Geneva. The Committee requests that information in this regard be provided to the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the proposed budget for special political missions for 2018.**

⁸ The consultants will assist the Personal Envoy in the field of governance, power-sharing and mediation strategy for reaching a political solution on the question of Western Sahara and will provide specific expertise on the topics for discussion identified by the parties during the negotiations.

Information technology

Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004)

32. Noting that the travel resources requested for 2018 were reduced by 51 per cent owing to the uncertainty regarding the appointment of a new Special Envoy (see para. 34 (c) below), the Advisory Committee sought clarification as to whether other support costs relating to the position of the Special Envoy were adjusted appropriately. The Committee was informed that the requirements under information technology were adjusted for 9 months (assuming the Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Political Affairs would continue performing the functions of the Special Envoy in the first quarter of 2018), while full-year provisions were made for office space and communications costs based on the requirements for a fully operational Office of the Special Envoy (the resource levels remained the same for ground transport and other supplies, services and equipment). **The Committee notes that the estimates under information technology are adjusted for 9 months for 2018, reflecting a vacancy rate of 25 per cent, which appears to be inconsistent with the methodology for the budgeting of resource requirements.**

33. During its review of the budget proposals for 2018 for the missions under thematic cluster I, the Advisory Committee also notes a number of issues with respect to the resource requirements requested under information technology, such as the application of standard rates for centrally managed information technology services and ratios for the holding of computing devices. The Committee makes comments on those issues in its main report on the special political missions (A/72/7/Add.10).

Official travel

34. The proposed resources for official travel for 2018 amount to \$5,526,100, representing a decrease of \$702,900, or 11 per cent, compared with the approved resources of \$6,229,000 for 2017 under cluster I (see table 3). Of the total of 10 missions under the cluster, the requirements for 2018 remain at the same level as in 2017 for three missions (Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Office of the Special Envoy for Syria and Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen), while the proposed decrease for 2018 reflects reduced requirements for seven missions, mainly under the three missions as follows:

(a) Office of the Special Envoy (Burundi) (a reduction of \$486,600, or 35 per cent), owing to the relocation of mission personnel to Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and Ouagadougou, thus reducing the requirement for extensive travel to the region from New York;

(b) Office of the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region (a reduction of \$96,800, or 16 per cent), mainly owing to reduced travel in the region and greater utilization of video-conferencing through better planning, combining trips where applicable and reducing travel days;

(c) Office of the Special Envoy for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) (a reduction of \$79,300, or 51 per cent), mainly owing to reduced requirements for travel taking into account the uncertainty regarding the appointment of a new Special Envoy.

35. The Advisory Committee requested a detailed breakdown of official travel undertaken during 2016–2017, including the number of trips and expenditures incurred. The Committee was informed that details of actual travel undertaken as of August 2017 were processed and extracted from the Umoja travel module. However,

for field operations, information on travel by military personnel and national staff was not readily available owing to the fact that travel information continued to be captured in legacy systems, rather than in the Umoja travel module, which had not been rolled out in the field for those categories of personnel.

36. Upon request, the Advisory Committee was also provided with a detailed breakdown of planned trips and cost estimates for 2018. The Committee notes discrepancies in the airfare estimates provided for the same destinations in the main report on the proposed budget for 2018 for special political missions. The Committee will make comments and recommendations on official travel in its main report on special political missions ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).

Compliance with advance purchase policy

37. The Advisory Committee notes from the information it received upon request that the compliance rates with the advance purchase policy in 8 of the 10 missions under cluster I remain below 20 per cent, significantly lower than the target rate of 70 per cent, with 0 per cent compliance for a few of them, such as the Office of the Special Envoy (Burundi)). The only mission with acceptable compliance rates is the office of the United Nations Representative to the Geneva International Discussions, which has consistently maintained rates between 74 per cent and 96 per cent during the biennium. The Committee makes comments on the target compliance rate of 70 per cent under official travel in its main report ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).

38. **While the Advisory Committee has recognized that, for some missions, the predictability of certain types of trips can vary owing to the nature of the work involved, it nevertheless continues to be dissatisfied with the extremely low rates of compliance with the advance purchase policy. The Committee reiterates its expectation that the reasons for the low compliance rates will be analysed and that necessary measures will be taken to improve the rate of compliance with the policy (see [A/71/595](#), para. 32).**

Other supplies, services and equipment

Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus

39. A provision of \$112,800 is requested under other services for 2018 for interpretation and translation services. Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the proposed provision would include an amount of \$62,816 for weekend media translators (individual contractors, one Greek Cypriot and one Turkish Cypriot) to translate and provide media summaries during the weekends when support is not available from the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). The proposed amount of \$62,816 is estimated at 104 weekend days at the daily rate of \$302 for each of the two contractors, inclusive of the cost of the newspapers and periodicals. **The Committee questions the rationale for the year-long coverage of weekend media translation services by contractors in addition to the translation provided by UNFICYP and the Committee therefore recommends that an amount of \$12,080 be provided for only limited emergency services for weekend translation (a reduction of \$50,736).**

Office of the Special Envoy (Burundi)

40. The Advisory Committee notes from the information provided that increased requirements relating to information technology are requested under both information technology and other supplies, services and equipment, owing to the requirement for an additional international contractor to mitigate information technology security risks (under information technology), as well as increased requirements for local individual contractors to support the Office's information

technology systems, services and equipment in 2018 following an analysis of systems that highlighted a number of risks (under other supplies, services and equipment). Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that, given the light footprint of the support component of the Office, the use of both international and local contractors is necessary in order to ensure adequate mission support. Furthermore, while the international contractors proposed under information technology provide the mission with a high level of expertise, the local contractors who are hired as individual contractors are budgeted under other supplies, services and equipment. For 2018, a provision is made for eight individual contractors (communication and information technology, 5; human resources, 1; logistics, 1; and facilities and infrastructure, 1). **The Committee questions the provision for a local individual contractor for human resources and recommends a reduction of \$9,600 to the proposed resources for 2018.**

41. **Subject to its recommendations in paragraphs 28, 30, 39 and 40 above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposals for operational costs for 2018.**

III. Recommendation

42. The Secretary-General's budgetary proposals for the special political missions for 2018, which require action to be taken by the General Assembly, are set out in paragraph 120 of his main report on estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the Assembly and/or the Security Council ([A/72/371](#)).

43. **The Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposal for the resource requirements for 2018 for the 10 special political missions under thematic cluster I, subject to the comments and recommendations above, as well as those in its main report ([A/72/7/Add.10](#)).**

Annex

Proposed staffing changes in the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (Burundi)

1. The proposed staffing changes, by location (Ouagadougou, Bujumbura, Dar es Salaam and New York), are as follows:

(a) **Ouagadougou:**

- (i) Relocation/redeployment of the position of the Special Envoy from New York to Ouagadougou, where the new Special Envoy (former president) is based and employed on a when-actually-employed basis;
- (ii) Relocation/redeployment of the position of the Special Assistant (P-5) from New York to Ouagadougou, and reclassification of the position from P-5 to P-4;
- (iii) Establishment of a new position of Administrative Assistant (FS) to provide administrative support to the Special Envoy in Ouagadougou;

(b) **Bujumbura:**

- (i) Relocation/redeployment of two positions of Political Affairs Officer (1 P-5, 1 P-4) from the former office of the Special Envoy in New York to the Dialogue Support Unit in Bujumbura;
- (ii) Abolishment of one position of Political Affairs Officer (P-4) in Bujumbura;
- (iii) Redeployment of one position of Senior Information Analyst (P-5) from the Dialogue Support Unit to Head of Office in Bujumbura;

(c) **Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania:**

- (i) Relocation/redeployment of two positions of Political Affairs Officer (1 P-5, 1 P-4) from the Dialogue Support Liaison Team, from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam, in order to strengthen its ability to support the East African Community-led dialogue process in the United Republic of Tanzania and its collaboration with the team of the Facilitator;¹

(d) **New York:**

- (i) Redeployment of one position of Team Assistant (GS (OL)) from the former Office of the Special Envoy to the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs in New York;
- (ii) Relocation of one position of Political Affairs Officer (1 P-3) from the Dialogue Support Unit in Bujumbura to the Africa I Division of the Department of Political Affairs to provide backstopping in New York.

¹ The team is to provide closer technical support to the facilitator, the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Benjamin William Mkapa, who is based in Dar es Salaam (see [A/72/371](#), paras. 215, 222 and 232).