

162(XIV). In-depth study of the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social sectors

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia,

Recalling General Assembly resolutions 32/197 of 20 December 1977 and 33/202 of 29 January 1979 and Commission resolutions 69(VI) of 1 May 1979, 80(VII) of 22 April 1980, and 105(VIII) of 6 May 1981, all dealing with the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations and the definition and strengthening of the functions of the regional commissions within a framework of decentralized delivery of the Organization's social and economic programmes,

Noting recommendations 2, 8 and 27 of the report of 15 August 1986 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, General Assembly resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986 dealing with the Group's report and decision 1987/112 of 6 February 1987 of the Economic and Social Council calling for the establishment of a Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields,

Having considered the item and made its observations thereon,

Requests the Economic and Social Council, in endorsing the in-depth study, to take into consideration the Commission's observations contained in the annex to the present resolution.

ANNEX

In-depth study of the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social sectors

1. The ministerial meeting of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia supports the efforts made in the ongoing process of reform in the United Nations system and for the rationalization of its machinery with a view to increasing its effectiveness in the service of Member States. In response to the request of the Economic and Social Council for concerted efforts to be made in line with that endeavour, the fourteenth session of the Commission, meeting at the ministerial level on 4 and 5 April 1987, addressed the following three topics and expressed the views thereon set forth hereunder.

2. By its decision 1987/112, the Economic and Social Council established a Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields and decided:

3rd plenary meeting  
5 April 1987

"To request... all subsidiary bodies of... the Council to submit to the Special Commission, within thirty days of the conclusion of their forthcoming sessions, their views and proposals on achieving the objectives envisaged in recommendation 8 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts regarding their functioning and that of their subsidiary machinery".<sup>1/</sup>

3. By the same decision, the Economic and Social Council decided:

"To request the Special Commission to consider, in the context of the in-depth study, the relevant provisions of recommendation 2 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations".<sup>1/</sup>

4. The third topic, because of its close relation to the ongoing process of reform in the United Nations system, is that of the experience of the regional commissions since 1977 with regard to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 32/197 on decentralization.

A. Recommendation 8: the intergovernmental machinery

5. With regard to the simplification and rationalization of the ESCWA intergovernmental machinery, the ministerial meeting of the Commission sees no need for modification of its present structure. The ESCWA intergovernmental machinery consists only of its annually held ministerial meeting and that of its Technical Committee. This structure meets the present needs of the Commission and the two bodies in question provide the necessary guidance for the work of the secretariat, the role and structure of which is in direct conformity with the programme of work and priorities determined by member States.

6. With regard to the channels through which its recommendations are communicated to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, the ministerial meeting is of the view that they function in a satisfactory manner, at least in so far as the Economic and Social Council is concerned. Often, however, the submission of Economic and Social Council resolutions to the General Assembly and its Main Committees leads to the exclusion of key elements from recommendations adopted by the Assembly, particularly as they relate to matters falling within the purview of the Fifth Committee. The Commission's ministerial meeting proposes that the authority of the regional commissions to take decisions at the intergovernmental level should be reinforced and that their involvement in the key programme and budget planning processes of the United Nations should be systematically increased.

B. Recommendation 2: frequency and duration of meetings of intergovernmental bodies

7. The fourteenth session of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, meeting at the ministerial level, addressed this topic and decided that the regular sessions of the Commission and the meetings of its Technical Committee should be held on a biennial basis instead of every year.

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<sup>1/</sup> See Report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 49 (A/41/49).

C. General Assembly resolution 32/197 (the "restructuring resolution")  
and the matter of decentralization

8. While there have clearly been major changes in the last 10 years in economic and social conditions in each of the regions served by the regional commissions, the ministerial meeting considers that there is ample evidence to support the continuing validity of the decentralization provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/197. In the case of the ESCWA region, the Commission's programmes have constantly evolved in response to the needs of member States and changing circumstances. The increasing multi-disciplinary and intersectoral nature of the Commission's work programme, as exemplified in its draft medium-term plan for the period 1990-1995, will enable it to play a more relevant and more integrative role in economic development and co-operation in the region. Like the other regional commissions, ESCWA works in close day-to-day co-operation with the countries of the region. This close relationship has, over the years, endowed the Commission with a unique knowledge of the countries of the region and of their problems and priorities, and it has become a depository of information and experience which enable it to provide rapid and appropriate assistance to those countries.

9. In the light of the foregoing, the ministerial meeting reaffirms the principles embodied in General Assembly resolution 32/197 as they relate to the increasing potential of the United Nations system to act at the regional level.

10. The ministerial meeting further considers that there is every reason to promote the necessary concomitant of any successful decentralization, namely the proper delegation of authority from Headquarters to the regional centres, subject to the required controls, in order to enable them to administer and manage their operations and support activities with the greatest possible efficiency.

11. The current financial crisis has highlighted the fact that an unacceptably high percentage of the Organization's resources has, for many years, been spent on management and support services. It is the experience of the Commission that this is partly due to the fact that decentralization has not resulted in the creation of core bureaucracies in the new offices with a concomitant reduction in central administrative staff, but has instead led to the creation of parallel bureaucracies whose principal function is to provide checks and balances on each other.

12. It is the judgement of the ministerial meeting that this situation is not the result of too much delegation of authority but, on the contrary, of insufficient or incomplete delegation of such authority and of the failure to develop the controls and procedures that would ensure its judicious exercise. It therefore also believes that, in an era of expanded communications, it will be only when the United Nations begins to operate as a genuine global institution and takes advantage of technologies that allow organizations of a universal character to function efficiently that it will be able to simplify its administrative machinery and reduce the cost of its operations without losing control of them.