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Chairman: Mr. Abelian (Armenia)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 117: Pattern of conferences (*continued*)
(A/51/946; A/52/685; A/53/669)

1. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's report on United Nations publications (A/53/669), said that the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on United Nations publications (A/51/946) had been prepared pursuant to a recommendation by the Advisory Committee contained in paragraph 83 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/50/7 and Corr.1); that recommendation had been endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/206 C and reiterated in resolution 51/211 B. The JIU report had been considered in the Committee on Conferences and in the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). Under article 11 of the JIU statute, the Advisory Committee received all JIU reports and made comments and observations on them in accordance with its mandate.

2. The Advisory Committee commended JIU on the quality of its report. While some of the recommendations had been reviewed by CPC, many had not been addressed by that Committee.

3. The objective of recommendation 1, which related to the need for the intergovernmental bodies concerned to review thoroughly their publications in conjunction with their work programmes, and which had been commented on by CPC, was similar to the objectives indicated by the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 73–83 of its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996–1997. The Advisory Committee was of the view that it was not necessary for those bodies to have a separate item on publications in their agendas, since such a procedure, were it institutionalized, might lead to a discussion of publications out of context.

4. The Advisory Committee saw merit in the JIU comments on avoiding duplication of publications within the United Nations and with organizations outside the United Nations system, and indicated how that matter could be dealt with in paragraph 6 of its report (A/53/669).

5. The Advisory Committee believed that recommendation 5, which had also given rise to discussion, could be implemented, but not as it would appear from the recommendation of the Joint Inspection Unit. Publications that arose out of general mandates should be reviewed by the relevant legislative bodies in the context of work programmes. Such publications were often produced in

excessive numbers, and sometimes materials were not published owing to a lack of resources.

6. The Advisory Committee had indicated in paragraph 15 how recommendation 9, also the subject of controversy, could be implemented. If that approach were followed there would be no need for a general sunset rule, as would appear to be the case from the JIU recommendation.

7. The overall conclusion of the Advisory Committee was that the JIU recommendations could be implemented in the light of the observations and recommendations of ACABQ and the views expressed in the Fifth Committee. The Secretary-General should indicate in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000–2001 the action he had taken or intended to take to implement those recommendations.

8. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the associated country Poland, said that the European Union favoured the review of the administrative, managerial and organizational structure of publishing activities, as proposed in recommendation 3 of the Joint Inspection Unit. Such a review should be ongoing so as to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

9. He noted with concern that, for the most part, senior staff members had not attended the Publications Board, the composition of which should thus be reviewed. The Secretary-General should also review ways of achieving more coordinated planning of the publishing process, since in practice the issuance of non-parliamentary publications had to be deferred when publishing resources were used entirely for parliamentary documentation.

10. Member States should evaluate the continuing relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of activities and programmes, in which context he welcomed the decision of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to apply a sunset rule provided that the specific publication was no longer a priority issue. JIU had pertinently noted that the Committee for Programme and Coordination currently did not exercise its mandated role of reviewing existing mandates to determine their continuing relevance.

11. On recommendation 1, concerning duplication, the same publication should be produced in different formats only at the specific request of Member States. It would be difficult, however, to coordinate with organizations outside the United Nations system. Recommendation 12, on flexibility in the use of the external printing account for internal printing purposes, and recommendation 14, on the use of advanced technologies, could contribute to greater cost-effectiveness.

12. The European Union concurred in the recommendation that the Secretary-General should develop a cost-accounting system to allow for the production of publications in a cost-effective manner. Establishment of such a system would require guidance by the Department of Management to coordinate the various departments involved in the process.

13. The European Union endorsed the JIU recommendation that sales income should be treated more flexibly. Departments needed the incentive of receiving a portion of revenues earned by their publications to defray associated costs. With the current sales programme an increase in net revenues did not necessarily result in a commensurate budgetary increase in resources for its expansion. The Secretary-General should present a proposal on that issue for consideration by the General Assembly. In that regard he endorsed the recommendation of the Advisory Committee contained in paragraph 13 of its report on a cost-accounting system for conference services and access to the optical disk system (A/53/507) that income generated through optical disk system subscriptions should be applied to help meet the cost of maintaining and/or expanding the system.

14. Regarding the reporting mechanism for sales income, he requested the Secretary-General to implement recommendation 16, which called for at least a quarterly review of sales income reports, indicating total revenues from various sales channels.

Other matters

15. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** asked when the Committee would take up the budget outline for the biennium 2000-2001, originally scheduled for the next day. In view of the pressing time constraints and the fact that several important matters had not yet even been taken up, it might be useful for the Committee to hold an exchange of views on which items were to be disposed of at the main part of the session and which could be deferred to the resumed parts of the session. Urgent decisions were required, bearing in mind that a deadline of 4 December had originally been set for the completion of the Committee's work.

16. **The Chairman** said that the Bureau shared that concern; postponement of consideration of the budget outline had been necessary because of the unavailability of reports. The Bureau intended to discuss the matter immediately after the adjournment of the meeting, and informal consultations could be held early the following week to determine where matters stood.

17. **Mr. Zhang Wanhai** (China) said that the Committee's work had been affected by the late issuance of reports. The

Secretariat, when introducing reports, should be asked for an explanation of why they were so late.

18. **The Chairman** said that he fully agreed. He would inform programme managers in the departments concerned that they would be required to indicate why reports had been issued late.

19. Further to the exchange of views at the previous meeting on the competence of the Fifth Committee for administrative and budgetary matters, he had submitted a letter to the President of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.