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Working Party on the Medium-term Plan
and the Programme Budget

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Geneva, 27-28 May 1999

Agenda item 3 (a)

REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME:
DRAFT PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 2000-2001

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

1. In general, several delegations expressed the view that the use of resources for consultants should adhere to established practice and should be devoted to the acquisition of specialized skills unavailable in the secretariat, particularly in subprogrammes 1 and 2. Delegations encouraged the secretariat to build up its internal capacity through appropriate measures, such as in-house human resources development. It was explained with examples that consultants were used when specialized, up-to-date or local expertise was needed which was in a non-recurrent way; collaboration between secretariat staff members and consultants was encouraged, as opposed to mere substitution of one for the other.

2. Another concern raised by several delegations was the nature and number of proposed *ad hoc* expert groups. It was explained that many so-called expert groups were intended to provide expert opinions at intergovernmental meetings, for example in the form of panel discussions or expert presentations. Delegations requested more information on these proposed activities because of the difficulty in determining their outputs. Some delegations also noted that, while the number of expert meetings in the intergovernmental machinery had been set at 10 by the ninth Conference, the number of *ad hoc* experts groups convened by the Secretary-General had had a tendency to increase.

3. Concern was expressed by some delegations at the high vacancy rate and the prolonged duration of vacancies. It was felt that the secretariat, albeit faced with external constraints, should be encouraged to improve the situation in that area as quickly as possible.

4. As regards the overall allocation of resources, many delegations expressed disappointment over the slight shift of resources to non-programme areas, and stated their preference for strengthening the programme of work instead.

5. Some delegations felt that the recommendations of the mid-term review were not sufficiently reflected in the proposed allocation of resources. An explanation was provided on how the mid-term review outcomes had been incorporated into the programmes, though this did not always involve resource shifts among the subprogrammes.

6. On subprogramme 3, there was general concern about the post reduction proposed, as many delegations attached high priority to this subprogramme. Several delegations emphasized that the *ad hoc* expert group proposed on the “development implications of diversification in the commodity sector in developing countries” should seek to produce concrete results. Clarification was sought on the reassignment of the work on the interface between investment and trade, previously carried out by the D-1 post to be redeployed to subprogramme 1. It was underlined that this was intended as a follow-up to a recommendation of the mid-term review to strengthen the capacity of UNCTAD on cross-sectoral issues.

7. On subprogramme 4, one delegation strongly opposed the inclusion of activities related to electronic trading opportunities on the grounds that there was no mandate for those activities and the past implementation record on the related activities was not satisfactory. The same delegation felt that resources allocated to that subprogramme might be better utilized if rechanneled to other areas of the programme of work. Some other delegations did not share this view, and stated that the activity in question had proven valuable in their respective countries.

8. On subprogramme 5, many delegations expressed disappointment over the lack of any increase in the posts allocated to this subprogramme, to which they attached high priority, and over the fact that the resource levels of this subprogramme were heavily dependent on voluntary contributions. It was explained that, for the biennium, provision had been made for the temporary services of one P-5 and one GS staff member for one year to assist in the preparations for the Third LDC Conference. Many delegations expressed concern over the weak coordination between the Special Coordinator’s Office and other subprogrammes, as well as over the inadequate integration of LDC work into the intergovernmental machinery of UNCTAD. The Special Coordinator explained what was being done to improve this situation and stated that member States would be further informed on this matter in the autumn. One delegation felt that the expected accomplishments listed in the proposed programme budget should specifically have included the improvement of coordination.

9. On policy-making organs, some delegations proposed that some of the funds budgeted for general temporary assistance and contractual services should be reallocated to programme areas. Another delegation, however, did not share this view. One delegation questioned the necessity of continuing to allocate resources to cover travel and DSA of 16 experts for the Commission on Investment, Technology and Related Financial Issues, even if that proposed allocation was based on a General Assembly resolution.