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U.N. Reform in the 1997 General Assembly

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Summary

This short report provides background and summarizes U.N. reforms considered and adopted by the 1997 U.N. General Assembly. During 1997, Congress considered legislation which would pay some of the U.S. arrears (debt) to the United Nations, the U.N. Specialized Agencies, and other international organizations but only in exchange for specific reforms adopted and implemented by the United Nations. Although the legislation did not pass, Secretary of State Albright has maintained that arrears payment is one of her top priorities for 1998, and in fact, a top priority for legislative action this spring.¹ As the issue was being debated in Congress, discussions and decisions on reform were continuing at the United Nations under the leadership of the newly appointed Secretary-General. In November and December 1997, the U.N. General Assembly approved two resolutions which endorsed most of U.N. Secretary-General Annan's reform proposals. These included efforts to streamline the administrative structure of the U.N. system, reduce the budget, and improve coordination among similar activities. The General Assembly established the U.N. Office of Internal Oversight (Inspector General), as a reform measure in 1994. A recent GAO report, required by U.S. legislation, noted that its structure and procedures are in place, but because GAO does not have access to all its reports, audits and records, its independence cannot be ascertained. Readers may also wish to see the following related CRS products: CRS Report 97-711, CRS Report 95-571, and CRS Issue Brief IB86116.

During the 1997 General Assembly session, which ran from September to late December, U.N. members focused on issues of reform as presented by the Secretary-General. In this second year of the biennium, the budget and assessment were debated and members spent considerable time on these subjects. While U.N. reform was being debated in Congress, discussions and decisions on reform were continuing at the United Nations and the other affected agencies, spurred in part by U.S. legislation, but also as a continuing effort by many members to address post-Cold War problems. The reform

¹ For information on the Congressional debate, see CRS Report 97-711, *U.N. Funding, Payment of Arrears and Linkage to Reform: Legislation in the 105th Congress*.

initiatives of the new U.N. Secretary-General developed out of these efforts. Many of the reform provisions addressed issues also of concern to the U.S. Congress. This paper focuses on the 1997 session of the General Assembly, but changes in U.N. practice, which both the State Department and Congress supported and often initiated, have been ongoing for many years. For example, the Office of Internal Oversight Services was established in 1994. Changes in U.N. peacekeeping procedures have been made in recent years. The requirement for zero real growth budgets and agreement by consensus of all members on the budget began in the mid-1980's.

Budget and Assessments

The General Assembly approved a budget of \$2.532 billion for the two year period 1998-1999. The budget had to be approved by consensus. This budget was lower than the budget of the previous biennium (\$2.608 billion). The General Assembly also agreed to the scale of assessments which would apportion the budget among the member countries for the next three years. The United States will continue to be assessed 25 percent. Japan's contribution will rise from 18 percent in 1998 to over 20 percent in 2000 and Germany's will increase from 9.6 percent to nearly 10 percent.² The assessment rate floor for the poorest countries was reduced to .001 percent, down from .01 percent, so that those countries whose economies would require an assessment lower than .01 will see their assessment reduced. Ability to pay will be determined for this period by each country's GNP for a six year period (down from the previous 7.5 year period.) Finally, the General Assembly may consider reviewing the scale of assessments for the 1999-2000 period during 1998 if conditions change.³

U.N. Reform Measures

The General Assembly considered U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Track One and Track Two reform proposals and adopted two resolutions which put many of his proposals into effect during the 1997 Session. Some of his proposals were adopted completely. Member states will continue considering others which lacked broad support during the spring 1998 session. In some cases, the Secretary-General was asked to provide further information.

Recommendations adopted.

- Establish the post of Deputy Secretary-General to assist the Secretary-General in managing operations, act for him in his absence, and support him in his oversight and coordination functions. Louise Frechette of Canada has been named to the post and will begin her duties in March.
- Establish a Department of Disarmament Affairs. Direct the Disarmament Commission and the First Committee (Disarmament and International

² For information on the current assessment of other countries, see IB86116, *U.N. System Funding: Congressional Issues*. For historical information on assessment rates, see CRS Report 95-571 F, *United Nations Regular Budget Contributions: Members Compared, 1989-1996*.

³ For a more detailed discussion of these changes, see *The New U.N. Assessment Scale* by Jeffrey Laurenti, U.N. Association of the United States. [Www.unausa.org/ programs/scale.htm](http://www.unausa.org/programs/scale.htm).

Security) to review their work with a view to rationalizing and streamlining it.

- Establish a Department of Economic and Social Affairs by consolidating three departments in the Secretariat which address economic and social affairs.
- Discontinue the High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development.
- Abolish the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and establish instead the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- Include discussion of humanitarian affairs during the annual session of the Economic and Social Council.
- Designate the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the U.N. Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator with responsibility for coordinating natural disaster relief. Transfer responsibility for operational disaster mitigation activities to U.N. Development Program.
- Combine the Vienna-based programs on fighting crime, drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorism into a single office headed by an Executive Director.
- Combine the Geneva based programs on human rights into a single office under the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Bring the UN development activities into a UN Development Group to facilitate cooperation to meet common goals and consolidate all UN offices in each country into a single UN office under a Resident Coordinator.
- Establish a development account in the 1998-1999 budget to be funded from savings in administrative and other overhead costs.
- Make the Department of Political Affairs the focal point in the UN for post- conflict peace building.
- Increase consultation and cooperation with the business community, labor unions, non-governmental organizations and academia.
- Encourage member states to continue to provide information to the Secretary-General that could assist in preventing conflict.
- Encourage all appropriate organs to consider specific measures to enhance the deployment capacity of the United Nations in peacekeeping operations.

- Request the Security Council to consider establishing a time frame for the conclusion of peacekeeping activities in establishing future peacekeeping operations.
- Cut Administrative costs over the next four years by \$200 million and from 38 percent to 25 percent of the budget by 2000. Reduce the number of permanent posts by 950 over the next two years. Consolidate U.N. information activities, procurement services, and conference support services within the Secretariat.

Recommendations to be considered further.

The General Assembly agreed to continue the consideration of other reform proposals of the Secretary-General. Some of the reform measures will be discussed during 1998. The General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General or other U.N. bodies consider further or report on several of the Secretary General's other proposals. These include the request to:

- examine the SG's recommendation for a review of the International Civil Service Commission;
- consider in more detail the approved change to results based budgeting;
- consider applying sunset provisions to new programs;
- consider the employee code of conduct expeditiously;
- consider the Secretary-General's recommendations for the reform of the Economic and Social Council's subsidiary bodies;
- conduct a review of the regional economic commissions in 1998 session of the Economic and Social Council and report to the General Assembly;
- consider arrangements for closer integration of the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, and UNICEF to ensure review of issues of common concern.

The General Assembly also asked the Secretary-General to elaborate further on his longer range proposals of establishing a new concept of trusteeship; holding a Millennium Assembly and a Millennium Forum; establishing a Special Commission to examine the need for Charter amendments and the treaties which establish the mandates of the U.N. Specialized Agencies; establishing a new system of core resources for development; financing natural disaster mitigation; establishing a revolving credit fund to assist the agency in time of financial difficulty; and retaining unspent balances under the regular budget for development programs.

U.N. Inspector General

The United Nations established the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) or Inspector General, in 1994. Reports by the Department of State on the independence and

adequacy of staffing and funding of this office have been required by legislation since 1994. Part of U.S. payments to the United Nations have been withheld, pending certification by the Department of State that the legislative conditions have been met. In addition, the General Accounting Office reported on the status of the U.N. Inspector General in November 1997.⁴ The GAO concluded that although the Office of Internal Oversight Services had some start up and early operational problems, many of these have been resolved. The GAO states that early concerns about inadequate budget and staff have been addressed and that two of the four OIOS units, the audit division and the Investigations Section have developed written audit and investigative policies and procedures. But, since the GAO did not have access to all the audit, inspection, and investigation reports and other records, it could not ascertain whether the OIOS exercised its authority and implemented its procedures in an independent manner.

⁴GAO/NSIAD-98-9. *United Nations. Status of Internal Oversight Functions.* November 1997.

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