

External Affairs
Supplementary Paper

No. 61/13 Budget Estimates for 1962

Statement by Mr. J.H. Price, Canadian Representative, in the 5th Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on October 7, 1961.

Mr. Chairman:

It gives my delegation great pleasure to add its congratulations to those which have been extended to you by other speakers on your election to the chairmanship of this Committee. My delegation will certainly extend to you its fullest co-operation so that we can conclude our lengthy agenda, which contains a number of very difficult questions, in good time for the closing date set for the session. It would certainly be a reflection on all of us here if this Committee, which is charged with ensuring that the United Nations is run in an orderly and effective way, should be guilty of such conduct as to finish its work late or not at all. However, judging by the way you have guided, or I might even say propelled our discussions along in the past few days, I have no real fear on that score.

I should like also to extend our delegation's warm congratulations to our friend and colleague from Ceylon, Mr. Edwards, on his election to the vice-chairmanship. We have also, I believe, made an excellent choice in our rapporteur, Mr. Arraiz of Venezuela. My delegation recalls with pleasure the fruitful and useful discussions which we had with him at the resumed session on some of the most important matters which were then under consideration.

Mr. Chairman, we, in this Administrative and Budget Committee, are meeting this year under very difficult circumstances. The organization has lost its chief administrative officer and it cannot but feel this great loss keenly. A number of items on our agenda depend very much on the views of the chief administrative officer of this organization and our task in dealing with them will not be an easy one. During his tenure of office, the late Secretary-General gave a great deal of thought to the building of this international instrument, which has been laboriously developed with the help of many dedicated people over the years. By insisting on wise and prudent procedures and by the imaginative use of the powers which were accorded to him under the Charter, this organization assumed a vitality which gave true meaning to the aspirations expressed in the purposes and principles of the Charter. I can think of no more fitting tribute to the man who has done so much in the philosophical as well as practical development of the United Nations than for us all here to continue this work with a minimum of factionalism and self-interest so that the United Nations can continue to develop in the same positive direction and potential which is contained in the provisions of the Charter.

The Fifth Committee is a technical committee. It is our job here to examine how best the organization can discharge the duties which the policy-making bodies and organs have placed upon it and to see that there are adequate finances to meet the obligations

the members of the United Nations have assumed by their collective decisions. It is not our task here to call into question these decisions but to accept them and to ensure that they are soundly carried out; that, in meeting its duties and challenges, the United Nations does not damage its efforts by poor administration and the hasty and ill-considered expenditure of funds.

If there is one political consideration which all of us here must bear in mind, it is that, without sound administration and sound financing, this international instrument which we have built up over the years, will be destroyed just as surely as if a conscious political decision were taken to do so. It would perhaps be naïve to attempt to exclude all political considerations from our work, for they are inherent in the attitudes expressed on administrative principles. But I hope nonetheless that in our work we will always recall our prime purpose for being here, and that is to see that decisions taken by competent bodies elsewhere are not frustrated by bickering and disarray on technical matters and excuses of a budgetary nature which become, in fact, political decisions not to do, or to do, improperly what has already been decided in the political arena.

One principle especially must guide us throughout our work. It is the principle of collective responsibility so clearly spelled out in the first two articles of the Charter. This is an organization of independent and sovereign states which gather here in sovereign equality. For the privileges we derive from this organization we must also assume the obligations of membership. Sir, my delegation will be motivated by this overriding consideration in all its work here; the collective character of our organization requires that we undertake to abide by the decisions of the appropriate stipulated in the Charter for approving financial measures.

At the same time, as the chairman of the Canadian delegation said in the general debate last week: Canada has the greatest understanding for those who would pay but cannot; we have no sympathy for the few who can pay but will not. The proposals which we may make and the measures which we will support to achieve the orderly financing of all UN undertakings will be based upon this important consideration.

We would be deluding ourselves if we comforted ourselves with the ... that by setting up special accounts for special purposes that we are somehow isolating the other activities of the organization from whatever financial consequences may arise from poor records of payments into these special accounts. The simplest proof that this is a delusion is that the Working Capital Fund, which was set up to deal with the question of late payment of contributions, is now depleted because of the calls upon it which have been made, quite properly, to finance peace-keeping operations. This situation has cancelled out the Working Capital Fund as a source of cash to fill the gap left by late payments. This is only one indication that the finances of the United Nations cannot be conveniently compartmentalized and parts of it forgotten or ignored. Apart from the practical links which exist between all expenditures of the United Nations, there is the overall consideration that all the work of the United Nations suffers if part of its undertakings collapse through financial indifference.

We have seen during the past few years and especially in the last few months that the Secretary-General has had to avail himself of his borrowing powers and have recourse to large-scale advances from the reserves of UNICEF, the Special Fund and other sources. I do not need to elaborate on how undesirable this procedure is. But, one thing is certain, the United Nations must not

allow the peace-keeping operations of the United Nations to wither away for lack of funds. The organization's ability to undertake such operations is perhaps the greatest test of its value and efficacy and they will have the first priority on our support.

Governments and the people who under our system are the ultimate arbiters of what we do, will find it increasingly more difficult to support the voluntary programmes of aid under the United Nations in the face of the discouraging response of member states to their mandatory obligations for all-important and peace-keeping undertakings. Should this happen, the whole organization will be diminished in our eyes.

I repeat again, we are a technical body and our decisions must be taken in the light of our collective experience on the best methods and procedures for ensuring that the work of this organization is done smoothly. This Committee has, over the years, benefited from the advice of an excellent group of technical experts, the members of the Advisory Committee. We have only to look through our documentation to see that we are well served by them. In the few decisions we have already taken, all of us have paid the fullest attention to their advice and have accepted their recommendations as being wise and prudent. I wish to pay a particular tribute to the Advisory Committee at this time of change and crisis in the life of the organization and to express the hope that they will always be there to render their valuable expert opinions to assist us in our work.

I should like to turn now to some more specific points in the documents before us. In the foreword to the budget the Secretary-General observes that the initial budget estimates for 1962 have been compiled "with the twin objectives of securing on the one hand a level of expenditure for 1962 which is as close as possible to that approved for 1961, yet, on the other, making the necessary provision to meet the expanding work programmes required by decisions of the principal organs, the enlarged conference activity and other unavoidable cost increases". That the estimates have been prepared with great care is borne out by the modest scale of reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that in order to achieve the objective of producing a total close to that approved for 1961 the Secretary-General availed himself of a \$2 million decrease in the special provision for technical assistance to former Trust Territories and other newly independent states to offset a proposed increase in staff costs of approximately the same amount. The other major factor contributing to the apparent budget stabilization is the non-inclusion of certain items pending General Assembly direction to do otherwise; I refer, Mr. Chairman, to possible provisions for the proposed increase in professional salaries, and the possible requirements for capital expenditures at headquarters and Geneva, and for the contemplated conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less-Developed Areas. With these possible additions and supplementary items reported after the main budget document (A/4470) had been released, arising from decisions taken by ECOSOC, the final overall 1962 regular budget gross total may exceed \$80 million, and this, Mr. Chairman, is exclusive of the financial requirements of UNEF and ONUC. I realize these facts are, no doubt, well appreciated by all distinguished representatives but I wished simply to set them our against the background of the organization's continuing precarious financial position, which Mr. Turner, the Controller, described in his statement last Thursday.

The seriousness of the organization's financial position makes it most important that every effort be made by all concerned, that is, the originators of expenditure proposals, those who scrutinize and endorse them and those who implement them, to establish and observe a system of carefully thought-out priorities. In particular the Economic and Social Council has a special responsibility in this respect because of the expansion of the work programmes under its sponsorship. If member states and their taxpayers - are to feel justified in their support of the organization the utmost efficiency and economy must be exercised in the carrying out of General Assembly decisions. It therefore falls upon members of this Committee to make every effort possible to ensure that unavoidable statutory increases, or increases resulting from proposals for new urgent projects, are offset by reductions in programmes which no longer command priority rating. Only through the constant review of the various activities and staffing arrangements can work of lesser importance or of doubtful continued justification be eliminated and staff transferred to more vital areas. With this thought in mind, Mr. Chairman, I might say that my delegation was pleased to note, in the report of the Committee of Experts which reviewed the activities and organization of the Secretariat, the proposal that the Fifth Committee might systematically each year examine in detail one or two main areas of expenditure. It is our firm hope that such reviews would be occasions for re-examining the conditions and assumptions under which programmes have been developed and expanded. In this way it will be possible to ensure that scarce resources are being properly and effectively utilized.

My delegation was interested to note, and fully endorses, the Advisory Committee's remarks concerning the desirability of prolonging the use of furniture and office equipment and the pressing need to keep the general pattern of meetings within manageable bounds. The serious staffing problems created by the holding of numerous and lengthy conferences is rightly a matter of concern for all.

The Advisory Committee, after careful review of the Secretary-General's initial estimates, has recommended reductions totalling approximately \$1 million and the Controller has informed us he does not intend to contest any of the proposed reductions. My delegation considers the recommendations are reasonable and intends to support them.

The rise in the budget of the UN over the last few years is a sign that this growing organization is being asked to undertake an increasing number of tasks in ever widening fields of responsibility: this is a sign of its vitality. Because of this expansion it is our duty to scrutinize most carefully each new programme and new expenditure to ensure that the growing calls on the resources - which are not limitless - of all nations, are wisely conceived. At the same time we must express satisfaction that the instrument forged by the framers of the Charter has become so essential a part of the fabric of international life and activity.

In one of his last reports to the Assembly, the Secretary-General proposed a substantial reduction in the amount of funds required to undertake what the Economic and Social Council had recommended. In this report the late Secretary-General described his plan to arrange the work which had been entrusted to him in such a way that the financial burden on all member states was lessened.

I should like to commend all those who worked with the Secretary-General to achieve this plan and to express the conviction that the Secretariat will always be ready to suggest to member states ways by which their decisions can be carried out in the most efficient way with the least expenditure of funds.

In our country we have a saying that a good speech should be like a woman's dress - long enough to cover the subject but short enough to be interesting.

I am afraid that perhaps I have not paid sufficient attention to this story in the course of my remarks, but in concluding may I express the hope that the distinguished delegates comprising this Committee will keep this in mind when we discuss the important and sometimes contentious issues that lie before us.



