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**UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**A GUIDE TO CONFERENCE ORGANIZATION AND DOCUMENTATION
FOR THE E C A SECRETARIAT**

*Prepared by
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Division of Administration and Conference Services*

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE PREPARATION OF MEETINGS -

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

(ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA)

Introduction

"If a huge volume of documents were conducive to the clarification of the issues faced by the organizations of the United Nations system and to facilitating their solution, there would be no cause for concern. In fact, however, an excessive volume of documentation is a hindrance. It tends to obscure issues by diverting attention from essentials, and it complicates the work of intergovernmental and other meetings. At the same time, it greatly overburdens available staff resources and can cause serious delays in processing and delivery of documents. The efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the United Nations system would greatly improve if its volume of documents could be reduced, their quality were improved and they were issued on time." This was one of the observations recently made by the Joint Inspection Unit in its report on "Control and Limitation of Documentation in the United Nations system" (JIU/REQ/80/12 of December 1980).

Documentation work in ECA, especially for conferences and meetings, is an issue of great concern. The Executive Secretary, the substantive divisions and the Division of Administration and Conference Services have frequently addressed themselves to the need to streamline the organization of ECA conferences. Divisions have raised questions about what they termed inadequate support services for conferences. The Division of Administration and Conference Services has complained about the tardiness of the divisions in taking the necessary steps to facilitate the work of the Conference Services Section; these steps relate mainly to the timely submission of documents for processing and the completion of recruitment forms for interpreters in the case of multilingual meetings. Rules and regulations designed by the United Nations to smooth the operations and functions of Conference Services are often ignored by the Divisions.

Recently the Executive Secretary directed that a written guide to the preparation of conferences be compiled for use by the ECA secretariat. Of course, organizational skills cannot be taught by manuals or guides. The acquisition of such skills demands practice, perseverance and co-operation by all concerned. It is hoped, however, that this guide will provide a practical help to those whose job, among others, is to co-ordinate with the Conference Services Section during preparations for meetings. Administrative assistants and project officers come easily to mind.

Scope and purpose

This manual is intended to serve as a general guide for ECA staff members concerned with conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops. The Administration and Conference Services Division hopes that staff members will familiarize themselves with the contents of this guide, and, more importantly, bring it to the attention of administrative officers as well as new colleagues. The manual outlines the basic steps to be taken by divisions organizing meetings and informs them of the servicing offices to be contacted and deadlines for various stages of conference preparation. Although the manual is directed primarily at ECA headquarters, its broad policies and procedures are expected to be applied to subregional offices, i.e. the MULPOCs.

Towards the end of each year the Office of the Secretary to the Commission issues a provisional list of conferences, meetings, seminars and workshops for the following year. It is the duty of every staff member to study this calendar and take whatever action is required regarding the meetings for which he or she is responsible. The first and major action concerns documentation.

Documentation

The Administration and Conference Services Division has devoted much effort to emphasizing the importance of divisions providing the Conference Services Section with information concerning intended documentation. A form is circulated at the beginning of each year to obtain advance information on each division's publications programme for the coming year. Each time the response is always poor.

The limited resources of the Commission's documentation processing machinery - the Translation Services, the Typing Pool and the Reproduction Unit - make it imperative that planning and forecasting should be tight in order to meet deadlines. In this regard attention is drawn to General Assembly resolution 33/56 on the "Control and limitation of documentation", which requests the Secretary-General "to take measures to ensure that pre-session documents for meetings shall be distributed not less than six weeks before the meetings in all working languages". By resolution 1979/1 and 1979/69 the Economic and Social Council also addressed itself to the question and reiterated that documents should be circulated in all working languages six weeks before the opening of the meeting for which they are intended.

In order therefore to ensure that the provisions of the above resolutions are complied with all documents for meetings must be submitted to the Conference Services Section 12 weeks before the meeting at which they are to be circulated. The following schedule will be observed by the submitting divisions:

(a) A confirmation note to be submitted to the Conference Services six months before the opening date of the meeting

- i) Stating that the meeting will be held as scheduled;
- ii) Providing the list of all documents to be circulated and indicating the language of the original draft, the number of standard pages and the expected dates of submission (divisions are not to wait 10 weeks before the meeting to submit documents). This is to enable the Conference Services Section to plan and to inform the divisions if the documentation workload exceeds the section's technical capacity to process the documents and to request the Administration or the division concerned to seek alternative means of production;
- iii) Requesting that interpreters should be engaged;
- iv) In the case of an extra-budgetary meeting indicating the account number to be charged for the recruitment of freelance translators.

(b) Sixteen weeks before the opening date of the meeting the division to submit to the Conference Services Section a completed form for the recruitment of interpreters and confirming the date and venue of the meeting as well as communicating the account number to be charged. It is important that this step is taken on time as the process of sorting out funding details and authorizing UNDP offices to issue tickets to interpreters takes an extremely long time. Interpreters have often arrived late or in an incomplete team because their ticket authorization reached the UNDP offices late, allowing them no time for proper flight reservations.

(c) Sixteen weeks before the opening date of each Conference of Ministers responsible for Economic Planning all documents should be submitted to the Conference Services Section including annotated provisional agenda and the programme of work. In the event of failure to observe this schedule a written alert should be addressed to the Chief of Translation Services regarding those documents that are intended for translation, and to the Chief of Documents and Publishing Service for those documents that require typing and/or reproduction. In both cases a copy should be sent to the Chief of Conference Services.

The Executive Secretary has instructed that failure to observe the timetable, particularly the documentation submission schedule, should be reported to him with a view to postponing or cancelling the meeting.

Submission of documents for translation

(a) Documents for translation will be submitted through a duly completed control form, neat, clean and clearly-typed.

(b) Only legible photocopies of original typescripts will be accepted.

(c) Original texts or manuscripts in which written corrections in pencil, ink, etc. have been made will in all cases be re-typed before submission for translation.

(d) Only documents that have been cleared with the relevant officials and are therefore final will be submitted for translation.

Withdrawing a document during translation, or submitting a corrected or amended copy for realignment is wasteful and complicates the translation task. According to the United Nations "Guidelines for the Preparation of Documentation" only corrigenda may be issued after the document has been submitted for translation. In all documents submitted for translation sources used must be indicated, with specific references and copies of relevant documents.

(e) Drafters will supply both material already translated and previously translated drafts with annotations of subsequent changes made.

(f) The name and telephone extension of the drafter will be indicated in the lower left-hand corner of the first page of the document to facilitate consultation with the Translation Service.

(g) The 32-page rule for lengths of secretariat documents includes the main document and any annexes and appendices. But as a general rule documents should contain not more than 15-20 pages.

Requests for typing, format and reproduction

At all times the Typing Pool is to be first and foremost at the service of the translation service. In producing documents for their meetings, divisions will ensure that:

(a) All the typing is done within the divisions except those to be sent for translation, the drafts of which will be returned to the divisions for stencilling.

(b) Routine work sent to the Pool from other divisions will normally not be accepted.

All documents will be presented in a form in conformity with the rules and regulations governing all United Nations documents and publications. In this regard the following will be observed:

(a) All documents will be restricted to 32 pages (including the main document and any annexes and appendices which may be required).

(b) The Conference Services Section, through the Documents and Publishing Service, will control the format or physical presentation of every document. No division will design its own or request for designs not in conformity with established practice regarding the physical presentation of official documents.

(c) In all cases the Conference Services Section will control the reproduction processes.

Quantity and distribution

In 1979 ECA alone produced more than 25 million page impressions of documentation compared to 20 million produced by ECLA and ESCAP together. The increase in documentation has been attributed to three factors: (a) the Commission having assumed executive agency status leading to an expanded programme of activity; (b) additional working languages - i.e. Arabic has now been added; (c) establishment of new institutions and organs outside and within ECA which by and large depend on ECA for secretarial services. In spite of this, much needs to be done to curtail the volume of documentation produced either for meetings or for general distribution. In submitting the documents for distribution divisions will apply the following formula:

		<u>Quantity</u>
Conference working papers	- 5 copies to each member State	250
United Nations agencies	- 2 copies to each agency	100
NGOS	- 2 copies to each NGO	150
Others	- 2 copies	150
Mailing lists	- To be determined by the Documents Control Unit	

In each case the Documents Control Unit will determine and control the quantities (i.e. print runs) required. Re-rolls will be authorized only by the ECA Documents and Publications Board. Divisions will therefore be expected to ensure that the print-runs requested are realistic.

In order to make efficient use of resources and machine time, all external requests for publications and documents whose stock is exhausted will be directed to the Documents Distribution and Mailing Unit. This Unit will file all the requests in respect of each publication/document in order to determine the volume of requests to justify reprinting.

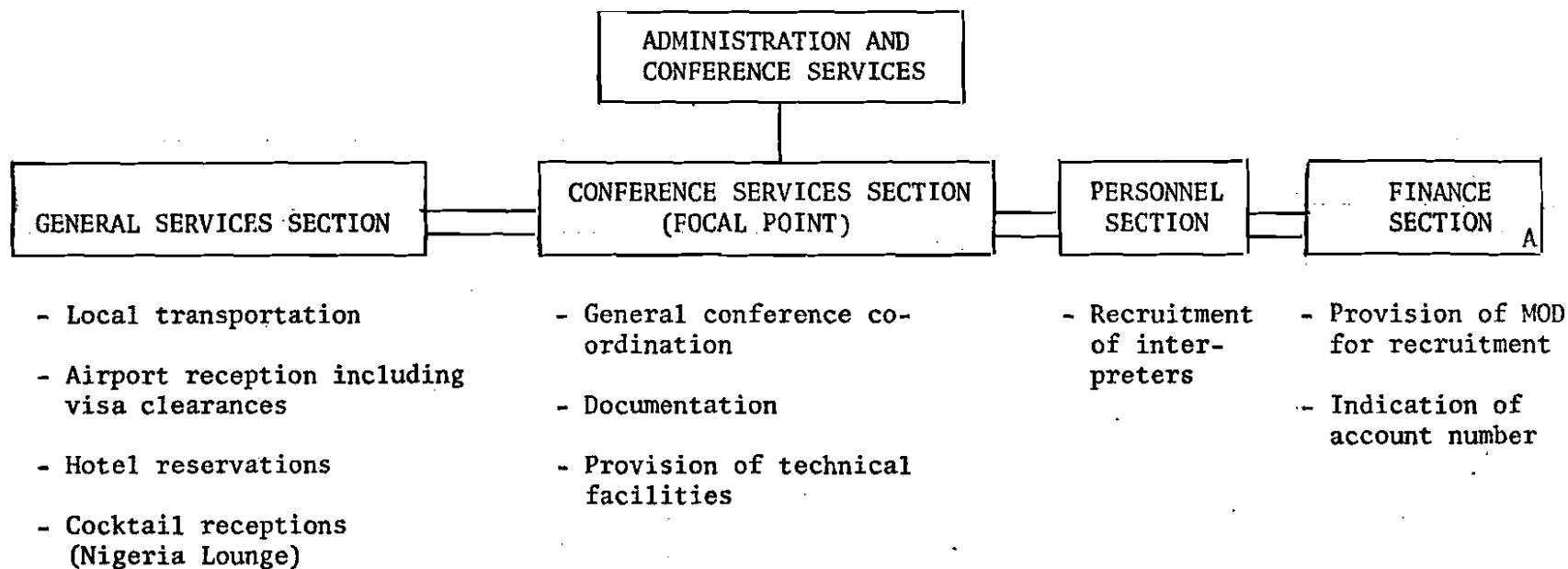
Table of submission and dispatch of documents

Category of conference	Deadline for sub- mission to Conference Services for process- ing	Deadline for dispatch to member States and other participants
	Prior to the opening date of the meeting	
ECA Conference of Ministers	16 weeks	6 weeks
Other ECA Ministerial Meetings	12 weeks	6 weeks
Regional Meetings	10 weeks	6 weeks
Seminars and workshops	10 weeks	6 weeks

Other procedural arrangements

While the Conference Services Section is the focal co-ordinator of all the conferences of the Commission, other arms of the Division of Administration and Conference Services have an equally important role to play. The table below illustrates the duties and responsibilities of the various sections which should be contacted directly in all cases.

Requisitions for local conference expenses (e.g. transportation for delegates, cocktail receptions, etc.) addressed to the Chief of General Services Section will indicate the account number to be charged and copied to the Budget and Finance Section.



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All correspondence addressed to each of the sections in the Administration and Conference Services will be through the Director of the Division and copied to the Chief of Conference Services.

The completion of the form for the recruitment of interpreters is the responsibility of the division. These forms will be completed at least 16 weeks before the meeting. It is only upon the receipt of this form that the Personnel Section or Conference Services will initiate the process of recruiting interpreters. Divisions should note that the minimum interpretation requirement for a meeting lasting beyond one day should be a team of four interpreters (in the case of a meeting using English and French) and seven interpreters for trilingual meetings (Arabic, English and French).

In the past the Divisions have tended to hold meetings extending over weekends. Apart from straining the personnel of the Conference Services Section, who have to work during weekends all the time, this tendency exhausts the overtime vote which in the last two years has been the subject of audit queries. As a rule no meetings will be programmed for Saturdays or an official holiday recognized by the United Nations. Meetings will be scheduled for working days, Monday to Friday.

Finally, divisions will in all cases consult with the Conference Services Section before deciding the time for the consideration of the report of an ongoing meeting. Normally the Conference secretariat will be allotted one complete working day to prepare the report - translation, typing and reproduction.

ECA calendar of meetings

In considering proposals for meetings it is important to ensure that conferences are evenly spread out in order to ensure that the technical facilities are sufficient, including such services as translation and reproduction. To achieve this the Director of Administration and Conference Services Division will, when all the meeting proposals have been compiled, call a meeting between Conference Services, Budget and Finance, General Services Section and the Secretary to the Commission to finalize the calendar before submission to the Executive Secretary. The Committee, the Secretary of which will be the Chief of Conference Services, will have the following terms of reference:

(a) To ensure that meetings are evenly spaced throughout the year and that they are within the Commission's physical and financial capacity;

(b) To determine resource allocations between regular budget and extrabudgetary funds;

(c) To ensure divisions confirm dates and venues for meetings in good time;

(d) To ensure that the divisions, in drawing up project proposals, include fees for translation and in some cases typing;

(e) In the case of jointly sponsored meetings to determine the responsibilities of each sponsor in terms of translation, interpretation and meeting servicing.

In making its final recommendations to the Executive Secretary the Committee will consult closely with the various Directors concerned.

Cancellations and change of dates/venues of scheduled meetings

All cancellations, change of dates and venues must be reported to the Director of Administration and Conference Services in the prescribed form eight weeks before the scheduled opening date of the meeting in question. Copies of such cancellations and/or changes will, at all times, be sent to the Chiefs of Conference Services, Personnel Section and the Secretary to the Commission. All cancellations/changes in dates and venues must be made in consultation with the Director of Administration and Conference Services or his authorized representative.

Steps to be taken during a meeting

The Director of the Division will appoint a report drafter or drafters at the beginning of a meeting whose name will be communicated to the Chief of Conference Services. Such an officer will act as a liaison officer and make sure that the report is given for editing and translation as it progresses, and that the Conference Services is informed of any additional assistance that the meeting might require - i.e. in cases of the extension of time of the meeting and/or need for night or weekend production facilities. In

such instances the Conference Services Section will be informed at least eight hours in advance to enable the Section to mobilize the necessary support and obtain approval for overtime. Each meeting must have a break of at least one working day to allow time for the Conference Services Section to prepare the report. This must be considered as the minimum in all cases.

General

The Conference Services Section will establish workload forecasts and advise the divisions when the volume of the intended submissions exceeds the technical capacity of the Section to cope with the documents. In processing the documents the first-come-first-served principle will be the guiding practice provided that all documents in question were submitted on time.

Manpower resources permitting, the system of load forecasts will be used more than has hitherto been the case. It must be borne in mind, however, that customarily such forecasts are first to be submitted by the originating divisions at the beginning of every year and should be reviewed periodically by them. Reasonably accurate forecasts are very important for effective decision making to streamline production work flows over a period. Such forecasts should be as accurate as possible. In their report on the "Evaluation of the translation process in the United Nations system" the Joint Inspection Unit regretted that in many instances the forecasts were not helpful because "actual document submissions bear little relationship to the schedules indicated and nothing is done about it. In most cases, major disruptions occur because originating units fall behind their schedule submissions dates and document deadlines, because the amount of documentation (especially for meetings) is often more than projected, and because the number and timing of meetings shifts and expands without full consideration of the translation and other conference servicing capabilities. In these circumstances," the report says, "the Translation Services have to struggle to keep production moving, to recruit adequate temporary staff, to meet deadlines and to negotiate priorities among competing

claims. This long-term planning is often unrealistic, monthly forecasts serve only as rough indicators, and the many disruptions and 'unforeseen' circumstances of the work forecasting process force the translation services to rely on short-term, ad hoc decisions and a continuous shuffling of resources, workloads and priorities".

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