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UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Executive Committee
Eighteenth meeting

Khartoum, 1-4 May 1978

INTRODUCTION OF ARABIC AS A WORKING LANGUAGE OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

1. By its resolution 3190 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973, the General Assembly decided to include Arabic among the working languages of the General Assembly and its principal organs. Subsequently, at its third meeting (twelfth session) held in February 1975, the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa adopted resolution 253 (XII) of 28 February 1975 by which it requested the Economic and Social Council to recommend to the General Assembly the approval of Arabic as an official and working language of the Economic Commission for Africa, in addition to English and French. On the recommendation of the Second Committee, on 15 December 1975 the General Assembly approved the inclusion of Arabic as an official and working language of the Economic Commission for Africa in addition to English and French.
2. To finance the services which would be required when the Commission uses the Arabic language, the General Assembly was supposed to increase the section of the regular budget of the United Nations relating to ECA by the amount of 524,000 United States dollars per year on the basis of 1975 estimates. Unfortunately, because of the severe constraints imposed by the lack of resources within the United Nations family, only a very limited number of posts for Arabic translators were allocated to the Commission to implement the decision adopted by the General Assembly.
3. At the fourth meeting of the Conference of Ministers of ECA (thirteenth session) held at Kinshasa from 24 February to 3 March 1977, the delegations of the Arab countries members of ECA expressed their concern at the fact that the documents for the Conference were not available in Arabic. The Executive Secretary of ECA promised to do his best to see that the Arabic language would be effectively used as a third working language of the Commission by the time the Fifth Conference of Ministers was convened in 1979.
4. After a thorough evaluation of the problem, it was realized that, in the light of the budgetary situation, it would be very difficult for ECA to introduce fully Arabic as a third working language of ECA unless extrabudgetary resources were received to supplement the meagre resources which ECA had for that purpose from the United Nations regular budget. For the 1978/79 biennial budget period, ECA had been provided from the United Nations regular budget with two posts of Arabic translators and two posts of Arabic typists, which fell far short of the requirements for full and effective performance of the Translation Unit of the ECA secretariat. The attached working sheet gives detailed

calculations of the requirements for staffing of the Arabic Translation Unit, as well as for purchase of dictionaries, reference books, dictaphones, typewriters and the initial cost for travel of the newly recruited candidates amounting to \$US 786,050 for 1978. The requirements for 1979 and 1980 would be \$US 618,700 each year.

5. It would be advisable to recruit the Arabic staff at least for a three year fixed-term period in order to ensure continuity and a high standard of candidates for translators as well as for general service personnel. The total amount of money required for the full staffing of the Arabic Translation Unit and its equipment would thus equal \$US 2,130,975.

6. In addition the Executive Secretary was asked by the fourth Conference of Ministers (thirteenth session) in resolution 294 (XIII) to provide language training services and facilities for the staff of ECA so that they could be proficient in Arabic in addition to French and English. To equip and staff the ECA language laboratory properly for that purpose would cost an additional sum of \$US 75,700 per annum, or \$US 227,100 for the three-year period 1978-1980.

7. The total resources to be covered from the extrabudgetary sources will thus amount to \$US 786,050 for 1978, \$US 618,700 for 1979 and \$US 618,700 for 1980.

8. In an attempt to secure the additional resources needed to implement the decision to include Arabic among the working languages of the Commission, the Executive Secretary invited the ambassadors of North African States accredited to Ethiopia to a briefing on 9 January 1978 at the Commission's headquarters.

9. He gave the ambassadors of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Morocco and the Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan the background to the question and recalled the commitment he had made at the last meeting of the Conference of Ministers at Kinshasa to the effect that Arabic would be adopted as the third working language of the Commission at the latest by the fifth meeting of the Conference of Ministers scheduled to be held at Rabat in 1979.

10. He then informed them that the General Assembly had just approved the budget of the United Nations for 1978/79 and that the allocation made available to ECA for the Arabic language amounted to 163,500 United States dollars whilst the total required each year to implement the relevant resolutions amounted to 949,800 United States dollars. The estimated deficit for 1978 was thus 786,050 United States dollars. For 1979 and 1980 the deficit was estimated at 618,700 United States dollars both years because there would be no need to buy equipment or cover the travel costs of the staff members concerned.

11. The Executive Secretary also pointed out that in resolution 294 (XIII) the Conference of Ministers had requested him to organize training services within the secretariat so that the staff could become proficient in Arabic, English and French. The French Government had donated a language laboratory to ECA which was already being used for teaching English and French. The secretariat was endeavouring to provide elementary courses in Arabic but, without suitable material and qualified teachers, the training could not be brought up to the desired level. To do so would require an extra 75,700 United States dollars per year or a total of 227,100 for the three years up to 1980.

12. It was for that reason that the Executive Secretary had wanted to consult the ambassadors of the North African Arab States accredited to Ethiopia in the hope that together they could find a way to solve the problem. It was unfortunate that the Algerian Ambassador to Ethiopia, who lived in Khartoum, had not been able to attend the meeting.

13. The ambassadors who were present praised the Executive Secretary for his initiative and stressed the importance of the problem posed by the adoption of Arabic as a working language of the United Nations system. In Africa eight or nine countries spoke Arabic and within OAU Arabic had been a working language for a long time. There was no doubt that it could be used in the Commission in the same way as English and French. It was made quite clear by all concerned that, if Arabic was to be used, it should be on an equal footing with English and French.

14. After taking note of the figures which had been provided, the ambassadors pointed out that the problem was an urgent one because the deficit for 1978 had to be made up quickly and yet at that stage all they could do was to report to their respective Governments and draw their attention to the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Conference of Ministers of ECA. They feared that the Executive Secretary might have intervened too late at least as far as 1978 was concerned since the States in question had already adopted their budgets without making provision for that additional requirement. It was however acknowledged that in exceptional and unforeseen cases they might make use of extrabudgetary resources.

15. It was asked why the meeting had been confined to the Arab countries members of the Commission and if that meant that they alone were to cover the deficit when it had been said that Arabic should be used on an equal footing with English and French. Bearing in mind the decision which had been adopted unanimously by the delegations of Arab States in the General Assembly in 1972 to bear the costs of implementing General Assembly resolution 3190 (XXVIII) mentioned above for the first three years with the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates providing 70 per cent of the costs, it was asked whether it was intended to apply the same principle in ECA. Moreover, one ambassador wanted to know whether it had not been possible to secure the financial resources required to implement the resolutions in question from the extrabudgetary resources of the United Nations.

16. The Executive Secretary explained that the meeting had been confined to representatives of the Arab States members of the Commission primarily because of what had happened in 1973 when there had been the problem of finding sources of financing to cover the cost of including Arabic among the working languages of the General Assembly and its main organs. Then he did not think that the problem facing the secretariat could be rapidly solved in a forum comprising the 49 States members of the Commission. That was why he had thought that the Arab States members of the Commission could help him to find a solution.

17. It was stressed that Arabic had been adopted as a working language of the United Nations only recently and that, for all the organs within the system, financing was assured through extrabudgetary resources. It was therefore understood that the General Assembly had difficulty in releasing credits under the regular budget to include Arabic among the working languages of ECA. The first suggestion made had been that extrabudgetary resources should be found to cover the expenses that the implementation of the resolution would entail because, at the time when the Conference of Ministers had adopted its resolution, the United Nations regular budget for 1976/77 had already been approved. Moreover, ECA had taken a

number of steps and the allocation of 163,700 United States dollars from the 1977/78 regular budget had not been secured without difficulty. At present, with the funds available, it would be possible to use Arabic as a working language, but not yet on an equal footing with English and French, for only a limited number of documents would be issued in Arabic. The Executive Secretary agreed that Arabic should be used on the same footing as English and French and the resources required to do so should be found rapidly. He pointed out that, if funds were not available before April 1978, it would be difficult to keep to the plans to use Arabic as a working language at the fifth meeting of the Conference of Ministers at Rabat in 1979.

18. The ambassadors promised that not only would they bring the question to the attention of their respective Governments but they would also have it put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Arab League because within the League a committee had apparently been set up to study the question of the adoption of Arabic as a working language in international organizations. At the same time all States members of ECA could be invited to make a contribution, even a token one, although that view was not shared by all the ambassadors. Arab and African Governments should instruct their delegations to intervene in the General Assembly and in the Fifth Committee with a view to finding ways of securing the necessary funds to have Arabic adopted as a working language of the Commission although that would be a long-term objective which would have to be implemented as from the 1980/81 budget cycle.

19. The Executive Secretary assured the ambassadors that the objective was ultimately to persuade the United Nations to take over all the expenses for Arabic to become the third working language of the Commission. For the time being, he proposed the 163,750 United States dollars and whatever contributions the Arab member States made should be used to make a start in implementing the resolution. That would be an example of an effort to be self-reliant which would speak for itself and force ACABQ to provide the necessary funds in the 1980/81 budget for the secretariat to adopt Arabic.

20. The Executive Secretary expressed his gratitude to the ambassadors and said that he had been encouraged by the positive way in which they had tackled the problem. He assured them that the question would be put on the agenda of the eighteenth meeting of the Executive Committee which would be held towards the end of April 1978 so that all member States would be informed about it.

ESTIMATED COST FOR ESTABLISHMENT WITHIN ECA SECRETARIAT OF ARABIC TRANSLATION UNIT

	Estimated cost of posts in \$US	Total cost per year in \$US	Provided from United Nations Regular budget in \$US	To be covered from extrabudget- ary resources in \$US
I. Staff				
Reviser (P-4) (2)	33 000	66 000		66 000
Translators (P-3) (6)	25 600	153 600	51 200	102 400
Typists (GS) (4)	5 000	20 000	10 000	10 000
Reference Assistant (GS) (1)	5 000	5 000	-	5 000
Proof-readers (GS) (2)	5 000	10 000	-	10 000
Subtotal - 15 posts		254 600	61 200	193 400
Common staff cost (40%)		101 840	24 800	77 040
Subtotal		356 440	86 000	270 440
II. Estimated cost of reproduction of ECA documents in Arabic		298 860	40 000	258 860
III. Estimated cost of two Arabic interpreters servicing ECA meetings				
12 meetings per year		84 000	-	84 000
IV. Acquisition of dictionaries, reference books and equipment				
(a) Dictionaries and reference books		10 000	5 000	5 000
(b) Dictaphones - (12)		4 000	1 000	3 000
(c) Typewriters - (4)		2 700	1 350	1 350
Subtotal		16 700	7 350	9 350

ESTIMATED COST FOR ESTABLISHMENT WITHIN ECA SECRETARIAT OF ARABIC TRANSLATION UNIT (continued)

	Estimated cost of posts in \$US	Total cost per year in \$US	Provided from United Nations Regular budget in \$US	To be covered from extrabudget- ary resources in \$US
V. <u>Initial travel</u>				
11 candidates X 8,000		88 000	-	88 000
VI. <u>Arabic language training</u>				
Teachers (2) 1080 h/year at \$US10/h		10 800	5 400	5 400
Equipment and materials		95 000	25 000	70 000
Subtotal		949,800	163 750	786 050
For 1978				786 050
For 1979 (\$786,050 less \$9,350 for dictionaries etc..., less \$88,000 for initial travel, and less \$70,000 for equipment)				618 700
For 1980				618 700
Subtotal				2,023 450
(Plus 10% contingencies, including inflationary factors)				202 345
TOTAL				2,225 795