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REPORTS OF THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the activities of the Economic Commission  
for Latin America (E/4935)

Addendum

OBSERVATIONS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON  
ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY QUESTIONS

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report on the Economic Commission for Latin America by Mr. S. Ilic, Mr. C.S. Jha and Mr. A.F. Sokirkin, members of the Joint Inspection Unit, and the observations thereon by the Secretary-General and the executive heads of several specialized agencies. In accordance with the procedures described in the seventh report of the Advisory Committee to the General Assembly at its twenty-fourth session (A/7738), the inspection report and the observations thereon were immediately transmitted by the Committee for issuance as documents of the Economic and Social Council (E/4935/Add.1).
2. The inspection was carried out in October and December 1969, when the authors of the report visited the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America at Santiago, Chile, and three of its other offices (Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City and Port of Spain); in addition they had detailed discussion with the heads of the ECLA offices at Bogotá and Montevideo. Thus their report presents an overall account of ECLA's work.
3. In the Advisory Committee's opinion, the inspection report comes at an opportune moment for it provides detailed observations, from an independent viewpoint, on a number of issues that are now being discussed at both the intergovernmental and the Secretariat level.
4. Thus, the Inspectors' observations on the staffing levels and the organizational structure of the Commission's secretariat are germane to the survey of ECLA by the Administrative Management Service (which was carried out some months later). Similarly, their remarks and recommendations on the Commission's role in the preparation of the programme and budget should be viewed in the context of the proposals

and studies relating to the form of representation of the United Nations budget and the duration of the budget cycle. Again, the question of the operational role of the regional economic commissions is closely interrelated both with the discussions in the Governing Council of UNDP on the Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System <sup>1/</sup>, and with the preparatory study on regional structures now underway pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1553 (XLIX) of 30 July 1970.

5. The Advisory Committee does not propose to comment at this stage on the Inspectors' recommendations concerning the level and deployment of staff resources; it will bear them in mind, however, when it considers the Secretary-General's proposals based on the findings of the Administrative and Management survey. The Committee was glad to note that the Inspectors found that, on the whole, the internal organization of the secretariat is satisfactory (E/4935, para. 27), and that its staff are highly qualified and efficient.

6. As for the role of the Commission in the preparation of the programme and budget, the Advisory Committee recalls that each regional economic commission is allocated a separate appropriation line (budget section) in the detailed outline of the proposed new form of presentation of expenditure and income estimates, which is to be used by the Secretary-General for purposes of preparing a mock-up of the 1972 budget estimates (A/C.5/1335). In this way, it will be much easier for the Secretary-General to associate the regional economic commissions more closely with the preparation of the budget estimates in accordance with Financial Regulations 3.1 and Financial Rules 103.2(a) and 103.3.

7. The question of the operational role of the regional economic commissions was discussed by the Advisory Committee in its observations on the inspection reports on ECA (E/4733/Add.2, paras. 4-14) and ECAFE (E/4781/Add.2, paras. 17-21). In the Advisory Committee's opinion this very complex question requires further study in the Governing Council of the UNDP, in the Economic and Social Council, at the interagency level and within the United Nations, before definitive conclusions can be reached.

8. The Advisory Committee has noted the Inspectors' observations and recommendations on the subject of liaison and co-ordination between ECLA, United Nations headquarters, other United Nations offices, the specialized agencies and other organizations, and the related observations by the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the specialized agencies. The Advisory Committee believes that the competent headquarters departments should give a high priority to the communications they receive from the regional economic commissions, because otherwise they may unwittingly contribute to

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<sup>1/</sup> United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.70.I.10.

feelings of isolation in the regional economic commissions from the mainstream of United Nations activities. By the same token, however, the regional economic commissions should respond promptly to the communications addressed to them by headquarters, and in the latter connexion the Advisory Committee is aware of several instances when ECLA's response was unduly delayed.

9. Recommendation I of the Inspectors (E/4935) deals with the organizational structure of ECLA. In it the Inspectors express the view that the Member States of the Commission may wish to review the existing organizational structure and methods of work of the Commission with a view to providing better opportunities for the exercise of their responsibilities in regard to the formulation of programmes, the establishment of priorities and control over the execution of such programmes. In this connexion the Inspectors refer to their report (E/4935, paras. 16-20 and 109-112).

10. The Advisory Committee trusts that the Inspectors do not intend their recommendation to be interpreted as an encouragement to ECLA to set up a multiplicity of committees, sub-committees and working parties. Indeed, in their report (E/4935, para. 112) the Inspectors clearly state that in all commissions Member States lay down guidelines of policy, that both the ECLA pattern and the patterns in other regional economic commissions have their advantages and disadvantages, and that they "wish merely to draw attention to those rather striking functional differences" between the commissions.

11. In the Advisory Committee's view ECLA is to be commended for having been able to discharge its responsibilities without resorting to a heavy programme of conferences and meetings. As the Inspectors indicate in their report (E/4935, para. 20) "the servicing of sessions of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, groups of experts, seminars and so on does not take up much of the Secretariat's time". Moreover, in paragraph 100 they state that subject to certain observations "the organizational structure and work of the secretariat can be regarded as fulfilling the requirements which the Commission's member States have set".

12. In the circumstances, and provided the States members of the Commission are satisfied that their wishes are reflected in the work programme of the Secretariat, the Advisory Committee would urge that ECLA's programme of conferences and meetings should not be expanded merely for the sake of formal uniformity with the working methods of other regional economic commissions, for such a development would not only be wasteful of manpower and material resources but would also run counter to the sustained efforts of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to curb the proliferation of meetings and conferences.

13. The inspection report on the activities of the Economic Commission for Latin America, together with the earlier reports of ECA and ECAFE, provide a detailed picture of the United Nations activities of the regional level which is bound to be of interest both to the Member States and to the Secretary-General. The Advisory Committee trusts that it will be given serious consideration by the competent organs.