
SUMMARY REPORT OF THE SECOND MEETING OF THE STATISTICAL COMMISSION

Held at Hunter College, New York on Thursday,

2 May 1946, at 10:30 a.m.

Present: Mr. Rice (Chairman)
Mr. Campion
Mr. Mahalanobis
Mr. Sauvy

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman at 10:30 a.m.

The "Working Paper on Statistical Commission Panel" prepared by Mr. E.G. Latham (E/STAT/W.1 - 26 April 1946) was introduced, and the Commission proceeded to consider recommendations to the Economic and Social Council on its composition.

After a brief discussion it appeared evident that there was substantial agreement among the members as to the size of the Commission. The points were made that the Commission should be as small as practicable; that reliance should be placed on the Secretariat, sub-commissions, and expert consultants, and therefore that the Commission need not include in its own membership experts in all fields; and that the desirability of widespread geographical distribution need not be a determining factor in establishing the size of the Commission. The views of Mr. Jahn, as stated in a letter to the Chairman, were presented as were the recommendations on this point contained in the memorandum (E/COMMISSIONS/2 - 30 April 1946) submitted by the United Kingdom Delegation to the United Nations.

The point was made that the size of the Commission to be recommended could not be decided without reference to consideration of the basis of selection or appointment of members of the Commission. On this point it was agreed that the basic issue is whether members

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should be appointed as individuals or as government representatives. The suggestion was made that members should be familiar with statistics of their own government and should be persons who can go back after sessions of the Commission with some hope of effecting implementation of decisions reached by the Commission. Their qualifications and professional standing should be recognized by their colleagues. It was pointed out that the Statistical Commission differs somewhat in this respect from other commissions in that its principal role is a technical one -- the development and improvement of statistics throughout the world. If members are appointed as government representatives, it may be difficult to assure the appointment of qualified persons.

The experience of the League of Nations was referred to in this connection. It was pointed out that members of the League's Committee of Statistical Experts were chosen in their individual capacities, and that geographic and subject-matter representation was attained in part through appointments to sub-committees. The sub-committees also served as a source of recruitment for membership on the Committee.

The views of the President of the Economic and Social Council on this point, as expressed in a conference with the Chairman, were reported as favouring appointment of members as individuals, in part on the ground that if government representatives were appointed it would be difficult to avoid having a commission with a membership too large for effective operation. It was pointed out that there may be no qualified statisticians in some countries, while other countries may have several individuals who would be qualified. Furthermore it is desirable to limit the amount of formality and protocol in connection with the establishment of the Commission and the conduct of its business.

Following this discussion, the Commission agreed that it would recommend strongly to the Economic and Social Council that members of the permanent Commission be appointed as individuals. It was then

agreed that in the light of this decision the Commission should be comprised of not more than 12 members.

The Commission then discussed possible recommendations as to the duration of terms of members, the extent to which continuity should be provided, and eligibility for reappointment. Agreement was reached that the Commission's recommendation to the Economic and Social Council should recognize the need for continuity, through "staggering" of appointments or otherwise. Framing of the language of such a recommendation was referred to a drafting committee.

Tentative agreement was reached on the following recommendation as to the composition of the permanent Statistical Commission:

A Statistical Commission of not more than 12 members should be appointed by the Economic and Social Council. The members should be appointed as individuals solely on the basis of their professional eminence, expert knowledge and experience in statistical work. Consideration may be given to representation of various subject-matter fields and areas of specialized technical knowledge, and to the desirability of widespread geographic representation, but such consideration should be subordinate to considerations of technical and professional competence.

Some discussion was devoted to the desirability of having different subject-matter fields and areas of expert specialized knowledge represented in the membership of the Commission. The question was raised whether the membership should not include persons with broad administrative experience on the one hand and eminent experts in special technical fields on the other. The consensus of the Commission, however, was that no specific recommendation should be made on this point. It was suggested that representation of experts in subject-matter fields or areas of specialized technical knowledge could be obtained through membership on sub-commissions or committees.

Following a brief discussion of the question of representation of specialized agencies in the deliberations of the Commission, it was agreed:

1. That specialized agencies should not have representation on the Statistical Commission as such;
2. That it would be desirable to have the benefit of attendance by qualified persons from specialized agencies who would participate to some degree in discussions but would not vote;
3. And that, therefore, specialized agencies should be invited to attend sessions of the Commissions if and when they wish to do so, and further that the Commission may invite specialized agencies particularly to send representatives to participate in discussion of specific problems.

A recess was taken at 12:25 p.m. until 2:00 p.m.

At 2:05 p.m. the meeting was reconvened by the Chairman.

Consideration was given to the question whether members of the Commission, when they are unable to attend a particular session, should be able to send observers in their stead, who would not participate in the discussion, and, if so, whether such observers might attend sessions at the expense of the United Nations. The Commission agreed that alternates should not be recognized but that there would be no objection to attendance at sessions by observers, provided such attendance did not involve expense to the United Nations. It was pointed out that in some circumstances it might be possible for the Commission itself to effect an equitable arrangement under the provisions of Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure (E/COMMISSION/1 - 26 April 1946). It was agreed further that if the present rules of the Economic and Social Council concerning alternates are maintained, consideration should be given in appointment of members to the Commission to the likelihood of their ability to attend sessions regularly.

The Commission then proceeded to consideration of recommendations concerning the statistical organization and functions of the Secretariat.

Discussion of this matter was directed principally to the proposals contained in the "Observations by the Delegation of the United States of America" on the organization of the statistical work of the Secretariat (Appendix IV (b) to the Report of the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations, page 130-131).

It was pointed out that, through an informal agreement between the Assistant Secretary-General for Social Affairs and the Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, a decision has already been made on the question of the location of statistical functions within the Secretariat (discussed in paragraphs 12 to 15 of the "Observations"). In accordance with this agreement, a single statistical staff will be established within the Secretariat to serve both the Department of Economic Affairs and the Department of Social Affairs, as well as other organs of United Nations, although the staff will be located in the Department of Economic Affairs. The Commission agreed to endorse this arrangement and to recommend that it be formally constituted.

With reference to item (a) "Informational Service to the Secretary-General" (paragraph 2 of the "Observations", page 130), no substantive modifications were suggested. The understanding of the Commission, however, was stated to be that the "staff" referred to means the staff of the Secretariat, and not a particular unit in the immediate office of the Secretary-General. Considerable discussion was devoted to the exact meaning of the terms "analyzed and interpreted". It was suggested that in some instances the statistical staff of the Secretariat might find it difficult to decide which of conflicting compilations of statistical information should be accepted. In some cases, as for example data on foreign exchange and certain types of price data, such decisions might involve important policy considerations which the statistical staff should not be expected to evaluate. It was pointed out that "analysis" of this type is inevitable if the statistical staff is to advise the Secretary-General; certain areas of judgment, therefore, must necessarily be

exercised by the statistical staff, although its principal tasks will be compilation, analysis and synthesis. It was suggested further that the problem will be largely one of presentation; in most instances the statistical staff, if it strives for objectivity, will avoid policy problems.

It was agreed that item (d), "Collection of Statistics from Member Governments or other International Organizations" (paragraph 5 of the "Observations", page 130) belongs more logically after item (a), and this change was ordered made in the draft to be prepared subsequently. It was also agreed that this paragraph should be revised to provide for collection of statistics from other sources in addition to member governments and specialized agencies.

With reference to item (b), "Validation of Statistical Findings Employed in United Nations Proceedings" (paragraph 3 of the "Observations", page 130), considerable discussion was devoted to the meaning of the term "validation". Various alternative phrases were suggested, and the following language was agreed to:

A normal function of the Secretariat will be the collection, critical examination, evaluation and analysis of statistics from member governments, specialized agencies and other sources.

The drafting committee subsequently appointed to prepare a revised statement of the functions of the statistical staff was directed to incorporate this language in the paragraph.

No substantive changes were suggested in text of item (c), "Internal Statistical Co-ordination" (paragraph 4 of the "Observations"), although it was pointed out that this paragraph was closely related to the preceding item and might be combined with it.

With reference to item (e), "Statistical Publications" (paragraph 6 of the "Observations"), it was agreed that the following language should be substituted:

International publications relating to statistics, regular and

occasional, will be a normal and useful consequence of the collection process mentioned in the preceding item.

Some discussion was devoted to the question of co-ordination of publication of statistics by specialized agencies, but it was the consensus of the Commission, on the basis of the experience of the League of Nations, that in practice such co-ordination would present no particularly difficult problems, as specialized agencies will publish detailed statistics in their fields, while in general only summary data in such fields will be published by the statistical staff of the Secretariat. It was suggested in this connection that the problems will arise in co-ordination of basic data rather than publication.

After a brief discussion of item (f), "Collection of Statistics for Affiliated International Organization" (paragraph 7 of the "Observations"), it was decided that consideration of this question would be deferred to a later meeting in the session when relationships with specialized agencies will have been discussed in more detail. It was pointed out that it would obviously be impossible for the statistical staff of the Secretariat to collect all statistics needed by the several specialized agencies and that it would be necessary to work out agreement as questions arise. The desirability of exercising some control over the volume of requests for statistics from member governments was referred to in this connection.

With reference to item (g) "External Statistical Co-ordination" (paragraph 8 of the "Observations," page 131), it was pointed out that it would be impossible for the Secretariat to dictate or control what statistics shall or shall not be collected by specialized agencies, since the latter are to some extent autonomous. It was stated to be the understanding of the Commission that the Economic and Social Council will negotiate initial agreements which will be in the nature of general understandings; that more detailed agreements will be negotiated by the Secretariat as occasion arises; and that such negotiations in any case will be flexible and adjustable, and not fixed for all time. It was agreed that the Statistical Commission will recommend to the Economic and Social Council

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that the United Nations Secretariat establish an interagency statistical co-ordinating committee among the specialized agencies, and that provision be made for joint meetings of this committee with the Statistical Commission on occasion. The drafting committee was directed to substitute the term "reach" for "negotiate" in the first line of this paragraph.

With reference to item (h), "Recommendation of Uniform Standards" (paragraph 9 of the "Observations"), it was agreed that reference to member governments should be modified so as to provide for wider application of desirable standards to the extent feasible. The following textual changes also were agreed to:

Line 5 - add "and form of presentation" after the word "collection"

Line 6 - substitute "desirable" for the word "such"

The drafting committee was directed to revise the wording as to this item to provide for promoting the development and improvement of statistics as well as formulation and acceptance of standards.

In connection with item (i), "Statistical Consultation and Advice" (paragraph 10 of the "Observations"), it was suggested that the Commission recommend that provision be made for making service available to non-member governments and others to the extent practicable. It was agreed that the drafting committee would attempt to formulate a generalization to cover this point, providing that budgetary limitations be recognized.

With reference to item (j), "Clearing House for International Statistics" (paragraph 11 of the "Observations"), it was pointed out that the second sentence of this paragraph is intended to provide a device to assist in reducing duplication of requests for data. It was agreed that the Commission interprets this paragraph also to provide for making international statistics generally available, and not merely to establish a routine documentation service.

Consideration was then given to other functions of the statistical staff of the Secretariat which should be included in this statement.

It was proposed that the Commission recommend that provision be made for

advanced training of statistical personnel. After some discussion of the types of training which might be provided, it was agreed that the Commission would recommend the adoption of such a programme within the limits of available funds. The drafting committee was directed to formulate such a recommendation.

It was suggested that some provision be made for a field staff to assist member governments in interpretation and application of desirable uniform standards recommended by the Commission. In this connection it was pointed out that recommendations on standards, for example, might be misinterpreted or given inadequate consideration if they are merely transmitted as formal documents. The Commission agreed that some reference to provision for a suitable field staff should be included in the revised statement to be prepared by the drafting committee.

It was agreed that the first item of business at the next meeting of the Commission will be an oral report on the statistical and research work of the Economic, Financial and Transit Department of the League of Nations.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.
