Administrative Committee on Coordination

ACC/1994/24 6 January 1995

ENGLISH ONLY

REPORT OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATION COMMITTEE ON ITS SECOND SESSION

(Geneva, 17-19 October 1994)

INTRODUCTION

- 1. The Information Systems Coordination Committee (ISCC) held its second session at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 17 to 19 October 1994. The agenda for the session is reproduced in annex I to the present report and the list of participants in annex II.
 - I. MATTERS FOR ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL BY THE ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON COORDINATION

2. ISCC recommends:

- (a) That the budget for the biennium 1996-1997 remain at the same level in real terms as the regular budget for 1994-1995, excluding the transitional costs from the Advisory Committee for the Coordination of Information Systems (ACCIS) (paras. 32-33);
- (b) That its recommendation for the position of Secretary of the ISCC secretariat be submitted to the Organizational Committee (OC), at its February 1995 session for the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) (para. 42);
- (c) That the position of Secretary be filled by secondment from a participating organization, and that the maximum tenure of office be two continuous terms of two years each (para. 43);
- (d) That the third session of ISCC be held at Geneva from 19 to 21 April 1995.
 - II. WORK OF THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS COORDINATION COMMITTEE
 - A. Actions taken and decisions adopted by ISCC

3. ISCC decided:

(a) That for the purposes of drafting an ISCC work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997, the task forces and other working groups for that

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biennium prepare their individual costed proposals to be submitted to the ISCC secretariat by 31 October 1994. With that input, the ISCC Secretary, in consultation with the Chairman, would prepare a draft of the work programme and budget, which would be circulated to ISCC focal points by the third week of November for comment (paras. 32-33);

- (b) To create a working group to assist the United Nations in its response to Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/46 on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States (para. 36);
- (c) That the Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination in the United Nations System (TF/IAD) would implement, to a limited number of organizations, a pilot of a distributed on-line network offering access to a reasonable number of United Nations system information sources. This pilot will be operational before the 1995 session of the Economic and Social Council (paras. 14-19);
- (d) To distribute to ISCC focal points, after some minor revision, the report on recommended practices for United Nations organizations in information security, produced by the Task Force to Review the Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations (TF/SEC). Focal points are expected to communicate any comments to the Chairperson of the Task Force by the end of October (paras. 20-23);
- (e) That focal points send in their comments on the proposed information security brochure intended for all staff of the United Nations system by mid-November 1994, after which a second draft of the brochure would be produced and sent to the focal points for final review. The size of the print-run, language versions and associated costs would be presented to the third session of ISCC for decision (paras. 20-23).

B. Summary of discussions

1. ACC matters

4. The Chairman brought to the attention of the Committee a number of relevant administrative matters being dealt with by the Organizational Committee (OC). These included the OC decision on procedures for entities not part of the United Nations system to participate in ACC subsidiary bodies as observers; the reaffirmation by OC of the "CCAQ formula" for cost-sharing to be applied to ISCC; the drafting of procedures for the appointment of Secretaries of jointly financed bodies; the location of inter-agency secretariats; and the brochure to be produced on the ACC machinery. The Chairman noted, in particular, the desire to have all secretariats of ACC subsidiary bodies in Geneva in close proximity of one another, but would await further instructions from the United Nations. In the mean time, the secretariat would remain housed in the Petit Saconnex annex.

2. Reports of ISCC task forces

Task Force on Document Management Technology (TF/DOM)

- The Chairperson of TF/DOM gave an oral report on the work of the Task Force to date and the results of the completion of the first phase of its work programme. These included a three-day workshop for Task Force members and staff from other interested agencies. The workshop explored the issues involved in document management, particularly the definition of documents; their role in business processes of an organization; the type of staff that need to be involved when deciding on an electronic document management system; and the problems associated with migrating from existing procedures to automated systems. The lead agency of the Task Force is the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Other members include the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).
- 6. The workshop ended with a demonstration of electronic document management system products by four vendors, who had been suggested by members of the Task Force.
- 7. The Chairperson also reported on the meeting of the Task Force that followed the demonstrations. A written report on the meeting and the workshop will be distributed shortly to ISCC focal points. The issues discussed concerned five leading points: (a) the need to define common document management concepts across the United Nations system; (b) the need to increase top management awareness of the importance of document management; (c) the need to recognize that the question of document management should be addressed using an interdisciplinary approach that includes information technology specialists, information managers, librarians, records managers and other users; (d) the need to understand that document management is not a panacea for solving management problems; and (e) the need to draw a "road map" to assist organizations in the migration from older systems to contemporary ones. In discussing those issues, the members of the Committee stressed that the changes in document management processes should not be technology-driven, but user-driven, involving management at all levels. Development should be approached with the special needs of United Nations organizations in mind.
- 8. The Task Force scheduled the following three of its five outputs for the second phase of its work programme: to define further the key concepts of document management for United Nations organizations; to draft model functional requirements based on best available United Nations organization sources; and to prepare a short executive report for ACC on the need for electronic document management. These will be completed by May 1995, with a report going to ACC at its meeting in the autumn of 1995.

Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB)

- 9. The work programme of the Task Force is based on issues raised in the 1992 report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Towards an integrated library network of the United Nations system" and also on work begun by ACCIS during the biennium 1992-1993. The outputs from the group, which are scheduled for completion in December 1995, include: (a) a recommended standard for United Nations system-wide bibliographic records; (b) proposed best practices and technology tools for United Nations system-wide sharing, access and dissemination; (c) model procedures for conversion of records from various types of existing material; (d) a proof of concept pilot of on-line sharing of bibliographic records; (e) a prototype of a bibliographic utility network; (f) a set of implementation guidelines and operating management principles; and (g) an implementation strategy and cost estimates. Initially, the tasks were scheduled consecutively but are now to be carried out concurrently.
- 10. It was noted that United Nations system libraries were currently unable to share records or provide uniform access to them owing to the incompatibility of their bibliographic systems and formatting standards. The immediate objective of this Task Force, therefore, is to agree on a common data formatting standard which would form the basis of a data conversion project of bibliographic databases in selected organizations.
- 11. Six organizations will take part in the data conversion project; these are the United Nations (Geneva), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), ILO, FAO, UNESCO and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). TF/LIB will coordinate and work with the subcommittees of TF/IAD as necessary. The first meeting of the group will be held at the end of 1994. The lead agency of the Task Force is ILO; other members include the United Nations, UNFPA, FAO, UNESCO, ICAO, the World Health Organization (WHO), IMF, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and IAEA.
- 12. As agreed with TF/IAD, TF/LIB will also assume responsibility and funding for the execution of a pilot project at the International Computing Centre (ICC) to test the provision of uniform access to multiple agencies' bibliographic databases.
- 13. The role of United Nations system librarians and their positive contributions in the areas of information technology were duly recognized by the Chairman of ISCC.

14. The Task Force presented its report, which contained the results of a technical meeting held at the World Bank, together with proposals for further development. The group reiterated its objective of providing a systematic method to locate information resources and to provide a United Nations systemwide accepted method for information access and dissemination.

- 15. It was reported that the Task Force had completed the following: (a) the design and architecture of a pilot project for a multi-domain, United Nations system-wide information directory service, including network methodology and information tree design; (b) proposed conventions for United Nations system-wide inter-operability and management, such as names, content of entries, attribute types, and syntax. The model agreed upon is based on the X.500 directory service standard, in a fully distributed environment, with each organization responsible for its own Internet infrastructure, directories, management and maintenance of information resources.
- 16. The Task Force will now proceed with the implementation of a pilot system based on this model. The goal of the pilot will be to establish a preliminary mechanism for the electronic provision of information to internal users. In addition to infrastructure, attention will be paid to uniform organization and presentation of resources, to help ensure a consistent approach to interface design, and search and retrieval functions. The pilot network will be in place by the 1995 session of the Economic and Social Council.
- 17. Participants in the project include the United Nations, UNICEF, UNDP, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), ILO, WHO, the World Bank, IMF, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and ICC, with IAEA as lead agency. Agencies without their own Internet infrastructure could use another host as appropriate.
- 18. A number of United Nations agencies are currently making available more than 90 databases and many thousands of documents via the Internet. Guidelines are needed to encourage consistency of access and presentation to users. An electronic discussion group for United Nations system information providers, that is, those that are planning or operating electronic information dissemination services, would be established by November 1994. It will be used for discussion of guidelines for menus, "home pages" (welcome screens providing hypertext links to United Nations system information), indexing conventions and other technical matters related to Internet access to United Nations system information. The discussion group will be maintained by ICC on its ISCC Internet server; the group will be moderated by ITU.
- 19. In the longer term, the Task Force will continue to develop the United Nations system-wide network model for electronic dissemination of information to external users, which will carry over in the 1996-1997 work programme of ISCC.

Task Force to Review the Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations (TF/SEC)

20. The Task Force reported that it had completed its review of the Information Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations. $\underline{1}/$ The Task Force concluded that the Guidelines had needed a thorough rewrite to reflect changes in technology and the continuing growth in the importance of information within the United Nations organizations. Staff throughout an organization, including information owners, users and custodians, have a collective responsibility for information security. Their respective roles and responsibilities in ensuring

the availability, confidentiality and integrity of information and information systems are themes common to all aspects of the information security discussion.

- 21. Two documents were presented for acceptance by the Committee. The first contained a revised set of recommended information security practices for United Nations organizations, intended for senior managers, functional area managers and technical staff. The second was a brochure intended for personal computer and workstation users. The organizations that contributed to the preparation of those documents were FAO, ICAO and the World Bank, with WHO as an observer.
- 22. The Committee approved the set of recommended practices, subject to minor revisions, including the introduction of material on wide area networks and other editorial changes. The document, to be reviewed by Committee members not later than the end of October 1994, will be made available as an internal ISCC document. One copy will be sent to each of the ISCC focal points in both electronic and paper format. Each organization will be responsible for further duplication and distribution internally as appropriate.
- 23. The Committee approved in principle the production of a companion, end-user brochure. Committee members will review the first draft of the brochure, which was distributed at the meeting, by the end of November 1994. A second draft, including greater emphasis on computer viruses, will be produced based on comments received, then reviewed a second time by Committee members. A costed proposal will be submitted to the ISCC meeting in April 1995, including details on number of copies, language versions and distribution mechanisms, before a final decision will be made on publication of the brochure.
- 24. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the participants in this project and to the World Bank in particular.

Task Force on Strategic Planning

- 25. The Task Force reported that it had fulfilled its first objective of collecting and summarizing information technology strategy papers of the United Nations organizations. Papers were submitted by the United Nations, UNICEF, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNFPA, ILO, FAO, UNESCO, ICAO, WHO, the World Bank, IMF, ITU, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).
- 26. A preliminary analysis of submissions showed that there were some commonalities in the organization or presentation of strategic statements. None the less, there were a number of areas of common interest that might serve as the basis for a framework for further collaboration and reporting. With respect to information technology issues, two topics were unanimously identified as priorities for United Nations organizations: the importance of training, and the need to access and share information through electronic means.
- 27. At the first meeting of the Task Force, it was decided:

- (a) To modify the analytic framework and circulate a questionnaire to all ISCC member organizations before the end of October, with a submission deadline of 30 November;
- (b) To meet at United Nations Headquarters in New York, from 12 to 14 December, to analyse the responses and prepare a draft report for discussion at the next ISCC meeting;
- (c) To submit the final report of the Task Force to ACC at its autumn session in 1995.

Evaluation Team for the Review of ACCIS Products

28. The Chairperson of the Evaluation Team reported that a consultant, who has the requisite background in information technology and experience as a knowledgeable user of information tools and products, had been engaged and would begin his work towards the end of October 1994. The consultant would visit a number of organizations and meet with information providers as well as users. The ISCC secretariat would provide assistance as required. The final evaluation report is scheduled to be completed in the first quarter of 1995, and will be taken up at the third session of ISCC.

3. Review of work completed by the ISCC secretariat

- 29. The ISCC Secretary presented an oral review of the tasks completed by the secretariat in its transition period, as mandated in the report on the first session of ISCC, including the compilation and distribution of the <u>UN-EARTH</u> microcomputer package and the <u>Directory of United Nations Information Sources</u> (DUNDIS); the distribution of the UNS/SABIR CD-ROM of integrated bibliographic databases and the Internet brochure; and the provision of assistance to the Macrothesaurus Maintenance Secretariat at the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) by submitting new terms for consideration for the upcoming fifth edition of the thesaurus.
- 30. It was also brought to the attention of the Committee that three of the seven posts of the former ACCIS had been vacated, with the remaining staff planning to leave, as requested, by the end of 1994.
- 31. The Committee expressed its deep appreciation to the Secretary and the staff of ACCIS for their outstanding work for that Committee and for their recent work on the transition to ISCC. The Committee also authorized its Chairman to review with the Secretary and the United Nations the final arrangements relating to her separation.

4. Work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997

32. Faced with the responsibility of producing an ISCC work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997 for submission to the United Nations by early December 1994, the Committee appointed a temporary working group comprising

UNDP, UNHCR, FAO, ITU, the lead agencies of the task forces, and ICC, to prepare the groundwork for further discussion by the Committee. A preliminary oral report was subsequently given for consideration by the Committee.

33. The Committee agreed that the budget for the biennium 1996-1997 should remain at the same level in real terms as the regular budget for 1994-1995, excluding the transitional costs from ACCIS. After receiving the preliminary report, it was decided that, for the biennium 1996-1997, the task forces and other working groups would prepare their individual costed proposals, to be submitted to the ISCC secretariat by 31 October 1994. With that input, the ISCC Secretary, in consultation with the Chairman, would prepare a draft of the work programme and budget, to be circulated to ISCC focal points by the third week of November for comment. Among the potential new priorities for 1996-1997 were disaster recovery, teleconferencing and remote conference servicing. Former ACCIS products might also be reviewed for inclusion depending on the outcome of their evaluation. The extent to which those activities could be included would depend on the continuing activities brought forward from the 1994-1995 work programme.

5. Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/46

- 34. ISCC took note of Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/46 entitled "The need to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States", and discussed its bearing on the work of the Committee. While much remains to be accomplished in the development of "easy, economical, uncomplicated and unhindered access" to United Nations system information resources, it was felt that United Nations organizations were making progress towards this goal, given current budgetary constraints.
- 35. The commitment on the part of the organizations to establish Internet connectivity, and the growing number of services, information and tools available to Member States through this network, directly address the concerns expressed in the resolution. It was further noted that the results of the ISCC task forces would resolve several of the more important technological and information management issues that remain in the creation of an accessible network for the United Nations system.
- 36. A working group consisting of UNDP and ITU was formed to assist the United Nations in the preparation of a written report responding to the resolution, on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to be completed by May 1995.

6. <u>Internet services at ICC</u>

37. The Committee heard an oral report on the status of Internet services at ICC, including the installation of an Internet server that was now fully operational. As part of these services, ICC was interested in creating "home page(s)" for official United Nations system information. The Committee decided

to review the "home page" idea in the light of the experience gained by the discussion group which will explore this issue in the global context of providing Internet access to United Nations system information (see para. 18).

- 38. The Committee reiterated the importance of connection to the Internet for all participating organizations in ISCC. It also encouraged those agencies that wished to make their information available on the Internet, but did not have the means to do so, to consider using outside hosts such as ICC.
- 39. ICC hosted a demonstration of the MOSAIC retrieval interface for the World Wide Web on the Internet.

7. Oral update on information technology matters of common interest

- 40. Each organization presented an oral report on its information technology development.
- 41. In addition, the representative of ITU reported to the Committee on the recent ITU Plenipotentiary Conference held in Kyoto in October 1994. The Committee took note of those resolutions of the Conference affecting the United Nations system, in particular resolution COM4/25, which reaffirmed the use of the United Nations Telecommunication Network for the telecommunication traffic of the specialized agencies; resolution COM4/29, which covered the support of United Nations telecommunication facilities to members hosting United Nations peace-keeping forces; and resolution PLEN/6, covering measures to enable the United Nations to carry out fully any mandate under Article 75 of the Charter of the United Nations.

8. Personnel issues

- 42. The Committee, in private session, took note of five applications received for the position of Secretary. It was decided to request member organizations to advise the Chairman in writing of their views on the candidates within three weeks. It was also decided to establish an interview panel, composed of the Chairman and representatives of the United Nations, ILO, GATT and WMO, to draw up a ranked short-list of three applicants. The Committee authorized the interview panel to submit the short-list, on its behalf, to the Organizational Committee, at its February 1995 session, for ACC.
- 43. The position of Secretary will be filled by secondment from a participating organization, and the maximum tenure of office will be two continuous terms of two years each.
- 44. The Committee agreed that the Chairman would make interim arrangements through WHO to provide essential secretariat services for the Committee between the completion of the contract of the present Secretary on 31 December 1994 and the starting date of the new Secretary once appointed.

9. Other business

- 45. The attention of the Committee was drawn to two JIU reports in which information technology issues were mentioned: "A review of telecommunications and related information technologies in the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/94) and "Accountability and oversight in the United Nations system" (draft). There was some question about the role of the Committee in commenting on or responding to points raised in such documents regarding system-wide, information management-related questions. The Chairman agreed to contact the Secretary of ACC regarding this issue.
- 46. ICC reported that several United Nations organizations, as well as other international bodies, were currently discussing the possibility of introducing a shared metropolitan network for the Geneva area in order to reduce overall telecommunication costs. An informal working group, coordinated by ITU, is meeting to examine models for infrastructure, ownership, implementation, scheduling, costs and benefits.

Notes

1/ United Nations publication, Sales No. GV.E.91.0.20.

Annex I

AGENDA

- 1. Opening of the meeting.
- 2. Approval of the agenda.
- 3. Follow-up to the report of ISCC on its first session.
- 4. ACC matters.
- 5. Reports of ISCC task forces:
 - (a) Task Force on Document Management Technology (TF/DOM);
 - (b) Task Force on Inter-library Cooperation, Standards and Management (TF/LIB);
 - (c) Task Force on Information Access and Dissemination in the United Nations System (TF/IAD);
 - (d) Task Force to Review the Information System Security Guidelines for United Nations Organizations;
 - (e) Task Force on Strategic Planning;
 - (f) Evaluation Team for the Review of ACCIS Products.
- 6. Review of ISCC work programme for the remainder of 1994-1995.
- 7. Preparation of the work programme and budget for the biennium 1996-1997.
- 8. Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/46 on the need to harmonize and improve United Nations information systems for optimal utilization and accessibility by all States.
- 9. Internet services at ICC.
- 10. Oral update on information technology matters of common interest.
- 11. Personnel issues:
 - (a) Appointment of Secretary;
 - (b) Other matters.
- 12. Date of next meeting.

13. Other business:

- (a) Geneva metropolitan area network (MAN);
- (b) ISCC response to JIU reports.

Annex II

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ACC/1994/24 English Page 14

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