

DOCUMENTS CONTROL

TO: The Editor of the Journal
FROM: The Director of Documents Control

SUBJECT: Journal policy
Ref. DC. 321/8

2 March 1953

1. The Journal, for which you have now assumed responsibility, has been the subject of much discussion and criticism, and has undergone a succession of changes of both form and content.

2. As you take over, it is perhaps appropriate that I should summarize the present position and thereby provide you with a general directive for your work.

Purpose of the Journal

3. The first, in order of succession, of the purposes which the Journal serves is to provide a statement of the meetings to be held on the day of publication, together with their agendas, and, occasionally, a statement of meetings which are planned for the next few days. This enables both delegations and Secretariat to be ready to deal with the day's meetings and to prepare for those that are to follow. You will appreciate that this part of the Journal is a very important instrument for the Secretary-General and his Office, delegations secretaries and heads of Secretariat Departments.

4. The second purpose is to provide a guide as to places and times of meetings.

5. The third purpose of the Journal is to give a succinct account of what happened at the previous day's meetings. This part of the Journal, again, must be visualized as an instrument to be used by delegations and Secretariat for the immediate purposes of the current work, e.g., delegation discussions and briefing meetings in which the line to be followed is determined and requests for instructions are decided, discussions in the Secretariat as to preparations, documentation, etc.

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6. It is true that the provisional "blue" records are out within 48 hours, but the answer required is to the question "where do we stand now?" Therefore, the immediacy of the Journal record is of its essence. The answer to the above question will no doubt sometimes require, in addition to the reading of this immediate Journal record, a survey of past developments, but, although the S.R. or P.V. series will provide for this if detail is required, the collection of Journals has the advantage of much greater handiness whenever a general outline will suffice.

7. The fourth purpose of the Journal is to announce signatures and ratifications of, and accessions to, international conventions and like instruments drawn up under the auspices of the United Nations.

8. The fifth purpose which the Journal is available to serve if occasion arises is that of the promulgating organ for any Headquarter site regulations. Publication in the Journal effects this promulgation within the Headquarter site itself.

9. However, when, for practical and legalistic reasons it is desired to make this promulgation conform also to the requirements of United States civil law, that is when the United Nations authorities wish to make certain that the text concerned is regarded as having been made available to the public at large, that text is also published in some outside organ. An example is afforded by the Safety Regulations which were promulgated in this twofold manner.

10. The sixth purpose is the publication of announcements. For those which are addressed to the Secretariat alone other vehicles are available. Normally, therefore, though announcements concerning Secretariat matters are not excluded, they must be such as to be of interest to delegations.

Responsibility for contents

11. Responsibility for the contents of the Journal should be considered in two stages.

12. Primary responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the programme of meetings rests with the Conference Planning Section. That Section is also responsible for ensuring that the material is supplied in good time, subject only to those alterations which may have to be made belatedly because of changes which were themselves belated.

13. Similarly primary responsibility for the accuracy and prompt delivery of summaries rests with the substantive Departments or other Units acting as secretariats to the bodies reported on. They are also required to conform to existing rules* limiting the amount and kind of material that can be included.

* These rules may now require some review. This matter is, however, discussed further on.

14. Nevertheless, the Editor's responsibility for exercising all possible vigilance remains.

15. In respect of the material received from the Conference Planning Service he has, of course, no assured means of detecting errors or omissions by scrutiny and could only be expected to query something that looked patently wrong.

16. With respect to meeting summaries on the other hand he should keep himself as fully informed as he can of current proceedings and developments, in order that he may be able to detect, as far as possible, any inadvertent errors or inadequacies in the material supplied to him. By way of background, he should also seek to acquire a competent grasp of procedural problems.

17. The Editor's scrutiny should not, however, be limited to the mere detection of errors. He must qualify himself to pick out in the material supplied to him any passages which may be inadvertently tactless or otherwise objectionable or unpolitic.

18. That such passages may occur is perhaps hard to credit and difficult for the Departments concerned to admit. But the verdict of experience is clear, rush conditions aiding, they do occur at times.

19. It is specifically the Editor's responsibility to maintain a reasonable uniformity of style and terminology. In this connection he must bear in mind that whereas verbatim records reflect both the style and the emotional approach of Delegations, in the short accounts of the Journal it is the Secretariat that speaks. It gives the purport of statements, not the words; it gives the bare facts, dispassionably and using the recognized parlance of the Organization. This is specially true of titles for instance.

Discharge of Editor's responsibility

20. Whenever the copy supplied contains errors, inadequacies, or unfortunately worded passages, or if it is too voluminous, the Editor should refer back to the authors in the first place and seek their agreement for a change, unless indeed an error is so patent that he can correct it without further ado.

21. Erroneous or ill-worded matter is unlikely to cause any difficulty when thus referred back. The matter of volume may be more difficult. The Editor should therefore know that he has both the duty and the power to press for reductions and, if the reductions are not forthcoming or if (Geneva cables) he cannot refer back, undertake them himself to the best of his ability.

22. In making these decisions, he must have due regard to maintaining a suitable over-all proportion as between the reports on organs of different importance and extending equal treatment to bodies of equivalent status, as well as to limiting the size of the Journal as a whole.

23. Should the Editor find himself confronted with one of these difficulties at a late hour and should he be unable despite every effort to reach the officer concerned in the matter, he must then make his own decision. In dealing with material which appears impolitic or otherwise objectionable, or with matter which appears on the face of it erroneous, where he himself does not know the facts, he must do the best he can to seek safety in omission or vagueness. However, in these difficult circumstances, it is not to be expected of him that he can invariably avoid making some mistake himself. It must be clearly understood therefore that no complaint can lie against him so long as he fulfils two conditions. His solution must have been both cautious and reasonably intelligent according to the facts as he knew them.

Organization of information supply

24. It is the responsibility of the Editor to ensure that all those who are required to supply information are apprized in good time of the nature and limits of their obligations.

25. Apart from the Conference Planning Service with which there is a standing arrangement, these comprise:

- (a) the secretaries of all United Nations organs holding their sessions at Headquarters,
- (b) the secretaries of all Headquarter-based organs holding their sessions outside Headquarters,
- (c) the secretaries of regional commissions.

26. As regards the kind of material which is required, the Editor possesses at present a stock of circulars,* giving the necessary indications, which can be remitted to those not already familiar with the procedure.

27. The Editor must make the necessary arrangements as each organ session begins, using these circulars as needful.

* These also may need some review. See further on under "Kind and amount of information".

28. In the case of Headquarter-based organs holding sessions outside, he must ascertain which officer is to be sent out as secretary and make all arrangements with him before that officer leaves.

29. Such arrangements include the sending of a daily cable to the Journal. This can frequently be combined, for the sake of economy, with the cable which is sent more or less daily by the organ secretary to the Headquarter substantive Department.

30. Arrangements are in existence with the Cable Service for the Journal to receive an immediate copy of such dual-purpose cables. The Secretary-General's Executive Officer has, on the other hand, expressly directed that the Journal cable shall not be merged with the "Comipress" one.

31. There are at present no definite arrangements for reporting ECAFE and ECLA, but there is a standing arrangement for the cabling to us of reports on ECE sessions at Geneva.

32. We ought to consider whether we should, and can, bring these other two regional Commissions into line in some more regular way. Please, therefore, let me see a collection of the cabled summaries received from ECE together with any comments or suggestions you may have on this point.

33. For the submission of the regular material from New York sessions, time limits are laid down in the circulars. The question how these work out in practice has a bearing on the matter of the overlap between the work of the editors and that of the Reproduction shop and hence upon editorial practice as regards "putting the Journal to bed". The suitability of these time limits and the problem of possible changes are therefore discussed under Production: Limits of Editor's responsibility.

Language editions

34. The Journal appears in a bilingual (English-French) edition except during the General Assembly when it is issued in three separate monolingual editions (English, French and Spanish).

Size of Journal and kind and amount of information

35. The elements which enter consideration for publication in the Journal have already been enumerated at the outset. All are practically self-delimiting except for the agendas and summaries of meetings, as to which further indications are required.

36. Agendas - As a measure of economy, Journal policy is to publish the whole session agenda at the beginning. This makes it possible in many cases to eliminate a separate series of mimeographed agendas. Since delegates have to have the session agenda at the very outset, when it is discussed as such, the draft agenda will be published for the opening day or before. Fortunately for the Journal, draft agendas are rarely modified in any substantial degree except by agenda committees properly so called, whose debate and conclusions are of course reported on as such. However, if important changes are made which alter the whole numbering sequence of a complex original draft, there may be a case for republishing the complete agenda, as amended, in order to save confusion. This is a possibility for the Editor to consider, but to use very sparingly.

37. The general agenda having been published in this way, the daily agendas which are published thereafter can then be limited strictly to the expected day's business, without the intelligibility and coherence of the whole sessional record of proceedings being in any way sacrificed, and the Editor can and should insist on their being so limited.

38. The annotation of these agendas, i.e. the indication of the main documentation required for the discussion of each item, is an essential requirement from the point of view of the committee secretary whose efforts to run an effective debate will be frustrated if delegates arrive without the needful papers.

39. From time to time such documentation inevitably includes papers still under active discussion, which have been carried forward from a previous session and should therefore not have to be distributed again.

40. The mention of these particular papers should be avoided if this is at all possible. If, however, it is insisted on, then the Editor should lend himself to any device that it may be possible to work out with Distribution (e.g., asterisking coupled with a note "Already distributed") in order to check the flow of repeat requests.

41. Under perfect conditions of servicing, all vital documentation should be out in time. If, unfortunately, some paper has been delayed and is not available for issue when required it will help Distribution if its mention can be momentarily avoided.

42. However, if it is the view of the organ secretary that Delegations have to be advised, even though they must be asked to wait, the secretary's wishes must prevail.

43. On the other hand, if the annotations extend to all the background documents, the Distribution Services have complained that they are flooded with requests for documents which are in short supply. They feel that reliance upon the agenda annotations and the procuring of documents on the spot then becomes an all too easy alternative to proper documentation and briefing arrangements within delegations. They also fear the type of individual with a collector's bent, who is thereby offered a guide to the assembly of whole dossiers of papers he does not need, should not have, and will merely waste.

44. Accordingly, it is the aim of editorial policy to ensure that the annotations on the full agendas published in the Journal should be adequate, but not so elaborate as to include old background documents and papers already discussed and disposed of.

45. On the other hand, such agendas being most valuable instruments for Production Control, they should contain a reference to all documents which are currently produced for the session, subject only to the omissions mentioned above.

46. This is not a matter with which the Editor is likely to be able to deal outright chemin faisant. He should however keep an eye on this matter, take note of any criticisms received, from the Distribution Service in particular, and refer specific cases of apparent bad practice to the Director of Documents Control for discussion with the Department concerned.

Summaries of meetings

47. This is the most difficult of the material to be handled especially since, if one took all the possible components, the result might be quite excessively elaborate.

48. There are in fact no less than seven of these, viz.

- (1) An indication of the agenda item when the debate on it is opened or resumed at subsequent meetings;
- (2) An indication by symbol number of the paper or papers (amendments) under discussion and of their authors;
- (3) An indication of the text or substance of such papers;
- (4) An indication of the countries which speak in the debate;

- (5) An indication of the position each or any group of them takes up;
- (6) An indication of the decision reached on each point;
- (7) An indication of the voting on each point.

49. Except possibly when certain highly important meetings of main organs are reported, the Journal must aim at something much more modest than a full treatment of these elements.

50. For instance, even in the longer summaries, item (5) is usually reduced to a mention only of authors of resolutions who accept amendments.

51. Furthermore, the details given under (3) depend upon the amount of detail and elaboration of the text considered as well as upon its political importance. Where the account would become unnecessarily long, various devices must be brought into play to shorten this material. One method is to delete the preambular paragraphs and quote only the operative clauses. A still further simplification lies in not even quoting these but giving in reported speech the essential purport of the proposal.

52. In the accounts of the debates of the Assembly, Assembly Committees and Councils, the above simplifications judiciously applied should yield satisfactory results.

53. The same is true of organic commissions. Although in their case, as well as in that of lesser bodies, still further possibilities of simplification may offer themselves, viz.

- (a) Not reporting on some or all of the draft amendments to main proposals, and indicating only the final result;
- (b) On some or all points not reporting the debate at all, but simply stating what result the committee or sub-committee reached;
- (c) Omitting the voting on points of detail, or even on the whole, and merely reporting the decision.

54. The above considerations are directed mainly at achieving a certain sliding scale of reporting according to the importance of the body concerned. This scale is however valid only for the series of reports as a whole, and not for any one report, for the importance of the day's proceedings must also enter into the appraisal. Even a

Council may have a meeting about which there is little to say whilst some particular day's work in a lesser body may be difficult to compress within very narrow limits.

55. Since the reports of the proceedings of bodies meeting outside Headquarters do not serve as a "tactical" guide for Delegations participating in the debates, they can and should be made as succinct as possible.

56. However, especially where the report concerns a Headquarter-based body, it must still convey to New York readers an adequate account of the proceedings, and this consideration will preclude the condensation of Council meeting summaries in particular beyond a certain limit.

General limits of size

57. Apart from these criteria a general policy has been promulgated concerning the size of the Journal. It is that, save during the sessions of the Assembly or of the Economic and Social Council, the bi-lingual Journal should be kept within the limits of four pages - going to six or eight only in exceptional circumstances.

58. Pressure for a reduction in size has come partly from the Publishing Division because of the fear of overburdening their staff especially at night. This difficulty, though real, cannot however be allowed to stand in the way of the publication of the material which is adjudged necessary, and the immediate decision on this point rests with the Editor, who may consult his supervisor if he thinks necessary.

59. The general policy as to average Journal size rests with his superiors in the Division, Bureau, Department and Higher Administration. It must be admitted that, in the past, criticisms have come down this very line of authority, indeed from the Secretary-General himself; and it is this which has led, in the main, to the imposition of general limits.

60. Although it must be conceded that there have been some over-generous accounts of debates, it may nevertheless be said that the intent of editorial policy has been throughout to produce briefer accounts than those which, regrettably, caught the eye of our critics.

61. That we have thereby incurred general restrictions is unfortunate because the fixed limitation of space which has resulted imposes a severe handicap.

62. The reason is the following. As will already have appeared, although we are able to simplify and condense in the manner explained the type of report we give on the lesser organs, this does not mean that we can keep every individual daily report even about the proceedings of a sub-committee within set limits. Such a body may spend many meetings on inconclusive debates which need yield us no report at all. At the end of its session it may, however, spend a whole day making one final decision after another. In such an event, the Journal report, even if reduced to skeleton terms, may still cover three quarters of a column or more.

63. The clash between these necessities and the general limit of size has led us at times to defer publishing part of our reports until the next day. This is deplorable because it sacrifices that immediacy of reporting which, as already stated, is of the essence of the Journal. The Editor's policy, if he is driven to this necessity, should be to sacrifice for later reporting those meetings which are held outside Headquarters (except, obviously, council meeting reports, whose presence in the Journal alongside material from other organs is always important and one of the justifications for an occasional six or eight-page Journal).

64. However, it would be better all round if sufficient confidence in the editorial policy and practice of the Journal could be restored to secure us some relaxation of this rather rigid rule about size.

65. I am therefore anxious that the Editor should carefully scrutinize the material he receives and, whenever necessary urge modifications and reductions of such a kind that we arrive at an adequate and regular pattern of reporting for organs of different size and importance. If the authorities of the Secretariat are given the feeling that this has been achieved, we may then be allowed a freer hand (subject to the possibilities of Reproduction) to let the Journal vary a little in size, with larger issues offset by the smaller ones, whilst still keeping it between reasonable average limits.

66. The upshot of such a standardization of method may then be a revision of the instructional circulars the Journal supplies to newcomers in the ranks of reporting secretaries. The existing ones should in any case be examined as already noted above. They were drawn up more than two years ago, and may no longer be strictly conformable to our practice as it now is.

Production: Limits of Editor's responsibility

67. The question whether the Editor and his staff should hand over responsibility for the production of the Journal to the Reproduction shop as soon as they have prepared final copy, or whether they should wait to check the final proofs, has been a matter of debate in the past and poses somewhat of a dilemma.

68. The preferences of the Printing shop have properly lain in the direction of assuming full responsibility for the accurate reproduction of the copy and of eliminating supervision by the Editor or Assistant Editor; though in actual practice the Editorial staff will still have the uneasy feeling that the unreflecting reader may wrongly hold them responsible even for any mistakes that may occur in the Printing shop.

69. Furthermore, the material is necessarily supplied to the shop over a period of hours and in an order different from that of its presentation. Feeding of material, composition, stripping up, and the two proof-readings are therefore overlapping operations, in the course of which much of the proof-reading (in French at least) has in practice been done by the Editorial staff.

70. Since, moreover, the total bulk of the material cannot always be determined until a late phase of the proceedings and last-minute cuts - occasionally of material already set up - have to be made to bring the whole within desirable limits of space, it is sometimes difficult for the Editorial staff to extricate themselves entirely from this phase of production.

71. On the other hand, and here is the other horn of the dilemma, the strain on our small staff if they were to "put the Journal to bed" every night, would be excessive.

72. I should like you to study this situation.

73. First, there is the reception of material to consider. Your records already show, I understand, the times at which summaries and information on programmes of meetings are received each day. As soon as you have collected a substantial number of these daily records during the coming committee season, I should like to go through them with you in order to determine whether there is any need (and possibility) of representations to individual departments and units with a view to prompt submission. And generally we should consider whether, by means of pressure of this kind, we can do anything substantial to improve existing practice and bring the submission phase within narrower and more favourable limits of time.

74. Secondly, I should like you, in conformity with the discussions we have held with Mr. de Walt, to make a trial of leaving the final proof-reading to the Printing shop. This will require two things:

- (a) An effort to make the submitted copy as clean and perfect as possible;
- (b) Safeguarding yourself by always taking home a complete set of duplicates of the copy, so that the shop can, if necessary, consult you by phone.

75. Will you then please report to me on the result. With the aid of these data we may perhaps be able to answer the question how far our burden can be lightened by organizing a more compactly timed operation, and how far if at all we can extricate ourselves from the proof-reading and other on-the-spot jobs we do in the Printing shop.

The Editor's functions - Administrative aspects

76. Administratively the Editor of the Journal is responsible for organizing the supply of information and for establishing and maintaining liaison to that end with all the parties concerned, that is to say the Secretary-General's Executive Office, the General Assembly Co-ordination Committee (by personal attendance), the Conference Planning Section, secretaries of United Nations Organs, responsible officers in regional commissions and the Cable Service.

77. He is also responsible for the liaison and working arrangements with the Reproduction shop.

78. Within his own Unit he supervises the work of translation, re-drafting, revision, typing, and ensures that the copy is adequate and complete.

79. Under the general guidance of his supervisor, he has administrative responsibility for his staff, organizes the hours and schedules of work, plans leave, replacements, etc., and makes any necessary proposals concerning the recruitment of new staff, more particularly during periods of expansion, such as General Assembly sessions. He is also responsible for submitting periodic reports on their work.