REPORT OF INFORMATION / RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

Prepared on the occasion of the UIA Council Meeting, 27-28 May 1999
(as a supplement to the report to the General Assembly in 1998)

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I. PUBLICATION ON PAPER (current)

A. Yearbook of International Organizations: Editorial work on the Yearbook of International Organizations continued according to the regular annual production cycle and despite the need for reorganization due to departure of key personnel. Significant changes include splitting Volume 1 into two physical parts (1a and 1b). Continuing efforts have been made to improve the bibliographical coverage of studies of international organization in Volume 4.

B. Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential: Work on the electronic version of some databases in this publication continues under contract, as described below.

C. Who’s Who in International Organizations: Editorial work on the new edition of Who’s Who in International Organizations continues, with a view to publication before the end of the year.

D. International Congress Calendar: This is the subject of a separate report.

E. Transnational Associations: This is the subject of a separate report.

II. PUBLICATION ON CD-ROM (current)

A. Yearbook Plus: International Organizations and Biographies: The annual edition is planned in the normal manner for production before October.

B. Encyclopedia Plus: Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential: There remains the possibility of producing a CD version within the context of the contract through which some Encyclopedia databases are currently being developed.

III. PUBLICATION ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB (current): A distinction should be made between the 11,000 static pages placed by the UIA on the Agora service provider and the UIA databases accessible dynamically on the UIA NT server connected to the Agora service.

A. Static pages: These continue to be maintained on a relatively low priority basis. They generate a significant amount of feedback and presumably also serve a major marketing function.

B. Dynamic pages: Most UIA databases are now “accessible” on the web. However the only databases freely accessible to “Guests” are those relating to the current development contracts of the Encyclopedia, namely the Problems and Strategies databases. The other databases are only accessible for test purposes.

It is worth noting the understandable explosion in activity of international organizations on the Web. Statistics on e-mail and websites of international organizations are presented in Annex 2.
IV. NEW AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

A. Future publication on the World Wide Web

The UIA is in process of shifting from focus on the static server to a hybrid focus in which users of the static pages will be referred to databases accessible from the dynamic server. This involves:

- User authentication (password, etc) through which access to particular databases will be restricted according to a wide range of marketing, partnership, sponsorship and editorial needs.
- Ability of a distant user to correct, supplement or criticize entries as a whole in any database, or any field in that entry
- Ability to display back to the user all comments already received on an entry, by field (with the possibility of e-mail contact with other users supplying comments)
- Ability to redisplay the entry with comments incorporated into the body of the description by field to provide an overview of the amended entry
- Ability to qualify comments (e.g., "5-star", "3-star", "0-star") according to a system of accreditation
- Ability for distant editors to edit particular entries.

Further work is required on this facility but it is currently being tested with selected distant Web users.

B. European Commission contract: Information Context for Biodiversity Conservation

Work on this DG-XIII contract (January 1998-December 1999) is proceeding satisfactorily with respect to development of the Problems and Strategies databases (see Annex 1 for further details).

Work on the web access facilities is proceeding satisfactorily, as noted above.

Work on the multi-media dimensions of this project is proceeding less rapidly, but the test interfaces already suggest dramatic new approaches to access to UIA data (see demo).

A. Interactive Health Ecology Access Links (IHEAL) Project

The UIA is a subconsultant to the NGO UNED-UK, which has been funded by the European Commission (DG-XI) to support work in preparation for the June 1999 Conference of European Environment and Health Ministers. The UIA is responsible for the text content of a participative web database (extension of the Encyclopedia); others are responsible for a GIS (mapping) component and organization database. This is a pilot project solely to provide a demonstration at the Healthy Planet Forum, the NGO event which runs parallel to the Conference of Ministers in June 1999. The estimated total budget for the project is 63,888 EUR (£42,938), of which the UIA has 23,526 EUR. The consortium of consultants is seeking further funds for full-blown development of the project.
V. CURRENT UIA FUND-RAISING AND PROJECT INITIATIVES
(see Annex 1)

- **infoDev:** Work on this project proposal to the World Bank has been completed and submitted under the title: Interactive Contextual Environmental Planning Tool (InterCEPT) for developing countries. A final decision is currently awaited from the Bank.

- **Fifth Framework Call for Proposals:** This new call was put out by the European Commission in March 1999. A number of possibilities, complementary to the UIA’s INFO2000, infoDev and IHEAL initiatives, will be considered for submission by June 1999.

- **Rural Development Information:** The UIA is in discussion with various groups associated with rural and community development projects (in Scotland, Palestine, India and Australia) concerning linkage (and distance learning) between a virtual community (Internet) and “real” local communities, using the development of one to support the development of another. This would be a further extension of the INFO2000 / infoDev initiatives.

- **Media Project:** Development Alternatives has suggested that we jointly submit a proposal to the European Commission to obtain media funds relating to their initiatives in India. This is being investigated by Allan Howard to see whether it is of interest.

- **EU-India Economic Cross-Cultural Programme:** A project under this programme has been drafted together with Development Alternatives and offices of the Programme’s offices in Brussels and New Delhi.

- **MyTown:** During her last visit to Australia, Nadia McLaren initiated discussions with the MyTown consortium based in Melbourne. MyTown is an online empowerment resource for local community development. It is currently in pilot planning phase, under the support of major corporate sponsors

VI. PUBLISHING AND MARKETING

A. Contractual relationships with SAUR

These continue to be satisfactory.

B. Sales and marketing

Reported sales are maintained in a difficult market, possibly due to the web marketing effectively undertaken through the UIA static pages.
C. Unsold copies

The pulping by Saur of the unsold copies of the regular publications continue to be a source of regret.

VII. IN-HOUSE COMPUTER SYSTEM

The UIA computers continue to require replacement or upgrading, notably to provide web and e-mail access from workstations continues.

This upgrading process is also a response to problems potentially associated with the Y2K issue.

VIII. RESEARCH-RELATED ISSUES

Research reports developed by UIA staff continue to be placed on the static web page facility.

The Bettati report has been placed on the web, in the same manner, as a means of inviting further comment and initiative.

IX. ORGANIZATIONAL AND PERSONNEL ISSUES

Work on publications is increasingly undertaken with much greater reliance on:

• work away from the Brussels secretariat: the logo project was largely undertaken from Leuven (home of a former UIA staff member), as is the current Who's Who project, and as are Yearbook commentary; major editing of the Yearbook is now down very successfully in London, following a move of a highly experienced co-editor of the Yearbook for family reasons; development and production of the CD-ROM is being done in Montreal

• electronic mail and file transfer: with editors working at a distance, the UIA has effectively been experimenting with a form of "tele-working"; international organizations increasingly communicate with the UIA by e-mail, notably concerning the Yearbook; much information is obtained from the Web. It is planned to further experiment with this mode of operating in the light of new developments with dynamic Web publishing on the new NT server.

• flexible working arrangements: volunteers made some contributions to the Encyclopedia (and hopefully will continue to do so in the future) and to the preparatory work for the French translation of the Yearbook; stagiaires have been used for translation work. In some cases this has been converted into paid work, even in the form of contracts.

These developments are partly in response to budgetary constraints, to the needs of individuals, or to the desire to benefit, or continue to benefit, from known expertise with UIA data and programs. It is expected that the UIA involvement with the Web will further change the balance and nature of secretariat operations.
Since August 1997, the UIA is having to deal with the departure of a number of significant editorial personnel working on the Yearbook -- whether due to resignation as the consequence of childbirth, moves to other jobs, or to retirement. Work at critical times has also been handicapped by extended illness. The fact that the 1998 Yearbook production cycle kept to deadlines was a result of exceptional initiative by those who had to compensate.

As the table below shows, this pattern represents a serious weakening of the editorial staff in a situation where experience and continuity are vital. At the beginning of 1999, there will be 3 full-time and 6 part-time (equivalent to 6 full-time) which is a slight increase on the 3 full-time and 5 part-time (equivalent to 5.5 full-time) in 1994. But those in 1994 had an average of 13 years experience, compared to 11 years experience in 1999. If the averages are weighted to take account of part-time contributions, the figures become 8.9 years for 1994 against 6.7 for 1999.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Initials</th>
<th>UIA years</th>
<th>Left UIA</th>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>New (started)</th>
<th>New (left)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior editor</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Feb 99</td>
<td>Retiring</td>
<td>PZ (Apr 98)</td>
<td>Oct 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior editor</td>
<td>JN</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td>Mar-Apr 98</td>
<td>(Temp. illness+)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Apr 98</td>
<td>New job</td>
<td>IZ (Aug 98)</td>
<td>Jan99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>MvB</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>Sep 97</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>LY (Jan 98)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>CF</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Nov 98</td>
<td>Child+job</td>
<td>LH (Oct 98)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>MG</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filing</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Aug 98</td>
<td>Dismissed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**YB Support:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initials</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computers Production</td>
<td>TJ</td>
<td>+20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Computers Editing</td>
<td>JF</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>+10</td>
<td>Jan-Mar 99</td>
<td>(Temp. absence)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with many employers, the UIA has difficulty locating suitable (and affordable) personnel who can be expected to stay long enough (several publication cycles) to acquire the levels of expertise necessary to undertake the more challenging editorial and research tasks -- which are increasingly computer-related. Trial periods for potentially useful people tend to be long, and expensive if the person finally proves unsatisfactory.
The above departures were preceded by representations from editorial staff collectively early in 1997 concerning salary and conditions. Salaries were increased late in Spring of 1998. It cannot be concluded that salaries have been the sole cause of this weakening of staff, but they have certainly contributed to it and make replacements a challenge. The effort to replace the senior editor (retiring early 1999) was an expensive failure due to the time necessary to determine whether the person could comprehend and take on the many dimensions of the task. Replacement of staff scheduled to leave is also expensive when double salaries have effectively to be paid whilst a new person is trained during the presence of the departing person --even though the productivity of the new person will take time to manifest.

X. STRATEGIC ISSUES

The long-term strategic issues were discussed in a report to an earlier Council meeting (Reflections on a Possible UIA Information Strategy). What follows is an updated checklist:

A. Positive features

1. Healthy financial position, with prudent reserves
2. Maintaining sales level (surprisingly good, according to Saur) in a declining reference market
3. Good relations with principal distributor (Saur)
4. Solid core of dedicated personnel of proven capacity in producing complex information products of a professional quality on a continuing basis under improbable conditions
5. Solid well-financed, contracted projects (with others in the pipeline)
6. Strategically well-positioned for the emerging knowledge society
7. Solid computer base: paid-up hardware base (workstations, etc); appropriate software; good in-house expertise
8. Respected image amongst information users, web document readers, and participants at conferences where UIA personnel make presentations (often by invitation)
9. Respected relationship to professionals in the highly competitive meeting industry (Associate Members)
10. Substantial (11,000 pages), appreciated, well-visited (5,000 hits/day) website -- strategically designed in relation to dynamic page serving in test mode
11. Ready to roll on innovative interactive, participative relationship with user-suppliers of information over the web
12. Good track record of de-centralized computer work (significantly positioned for any transition to editorial teleworking)
13. Credible, cutting edge opportunities (consonant with EU Fifth Framework for Research and Technology Development now shifting to “research which focuses on the social and economic problems which face society today”, and the like)

14. Operational implementation of innovative visual interfaces to respond the crises of meaning, overview and information overload characteristic of the information society and the UIA’s information in particular

15. Core preoccupation with highlighting and enabling relationships (hyperlinks) between initiatives crossing category boundaries, and the manner in which such patterns can be more meaningfully comprehended, that is remarkably consistent with a 21st century interpretation of what might otherwise be understood as a completely outdated name: Union of International Associations.

16. Demonstrated continuing ability to sustain the above, despite the challenges identified below

B. Challenging features

1. Fragile personnel situation -- 7 key people lost in past 18 months (notably with respect to longer-term continuity and competence, replacement possibilities at current salary levels, and the intelligent attention to detail required on massive long-term jobs, -- especially where such expertise is widely sought at generous commercial rates) -- with consequent effects on morale and challenges to performance

2. Fragile, or mutually indifferent, relationship to traditional UN-IGOs, significantly challenged by their own problems, budgets and politicized, short-term decision-making on flavour-of-the-month programmes of questionable strategic value in the light of their poor track record

3. Fragile, or mutually indifferent, relationship to "NGOs" seeking to redefine themselves, their priorities, their alliances and their coalitions in an increasingly complex society, and in response to solicitation from a variety of "umbrella" service providers -- accompanied by much in-fighting and competition for resources

4. Fragile "cercle d'amis", whether researchers or Full Members, without any significant role in relation to the UIA

5. Fragile relationship to Associate Members in the light of the rapid evolution of competitive meeting information provision on the web

6. Fragile relationship to cooperative in-house ISP (information service provider) and the financial challenges of commercial substitutes

7. Fragile office situation, given the current finances of the Maison des Associations Internationales and the Belgian government response

8. Fragile strategic consensus and sense of core priorities -- poorly informed of web opportunities and constraints imposed by other initiatives and actors (notably the relationship between the Yearbook, as the source of the core income stream, and emerging web equivalents) and the capacity of over-stretched personnel
9. Problematic evolving relationship to Belgian government regarding TVA, taxation, personnel, social security and pensions (notably inhibiting hiring and firing, and use of non-European personnel)

10. Fragile long-term income prospects (decline of book market, competition in the information business, competition in the contract market)

11. Increasingly complex financial relationships to manage multi-partnered matching-fund projects, and the use of valuable expertise to this end

12. Problematic (unresolved) policy issues regarding "market rate", "cost recovery", and "for-free" information access, notably in relation to NGOs and those UIA (as a nonprofit organization) seeks to enable -- as exemplified by the annual bulk pulping by Saur of unsold UIA reference books

13. Increasing challenges with regard to computer expertise (whether over-stretched in-house capacity or expensively contracted out) due to the rapidly evolving computer environment, the constant need to upgrade, and the more fundamental challenges foreseeable when upgrade pathways (for software) require major adaptations.

14. Significantly over-stretched and under-supported personnel forced into a creative "can-do / can-fix" mode that inhibits proper use of their skills, and leads to a cumulative build up of bad working habits

15. Useful tasks, notably of a "public relations", proactive-contact form, are avoided, de-prioritized or inadequately cared for. Expertise for such tasks, sensitive to the challenges of an international nonprofit audience, is notably expensive and unproven, especially when hands-on continuity is essential to develop responses to costly one-off campaigns.

16. Modest to “unimpressive” office facilities, for those sensitive to the need to impress and be impressed in this way.

17. Uncertainty regarding the appropriate UIA image, especially for the 21st century, and the manner in which it can best be positioned and enhanced.

18. The combination of the above -- which saps morale and raises fundamental questions about appropriate future action.

C. Evaluating future options

Within the above context, with its various positive and negative dimensions, the question is how to evaluate future proposals and projects.

A tentative framework, entitled Degrees of fulfilment of UIA operational and strategic objectives has been prepared for discussion (see separate Annex 7 of Council documents). In that Annex, Table 1 identifies a set of 11 criteria and 4 levels of achievement. In Table 2 these criteria are applied experimentally to a range of products and services.

Partly in the light of this document (Annex 7), a separate document on UIA Initiatives
and services has been prepared (see separate Annex 4 of Council documents). This endeavour to highlight the essential strategic dilemmas to be faced in responding to new opportunities. Implicit in these is the challenge to the UIA of:

- (a) determining what constitutes effective action in terms of its mandate
- (b) what financial concessions it wishes to make, at what cost, to those it deems in need of information services or other assistance
- (c) what posture to adopt with respect to sponsorship arrangements which run the risk of detracting from the UIA’s image
- (d) what effort to put into responding to calls to essentially indifferent IGOs?
- (e) how to make best use of personnel or to pay for additional personnel in the light of a new pattern of requests.