

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL
ON ARCHIVES

Section of Archivists of
International Organisations

Third Session
(International Labour Office,
Geneva, 2, 3 and 4 October 1978)

REPORT

The Third Session of the Section of Archivists of International Organisations was held in Geneva, at the International Labour Office, on 2, 3 and 4 October 1978, under the chairmanship of Mrs. Gilberte Pérotin.

It was attended by Mr. D.K. Bloomfield (World Bank, Treasurer of the Section), Mr. A. Erlandsson (United Nations, New York), Mr. J.M. Flowers (International Labour Office), Mr. R.E. Manning, Mr. N. Ner (International Labour Office), Miss C. Périer (International Telecommunication Union), Mrs. G. Pérotin (International Telecommunication Union, Chairwoman of the Section), Mr. Salvi (Food and Agriculture Organisation), Mr. F. Schork (United Nations Conference for Trade and Development), Mr. Simon (United Nations, Geneva), Mr. R. Symonds (United Nations Development), Mr. S. Welander (United Nations, Geneva). Apologies for absence were received from Mr. C. Kecskemeti (Executive Secretary of the International Council on Archives), Mr. A. Sayour (World Health Organisation), Miss M. Stark (International Monetary Fund), and Miss P. Wright (Food and Agriculture Organisation, Vice-Chairwoman of the Section). It was noted with regret that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation had not sent its archivist or a representative.

The participants were welcomed on behalf of the Director-General of the International Labour Office by Mr. Francis Wolf, Legal Adviser and Chairman of the ILO Archives Committee, who stressed the value of archives generally and the unique quality of ILO archives and outlined the efforts being made to maintain archives service in the ILO in spite of its financial difficulties. Participants were invited to receptions given by the ILO and - on behalf of the Secretary General of ITU - by Mrs. G. Pérotin, Chairwoman of the Section.

The draft agenda was adopted without modification and Mr. Flowers appointed rapporteur, and it was agreed that an attempt would also be made to exchange views on the archival treatment of technical co-operation records, in respect of which Mr. Symonds expressed his hope that the experience of other archivists would facilitate the formulation of UNDP archives policy.

The Chairwoman reported on the Section's activities and membership and drew attention to the need for any proposals for amendment of the provisional statutes of the Section to be presented in good time, if possible for discussion at the 1979 meeting. The Treasurer reported a credit balance of U.S.\$ 109.30 and Swiss francs 70.-, and it was agreed that the annual subscription of Swiss francs 15.- should be payable in respect of each calendar year.

On the question of training, Mrs. Pérotin expressed her opinion that a week of archival training every two years is an absolute minimum training need for members of the profession. Various members expressed their opinions on the availability of training in specific subjects, noting that certain countries had an outstanding reputation for their development in certain archival fields, for example : the United Kingdom for intermediate repositories and records retention schedules; the United States for records management; Spain for microfilm and restoration; the Federal Republic of Germany for variations on current files practice; Sweden for archives organisation and data processing; Canada for records centres, and France for archives installations and protection. It was thought that the United Nations Institute for Training and Research could usefully organise a seminar, similar to those for documentalists, with lecturers from the above-mentioned countries.

It was remarked that a UNITAR archives seminar for high-level administrative staff would also be useful in creating a greater degree of consciousness of the importance of archives work in international organisations, and attention was drawn to the positive approach taken in regard to the United Nations archives in the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SCGB/158 of 28 July 1977 and the subsequent Administrative Instruction ST/AI/252 of 28 October 1977.

In the absence of any information from UNESCO, consideration of the item relating to the UNESCO General Information Programme and its possible archives content was adjourned.

The conclusions and recommendations of the session on the remaining questions under study were the following :

- a) that, in international organisations, uniform rules for the preservation and elimination of personal files of officials, namely their employment records, should provide
 - i) for indefinite preservation of the personal files of officials of ranks carrying major management and administrative responsibilities and of a representative sampling of files of other staff;

- ii) that where there exist abstracts from personal files of what is to be considered to be essential data, such abstracts, whatever their form, should be preserved indefinitely for all staff;
- b) reaffirmation of the importance of the generally accepted precaution that access is not granted to records containing papers which might, if opened to external consultation, result in embarrassment to a government, to the organisation, or - in the case of personal files in particular - to the individual concerned, or could result in endangering his or her reputation or personal safety;
- c) that a suitable uniform rule on access to personal files would be that applied for the League of Nations archives, under which access is permitted only 60 years after the date of the last relevant paper on the file; depending on the type of information recorded in the abstracts referred to under a) ii) above, organisations should make them available to consultation as soon as possible, and in any event not later than after a period of 60 years;
- d) that certain general and special precautions should be observed in respect of files confined to correspondence between organisations within the United Nations family;
- e) that in addition to the work on standardisation of archival practice in international organisations already included in the programmes of the Council and of the Section, three major needs call for the promptest consideration and action by the Council and the International Congress on Archives :
 - i) full recognition, by each organisation, however small, of the pressing necessity to set up and maintain a professional archives service;
 - ii) a clearer and more refined conception of the liaison between records management services and archives services;
 - iii) training of staff in archives policy and practice for international organisations;
- f) the Council and the Congress are asked to put the weight of their authority behind the first need above by addressing to the executive heads of the United Nations and specialized agencies a motion stressing the outstanding importance and significance for posterity of the history of international co-operation and the need to take without further delay all the steps necessary to the preservation of its indispensable archival heritage;

- g) similarly, the Council and the Congress are asked to urge the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) to devote seminars to the archives and records management training of the staff concerned in international organisations generally.

It was agreed that the Fourth Session of the Section should be held in September 1979 in New York and that the following new items should be included in the agenda : Microform - use and misuse; Records relating to technical co-operation - retirement and archival treatment at headquarters and in the field.

Geneva,
January 1979.

(An abridged version of this report has been supplied to the Secretariat of the International Council on Archives for publication in its Bulletin.)