The UNTAG funding process is VERY complicated. In this update, we will attempt to explain some of the tedious legislative procedures involved. Many congressional staff members, some who work with key Committees that deal with this matter, are unsure about the details around the process of obtaining funding for the UN peace keeping account. Each week, reports about the process seem to change. With that as a given, here is WOA's present understanding of the situation.

The United Nations (UN) has assessed the U.S. $129 million as its share of the costs of the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG). A total of $150 million is included in the supplemental request section of the Reagan Administration's FY 1989 budget for the worldwide UN Peace Keeping Account. Only $101.5 million of those funds are earmarked specifically for UNTAG. $25 million of the UNTAG funding request has already been reprogrammed from the State Department budget and will be sent by the middle of April to the UN as a "down-payment" on our total assessed cost. However, some legislative problems lie in the supplemental request for a transfer of $125 million from the Department of Defense (DOD) budget for the peace keeping account.

Dante Fascell (D-FL), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee has indicated his support for passage of UN peace keeping funds without restrictions. The House Foreign Affairs Committee approved a similar Administration request at the close of the 100th Congress in November/December, 1988. The Appropriations Committee chaired by Congressman Jamie L. Whitten (D-MS), and the appropriating subcommittee for this measure, the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary, will consider the request in the House before a final floor vote.

House Appropriations Committee Chairman Whitten will have a strong impact on the measure by initially proposing in what form the appropriations supplemental is presented to both Houses of Congress. Presently, WOA supports inclusion of the supplemental transfer request within a package of other supplemental requests. Because all appropriation requests begin in the House, the Senate Appropriations Committee will initially have to work with the House-passed version, but can amend the measure. After the Senate-amended appropriations measure passes that body, a Conference Committee between the two Houses of Congress to reconcile the differences in the two bills (if there are any) can begin. Having the peace keeping monies included in a omnibus package of legislation which will also include some requests that are guaranteed speedy passage due to domestic concerns, may prevent some time-consuming attempts to restrict the disbursement of UNTAG money.

In the Senate, there are other complications for smooth passage of UNTAG funds. Because the proposed disbursement schedule change caused by the transfer of DOD funds to the UN peace keeping account is not "budget neutral (or causes no increase in the budget)," consideration of the UN peace keeping monies has to come under a "point of order" on the Senate floor that needs 60 votes for approval. This means that transferring money that was originally in the DOD
budget and on a certain expenditure time schedule, adjusts the "outlay" (actual dollars expended on a given schedule). Once the money is transferred from one account to another, the spending schedule is adjusted, and the money is said to no longer be "budget neutral." Therefore, 60 votes are needed to override the fact that the requested transfer from DOD to be used immediately for UNTAG mandates an earlier "outlay" of the monies than originally planned and is therefore, not "budget neutral."

Obtaining these 60 votes does not appear to be a difficulty at this time. However, when the measure is on the floor of the Senate for the point of order vote, it will be open to amendments. Since there is no "Rules Committee" in the Senate, as in the House (the Rules Committee regulates how many amendments and how much debate time will be available for pending legislation), technically, the request for UN peace keeping money could be amended or debated at any time. The legislative strategy of attaching the measure to other pending supplemental requests is standard procedure. Presenting the Senate with an omnibus package of supplemental requests already passed by the House, may prevent or at least limit Senate debate on the specifics of any one supplemental funding request within the package.

Other Possible Senate Action

All reports seem to indicate that Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) is seriously considering linking the disbursement of UNTAG funds to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola or verification of UN "impartiality" during the upcoming elections in Namibia.

We have done a non-scientific poll of several staff members of the Senate Appropriations and Foreign Relations Committees about this matter. While the majority were uninformed about the entire process of approval of UNTAG funding or the independence process for Namibia, they indicated some measure of opposition to conditions on the disbursement of UNTAG funds. A few staff members were absolute about their Member's opposition to possible amendments by Mr. Helms.

Senator Dennis DeConcini (D-AZ) has indicated support for a non-binding Resolution that states the sense of the Congress that U.S. support for the UNTIA guerrillas in Angola should continue in the absence of national reconciliation talks in Angola. While it is our understanding that Mr. DeConcini has not indicated that he will block the UNTAG funding process with his Resolution, a recent New York Times editorial indicated otherwise. At this time, we are unclear whether Mr. DeConcini will introduce this measure during the Senate floor debate on UNTAG funding, or whether Senators Steven Symms (R-ID) and Charles Grassley (R-IA) will consider doing a similar measure.

Timeline + Administration Position on UNTAG

Congressional staff members are presently indicating that supplemental requests may begin moving through the House by the end of April. Given the time involved in obtaining approval by the full House Appropriations Committee, amendments and debate by the Senate Appropriations and Foreign Affairs Committees, the Conference Committee, and then a Presidential signature, enactment of UNTAG funding may not occur until July, 1989 at best. There may be several congressional debates on contentious issues such as the S & L bail-out, Foreign Aid or the results of the charges against Speaker of the House Jim Wright, which could delay passage of the supplemental request for UNTAG funding even further.

We understand that Secretary of State James Baker has begun lobbying key Senators for speedy approval of the UN peace keeping monies. The Washington Office on Africa along with 15 church and anti-apartheid organizations, have sent Secretary Baker a letter urging that action. Swift and strong Administration pressure in support of UNTAG funding will do much to clear away Congressional red tape that traditionally surrounds any supplemental appropriation request. Without immediate participation by Mr. Baker throughout this process, Senate opponents may be able to delay action on UNTAG funding.