



GENERAL COMMITTEE
7th meeting
held on
Wednesday, 28 November 1979
at 9.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. SALIM (President of the General Assembly)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.45 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK: RATIONALIZATION OF THE PROCEDURES AND ORGANIZATION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: NOTE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/BUR/34/3)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, as members were aware, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, had adopted at its 46th plenary meeting, on 25 October 1979, some of the Secretary-General's proposals relating to documentation and organization of work. In document A/BUR/34/3, the Secretary-General had drawn the General Committee's attention to the remaining proposals, consideration of which had been deferred in order to allow time for consultations. As a result of those consultations, some suggestions had been made for consideration by the General Committee. He therefore intended to put document A/BUR/34/3 before the Committee section by section, referring to the corresponding suggestions under each section, as set forth in the working paper dated 27 November.

2. He would first submit for consideration section II, dealing with documentation. As members were aware, that was a very delicate matter which had already been the subject of some debate at a previous meeting. The real problem facing the Assembly was how to cope with documentation needed in order to meet the schedule set by each Main Committee. Some agenda items could not be taken up without the reports of the principal and subsidiary organs of the Assembly, the reproduction of which was often delayed owing to the fact that the translation and typing services were occupied with documents arising from communications from Member States. There were also many draft resolutions which, in accordance with the rules of procedure, needed to be circulated at least 24 hours in advance. Obviously, there was a need to establish guidelines or criteria for determining which documents had priority for reproduction. Therefore, some suggestions had been made to revise the recommendations contained in subparagraphs 5 (d) and (f) of document A/BUR/34/3. According to those suggestions, the recommendations would now read:

"The General Committee recommends that:

"(a) The General Assembly, including its Main Committees, should merely take note of those reports of the Secretary-General or subsidiary organs which do not require a decision by the Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them, unless specifically requested by the Secretary-General or the organs concerned;

"(b) The publication of reports of the principal organs and subsidiary organs of the General Assembly and any draft resolutions and amendments should be given priority over that of any individual communications received from Member States;

"(c) Member States should refrain, to the extent possible, from requesting the circulation of any individual communications as documents of the General Assembly and in lieu thereof, where circulation of such documents is desired, should, as far as possible, request such circulation under the cover of a note verbale in the official languages provided by them."

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3. Mr. PETREE (United States of America) said that his delegation was very happy that further progress had been made in rationalizing the work of the General Assembly. The Chairman was to be commended for the time, energy and imagination he had put into achieving that progress. His delegation supported the three recommendations submitted, but wished to point out that, in its view, although recommendation (c) appeared to represent a useful step in the right direction, it still would not solve the problem. It was unfortunate that, after such extensive consultations, it had not been possible to draft a stronger recommendation. In the view of his delegation, the question would have to be taken up again at a later stage, he hoped that it would then be possible to reach general agreement on a more specific recommendation.

4. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the recommendations contained in section II of document A/BUR/34/3 by consensus.

5. It was so decided.

6. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider section III of document A/BUR/34/3, on organization of work. To facilitate organization of the work of the General Assembly, it had been suggested that the General Committee might recommend that:

(a) Before the conclusion of a session of the General Assembly, regional groups should agree on the distribution of chairmanships among them for the following session;

(b) Candidates for the chairmanships of the Main Committees should be nominated as soon as possible.

Furthermore, it had been suggested that the General Committee might wish strongly to recommend that nominees for the chairmanships of the Main Committees should have experience in the work of the General Assembly.

7. Mr. EL-CHOUFI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that recommendation (a) under section III did not seem feasible, since it was very difficult for the regional groups to meet during a session for the purpose of nominating candidates for chairmanships of the Main Committees for the following session. Nomination of candidates should instead be made at some time after the end of a session; in the case of the current session, such nomination might be made during January 1980.

8. Mr. KOH (Singapore) said there was a misunderstanding regarding recommendation (a), since it did not request the regional groups to nominate candidates for each of the chairmanships of the Main Committees. All it asked was that regional groups should agree on the distribution of chairmanships among them; it was not necessary for them specifically to nominate candidates.

9. The CHAIRMAN confirmed that what was proposed in the recommendation was that the chairmen of the regional groups should hold consultations and distribute among those groups the chairmanships of the Main Committees for the following session.

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(The Chairman)

He pointed out that the Secretary-General's recommendation had been much more far-reaching, since it requested the nomination of candidates. However, it had been felt that that would not be possible for the time being, and a much more limited recommendation had been agreed upon. The proposal made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic was timely, as far as the current session was concerned, since, if the General Assembly accepted the General Committee's recommendation, there would not be enough time left before the end of the session for the regional groups to agree on the distribution of chairmanships. It would be preferable if such agreement could be reached before the end of the current session, but, if that was not possible, it would be advisable for the chairmanships of the Main Committees for the next session to be distributed at least before the end of January 1980, as suggested by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee endorsed the recommendations suggested.

10. It was so decided.

11. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider the suggestions under section IV, dealing with resolutions. A slight revision had been suggested to the Secretary-General's recommendations in paragraphs 8 and 9 of document A/BUR/34/3. As a time-saving measure and in order to make the debates more meaningful, the General Committee might wish to recommend to the General Assembly that:

(a) Subsidiary organs reporting to the General Assembly should make every effort to submit draft resolutions in order to facilitate the consideration of the items;

(b) Whenever possible, resolutions requesting the discussion of a question at a subsequent session should not call for the inclusion of a separate new item and such discussion should be held under the item under which the resolution was adopted.

12. Mr. EL-CHOUFI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that recommendation (a) should be amended to make it more specific, by requiring subsidiary organs to submit their reports within a given time-limit.

13. The CHAIRMAN explained that the problem mentioned by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic had been solved. The General Committee had recommended and the General Assembly had decided that reports of subsidiary organs should be submitted by 1 September at the latest. It was therefore a question of recommending, that, wherever possible, those organs should include in their reports draft resolutions, in order to facilitate the work of the Main Committees and of the General Assembly. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the General Committee endorsed the recommendations under section IV.

14. It was so decided.

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15. The CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider the recommendations contained in section VI of document A/BUR/34/3, concerning subsidiary organs of the General Assembly. As the Secretary-General had stated in paragraph 12 of that document, subsidiary organs constituted an essential means of ensuring the continuity of the work of the General Assembly between sessions. Nevertheless, the sharp increase in the number of subsidiary organs of the Assembly had created problems, not only in connexion with documentation, but also in the provision of conference services. During the discussions of the subject, there had been general agreement that the General Assembly should review the usefulness of its subsidiary organs to determine the necessity of their continuance. Some delegations had felt that the General Assembly should appoint the members of the General Committee of the thirty-fourth session to constitute an interim ad hoc committee to review the work of subsidiary bodies with a view to making a recommendation to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session regarding the necessity of their continuance, on the understanding that the ad hoc committee would work on the basis of consensus and that the chairmen of the regional groups would be invited to participate on a continuing basis. Other delegations had considered that at least informal consultations should be held between sessions on the subject. Since there was still no general agreement on the question, he hoped that there would be an exchange of views for the purpose of reaching such agreement. At any rate, it had been suggested that a moratorium for a fixed period on the establishment of additional subsidiary organs should be considered by the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

16. Mr. ERALP (Turkey) said that in document A/BUR/34/3 a moratorium of one year had been recommended. The Chairman had spoken of a moratorium for a fixed period. Was it being suggested that the moratorium should be for a period other than one year?

17. The CHAIRMAN replied that what was being suggested was that the General Assembly should take a decision on the matter at its thirty-fifth session. Thus, there would be time to hold further consultations concerning the duration of the moratorium and for the time being a provisional period of one year could be accepted.

18. Clarifying the meaning of the first recommendation, he pointed out that it was generally agreed that there were too many subsidiary organs and that the General Assembly had decided some time ago to study the question of subsidiary organs with a view to deciding whether or not they should be continued. Obviously, the subsidiary organs themselves could not be requested to carry out such an examination and, unless a procedure was set up for the purpose, the General Assembly's decision would not be implemented. That was why it had been suggested, during the informal consultations, that the General Assembly should establish an interim ad hoc committee, with the membership and the functions he had just mentioned. Perhaps members of the General Committee might wish to make other suggestions.

19. Mr. PETREE (United States of America) said that his delegation had hoped that the General Committee itself could continue examining the question between sessions. Nevertheless, if there was no general agreement on the General Committee's continuing that task, his delegation would support the recommendations that had

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(Mr. Petree, United States)

been made, while suggesting that it should be agreed that the Chairman should continue holding consultations and that, early in the next session, he should submit a report on the role of the General Committee in that regard. One of the fundamental elements in the over-all effort to rationalize procedures of the General Assembly was the presentation of innovative ideas for strengthening, clarifying and improving the effectiveness of the General Committee itself as a forum where the rationalization process could be discussed until complete agreement was reached.

20. Sir Anthony PARSONS (United Kingdom) said that what caused a waste of time and money was not so much the existence of the subsidiary organs as the idea that they had to meet even if they had no useful work to do. It was difficult for the Assembly to eliminate certain subsidiary organs and it would sometimes appear to be more advisable, in certain areas, to revive an organ that had not met for some time than to create a new one. Consequently, his delegation suggested that the recommendation should be directed not so much at the question of the existence of the subsidiary bodies as at the idea that they should not be required to meet unless such an obligation was stipulated in the Charter or they had some substantive work to accomplish.

21. Mr. PETROVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation had no objection to the idea of examining the complex and delicate question of the usefulness of the subsidiary organs and felt that such a task should be carried out by the Chairman, in consultation with the Member States that had taken part in the creation of the various organs. There was no doubt that there were good reasons, in certain areas, for implementing the Secretary-General's recommendations, but the problem could not be solved automatically nor on the basis of formal criteria alone; rather, all factors relevant to the work of the subsidiary organs must be taken into account.

22. Mr. ERALP (Turkey) said he was not sure it was advisable to postpone taking a decision on the moratorium on the establishment of additional subsidiary organs. It would be possible to save time and money by adopting a decision during the current session.

23. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that, since there were so many subsidiary organs, it would be advisable to make choices among them. The restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system had shown that it was very difficult to abolish organs, not so much because of their usefulness but because their members often wished to continue meeting from time to time. His delegation therefore found the United Kingdom suggestion very interesting and felt that the Committee should consider setting up a mechanism for drastically limiting the number of unnecessary meetings of the subsidiary organs.

24. Mr. KOH (Singapore) said that the recommendation to review the work of the subsidiary organs was not new, but what was new was the suggestion that a mechanism should be set up for that purpose. For both substantive and procedural reasons, his delegation supported the Chairman's suggestion. In the first place, the mandate to review the usefulness of the subsidiary organs was broad enough to include

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(Mr. Koh, Singapore)

suggestions such as the one made by the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the creation of an interim ad hoc committee to carry out the review was a good solution since such a committee would be sufficiently representative but would not have an excessive membership; in addition, it would obviate the legal objections to having the General Committee continue to meet after the end of a session.

25. Mr. OYONO (United Republic of Cameroon) said that, in considering the rationalization of the procedures of the General Assembly with regard to subsidiary organs, it was important not to lose sight of the circumstances under which such organs had been created. It was an exaggeration to say that some of them met only for the sake of meeting. His delegation was in favour of creating an interim ad hoc committee made up of members of the General Committee and chairmen of the regional groups, because that would ensure representation for all the member States that had participated in the establishment of the various subsidiary organs.

26. Mr. NAIK (Pakistan) endorsed the Chairman's suggestions and said he hoped that they would lead to practical recommendations to prevent the continued proliferation of institutions. His delegation also endorsed the comments made by the representative of Turkey on the need for taking a decision during the current session on the recommendation that a moratorium on the establishment of additional subsidiary organs should be declared for a period of one year, which appeared in paragraph 13 (b) of document A/BUR/34/3.

27. Mr. GURINOVICH (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that, since no one had opposed the idea of a moratorium on the establishment of additional subsidiary organs, there was no need to take a decision on the establishment of an interim ad hoc committee. There was no time during the current session to study the administrative and financial implications of establishing such a committee and it would be preferable to reach agreement on subsidiary organs through informal consultations.

28. The CHAIRMAN said he agreed that informal consultations should be continued, but pointed out that it would obviously be impossible to solve the problem on that basis after the session, because there would be no way of requesting the Secretariat to prepare the necessary studies or reports. The official existence of an interim ad hoc committee would make it possible to continue the work on the basis of informal consultations. Several years before, the General Assembly had decided to review the work of subsidiary organs; nevertheless, the question would be purely academic unless the necessary mechanism was established. He hoped to be able, at the next meeting of the General Committee, to submit recommendations on a review of the usefulness of subsidiary organs based on the views and suggestions of members.

29. He went on to remind members that, at its 4th plenary meeting, on 21 September 1979, the General Assembly had decided to establish a mandatory deadline, not later than 1 December, for the submission to the Fifth Committee of all draft resolutions with financial implications. As concerned plenary meetings, the Assembly still had to consider the following agenda items after 30 November:

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(The Chairman)

item 25 (The situation in the Middle East), item 29 (Question of the Comorian island of Mayotte) and item 18 (Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples) and, if it was approved by the General Assembly, the additional item entitled "Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council". Delegations wishing to submit draft resolutions on any of those items which were likely to have financial implications should do so by Friday, 30 November, at the latest.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.