

---

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983 (continued)

General debate (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

Documentation of the Committee

---

\* This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room A-3550, 866 United Nations Plaza (Alcoa Building), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate fascicle for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL  
A/C.5/36/SR.15  
2 November 1981  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983 (A/36/6, A/36/7, A/36/38) (continued)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. WAGARA (Kenya) said that the Secretary-General had attempted to justify the adoption of a zero growth rate for the next biennium. However, the Kenyan delegation was not convinced that the international situation fully justified his action. Other senior Secretariat officials, faced with similar economic difficulties and financial constraints, had reached different conclusions. For example, the Executive Director of UNICEF, recognizing that the main victims of the economic recession were the developing countries, had submitted a proposal for a budget covering that period which showed a net increase of 54.3 per cent. The Director-General of UNESCO had also presented a budget showing a growth in real terms of 6.5 per cent. The Director-General of FAO held the view that the response of the international community to the economic crisis should not be regressive, but positive and realistic. He had therefore stressed that the economic difficulties were far outweighed by the actual needs of most of the world's hungry and malnourished people and had concluded that while FAO programmes needed to be tempered, they should definitely not be cut. Confronted with the same factual situation, the United Nations had reached a different conclusion.

2. Criticizing the concept of zero growth, he said that it was a negation of programme planning and budgeting. Furthermore, it really meant that for the next two years, at least, the objectives of the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade would be frozen and the results of the negotiations in the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and General Assembly resolutions would be disregarded.

3. The adoption of a zero growth rate had a further consequence: substantive programmes benefitting the developing countries, which represented only 20 per cent of the budget, would be sacrificed in favour of administrative costs. The zero growth rate appeared to have been imposed on the legislative organs of the Organization by outside pressure: it had never been debated in accordance with democratic procedures and most Member States were now confronted with the fait accompli. The main losers, in his view, were the developing countries. As the Indian representative had pointed out, although the public expenditure of the major industrialized countries had risen in the last three years in real terms, those same countries advocated a zero growth rate.

4. His delegation rejected that concept and all the consequences of applying it. That did not mean that it had no respect for economic and financial restraint; on the contrary, when certain programmes proved ineffective, it agreed that the resources allocated to them should be released and redeployed in the interest of the rational management of United Nations funds. In the last analysis, however, the decision that a programme was obsolete or of marginal usefulness was necessarily a political decision to be taken by the legislative organs of the Organization and not by the Secretariat.

/...

(Mr. Wagara, Kenya)

5. In absolute figures, the amount of the budget for the biennium 1982-1983 might seem large. Actually, it was less than the budget of a medium-sized American university or the cost of a single intercontinental ballistic missile.

6. The gap between the developed and the developing countries was widening every year and it was as if the Fifth Committee was adopting a budget which perpetuated and widened that gap. In justifying adoption of a zero growth rate, the Secretary-General had said that he had adopted "a budget policy which was deliberately oriented towards maintaining and strengthening the financial credibility of the Organization." He wondered with whom the United Nations had to establish its financial credibility. The adoption of a negative growth rate in real terms could only operate to the detriment of its economic and social programmes.

7. His delegation supported the recommendations of CPC for the establishment of an order of priority among the major programmes in the budget (A/36/38, para. 453). It was disappointed to find that resources for the next biennium had been allocated to the various activities without regard for priority settings.

8. Mr. GBEHO (Ghana) recalled that several members of CPC had expressed reservations about certain sections of the proposed programme budget for the 1982-1983 biennium and that it would therefore be desirable for the Assistant Secretary-General for Programme Planning and Co-ordination to participate actively in the consideration of that document.

9. In view of the importance the international community attached to the International Development Strategy for the Third United Nations Development Decade, the Fifth Committee, in considering the proposed programme budget, should determine whether it faithfully reflected the development strategies and concepts endorsed by the General Assembly. He noted, in particular, that the international community had decided to implement the Vienna Programme of Action on science and technology for development primarily in order to strengthen the scientific and technological capacities of the developing countries and that the General Assembly was scheduled to carry out a review and appraisal of the implementation of the new International Development Strategy.

10. His delegation hoped that the measures which the Secretary-General proposed to take to counteract fluctuations in exchange rates should be applied in such a way as to reduce the total appropriation submitted for final approval as much as possible.

11. While his delegation was concerned about the increasing disparity between the wide range of tasks assigned to the Organization and the stagnation in its resources, it felt that the General Assembly should not refrain from adopting decisions which might have financial implications. Although additional appropriations had a more immediate adverse effect on the developing countries, they were willing to accept them because they considered them necessary for the implementation of the objectives laid down by the General Assembly. His delegation could not accept the premise that the United Nations budget was inflated beyond reasonable limits and showed more growth than the national budgets of Member Governments. The fact was that the latter, and particularly the developed countries, lacked the political will to divert part of their military expenditure to support the United Nations budget.

/...

(Mr. Gbeho, Ghana)

12. His delegation could not support cuts in programmes or their elimination without the consent of the General Assembly and the competent organs. In that connexion, it looked forward with interest to the review initiated by the Secretary-General in pursuance of resolution 35/209 relating to the identification of activities which had been completed, were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective. Noting that, according to the Secretary-General, "all possibilities of savings by means of redeployment of resources will have to be explored," he wondered what would be the fate of the programmes if it were found that no resources could be redeployed, what areas might be open to a redeployment of resources and whether that question would be clarified in the special review mentioned in paragraph 4 of the Secretary-General's Foreword.

13. Referring to the proposed reclassifications, he cautioned against an automatic increase in personnel or a reclassification of posts whenever a proposed budget was adopted. In that connexion, account should be taken of General Assembly resolution 35/210, which reaffirmed the need to increase the representation of developing countries in senior and policy-formulating posts. That being so, his delegation hoped that the administrative expenses of the Organization would be kept strictly to the minimum and that the personnel policy would be designed to ensure the effective implementation of programmes.

14. He noted that the resources allocated to common services had frequently been criticized. Under the pretext of making savings for substantive programmes, some delegations had called for drastic reductions in the number and frequency of United Nations conferences. As stated in paragraph 108 of the report of CPC, "a principal function of the United Nations was to provide a forum where Member States could meet to exchange views." In other words, any attempt to reduce the number and frequency of conferences was an indirect way of preventing the General Assembly from taking certain new decisions. His delegation would continue to resist those attempts, in order to preserve the dynamic nature of the Organization.

15. In his view, co-ordination was one of the areas which betrayed a lack of financial economy and efficiency. For example, the subprogrammes under section 6.44 (Advancement of women) could be merged, with resultant savings; similarly, under section 6.18, subprogramme 2 (Monitoring and assessment of world development) could be merged with subprogramme 4 (Interrelations among development issues).

16. He noted that the General Assembly had called for a real increase in the flow of resources for operational activities on a predictable, continuous and assured basis. Furthermore, the allocation of those resources should fully reflect the over-all strategies and priorities laid down by the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. His delegation was of the view that, in the Committee's consideration of the individual sections of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983, efforts should be made to determine to what extent the budget met those requirements.

/...

17. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said that the programming aspects of the question before the Committee were the most important, since they would prevent the budget from being an effective tool for giving substance to the decisions of the various United Nations organs. In his view, the most important aspect was that of the definition, place and functions of the technical link between the budgetary instrument and the longer planning and programming cycle. In its resolution 34/224, the General Assembly had defined that link at the political level by placing the budget at the end of the programming cycle, in other words, including it in the medium-term plan, which in turn was part of the larger structure of the Strategy. At the technical level, however, that link was not always clear: whereas the programme was structured progressively according to its objectives, the budget was broken down into administrative units and still presented elements according to object of expenditure. Furthermore, as CPC had noted at its twenty-first session, there were some budget sections without programmes, resulting from the ambiguous juxtaposition of structures that were already unclear.

18. His delegation considered that there were two ways of clarifying the relationship between the programme and the budget. The first was that of structuring the programmes, objectives and terms of reference establishing by the deliberative bodies as a function of certain objectives. Subsequently, it was necessary to place those objectives in order; the existing distinction between programme and subprogramme was not sufficiently clear. Finally, it was necessary to define the relationship between the programme and the budget by deciding where the first ended and the second began. He noted that, the higher the level of analysis, whether in connexion with budgeting or with programming, the vaguer and more general the concepts became. If the budget were more concrete, it might represent a prolongation of the plan at the level of the subprogrammes themselves. The sections could cover a group of subprogrammes, themselves divided into specific, clearly identifiable elements: in the current situation, there were 350 subprogrammes and 1,500 programme elements.

19. The second solution, in his view, would be to prepare documentation that enabled delegations to consider in a programming context the proposed budget submitted for their approval. The Chairman of CPC, moreover, had made a similar request. In paragraph 10 of the foreword to the proposed programme budget (A/36/6, vol. I), the Secretary-General had indicated that, in the preparation of the proposed programme budget, careful attention had been given to the programme aspects. In paragraph 104 of the CPC report (A/36/38), it was also stated that, for the first time, the Office for Programme Planning and Co-ordination had been involved in the preparation of the proposed budget. While that was commendable, it would have been better if the Office had gathered together in a detailed document for the benefit of delegations the results of their analysis of the budget, viewed from the programme standpoint.

/...

(Mr. Monthe, United Republic of Cameroon)

20. A good programme analysis document would facilitate the speedy and full consideration of the budget proposals, notably by indicating straight away the programmes based on recent decisions and the sections of the budget to which they referred, and by giving an idea of their priority.

21. Turning to the question of decentralization, he expressed regret that the budget did not yet directly meet the express intentions of the General Assembly owing, in his view, to the fact that the in-depth study of the programmes was very inadequate, even on an experimental basis. That had been borne out by the discussions in CPC devoted to those questions (A/36/38, chap. IV). On the other hand, he noted with satisfaction that the regional commission had already prepared a coherent and complete overview of their programmes and that they were constantly improving their capacity to intervene at the local level.

22. With regard to the zero growth rate, he considered that to be a valid concept when it was the outcome of a meticulous process of programming and budgeting, but not when it was a prior condition. Furthermore, it was functional only if the deliberative bodies ceased to decide on new activities or, if they did not, then only management methods were changed. With the prospects of a constant expansion of United Nations activities in an increasingly complex world, the redeployment of resources might prove insufficient. Moreover, it should be noted that the extent of the proposed redeployment in the proposed programme budget before the Committee could not be assessed in practice by the bodies called upon to decide the matter, since they, too, were not in a position to evaluate the programmes in depth.

23. He felt that it would be interesting to compare, in the programme analysis document the preparation of which he was recommending, the growth rate of resources with that of programmes. The budget was dynamic in character (for the biennium 1980-1981, it would have grown by 3.8 per cent, whereas a rate of 0.8 per cent had been forecast); on the other hand, the introduction of new management methods was very slow in the United Nations, as the Joint Inspection Unit had frequently noted. It would therefore appear that a zero growth rate was possible only if the over-all budget process was based first of all on a programme analysis process.

24. Lastly, he wished to know for information purposes the real growth rate of the current budgets of other agencies in the United Nations system, in order to know how they had coped with the problem of adapting to the over-all financial difficulties.

25. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said that the crucial question before the Committee was how to evaluate the proposed programme budget effectively. In his view, it was insufficient merely to consider the growth rate, since that could only give an indication to Member States of the amount by which their assessments would be increased. It would certainly be useful for those responsible for programme planning to be present during the discussions; it might also be instructive to hear how resources had been redeployed among programme elements and how the priorities established by the intergovernmental bodies had been respected. The Committee should first consider the information given by the Secretary-General himself.

/...

(Mr. Pedersen, Canada)

26. Referring to the main points in the statement made by the Secretary-General at the Committee's 8th meeting (A/C.5/36/SR.8), he observed that the Secretary-General had been able to present a zero-growth budget while assuring the Committee that resources were sufficient to carry out all the programmes entrusted to him. The leaner diet proposed should make the Organization more vigorous and efficient. That had been confirmed by the Advisory Committee, which had prescribed an even stricter diet, for example with respect to staff travel.

27. The Under-Secretary-General had said that the Secretariat should redeploy its resources to higher-priority activities. It was a rule for any organization, whether private or public, that its resources had to serve competing demands. The problem, therefore, was to eliminate waste and unproductive programmes, and it appeared to his delegation, when reading the proposed programme budget, that the Secretariat had made a genuine effort in that direction. The fact of zero growth in the budget appeared of secondary importance.

28. The general problem, in his view, was the establishment of an order of priorities. Programme managers tended by nature to be empire-builders, and the only way to limit their desire for expansion was either to impose an arbitrary financial ceiling or to set an order of priorities from the outside and identify programmes for elimination. It appeared that Member States would one day have to take that tough political decision. There should be a means of examining the budget as a whole together with the possibilities for further redeployment of resources, including the possible elimination of low-priority programmes. That would both allow for dynamism in the Organization and take account of the real financial constraints with which Member States were faced. The process of priority-setting required to be further developed and refined so that Member States could determine more clearly what programmes should be expanded, reduced or eliminated; only then could the budget be evaluated.

29. He asked when the Committee might expect to receive the report called for in operative paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 35/209, in which the Secretary-General was requested to identify obsolete, marginally useful and ineffective activities, in the preparation of the programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983. It would also be useful if the Secretariat could provide a table showing Professional vacancies by grade and department and by the length of time they had been vacant. He shared the concern at the high level of expenditure on common services, which should be reduced, or at least stabilized. Lastly, since the exchange rates used in the budget were only assumptions, his delegation expected the situation to be re-examined towards the end of the session if current trends continued.

30. Mr. ANDRIANONY (Madagascar) said that he well understood that the Secretary-General had to apply the General Assembly's decisions with respect to zero growth, but even if the Organization's budget was an undeniably changing budget, it appeared necessary to reduce operational charges and provide the maximum resources for development programmes of special interest to Member States, particularly the

/...

(Mr. Andrianony, Madagascar)

developing countries. By making downward adjustments in Secretariat estimates, the Advisory Committee had taken account of the concern of Member States. The existence of credit balances, which had been observed during the submission of the financial accounts, was also encouraging.

31. With respect to the contributions of Member States, the method of calculating assessments, in the view of some delegations, was still inequitable, and it was not surprising to note that some Member States were in arrears with their payments, not because of any ill will but as a result of the world economic crisis. His delegation would welcome any action to diversify the Organization's sources of income, such as the issue of postage stamps.

32. With respect to the present structure of the Secretariat in the administration, finance and personnel areas, his delegation would have liked the conclusions of the Committee of Governmental Experts responsible for its evaluation to be available before the final formulation of the proposed programme budget, since they would have helped to make the optimum use of the Organization's resources, particularly at the staff expenditure level. A new activity should not necessarily be reflected in the establishment of new posts, and all recruitment should be justified. In addition, post reclassification should not become a regular practice. Lastly, he reaffirmed the importance attached by his delegation to the work and conclusions of the Committee of Governmental Experts, and hoped that that Committee would make suggestions and recommendations combining economy with efficiency.

33. Mr. CULLEN (Argentina), referring to the concept of zero growth, said that he was in favour of eliminating excess expenditure, but the rationalization of expenditure, even though imposed by circumstances, should in no way represent the Organization's ideal budgetary policy. Zero growth should in no case be reflected in the elimination or reduction of programmes in the economic and social fields and should not create a precedent. Sight should not be lost of the programmes that contributed the most to the realization of the objectives set forth in the Charter, and that meant making a choice among programmes rather than reducing them, and seeking alternative solutions to improve the execution of the Organization's work. The Organization must be given the necessary means for fulfilling its task, and particularly the necessary resources for economic and social assistance programmes.

34. He did not share the view that zero growth would strengthen the Organization's credibility; on the contrary, he wondered whether the reduction of essential programmes would not directly threaten such credibility. The effects of zero growth were all the more disquieting in view of the fact that the distribution of resources among the budget sections had remained unchanged, an excessive proportion of such resources, estimated at 75 or 80 per cent, being allocated to salaries and related expenditure.

35. Neither did he subscribe to the idea that zero growth was a consequence of the economic and financial difficulties faced by Member States, as stated by the Secretary-General in paragraph 2 of the foreword to the proposed programme budget (A/36/6). It was precisely when the international economic situation was deteriorating that the Organization should redouble its efforts to find solutions to the crisis.

/...



(Mr. Cullen, Argentina)

36. Referring, lastly, to the difficulties encountered by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination in fulfilling its tasks, he said that that Committee should be given the means for carrying out its responsibilities. It should also improve its co-ordination with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in order to make the respective operations of the two Committees more effective.

#### ORGANIZATION OF WORK

##### DOCUMENTATION

37. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) considered it quite unacceptable that documents which should have been prepared and translated before the convening of the General Assembly were being produced during the session itself. He wondered, as he had occasion to wonder every year, what the substantive Secretariat units were doing during the nine months when the General Assembly was not in session.

38. He also strongly deplored the fact that the Committee did not have at its disposal the summary records of its debates. Those records were an indispensable tool for small delegations with insufficient personnel to attend every meeting. It was obvious that they were of greater use during the consideration of a particular item than after the close of the session. The Secretariat bore full responsibility for the lack of progress achieved by the Committee in its work and he expected a detailed explanation on the matter.

39. He considered that the press releases, which could act as a supplement to the summary records, were badly done. Moreover, for the Fifth and Sixth Committees they were available only in English. In addition, the service responsible for producing them worked in English only, a fact which hindered communication with delegations. Finally, in the press releases statements were greatly simplified, and the meagre coverage gave a poor idea of the quality of the debates. He expected explanations on all those issues from the Secretariat.

40. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Committee found itself in a very difficult situation as a result of the lack of summary records of its meetings, and asked the Secretariat to explain the delay and to take steps, as a matter of urgency, to ensure that documents were issued on time.

41. With regard to press releases, he considered that they were printed in insufficient quantities and that they often ignored, or indeed distorted, the substance of statements made at meetings. He called for urgent measures to improve their quality. Press releases were the documents which delegations used in order to acquaint themselves with the positions of other Member States and the arguments put forward during meetings.

/...

42. Mr. YOUNIS (Iraq) agreed with the comments made by the representatives of Morocco and the Soviet Union. He feared that the serious shortcomings which they had pointed out would have the effect of making the work of the Committee on its two most important agenda items, the report of the Committee on Contributions and the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983, more difficult. It was vital that delegations should have access as early as possible to the relevant documents and summary records in order to make a useful contribution to the discussions. In that connexion, he also recalled that the Group of 77 was preparing a proposal on the calculation of the assessments for 1983-1985; the proposal would be submitted to the Committee on Contributions at its next session.

43. Mr. FERNANDEZ MAROTO (Spain) also considered that the quality of the press releases left something to be desired. He had pointed out on a number of occasions that statements made by his delegation had often been distorted in the brief summaries of those statements which were contained in the press releases.

44. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) welcomed the efforts made by the Secretariat during the current year to ensure that the budget documents were made available earlier than usual. He was, however, concerned at the publication date for the report of the group appointed to review programmes, and wished to know how the discussions in the Fifth Committee on that issue would be organized in view of the fact that the report had first to be submitted to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and, possibly, to the Economic and Social Council as well. He also asked the Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management how financing could be assured for new programmes during the next biennium if States were to reach agreement on such programmes and the redeployment of resources was insufficient to fund them.

45. Mr. BRACHO (Venezuela) was disturbed to note that the situation with regard to documentation was deteriorating from year to year. It seemed to him that the prime responsibility lay not with the Secretariat, which had made praiseworthy efforts, but with the Member States, which were calling for an ever-increasing volume of reports, studies and documents instead of taking the necessary steps to cut back. At its most recent session the Economic and Social Council had recommended that the General Assembly should give priority at its thirty-sixth session to the documentation problem, which affected not only the Fifth Committee but all the Assembly's subsidiary bodies. The Secretary-General should consider the matter and submit recommendations. Furthermore, the Joint Inspection Unit had already made a number of suggestions, and its report would probably be submitted to the Committee in the near future.

46. Mrs. DORSET (Trinidad and Tobago) said that she could not regard the Secretariat as solely responsible for the problems of documentation. The volume of documentation was constantly increasing, largely because of the fact that each year Member States called for new reports or studies when it was often the case that existing documentation was totally adequate. It was no longer a matter for recrimination. The Secretariat and Member States must endeavor to find a joint solution to a serious problem. With regard to press releases, she said that they were sometimes issued two or three weeks late and that the original schedules were not being adhered to.

/...

47. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) said that the situation regarding documentation had never been worse; the budget documents had been issued only a few days before the opening of the session. While fully recognizing the difficulties confronting the Secretary-General, his delegation hoped that the Fifth Committee would be given a more detailed explanation of the reasons for that regrettable state of affairs. One reason seemed to be that the substantive units rarely adhered to the time-limits established for the submission of reports.

48. He noted that the publication dates for certain documents mentioned in the note by the Chairman on the work of the Fifth Committee at its thirty-sixth session (A/C.5/36/L.1) had already passed. It was to be hoped that the Secretariat would update that document.

49. Mr. LYNCH (Acting Secretary of the Committee) said that he had taken note of the comments and questions put forward by delegations, particularly those relating to the work of the Fifth Committee. He would draw the attention of those concerned to the comments made on the subject of summary records, documentation and press releases and would inform the Fifth Committee of their response.

50. The CHAIRMAN, on behalf of the officers of the Fifth Committee, associated himself with the requests made by representatives and expressed the hope that the documents the Committee needed to carry out its work would be made available to it in good time.

The meeting rose at 1.00 p.m.