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Agenda item 96

### PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

#### Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. Carl C. PEDERSEN (Canada)

#### I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 3rd plenary meeting, on 19 September 1980, the General Assembly decided to include in the agenda of its thirty-fifth session the item entitled "Pattern of conferences: report of the Committee on Conferences" and to allocate it to the Fifth Committee.
2. The Fifth Committee considered the item at its 9th to 11th, 14th, 15th, 17th and 21st to 24th meetings, held on 3, 6, 8, 13, 15 and from 21 to 24 October 1980.
3. The Committee had before it the following documents:
  - (a) Report of the Committee on Conferences 1/ containing recommendations 2/ and a draft resolution on special conferences; 3/
  - (b) Report of the Secretary-General entitled "Pattern of conferences: control and limitation of documentation" (A/C.5/35/12);

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1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32) and A/35/32/Add.1.

2/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32) para. 70, and A/35/32/Add.1, para. 17.

3/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32), para. 70, recommendation 5.

(c) Letter dated 6 October 1980 from the Chairman of the Sixth Committee to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/35/L.5);

(d) Letter dated 8 October 1980 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/35/L.6);

(e) Letter dated 14 October 1980 from the President of the United Nations Council for Namibia to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/35/L.8).

4. The comments and observations made by delegations in the course of the discussion of this item and the replies to queries raised are reflected in the relevant summary records (A/C.5/35/SR.9-11, 14, 15, 17 and 21-24).

## II. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS

### A. Amendments to the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences

5. At the 21st meeting, the Chairman of the Fifth Committee submitted for consideration by the Committee the following amendments (A/C.5/35/L.14) to recommendation 3 of the Committee on Conferences 4/ which were prepared during informal consultations among interested delegations:

"1. Guideline 11 (b) should read:

'Each paper or report will be issued only once as an official document, either in the full text or in summary form, in the language of submission only, which should be one of the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat.'

"2. Delete guideline 13."

6. At the 22nd meeting, the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon pointed out that the amendments (A/C.5/35/L.14) would require a corresponding adjustment in annex III of the report of the Committee on Conferences. 5/ The revised amendments (A/C.5/35/L.14/Rev.1) submitted to the Committee at its 23rd meeting, incorporated this change by adding the following amendment to document A/C.5/35/L.14:

"3. Annex III, paragraph 4 should read:

'Papers should be submitted in one of the working languages of the United Nations Secretariat, and they will be circulated only in the language of submission.'

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4/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32), para. 70.

5/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32).

7. At the same meeting, the revised amendments (A/C.5/35/L.14/Rev.1) were orally further amended by the representative of New Zealand, who acted as co-ordinator for the informal consultations, by inserting in guideline 11 (b) the words "if possible" after the words "... in the language of submission only, which should ...". Accordingly, the words "if possible" were also inserted after the words "Papers should" in annex III, paragraph 4.

8. Following further informal consultations, the Chairman, at the 24th meeting, submitted a further revised version of the amendments (A/C.5/35/L.14/Rev.2) which read as follows:

"1. Delete section C of the guidelines, entitled 'Control and limitation of documentation', in recommendation 3 (i.e. guidelines 9-13).

"2. Delete annex III.

"3. Insert a new paragraph after paragraph 4 of the draft resolution contained in recommendation 5:

'Requests the Committee on Conferences in the light of discussions during the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, to reconsider the question of guidelines on the control and limitation of documentation for special conferences and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.'

9. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted these amendments by consensus.

10. At the 21st meeting, the Chairman submitted, also on the basis of informal consultations, the following amendments (A/C.5/35/L.10) to recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences: 6/

"1. Delete the preambular paragraph of the draft resolution.

"2. Operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution should read:

'Invites Member States and United Nations organs when considering the convening of special conferences to determine whether the objectives of the proposed conference are such that they have not been achieved and cannot be pursued through the established intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations and the specialized agencies.'

11. In the course of the 21st meeting, the representative of Morocco suggested, the replacement, in operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution, of the words "determine whether" by "ensure that" and the insertion of the words "within a reasonable time-frame" after the words "cannot be pursued".

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6/ Ibid., para. 70.

12. The representative of New Zealand, as co-ordinator for the informal consultations, accepted these suggestions and incorporated them in the revised amendments (A/C.5/35/L.10/Rev.1), which were introduced at the 22nd meeting.

13. At its 24th meeting, the Committee adopted these amendments by consensus.

14. At the 21st meeting, the representative of New Zealand submitted, on behalf of his delegation, an amendment (A/C.5/35/L.15) to recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences, which provided for the addition of a new paragraph reading as follows:

"Invites the Joint Inspection Unit to undertake an evaluation study of the secretarial organization for special conferences, with a view to recommending procedures for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of preparations for such conferences; and to submit its report, through the Committee on Conferences, to the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly."

15. Following consideration of this proposal by the Committee, the representative of New Zealand introduced at the 23rd meeting, a revised amendment (A/C.5/35/L.15/Rev.1) which incorporated the following changes in the new paragraph: (a) Deletion of the word "evaluation"; (b) Insertion of the words "on the improvement" after the word "study", (c) Replacement of the word "improving" by the word "reinforcing".

16. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted the revised amendment by consensus (see para. 33, draft resolution C).

#### B. Draft resolution A/C.5/35/L.9

17. At the 21st meeting, the Chairman of the Committee submitted the following draft resolution (A/C.5/35/L.9) entitled "Future work of the Committee on Conferences":

"The General Assembly,

"Reaffirming General Assembly resolution 32/72 of 9 December 1977, in particular operative paragraphs 3 (c), (d) and (e),

"1. Takes note with appreciation of the report of the Committee on Conferences 7/ and approves the recommendations contained therein as amended; 8/

"2. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments in the calendar of conferences for 1981 which may become necessary as a result of action and decisions by the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session;

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7/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32), and A/35/32/Add.1.

8/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32), para. 70, and A/35/32/Add.1, para. 17.

"3. Emphasizes the need for the Committee on Conferences to exercise more control over the establishment of and changes to calendars of conferences of subsidiary bodies of the United Nations, including its offices, programmes and organizations, and requests the Committee to undertake the necessary consultations in that regard;

"4. Instructs all subsidiary organs of the General Assembly to complete their reports for the next session of the General Assembly not later than 1 September and to report any activity after the adoption of such reports, where necessary, to the Assembly in addenda to the reports of the organs concerned;

"5. Requests the Committee on Conferences, when preparing the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1982-1983, to propose, on the basis of past experience and after due consultations with subsidiary organs concerned, the shortening of sessions of subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and to recommend, if appropriate, bodies which could begin to meet on a biennial basis for consideration by the Assembly;

"6. Decides further that all proposals affecting the schedule of conferences and meetings made at sessions of the General Assembly shall be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences when administrative implications are being considered under the requirements of rule 153 of the rules of procedure;

"7. Requests the Committee on Conferences to study the possibility of establishing effective mechanisms to enforce all existing rules to control and limit documentation with a view to ensuring the timely availability of documentation in all official languages and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session;

"8. Requests the President of the General Assembly, after consultations with the chairmen of the regional groups, to appoint 22 Member States, on the basis of an equitable geographic balance, to serve on the Committee on Conferences for a three-year term."

18. At the same meeting, the representative of Senegal on behalf of Senegal and Zambia, submitted the following amendment (A/C.5/35/L.11) to the draft resolution:

"Insert part B as follows:

B

"1. Confirms the continued applicability of resolution 34/50 in respect of summary records for all those subsidiary organs of the General Assembly for which the provision of summary records was discontinued, 9/ for those organs which did not receive summary records prior to adoption of resolution 34/50, and for those organs which may be established in the future, unless explicit exceptions are approved by the General Assembly;

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9/ A/C.5/35/12, para. 4.

'2. Decides to grant the following exceptions from the rule set forth in paragraph 1 above:

- Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;
- United Nations Council for Namibia;
- United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for meetings devoted to the discussion of legal texts;

and requests these bodies to keep their requirements for summary records to a minimum and to dispense, whenever possible, with meetings records."

19. At the same meeting, the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of France, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, introduced an amendment (A/C.5/35/L.12) which read as follows:

"Insert part B as follows:

B

'1. Confirms the continued applicability of resolution 34/50 in respect of summary records for all those subsidiary organs of the General Assembly for which the provision of summary records was discontinued, 10/ for those organs which did not receive summary records prior to adoption of resolution 34/50, and for those organs which may be established in the future, unless explicit exceptions are approved by the General Assembly;

'2. Requests the Committee on Conferences to consider, on a priority basis early in 1981, any requests by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly for reinstatement of summary records which were submitted to the Assembly at its thirty-fifth session and authorizes the Committee to grant those exceptions it finds warranted."

20. After a debate in which a number of delegations participated, the representative of Senegal, on behalf of Senegal and Zambia, introduced, at the 22nd meeting, a revised amendment (A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.1), which changed the last part of operative paragraph 2 of amendment A/C.5/35/L.11, beginning with the words "and requests these bodies...", to read:

"and requests these bodies to keep their requirements for summary records whenever possible to a reasonable minimum and to dispense, whenever possible, with meeting records."

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10/ Ibid.

21. At the same meeting, the representative of Nigeria proposed that the Special Committee against Apartheid should be included in the list of exceptions in operative paragraph 2 of document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.1, and the representative of the Philippines proposed that the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization should also be included. The representative of Austria proposed that the words "discussion of legal texts" should be replaced by the words "preparation of draft conventions and other legal instruments".

22. Accepting these proposals, the representative of Senegal, on behalf of Morocco, Nigeria, the Philippines, Senegal, Uganda, the United Republic of Cameroon and Zambia, submitted, at the 23rd meeting, a further revision of the amendment (A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2), operative paragraph 2 of which read as follows:

"2. Decides to grant the following exceptions from the rule set forth in paragraph 1 above:

(a) Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;

(b) United Nations Council for Namibia;

(c) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for meetings devoted to the preparation of draft conventions and other legal instruments;

(d) Special Committee against Apartheid;

(e) Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization;

and requests these bodies to keep their requirements for summary records whenever possible to a reasonable minimum and to dispense, whenever possible, with meetings records."

23. The administrative and financial implications of the amendments contained in documents A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2 and A/C.5/35/L.12 were set out in a statement submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly (A/C.5/35/34).

24. At the 24th meeting, the representative of Austria submitted the following subamendment (A/C.5/35/L.16) to the amendment contained in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2:

"After the word 'above' in the first sentence of paragraph 2, add the following: 'subject to review at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly on the basis of recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and in the light of experience gained'."

25. At the same meeting, the representative of Sri Lanka submitted the following subamendment (A/C.5/35/L.17) to the amendment contained in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2:

"In operative paragraph 2, add a new subparagraph (f) reading as follows:

'(f) Preparatory meetings of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, when preparing for the Conference on the Indian Ocean envisaged in General Assembly resolution 34/80 B.'"

26. The representative of Senegal, on behalf of the sponsors, accepted the amendments referred to in paragraphs 24 and 25 above and orally revised the amendment in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2 accordingly. Mozambique and Sri Lanka joined the sponsors of this amendment as revised.

27. At the same meeting, in a separate vote requested by the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Committee decided, by 86 votes to 13, with 11 abstentions, to retain the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law in operative paragraph 2 (c) of the amendment in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2. A statement in explanation of vote before the vote was made by the representative of the Upper Volta. The representative of Australia explained his vote after the vote.

28. In a separate vote requested by the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Committee also decided by 80 votes to 19, with 13 abstentions, to retain subparagraph 2 (e) of the amendment in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2.

29. As requested by the representative of the United States of America, the Committee voted on the amendment in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2, as orally amended, paragraph by paragraph: (a) Paragraph 1 was adopted by 113 votes to none. (b) Paragraph 2 was adopted by 86 votes to 9, with 19 abstentions. The representatives of Canada, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics explained their votes before the vote. Explanations of vote after the vote were made by the representatives of Brazil, New Zealand, Israel, Finland, Trinidad and Tobago and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

30. The Committee then voted on the amendment contained in document A/C.5/35/L.11/Rev.2, as orally revised, as a whole and adopted it by 87 votes to 6 with 20 abstentions (see para. 33, draft resolution B). Explanations of vote after the vote were made by the representatives of the Bahamas, Indonesia, Australia and Peru.

31. The Committee then adopted draft resolution A/C.5/35/L.9 by consensus and designated it as draft resolution A (see para. 33, draft resolution A).

32. The Chairman stated that the revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1981, approved under operative paragraph 1 of draft resolution A, would remain subject to any additions or changes that might become necessary as a result of decisions of the General Assembly at its current session and to other changes and adjustments not having administrative and financial implications.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

33. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

Pattern of conferences

A

Future work of the Committee on Conferences

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolution 32/72 of 9 December 1977, in particular paragraph 3 (c), (d) and (e) thereof,

1. Takes note with appreciation of the report of the Committee on Conferences 11/ and approves the recommendations contained therein 12/ as amended;
2. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments in the calendar of conferences for 1981 which may become necessary as a result of action and decisions by the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session;
3. Emphasizes the need for the Committee on Conferences to exercise more control over the establishment of and changes to calendars of conferences of subsidiary bodies of the United Nations, including its offices, programmes and organizations, and requests the Committee to undertake the necessary consultations in that regard;
4. Instructs all subsidiary organs of the General Assembly to complete their reports for the following session of the Assembly not later than 1 September and to report any activity after the adoption of such reports, where necessary, to the Assembly in addenda to the reports of the organs concerned;
5. Requests the Committee on Conferences, when preparing the biennial calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1982-1983, to propose, on the basis of past experience and after due consultations with the subsidiary organs concerned, the shortening of sessions of subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and to recommend, if appropriate, bodies which could begin to meet on a biennial basis for consideration by the Assembly;

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11/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32) and A/35/32/Add.1.

12/ Ibid., Supplement No. 32 (A/35/32), para. 70, and A/35/32/Add.1, para. 17.

6. Decides that all proposals affecting the schedule of conferences and meetings made at sessions of the General Assembly shall be reviewed by the Committee on Conferences when administrative implications are being considered under the requirements of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly;

7. Requests the Committee on Conferences to study the possibility of establishing effective mechanisms to enforce all existing rules to control and limit documentation with a view to ensuring the timely availability of documentation in all official languages and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session;

8. Requests the President of the General Assembly, after consultations with the chairmen of the regional groups, to appoint twenty-two Member States, on the basis of an equitable geographical balance, to serve on the Committee on Conferences for a three-year term.

B

Summary records for meetings of subsidiary organs  
of the General Assembly

The General Assembly,

1. Confirms the continued applicability of its resolution 34/50 of 23 November 1979 in respect of summary records for all those subsidiary organs of the General Assembly for which the provision of summary records was discontinued, 13/ for those organs which did not receive summary records prior to the adoption of resolution 34/50 and for those organs which may be established in the future, unless explicit exceptions are approved by the Assembly;

2. Decides to grant exceptions from the rule set forth in paragraph 1 above, subject to review at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly on the basis of recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and in the light of experience gained, to the following subsidiary organs:

(a) Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People;

(b) United Nations Council for Namibia;

(c) United Nations Commission on International Trade Law and Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space for meetings devoted to the preparation of draft conventions and other legal instruments;

(d) Special Committee against Apartheid;

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13/ A/C.5/35/12, para. 4.

(e) Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization;

(f) Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, when holding preparatory meetings for the Conference on the Indian Ocean envisaged in General Assembly resolution 34/80 B of 11 December 1979;

and requests those organs to keep their requirements for summary records, whenever possible, to a reasonable minimum and to dispense, whenever possible, with meeting records.

C

Special conferences of the United Nations

The General Assembly,

1. Invites Member States and United Nations organs, when considering the convening of special conferences, to ensure that the objectives of the proposed conference are such that they have not been achieved and cannot be pursued within a reasonable time-frame through the established intergovernmental machinery of the United Nations and the specialized agencies;
2. Decides that preparatory committees should only be established for special conferences if this function cannot be appropriately performed by an existing intergovernmental organ;
3. Decides that the secretariats for special conferences should, to the extent possible, be provided by the existing Secretariat machinery, with such temporary strengthening as may be required;
4. Approves the guidelines for the preparation, organization and servicing of special conferences as set out in the annex to the present resolution;
5. Requests the Committee on Conferences, in the light of discussions during the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, to reconsider the question of guidelines on the control and limitation of documentation for special conferences and to report thereon to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.
6. Requests the Secretary-General to propose draft standard rules of procedure for special conferences of the United Nations for consideration by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session;
7. Invites the Joint Inspection Unit to undertake a study on the improvement of the secretarial organization for special conferences, with a view to recommending procedures for reinforcing the efficiency and effectiveness of preparations for such conferences, and to submit its report, through the Committee on Conferences, to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session.

ANNEX

Guidelines on the preparation, organization and servicing  
arrangements of special conferences of the United Nations  
and their preparatory meetings

I. PREPARATORY PHASE

A. Action to be taken at the intergovernmental and  
national levels

1. If the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council designates or establishes a preparatory organ for the conference, this organ should hold as soon as possible or practical a short organizational session of a few days' duration in order to elect its officers, to consider the organization and timing of a further session or sessions during the preparatory period, to adopt a provisional agenda for its first substantive session and to provide initial guidance for the substantive activities of the Secretariat.
2. If a preparatory organ is scheduled to hold several sessions, it should adopt at the end of each session a provisional agenda for the subsequent session.
3. If a preparatory organ is established, its last session prior to the conference should be scheduled so as to allow enough time, between the closing of the session and the opening of the conference, for the timely circulation of the preparatory organ's report in all official languages.
4. States should be invited to designate, whenever appropriate and where possible, a single national focal point early in the preparatory process and to inform the conference secretariat thereof by a certain date.

B. Action to be taken by the Secretary-General

5. An indicative outline of the work programme derived from the general goals and objectives pronounced by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council when convening the conference should be submitted to the preparatory organ at its organizational session.
6. The bureau of a preparatory organ should be informed in an appropriate manner of the substance of all relevant measures to control and limit documentation which need to be applied to the documentation for a special conference and its preparatory organ.
7. Organizational rules and arrangements relevant to a conference, as well as a draft time-table for its work throughout its entire duration, should be submitted in the form of a document to a preparatory organ by the time of its last session.

8. An annotated provisional agenda, a document on the organization of work and related arrangements, including a time-table, and all required and available substantive documentation should be circulated well in advance of, but not later than, six weeks prior to the opening of a conference for which no preparatory organ is established.

C. Conferences held at the invitation of a host Government  
in accordance with General Assembly resolution 31/140

9. Whenever it is decided by the General Assembly to hold a conference away from established headquarters, a host Government should be invited to set up, at its earliest convenience, a national preparatory committee to serve as focal point for local arrangements to be made in connexion with the conference.

10. With respect to practical arrangements and working facilities, account should be taken of:

(a) The need to accommodate working, drafting and negotiating groups, as well as caucuses and regional groups, interagency meetings and briefings of press and non-governmental organizations, in suitably sized and suitably equipped conference rooms;

(b) The possibility of setting up, under the host Government's auspices and on a commercial basis, a service centre at the conference site for use by delegations. The Secretary-General shall inform delegations well in advance of the opening of the conference about such local facilities and the conditions under which they would be available.

II. CONFERENCE PHASE

11. Special conferences should be scheduled so as to allow a sufficient interval, between the closing of the conference and the opening of the regular session of the General Assembly at which the report of the conference is to be considered, for the timely circulation of the report in all official languages.

12. Where necessary, there should be provision for a total of up to two days of consultations immediately prior to the opening of a conference:

(a) For pre-conference consultations to consider organizational matters, preferably on the day prior to the opening of the conference;

(b) For consultations within regional groups.

13. Recommendations emanating from pre-conference consultations should, in principle, be acted upon without further discussion at the first plenary meeting of a conference.

14. If circumstances so require, each regional group could be requested to designate, immediately prior to the opening of the conference, two persons to serve as "friends of the Rapporteur or Rapporteur-General" to assist the latter in preparing the draft report of the conference.
15. Messages by heads of State or Government which are made available during the opening meeting of a conference should be read from the floor by the delegation concerned prior to the substantive opening statement by the Secretariat.
16. If a general debate is to be held at a special conference, it should start at the second meeting, usually in the afternoon of the opening day.
17. A time-limit of 15 minutes for interventions by representatives of States and of 10 minutes for statements by other participants should normally be observed during the general debate.
18. The following procedure should apply in connexion with the right of reply:
  - (a) Delegations should exercise their right of reply at the end of the day whenever two meetings have been scheduled for that day and whenever such meetings are devoted to the consideration of the same item;
  - (b) The number of interventions in the exercise of the right of reply of any delegation at a given meeting should be limited to two per item;
  - (c) The first intervention in the exercise of the right of reply for any delegation on any given item at a given meeting should be limited to five minutes and the second intervention should be limited to three minutes.