

United Nations

# GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records \*



FIFTH COMMITTEE  
17th meeting  
held on  
Thursday, 21 October 1982  
at 10.30 a.m.  
New York

## SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland)

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

## CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 8: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

(b) SUBSIDIARY ORGANS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)

---

\* 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, 66 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.5/37/SR.17  
25 October 1982

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/37/32, A/37/112 and Add.1; A/C.5/37/2, A/C.5/37/7 and Corr.1, A/C.5/37/11; A/C.5/37/L.6, L.7, L.9/Rev.1 and L.10 to L.15; A/C.5/37/CRP.1 to 3)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued) (A/36/167 and Add.1 and 2; A/37/32, chap. V; A/C.5/37/11)

AGENDA ITEM 8: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

(b) SUBSIDIARY ORGANS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/37/3, chap. III, sect. A and chap. IX, sects. C and H)

1. Mr. KUYAMA (Japan) said that his delegation, a sponsor of the proposal contained in document A/C.5/37/L.7, fully recognized the value and purposes of United Nations meetings and conferences, and accepted the fact that the responsibility for determining the length of meetings and conferences rested with the legislative bodies of the Organization. There were, however, cases where a legislative body indicated the need for meetings of, for example, a working group or a regional preparatory body, without specifying their number or duration. In such cases, the Secretary-General should use his own judgement in drawing up the pertinent budgetary proposals, instead of merely following past practice. The intention of the proposal was, therefore, to encourage greater efforts to reduce the financial implications of meetings called for by United Nations bodies.

2. Mr. KELLER (United States of America), speaking on behalf of the sponsors of the proposals contained in documents A/C.5/37/L.6 and L.7, said that the debate on the item had made it plain that all delegations wanted the work of the United Nations to be done with dispatch, efficiency, reasonable economy, and due regard for the amount of work that delegations and Governments could cope with. The representatives of the United Republic of Cameroon and Canada had raised questions about the amendment to paragraph 14 (recommendation 6 of the Committee on Conferences) proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.6 which appeared to be based on a misunderstanding of the thrust of the proposal. The General Assembly had already endorsed a 32-page limit for the reports of subsidiary bodies, and the proposal - which applied only to bodies receiving verbatim or summary records - was intended to tighten that limit. In the interests of brevity, reference could always be made to existing documents. His delegation was firmly convinced that any organ should be able to express its views in 32 pages. Indeed, the shorter the document, the more likely it was to be read. Since in fact it was normally the Secretariat which initially drafted reports, the proposal was eminently sensible and workable.

/...

(Mr. Keller, United States)

1. The sponsors of the amendment in document A/C.5/37/L.7 agreed that the full support of Member States would be needed if the number of conference days scheduled in 1984-1985 was really to be reduced. They also agreed that the Secretary-General should not assume authority that belonged only to Member States. The Secretary-General did, however, have the authority to propose the programme budget, and the sponsors' intention was to ask the Secretary-General to tighten up his planning for the next two years.

2. As the Soviet representative had pointed out, many meetings were postponed, curtailed or cancelled, and the resulting waste could well account for over 10 per cent of conference resources. If, therefore, a committee wished to hold additional meetings without having the budgetary provision to do so, it should be required to seek approval.

3. On behalf of his own delegation, he welcomed the revised version of the Soviet proposals appearing in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1. The new version was a great improvement, since it acknowledged that individual United Nations bodies had to take the real initiative.

4. His delegation still favoured recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences. The Secretary-General's views, as stated in document A/37/112/Add.1, paragraph 40, should not be lightly disregarded.

5. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom) said that, while there was almost universal agreement on the fact that both the United Nations and member delegations were adversely affected by the current volume of documentation, opinions diverged, when attempts were made to reduce that volume. Delegations were naturally reluctant to accept a reduction in documents of particular concern to them. The only way, therefore, to avoid calls for a large number of exceptions to the limits imposed would be for all concerned to recognize that some sacrifice would be required of them. The proposals contained in documents A/C.5/37/L.6 and L.7 held out greater promise of reductions in the volume of documentation than did general appeals for brevity and economy, in response to which it was all too easy to plead special circumstances.

6. Mr. EL SAFTY (Egypt) said he was still not persuaded of the merits of the proposals in documents A/C.5/37/L.6 and L.7. Although the Secretary-General had the authority to draw up the programme budget, the budget document was a proposal, subject to the approval of Member States. If States could not limit the number of scheduled conference days directly, they should not seek to do so obliquely. Although the revised Soviet proposal contained in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1 put to rest some of the concerns caused by the original proposal, the essential problem remained unresolved: the Fifth Committee had already discussed and rejected the idea of imposing quotas on meetings and documentation, and he could see no reason for it to change its mind. In particular, the stipulation that the quota system should be applied "without detriment to the implementation of programmes approved by the General Assembly" left open the possibility that the opportunity to introduce further activities, not yet sanctioned by the General Assembly, could be

/...

(Mr. El Safty, Egypt)

restricted by quota. Such a possibility was quite unacceptable. As for the third paragraph of the Soviet proposals, he continued to feel that greater use should be made of contractual translation only if the Secretariat could provide assurances that that was, indeed, the most economical arrangement. He understood that the Secretariat had, in the past, reported cases where contractual translation had cost more than translation by permanent staff would have done.

9. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said he understood that the sponsors of document A/C.5/37/L.6, were prepared to withdraw their proposal relating to paragraph 14 of the draft resolution recommended by the Committee on Conferences, in favour of the wording originally proposed with the addition of two further provisions, reading: "Requests all subsidiary organs of the General Assembly whose reports exceed 32 pages to submit to the Committee on Conferences, prior to its next session, reasons for non-compliance; Requests the Committee on Conferences to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session on a possible tightening of the 32-page rule".

10. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) said that the Egyptian representative had given no specific reasons for his opposition to the third paragraph proposed by the Soviet Union in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1. Unless the Secretariat could confirm that, as asserted by the Egyptian representative, there were cases in which contractual translation cost more than translation by permanent staff, he believed that delegations had no alternative but to support the Soviet proposal in order to reduce the budget of the Organization.

11. Mr. EL SAFTY (Egypt) maintained that, on the contrary, delegations should not vote to increase the already disturbingly high proportion of translation work done outside the Secretariat unless assurances could be given that that was, indeed, the most economical arrangement. He was reluctant to become too dependent on external contractors, over which the Secretariat could exercise no control. If there was the slightest doubt that, with increased reliance on external contractual translation services, the Secretariat would have the capacity to deal with an emergency, he would prefer all United Nations translation work to be done by established staff.

12. Mr. GRODSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation's purpose in making the proposal was to produce savings for the Organization without compromising Secretariat standards of quality, presentation and punctuality. He was a little surprised at the suggestion that the Secretariat had reported finding contractual translation more expensive than translation done at Headquarters, and asked the Secretariat for confirmation.

13. Since no disagreement had been expressed with his delegation's earlier observations concerning recommendation 4 of the Committee on Conferences, he wished to introduce formal amendments based on those observations. In paragraph 4 of the proposed guidelines, the words "have the opportunity to" should be deleted in the English text so that the wording would require United Nations organizations to contribute to the substantive preparations for special conferences - as, indeed,

/...

(Mr. Grodsky, USSR)

they already did in most cases. In the final sentence of paragraph 9, the word "preferably" should be deleted; detailed cost and servicing estimates should invariably be available before a government's offer to host a conference was accepted. Since the career development of all United Nations staff was governed by the Staff Rules and Regulations, paragraph 14 of the proposed guidelines, which appeared to offer special career development for staff serving as secretaries for intergovernmental meetings, should be deleted.

14. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) commented that statistics made available at the request of the Soviet delegation in document A/C.5/37/CRP.1, showed an upward trend in the use of external translation in recent years, in the light of its demonstrated financial advantages. The Fifth Committee had already been told, however, that certain categories of documents had, for one reason or another, to be translated internally: for example, documents that had to be issued in a number of specified languages at a given time, a category which included most documentation for meetings and conferences. A basic complement of established translation staff had to be kept at Headquarters for that purpose. Other documents, such as publications, final official records and the backlog of documentation which sometimes built up despite the Secretariat's best efforts, were suitable for contractual translation.

15. The Joint Inspection Unit's conclusion that contractual translation was a more economical process than translation by permanent staff had never been challenged by the Secretariat: certainly, contractual translation was cheaper than hiring temporary assistance, if only because the Organization did not have to pay the cost of travel, subsistence and office furniture.

16. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) said that, since the Secretariat had confirmed the validity of the Joint Inspection Unit's conclusion as to the economy of contractual translation, the Fifth Committee must reaffirm the decision already taken by the General Assembly and call on the Secretary-General to make wider use of contractual translation.

17. Mr. KABA (Guinea) said that there were political considerations which had to be taken into account in discussing the question of conference services and documentation. The developing countries needed every possible forum in which to bring their problems to the attention of the world community, and meetings would inevitably result in documentation. It was clear, on the other hand, that the limitation and control of documentation were a means of reducing the expenses of the Organization. Although his country was only a small contributor to the budget, it would nevertheless benefit from any such reduction.

18. He asked whether a reduction in the volume of documentation would adversely affect the small countries, whether all countries would still have adequate opportunity to express their views on contemporary problems if the number of conference days was reduced and how any savings resulting from the reduction of documentation and conference days might be used.

/...

19. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) observed that several amendments before the Fifth Committee would request the Committee on Conferences to issue further reports. That was an example of how the volume of documentation was constantly being increased. The Fifth Committee's own discussion of the amendments had been going on since the preceding meeting and had generated pages of summary records, which had to be translated, typed and reproduced at considerable expense. In the interests of economy, the information contained in Conference Room Paper No. 3 could have been presented orally. If delegations wished to control documentation, they would have to practise self-discipline.

20. Mr. KELLER (United States of America) agreed with the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon that ultimate responsibility for controlling documentation rested with Member States. The Committee should heed his appeal for a more sensible use of documentation in future.

21. The sponsors of document A/C.5/37/L.6 were prepared to accept the subamendment proposed by the Canadian delegation. They would not, therefore, press to replace paragraph 14 with their proposed new paragraph. However, they hoped that members would give favourable consideration to their second proposal in that document.

22. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that it was not clear how the two new paragraphs proposed by the Canadian delegation would be incorporated into existing paragraph 14.

23. Ms. ZONICLE (Bahamas) suggested that the word "tightening" in the second paragraph proposed by the Canadian representative should be replaced by a reference to improving the effective implementation of the rule.

24. Mrs. DORSET (Trinidad and Tobago) said that, on the face of it, contractual translation appeared to be cheaper than translation by permanent staff but that depended on whether the permanent staff were being fully utilized. In that connection, she referred members to document A/35/294 containing the comments of ACC on a JIU report on the evaluation of the translation process in the United Nations.

25. Mr. SHAHANKARI (Jordan) said that the common thread running through the statements of members was a concern to control conference servicing costs and limit documentation. The recommendations of the Committee on Conferences dealt adequately with that concern, and the various proposed amendments were designed to promote the same objective. Since the sponsors of the amendments in document A/C.5/37/L.6 had agreed to withdraw their controversial first proposal, he hoped that consensus could be reached, and his delegation was prepared to support all the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and the amendments thereto.

26. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the observations made by the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon, said that he had been advised that the cost of one meeting of the Fifth Committee, exclusive of documentation, was \$8,000.

/...

27. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) said that, while grateful to the Soviet delegation for revising its original proposals, his delegation still had problems with the amendments in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1.

28. He noted that no indication had been given in Conference Room Paper No. 3 as to the reasons for the cancellation of meetings. Meetings might be cancelled for various reasons, one of which was to enable delegations to hold informal consultations.

29. Mr. ENODIEN (Nigeria) said that his delegation had difficulties with the first new paragraph proposed by the Canadian delegation since it was limited to just one year. It had no difficulty, however, with the proposed second new paragraph, as subamended by the representative of the Bahamas.

30. Turning to the Soviet amendments in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1, he said that there was not much to disagree with in the first paragraph but that the second paragraph might prove to be impracticable. As to the third paragraph, he observed that during peak periods the permanent translation staff would obviously be working to full capacity but he did not know whether that was the case throughout the year. While contractual translation might appear on the surface to be cheaper than translation by permanent staff, it might not always be cost-effective.

31. Mr. ELHASSAN (Sudan) said that information on the reasons for the cancellation of meetings would be helpful to delegations in evaluating the amendments in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1 and the other proposals. No one disagreed with the objective of reducing costs, but ways must be found of doing so without affecting the work of the Organization. To mandate a reduction in the number of conference days or quotas on the holding of meetings and to require the Secretariat to reduce overall documentation by a specific percentage would be to put a strait-jacket on the Organization. While he had no objection to the third paragraph in document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1, it was necessary, as the representative of Trinidad and Tobago had pointed out, to examine the productivity of the permanent staff in order to ascertain whether contractual translation was cost-effective.

32. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conferences Services and Special Assignments) said that he was grateful to the representative of Trinidad and Tobago for the comments she had made because they afforded him an opportunity to clarify the distinction between permanent staff, temporary assistance and contractual translation services. In his association of some 20 years with the United Nations in various capacities, he had always found the conference-servicing staff of the Secretariat, including the translators and revisers, to be hard-working, conscientious and highly qualified. The representative of Nigeria had referred to peak and off-peak periods but, as delegations could see from the calendar of conferences, off-peak periods were becoming increasingly rare. For example, during the months of May and June, there were as many meetings scheduled as during the General Assembly. Thus, the translation work-load was spread out over the entire calendar year. The management of DCS was making every effort to ensure that conference-servicing resources were utilized to their full capacity and external assistance was resorted to only when the work could not be done by the regular

/...

(Mr. Wyzner)

staff. Since he had assumed the post of Under-Secretary-General some three months earlier, the question of productivity had been discussed at least six times at departmental directors' meetings and a working group had been set up under the chairmanship of the Chief Editor to study the question of productivity statistics and how best to utilize the Department's existing resources.

33. With regard to the question raised by the representative of Ghana, he said that 353 of the meetings which had been cancelled in 1981 had been reassigned for other purposes, including informal consultations and meetings of drafting groups and regional groups.

34. Mr. EL SAFTY (Egypt), referring to document A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1, proposed that the third paragraph should be amended to read as follows:

"Invites the Secretary-General to continue to make use of contractual services for the translation and printing of United Nations documents when it is the most effective and economical method;".

Although his delegation still had reservations regarding the first and second paragraphs of that document, it was prepared to agree to them if the Soviet delegation could accept the subamendment he had proposed to the third paragraph.

35. Mrs. DORSET (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the text proposed by the representative of Egypt covered the point she had raised.

36. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) said that his delegation still had reservations about the first and second paragraphs of the proposed Soviet amendments (A/C.5/37/L.9/Rev.1) to recommendation 6 of the Committee on Conferences. There was no reason to impose a quota on the holding of meetings or a 5 per cent reduction in the volume of documentation. Both paragraphs should be deleted.

37. Recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences should also be deleted. If Member States were delaying payment, the question should be dealt with in the context of General Assembly resolution 31/140.

38. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon), referring to the first and second paragraphs of the Soviet amendments, said that there was little point in requesting the Committee on Conferences to study a question which it had already studied, while account should be taken of the impact which a reduction of 5 per cent in documentation would have. With regard to the third paragraph, there was no need to make a specific request to the Secretary-General to use contractual services, since he was already obliged to limit costs where appropriate. The request contained in the fourth paragraph would merely lead to more documentation.

39. The proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.6 would also lead to more documents being produced. In any event, the proposed new paragraph 15 contained in that document was very similar to the final paragraph of the Soviet amendments.

/...



40. Mr. OUAIDAT (Lebanon) said that, if the main aim of the Soviet amendments was to reduce documentation, the Committee should simply invite United Nations organs to limit documentation without specifying a particular figure.

41. Mr. GRODSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the motive behind the first and second paragraphs of his delegation's amendments had still not been understood, even though the Committee was aware of the fact that many meetings were cancelled and that there was a need for economy. It was essential for the Organization to take speedy and effective action to rationalize its organization of meetings and conferences. Nevertheless, in view of the opposition voiced in the Committee, his delegation was prepared to withdraw the first paragraph of its amendments.

42. With regard to the second paragraph, most delegations supported a reduction in the volume of documentation, but were reluctant to specify an amount. His delegation was thus willing to delete the reference to a specific figure.

43. With respect to the third paragraph, the Soviet Union was willing to accept both the amendments proposed by the representative of Egypt, on the understanding that the paragraph would then receive the support of the Committee.

44. Most delegations were not opposed to the fourth paragraph of the amendments. While it would undoubtedly entail some additional documentation, the proposal contained therein was necessary in the interest of rationalizing meetings, which would result in great economies. His delegation thus insisted that a vote be taken on the fourth paragraph.

45. Mr. van HELLENBERG HUBAR (Netherlands) said that he supported the subamendment proposed by the representative of Lebanon to the third paragraph of the Soviet amendments. It was preferable to leave the matter to the discretion of the Secretary-General.

46. Ms. ZONICLE (Bahamas) said that, although she agreed with the intent of the second paragraph of the Soviet amendments, it was rather simplistic to mention a figure of 5 per cent. In view of the Canadian subamendment to the proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.6, the Soviet representative might feel able to withdraw that paragraph.

47. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would proceed to vote on the proposals before it. The recommendations of the Committee on Conferences would be taken up one by one, but it would expedite matters if delegations explained their votes on all the recommendations and the amendments thereto in a single statement.

48. Mr. DITZ (Austria) said that it would be preferable to offer an explanation of vote on each item as it was taken up, given the large number of recommendations and amendments.

49. Mr. LADOR (Israel) asked whether delegations were to make separate statements on each recommendation or deal with them all in a single statement.

/...

50. The CHAIRMAN said that he would prefer delegations to give their explanations of vote on all the recommendations in a single statement. He trusted that the representative of Austria would not insist on a different procedure.

51. Mr. DITZ (Austria) reiterated that it was impossible for delegations to deal with all the recommendations and amendments in a single statement.

52. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) supported the remarks made by the representative of Austria. It would be preferable for the Committee to vote on the recommendations and amendments thereto once the latter had been reissued in their revised form. It was, in any event, normal practice in such situations for delegations to explain their vote on each item as it came up.

53. Mrs. DORSET (Trinidad and Tobago) said that her delegation, which had been paying close attention to the explanations given by the Chairman, was prepared to follow the procedure he had suggested. Further delay would be undesirable.

54. Mr. EL SAFTY (Egypt) said that he agreed with the representative of Austria that delegations should have an opportunity to explain their vote on each item as it came up.

55. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) proposed that the matter be deferred to the Committee's next meeting.

The meeting rose at 1:05 p.m.