

*United Nations*  
**GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**  
**THIRTY-EIGHTH SESSION**  
*Official Records\**



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FIFTH COMMITTEE  
9th meeting  
held on  
Wednesday, 12 October 1983  
at 3 p.m.  
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KUYAMA (Japan)

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

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Distr. GENERAL  
A/C.5/38/SR.9  
21 October 1983  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 114: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/38/32)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

1. Mr. MOHSIN (Bangladesh) said that there was an excess of conference facilities as compared with the needs of the users or their capacity to utilize. The widespread failure to utilize resources noted over the past three years, which constituted a form of waste, could be eliminated either by increasing the capacity of the users or by progressively reducing facilities to the extent that they matched the actual requirements. The Committee on Conferences had both options under study. His delegation felt, however, that if the trend to under-utilization persisted, serious consideration should be given to the possibility of allocating the resources that were remaining unused as conference facilities to sectors which were more active. Moreover, in view of the mass and diversity of documentation generated by the various bodies of the United Nations, it was imperative, as the Committee on Conferences had noted, to stress the need to respect the requirements of precision, incisiveness and brevity in compiling reports. As to the recommendation appearing in the report of the Committee on Conferences concerning the introduction of an abbreviated form of summary records, that suggestion, if it proved feasible in practice, should be of tangible benefit to all concerned.

2. Mrs. FELDMAN (Canada) said that her delegation supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences aimed at making the best possible use of conference resources and supported the renewal of the mandate of the Committee on Conferences for a further three years, in view of its essential role. With regard to the under-utilization of conference resources by subsidiary bodies of the United Nations, her delegation felt that the current pattern of conferences did not encourage a more precise calculation of the duration of conferences and services required in order to minimize costs. It noted that consultations with the subsidiary bodies which had used less than 75 per cent of the resources made available to them over the past three years had not yet yielded significant cuts in the duration of sessions or a more effective use of resources, and had not led those bodies to opt for a biennial cycle of meetings. Her delegation would therefore support the use of a formula to trim resources which were consistently under-used and supported the idea of a round of consultations to determine the natural level of resources warranted by each subsidiary body. It would perhaps be worth considering the savings which could be made through a better system of advance notification of cancellations of meetings.

3. It had been noted during the discussions that the establishment of a calendar of informal meetings would be financially advantageous. Many delegations recognized the value of informal meetings; however, institutionalizing those meetings would be liable to defeat their intended purpose. Nevertheless, her delegation felt that informal meetings should be organized whenever possible. It welcomed the efforts to limit the volume of documentation produced by subsidiary bodies of the United Nations and supported the principle of limiting reports to

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(Mrs. Feldman, Canada)

32 pages and also the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences to accelerate the distribution of documentation and avoid the duplication of information. It believed that the United Nations could consider recycling or selling the waste paper it produced. In that respect she cited the experience of the Canadian Government, and noted that UNICEF cards were printed on recycled paper.

4. Mr. MA LONGDE (China) said that his delegation hoped that a tighter schedule of meetings would be established and that fewer, shorter and better quality documents would be produced in order to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations and enable it to achieve more with the limited human and material resources at its disposal. In that respect, he noted several useful suggestions in the report of the Committee on Conferences, aimed in particular at shortening the time allocated to certain meetings in the light of past experience, reducing the length and number of reports, avoiding the unnecessary reproduction of documents or the quotation of earlier resolutions in full, and eliminating redundancy. However, he felt that the limitation of meetings and documentation was not an end in itself and that the smooth functioning of the United Nations must be considered the first priority. Delays in the distribution of documents directly affected the work of the various bodies, and his delegation requested the simultaneous distribution of documents in all languages, including Chinese, in accordance with the principle of equal status for all United Nations official languages, as well as an immediate solution to the problem of the late issuance of documentation; it proposed that that request should be reflected in a draft resolution to be submitted to the General Assembly at its current session in order to implement the relevant decision of the Assembly appearing in resolution 36/117, section B.

5. Mr. POERWANTO (Indonesia) said that the basic challenge before the Committee was to reconcile the needs of Member States and intergovernmental bodies for adequate conference servicing and timely documentation with the need for the Secretariat to economize its resources. If a balance was to be struck, it was not sufficient to look solely at the responsibilities of Member States and intergovernmental bodies; improvements in the working of the Secretariat must also be considered. It should be noted in that respect that most of the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on conference services and documentation called for restraint on the part of intergovernmental bodies. His delegation, while fully supporting those resolutions, favoured a more balanced approach.

6. He recalled that the General Assembly had adopted several resolutions inviting the intergovernmental bodies to shorten their sessions or to establish a biennial cycle of meetings. Decision 1983/164 which the Economic and Social Council had adopted that year on the subject of the organization of work of the Second Committee pursued the same objective, and the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme had already considered the question of the periodicity and duration of its sessions. While it had taken the view that it would not be feasible to meet biennially for the time being, the Governing Council had decided not to hold a session in 1986 and to make a final decision about the periodicity of its sessions in 1987, taking into account the experience acquired in previous years. At all events, the rationalization of meetings should not

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(Mr. Poerwanto, Indonesia)

adversely affect the productivity of subsidiary bodies. In that respect, his delegation welcomed the decision of the Committee on Conferences requesting its Chairman to contact the subsidiary bodies that had used less than 25 per cent of the resources allocated to them for each session over the past three years for the purpose of holding consultations on ways of adjusting the length of their sessions.

7. As to the control and limitation of documentation, he recalled that intergovernmental bodies had been requested to ensure that their reports did not exceed a desirable limit of 32 pages. Certain bodies might exceed that limit because of the very nature of their work but his delegation concurred with the view of the Committee on Conferences that there was a discernible trend towards strictly respecting the 32-page limit. Efforts had been made to reduce the volume of documentation so as to enable the Secretariat to accelerate their reproduction, but delays in the distribution of pre-session and post-session documentation continued to give rise to problems and on a number of occasions meetings had to be postponed to enable delegations to study the relevant documents. Thus delays in providing advance copies of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1984-1985 had prevented the seventeenth session of the Industrial Development Board of UNIDO from making a detailed analysis of that document. Similarly, the closing session of the third meeting of the high-level committee to review technical co-operation among developing countries had had to be postponed for two days because the final draft of its report had not been available in languages other than English. His delegation felt that those problems should be considered by the Committee on Conferences in 1984. It hoped that the increased appropriations envisaged under section 29 (Conference and Library Services) in the programme budget for 1984-1985 would be translated into corresponding improvements.

8. Mr. YOACHAM (Chile) said that recommendations by the Committee on Conferences on rationalizing the calendar of conferences and meetings and limiting documentation made a not insignificant contribution to the smooth functioning of the United Nations, but had not, unfortunately, completely solved the financial and administrative problems for the Secretariat that the mass of documentation and proliferation of conferences continued to cause. His delegation thus attached particular importance to draft resolution D in the Committee's report, which would, if scrupulously applied, permit better use of conference resources and a reduction in documentation. The other Main Committees and the various United Nations bodies must also become aware, as another delegation had stated, of the need for effective implementation of resolutions on rationalizing conferences, holding them at the headquarters of the organizations concerned controlling and limiting documentation etc. In short, his delegation supported the report of the Committee on Conferences and the draft resolutions contained therein, particularly the one on the renewal of the Committee's mandate.

9. Mr. RAKAU (German Democratic Republic) said that his delegation supported most of the draft resolutions put forward in the report of the Committee on Conferences. It was, in particular, in favour of renewing the Committee's mandate and of the proposals on the control and limitation of documentation and ways of improving the drafting skills of Secretariat officials. It also endorsed the Soviet delegation's

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(Mr. Rakau, German Democratic Republic)

proposal to delete the wording appearing in brackets in paragraph 8 (i) of draft resolution C. He cautioned against too broad and mechanical an application of draft resolution E, operative paragraphs 2, 3 and 4, which should be understood in the light of the role played by the United Nations and the current international situation; according to the Charter, the United Nations should be a centre for harmonizing the action of nations. Like most other delegations, he shared the Secretary-General's views on the establishment of an effective system of international security as indispensable to future progress in arms control and disarmament, and on the need to give new impetus to multilateralism and internationalism. Although it certainly could not have been the intention of the Committee on Conferences to contradict Article 4 of the Charter, operative paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of draft resolution E might compromise the performance by United Nations bodies of the tasks entrusted to them. His delegation hoped they could be redrafted. In order to reach a compromise, it suggested informal consultations among interested delegations and the postponement of any decision by the Committee on that draft.

10. Miss ZONICLE (Bahamas) acknowledged that chapter II of the report of the Committee on Conferences contained practical and innovative proposals, but felt that they were insufficient to resolve the fundamental issues raised.

11. The first of those issues was to establish, with due regard for efficiency and effectiveness, a calendar of conferences that guaranteed optimum use of conference servicing resources. Her delegation had been struck by the fact that in presenting the draft calendar for 1984-1985 and proposed adjustments thereto, the Committee had established no direct quantitative correlation between the volume of services required for the meetings and conferences requested and anticipated and the material and human resources available to the Secretariat for that purpose. While she recognized that the different kinds of meetings and conferences held by United Nations bodies made overall estimates difficult, a tangible picture, based on past experience and existing mandates, of the sum total of conference services requested by Member States would encourage the bodies concerned to take a harder look at their requests for resources and the use they made of them, as they were requested to in draft resolution D, paragraph 4.

12. Her delegation therefore subscribed to the proposal made by the representative of the United States at the eighth meeting, namely to include informal consultations and meetings when scheduling meetings. Furthermore, it suggested that the relevant parts of the calendar thus expanded should be submitted to all United Nations bodies (as had recently been decided in the case of the medium-term plan) to make them realize how their individual requests could compromise the optimum use of conference servicing resources. The practice would also make it possible to avoid an overlapping of meetings on the same subjects and prevent meetings of bodies that required large amounts of documentation from being too closely spaced. The latter point was particularly important since effective programme implementation required optimum use of human resources. Paragraph 8 (e) of draft resolution C should therefore be addressed not only to the Committee on Conferences, but to all United Nations bodies.

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(Miss Zonicle, Bahamas)

13. The Committee on Conferences should encourage other organizations in the system to undertake a similar exercise and bear in mind, when they considered their expanded calendars, the calendars of other bodies with similar programmes, especially those to which they had to report. The amendment to draft resolution A/C.5/38/L.3 (financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors) submitted by the Greek delegation on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community was of particular importance in that connection.

14. The second issue was what her delegation referred to as the "management of documentation", which seemed to reflect better than the term currently in use (control and limitation of documentation) the complexity of the United Nations system. In the United Nations in particular, exchanges between Member States should have at least one channel through which to flow, and an underpinning which authoritatively recorded the outcome of such exchanges (decisions, proposals, notifications, protests, studies etc). In that connection, the reaction of departmental heads to the request to them to cut down on documentation (A/38/32, paras. 39 and 40) was noteworthy. The mere fact of having to publish most documents in the six official languages served to increase the volume of documentation. Further, the beneficial impact of recapitulation should not be neglected: whether of statements of principle or position, recapitulation could be of guidance to both new and experienced participants in their decision-making.

15. There were, therefore, inescapable limits to the limitation of documentation, and rather than looking for solutions to reduced demand, technical and supervisory improvements should be made. The Secretariat and delegations should study the possibility of using modern, cost-effective techniques to facilitate the recording, storage and retrieval of information. Concision and clarity should be the rule for both Member States and the Secretariat. In that light, her delegation endorsed paragraphs 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of draft resolution E in the Committee's report (para. 4). Documentation should be subject to periodic review so as to check on its utility and identify obsolete and redundant documents; her delegation therefore endorsed operative paragraphs 14 and 17 of draft resolution E, and welcomed the accent placed by the draft on the need for certain bodies to undertake such a review (see operative paras. 12, 14, 15 and 16).

16. While endorsing the intent of operative paragraph 10 of resolution E, on the introduction of an abbreviated form of summary record, her delegation had reservations as to the modalities of its application. The production of much-summarized texts, with the necessary interpretation and editing of the original, could lead some representatives to insist on corrigenda to incomplete texts, which would outweigh the benefits of rapid distribution. It might be more productive for representatives themselves to undertake the requisite exercise in synthesis, which should not be overly difficult in the case of long-standing topics where positions were unchanged.

(Miss Zonicle, Bahamas)

17. Concerning paragraph 11 of draft resolution E, to which her delegation had no objection in principle, she commented that the application of its various provisions would eliminate many of the causes of delay in the distribution of documents.

18. The third issue related to the role of the Committee on Conferences and the maintenance of its efficiency. Since 1975, the Committee had managed to take many concrete and useful steps and it should be congratulated for doing so. But its long-term efficiency would depend on the extent to which it was able to convince the United Nations and other bodies to adopt and implement effective management methods for conference servicing. Her delegation was convinced that when Member States realized what all their requests added up to, they would take the necessary steps to secure proper co-ordination, to review documentation and do away with unnecessary meetings. If those provisions were combined with the ones outlined in operative paragraphs 8 (c) and (d) of draft resolution C and the ones set forth in paragraph 18 of the Committee's previous report (A/37/32), the Committee would be left with only two really important tasks: deciding on departures from the calendar that did not fall within the framework of the above provisions and preparing and revising the calendar of conferences for the next biennium.

19. Upon examining closely the explanations which had been given so far to justify departures from the calendar, the Committee would probably find that some cases could have been foreseen. It could then improve the existing guidelines and make recommendations concerning those regular intersessional departures from the calendar which might be avoided. It would then simply have to prepare the new calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium and would no longer need to meet between sessions.

20. Mr. RALLIS (Greece), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community (EEC), supported the five draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences, adding that draft resolution C concerning the pattern of conferences, had the merit of codifying existing practice and thus providing a useful frame of reference. With regard to draft resolution D, pursuant to which the General Assembly would request the United Nations organs to consider meeting on a biennial basis or shortening their sessions, he expressed the hope that the organs concerned would consider the provisions carefully with a view to rationalizing future work. Turning to draft resolution E, paragraph 11, according to which the Committee on Conferences would be requested to consider possible solutions to the problem of late issuance of documentation, the States members of EEC deplored the fact that the problem - which had existed for many years and was getting worse every year - had not yet been solved and they endorsed the efforts made by the Committee on Conferences to solve it. In that connection he pointed out that Member States and the Secretariat must be very disciplined in order to increase the efficiency of the Organization and enable it to fulfil its mission.

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21. Mr. KOULIK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) expressed the hope that the constructive proposals and recommendations made in the report of the Committee on Conferences would be heard and heeded by the Secretariat services and the deliberative organs for conference planning still left much to be desired: conference services were underutilized and many meetings were either cancelled or late in starting.

22. There was a contradiction between the wastage of conference service facilities and the question of the overwork of those services, which often arose. What happened to the facilities which were not utilized? The Committee on Conferences should examine the question, for there was room for improvement in the planning of conferences taking into account real needs.

23. Concerning the funds allocated to conference services, his delegation reaffirmed its position, namely, that funds allocated to conference services for the biennium 1984-1985 should not exceed the level of appropriations of the previous biennium. Furthermore, any further conferences should be financed by redeploying available resources. Finally, his delegation was in favour of extending the mandate of the Committee on Conferences.

24. Mr. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) referring to the simultaneous issuance of documents in all official languages, noted that the Committee on Conferences planned to examine the causes of the late issuance of documentation. The causes were largely familiar. In particular, it was clear that English was favoured over the other languages and that constituted a serious handicap for non-English-speaking delegations. He stressed that working papers must be made available simultaneously in all official languages of the United Nations. He paid tribute to the efforts made by the Secretariat to reduce the volume of documentation noting, however, that much still remained to be done. The presentation of documents could be improved still further and specific guidelines should accompany the questionnaires sent to Member States; those guidelines should be as simple as possible. Turning to the problem of the late starting of meetings and conferences of the United Nations, he pointed out that any delay led to considerable waste of resources. The Committee on Conferences might consider drawing up new rules to avoid such wastage. His delegation therefore supported the proposals made by the Committee on Conferences in the draft resolutions before the Committee.

25. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said that in order to grasp the full dimensions of the problem of conference services it was necessary to stand back from the recommendations submitted by the Committee on Conferences in its report; those recommendations were intended to solve technical problems but did not deal with the essence of the matter. The organization of conferences stemmed from provisions of the United Nations Charter which urged Member States to seek peaceful solutions to disputes. With reference, more specifically, to the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, he noted that pursuant to paragraph 8 (i) of draft resolution C in any given year, no more than five special conferences, that was to say, not more than one in each of the five different fields of activity (political, scientific, economic, social and legal), should be convened. How could the number of conferences possibly be set so arbitrarily? Conferences kept pace with history - the faster the pace of developments the more frequently it was necessary to meet.



(Mr. Tommo Monthe, United Republic  
of Cameroon)

26. With regard to the 32-page limit set for reports submitted by subsidiary organs to the General Assembly, he noted the statement in paragraph 35 of the Committee's report, that some reports, particularly those of legal bodies and committees which generated large numbers of draft resolutions, could not reasonably be expected to be confined to 32 pages. That nuance should be borne in mind for the various organs and committees did not all have equal needs; accordingly the length of reports should be determined by the substance of the items considered.

27. As to the number of reports, the Committee on Conferences recommended in paragraph 42 of its report that the General Assembly should call on Member States to limit to a minimum requests for the preparation of reports or the circulation of documents. He doubted that the reduction could take place at that level - just as conferences were necessary so Member States wished to take note of the relevant documentation. If further conferences were organized it was because Member States had failed to agree at previous conferences. Accordingly, it was essential that delegations be able to take note of the relevant documents in order to be able to participate better in the new conferences.

28. The problem of conference services and documentation could be solved if Member States demonstrated a strong enough political will to solve the problems which were the subject of international negotiations.

29. The late start of some meetings was due in many instances to the holding of informal consultations which had a direct bearing on the substantive work.

30. Lastly, he expressed the hope that, in acting on the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, the Fifth Committee would leave some leeway and would not seek to regulate systematically what was unforeseeable.

31. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) said that the documentation produced by the United Nations was less voluminous than it seemed at first sight. He had read in a brochure concerning United Nations activities that the Organization consumed far less paper than a newspaper like The New York Times, and he asked for some information on that point.

32. Mr. RUSSO (Peru) expressed support for the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences and said that, in view of the Committee's positive role in rationalizing the work of the Secretariat, its mandate should be renewed.

33. Mr. EL SAFTY (Egypt) endorsed the comments made by the representatives of the United Republic of Cameroon and Sweden. Too great a desire to achieve budgetary savings could at times even lead to technical mistakes. Accordingly, in paragraph 3 of draft resolution A, the Committee on Conferences recommended that the General Assembly should authorize the Committee to make any adjustments, within approved resources, in the calendar of conferences for 1984-1985 that might become necessary. There were not yet any approved resources for the biennium 1984-1985,

(Mr. El Safty, Egypt)

since the resources for conference services would not be appropriated until the programme budget for that biennium was adopted. Moreover, under paragraph 6 of draft resolution C, the Secretary-General was requested to provide interpretation services for informal meetings on an ad hoc basis as existing resources permitted. It seemed to his delegation that it was not feasible to give advance instructions to the Secretary-General on the use of resources the amount of which would not be known until after the adoption of the draft resolution. It was therefore unable to agree to that recommendation, for both technical and political reasons.

34. In paragraph 8 (d) of draft resolution C, the Committee on Conferences recommended that subsidiary organs of the General Assembly should not, without the approval of the Assembly, create new standing bodies or ad hoc sessional or intersessional bodies that required additional resources. He wondered if the Committee on Conferences was implying that subsidiary organs were entitled to create new bodies without the approval of the General Assembly if resources were available.

35. He had also some comments to make on draft resolution E. Paragraph 1 of that draft resolution called upon Member States to limit to a minimum requests for the preparation of reports or the circulation of documents. That request was surely superfluous, since if Member States called for documents it was because they needed them. Paragraphs 2 and 3, which urged Member States to be brief in their answers to the questionnaires sent to them by the Secretariat, should be deleted, as should paragraph 6, which called for the improvement of the drafting skills of Secretariat officials who assisted Rapporteurs in their work. In paragraph 10, the Committee on Conferences recommended that the General Assembly should request it to undertake a study into the feasibility of instituting an abbreviated form of summary record. In his view, the United Nations already used the abbreviated form too frequently and the abbreviated form led to misunderstandings.

36. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments), replying to a question put by the representative of Sweden, said that The New York Times used 3,300 tons of paper for its Sunday edition, whereas the average annual volume of documentation produced by the United Nations required only 2,400 tons of paper according to the provisional figures available for recent years.

37. He had perceived the interest shown by delegations in both the substantive questions dealt with by, and the recommendations contained in, the report of the Committee on Conferences. The numerous interesting ideas aired during the debate would be taken into account, while the expressions of encouragement to his Department would help it to perform its task.

38. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences, said that the representative of the Soviet Union had requested that, in paragraph 8 (i) of draft resolution C, entitled "Pattern of conferences", the words in brackets should be deleted. Also, since some delegations, including the delegations of China and the German Democratic Republic, wished to consider the possibility of amending one or more of the draft

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(The Chairman)

resolutions, he would, if there was no objection, request Mr. Tommo Monthe, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, to co-ordinate informal consultations on the subject.

39. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 115: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (continued) (A/38/11 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.2)

40. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) commended the Committee on Contributions and its Chairman on the quality of the work performed and the faithfulness with which the opinions expressed had been reflected. The calculation of assessments continued to be a source of controversy; that was due in part to the nature of the exercise but primarily to the failure to devise a methodology acceptable to all Member States for the evaluation of their real capacity to pay - the fundamental and uncontested criterion on which the scale was based. National income alone was not sufficient to reflect that capacity and the economic and social indicators proposed by the Committee could not be utilized until the weighting to be given to them had been worked out. The Fifth Committee, which had established the framework within which the Committee on Contributions operated, had a duty to provide the latter with convincing proposals in that area.

41. While all countries were no doubt experiencing difficulties, the Committee on Contributions should bear constantly in mind the special situation of the developing countries; their contributions, which might seem very modest to some, at times came from the resources required to meet basic needs. He deplored the lack of understanding which at times characterized the attitude of the developed countries to the developing countries, despite the persistent disparities between their reciprocal economic situations. Short-term economic difficulties must also be taken into account when the scale of assessments was drawn up.

42. He also drew attention to the particular situation of countries whose earnings depended heavily on one or a few products, especially the countries producing energy products, which had been criticized at a time when the situation was favourable for them, but whose problems were ignored when the demand for those products had fallen.

43. The problem of foreign currency was also crucial for certain countries which did not always have the required foreign currency reserves to meet their obligations with regard to the United Nations and the specialized agencies. All those aspects should be taken into account by the Committee on Contributions.

44. With regard to the four new methods proposed by the Committee, he pointed out that the first method - which would divide Member States into three groups, thereby perpetuating the distinction between rich and poor countries - was at variance with the Charter, which sought to unite rather than divide countries; those groups could not be compared with the groups set up for the UNCTAD negotiations, which had been

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(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

de facto groups. Furthermore, a scale established on that basis would be defective as soon as more than one country became eligible for the ceiling assessment, which would occur shortly. Furthermore, if a large number of developing countries were to be assessed at the floor of 0.01 per cent, which was likely in view of the constant deterioration of the economic situation, the burden on the other members of their group would be increased. Alternative I, which tended to divide the international community and could give rise to injustices within the groups, was therefore unacceptable.

45. Alternative II was also unacceptable to his delegation: although it favoured Morocco, it was totally contrary to the principles of the Organization.

46. Alternatives III and IV should be given further consideration. The main problem was not only to find economic and social indicators which, combined with national income, would permit the elaboration of a fair scale, because, as was generally recognized, the use of national income alone gave rise to arbitrary and unfair results; it was also necessary to find a method which would allow such indicators to be integrated into the calculations. The differences of opinion within the Committee would be considerably reduced if agreement could be reached on the weights to be assigned to those indicators.

47. Recent events had demonstrated, if demonstration was necessary, that it had become essential to reduce the statistical base period in order to represent more faithfully the situation of countries, whether developed or developing.

48. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) said that the report of the Committee on Contributions demonstrated the genuine effort made by the Committee in response to the General Assembly's request that it should study ways and means of improving the methodology for the measurement of the real capacity to pay of Member States. Nevertheless, since the report was of an interim character, his delegation reserved its position on the questions considered until it received the final report, which would be submitted at the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

49. Despite long-standing dissatisfaction with the method used to convert national income statistics from zlotys to United States dollars, his delegation had not associated itself with the criticism directed at the Committee on Contributions and the scales of assessments which had been proposed over the past seven years. It had been guided and continued to be guided by the desire above all to support the Committee, whose position within the Organization should be strengthened.

50. His delegation was fully aware of the complexity of the task of elaborating the scale of assessments. The difficulties encountered by the Committee in that regard stemmed mainly from the increasing level of the expenses of the Organization, which imposed a substantial burden on Member States, especially those whose economic and financial situation was unstable. It therefore wished to thank the Chairman and the members of the Committee on Contributions for the dedicated service which they had rendered to the Organization, and it urged that the Committee should be provided with all the means necessary to enable it to carry out the mandate which the General Assembly had entrusted to it.

(Mr. Abraszewski, Poland)

51. With regard to the alternative methods to assess the real capacity of Members to pay discussed in the Committee's report, he felt that the order in which the four alternatives were presented did not correspond to any scale of priorities or importance. Alternatives I and II ("Groupings" and "Personnel and sovereignty factors", respectively) constituted a substantial departure from the current methodology, and the Committee itself seemed sceptical about their applicability. It could be asked whether the search for alternatives so remote from the one currently used had been envisaged by the General Assembly when it had requested a study on alternative methods.

52. As had been rightly pointed out, alternative I might introduce elements of confrontation between and within groups and convert the establishment of the scale of assessments into a political process. Furthermore, since it was based on the criteria currently used to establish the scale, that alternative would not better reflect the real capacity to pay of Member States. It could be assumed that such a concept would favour a group of countries whose assessed contributions were likely to increase if use of the current method of calculation continued.

53. Alternative II constituted a further departure from the current methodology, or even a negation of that methodology, since it totally abandoned the concept of real capacity to pay. In addition to the shortcomings indicated by the Committee on Contributions itself, it was not clear what "personnel" factor would serve as the criterion for the apportionment of United Nations expenses. The very purpose of alternative II, namely, to assess countries according to the benefits which they derived from the Organization, would be nullified if Professional staff only were taken into account. On the other hand, a number of countries would be opposed to taking into account all United Nations employees, including the General Service staff, whose employment was governed by totally different principles. Another question which had not been answered was how to take into account United Nations staff with short-term appointments. In spite of their theoretical interest and innovative nature, alternatives I and II did not constitute practical proposals which could be supported by a sufficient number of Member States.

54. The Committee on Contributions itself had dismissed alternative III (National wealth) because of insufficient progress in the areas of methodology, availability and comparability of coverage of national wealth statistics. With regard to alternative IV (Variants of current methodology and their effects on assessable income), he pointed out that although the preliminary conclusions which could be drawn from the report of the Committee on Contributions were not very encouraging, the Committee should be commended for the considerable effort which it had undertaken in exploring variants of and improvements on the current formula which would better take into account conditions or circumstances which adversely affected the capacity to pay of Member States.

55. Regarding the integration of economic and social indicators into the existing assessment methodology, the Committee had distinguished long-term concerns from short-term concerns, the former relating to lack of industrial development,

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infrastructure, educational development, health facilities and insufficient food supply and malnutrition, and the latter including indicators such as terms of trade, export earnings, external public debt service, international reserves, wars and natural disasters. Paragraph 23 of the report indicated that the long-term economic and social concerns could form part of the general methodology for establishing assessments. Did that mean, then, that the so-called short-term indicators, even if they occurred within the base period and their effects were prolonged, could not form part of the general methodology? If the Committee took that position, Poland would strongly oppose it. Although the distinction between long-term and short-term indicators might be of significance in measuring the level of the socio-economic development of a given country, when it came to establishing the scale of assessments for three successive years and measuring real capacity to pay the short-term economic and social indicators seemed to be at least as relevant. The Polish delegation had the impression that the Committee had not given enough weight to the short-term economic indicators and urged it to review its position.

56. The Chairman of the Committee on Contributions had rightly stressed the complexity of the problem of integrating economic and social indicators into the current assessment methodology and had reminded the Fifth Committee that, unlike "national income", which was an international norm accepted by all Member States, the scope and coverage of economic and social indicators varied widely from one country to the next and distortions could occur if such indicators were selected to replace or supplement national income in determining the capacity of Member States to pay. The results presented in annex II of the report demonstrated that the integration of the seven socio-economic indicators selected would result in a sharp increase in the assessed contributions of a large number of countries developing ones especially, and thus raised doubts about whether the "mechanical" integration of socio-economic indicators would improve the measurement of capacity to pay and make the scale of assessments fairer and more equitable, those being the major objectives of the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

57. On the question of adjustments for inflation and changes in exchange rates, Poland was strongly opposed to the introduction, or even consideration, of "pseudo" rates of exchange. Apart from the lack of reliable and comparable statistics for all Member States and the conceptual difficulties involved, it was improper for an international organization to modify national income data supplied by Member States and Poland challenged its right to do so. As the Committee on Contributions had itself rightly pointed out, the setting of prices and exchange rates was the primary responsibility of each Member State and lay within the scope of its sovereignty.

58. The Committee had already experienced substantial difficulties in working out a modified formula for measuring capacity to pay, and it might well be that there was no real possibility of improving the current methodology.

59. Should the Committee decide that it was not in a position to recommend an agreed and workable modified formula, the need to make the scale of assessments

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fairer and more equitable would still exist, and the Committee would then be expected to propose a set of guidelines for expanding its mitigation process. That process should allow for greater accommodation of valid claims in special cases.

60. The General Assembly had decided in resolution 36/231 A, adopted in 1981, to extend the base period for the 1983-1985 scale of assessments from 7 to 10 years. The Polish delegation had never fully understood the rationale for such an extension, and it observed that the idea of shortening the base period was now gaining considerable support among Member States, especially developing countries. It had often stressed that the scale of assessments should reflect the current economic situation of Member States as faithfully as possible. In fact, there was always a gap of at least two years between the period covered by the statistical data and the period to which the scale applied. The contributions of Member States were thus calculated primarily on the basis of a past economic situation, and that often produced a distorted measurement of a State's capacity to pay. Poland, whose economic and financial difficulties were all too familiar, was a prime example, and there were many States, especially developing countries which were experiencing economic and financial difficulties of a similar kind. Unfortunately the Committee on Contributions was not ready to give its opinion on the important question of the length of the base period, and it seemed to the Polish delegation that the consideration of too many important issues had been deferred until the next session. It was the opinion of his delegation that the base period should be shortened considerably, preferably to five years.

61. As for the low per capita income allowance formula, his delegation, like many others, had long been requesting an upward revision of the upper limit to offset at least partially the depreciation of the dollar. It was small wonder that some of the countries with the highest per capita incomes, motivated solely by their own interests, did not favour periodic revisions of that limit. The Committee's report regrettably did not resolve the matter satisfactorily. It indicated that the Committee intended to study at the next session the implications of bringing up to date the values of the allowance formula, and his delegation eagerly awaited the Committee's recommendations on the subject.

62. On the other hand, he was somewhat surprised that the Committee had taken pains to provide additional information on the progressive nature of the scale resulting from the application, in calculating assessable income, of the low per capita income allowance formula. It could only be assumed that the Committee had wished to show that in some cases the increase in a country's rate of assessment exceeded the growth of its national income over the same period. Nevertheless, such a one-sided presentation of the allowance formula was unbalanced and unjustified. It was to be hoped that the Committee would correct that presentation in its next report and would of its own accord be able to recommend an upward revision of the upper limit, thus responding to the requests made on many occasions in the General Assembly.

63. Even though the General Assembly was not considering a revision of the scale of assessments at the current session, his delegation wished to state once again

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that Poland still considered its assessment to be too high, despite the substantial decrease in the scale for 1983-1985, and that it had accepted that scale on the condition that its assessment would be reduced at the subsequent revision so as to reflect its real capacity to pay. His delegation hoped that the Fifth Committee would keep the question of Poland's assessment in mind and that the Committee on Contributions would grant its just claim when revising the scale of assessments in 1985.

64. Mr. BOUSHEV (Bulgaria) said that the deliberations on the scale of assessments during the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly had revealed a great diversity of opinions and a feeling of dissatisfaction among some delegations. His delegation shared that feeling, which had been inspired not only by the scale of assessments proposed, but also by the lack of a clear cut, convincing method. It seemed, in fact, that there had been two methods: a practical one used to elaborate a concrete scale, and a second, theoretical one, which had been the subject of academic discussion. That startling inference was confirmed by the report of the Committee on Contributions, which rather gave the impression that nothing had been done before the studies relating to the scale of assessments presented in that document. It was the feeling that there was a discrepancy between theory and practice in assessing contributions of Member States which had forced his delegation on various occasions to request the Committee on Contributions to provide a more detailed explanation of the way in which the scale of assessments was actually calculated. The replies which had been given left something to be desired.

65. The report of the Committee presented a thorough study of the various approaches aimed at determining the capacity to pay of Member States. It was a good idea to have referred in the report to those resolutions in which the General Assembly had defined the three main tasks to be discharged in that regard, namely: (a) a thorough study on alternative methods to assess the real capacity of Member States to pay (resolution 36/231 A); (b) an in-depth study of ways and means of increasing the fairness and equity of the scale of assessments bearing in mind the eight requirements specified in resolution 34/6 B; and (c) the preparation of a set of guidelines for the collection and presentation of data by Member States, in order to ensure that adequate data and statistical information were submitted to the Committee on a uniform and comparable basis (resolution 37/125 B). The Committee on Contributions, all of whose suggestions relating to the first two of those tasks appeared in chapter III of the report, seemed to view the two tasks as having much in common. However, his delegation was not convinced that such a unified approach was appropriate. The first task related to the real capacity to pay, determined mainly on the basis of fairly objective economic considerations. The second task, on the other hand, implied taking into consideration various social factors. With regard to the first task, the Committee had considered three alternatives, described in parts A, B and C of chapter III.

66. Alternative I consisted of dividing the Member States into three groups, namely the OECD countries, the countries with centrally planned economies and all other countries. Leaving aside the ambiguity of such a grouping, his delegation

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found it unacceptable since instead of solving the problem it passed it on to the groups themselves. Bulgaria thus endorsed the reservations contained in paragraph 13 of the report.

67. Alternative II (Personnel and sovereignty factors) could hardly be taken seriously as it made no mention of States' capacity to pay, which was clearly contrary to rule 160 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, under which the Committee on Contributions should advise the General Assembly concerning the apportionment of the expenses of the Organization among Members, broadly according to capacity to pay. That alternative, moreover, flouted the very spirit of the provisions of the Charter relating to the composition of the Secretariat, as contained in Article 101, paragraph 3. His delegation considered that the Committee on Contributions had made a serious mistake in including that alternative in the report, and had been puzzled to learn that the Committee intended to study it in greater depth.

68. Alternative III relating to national wealth, foundered on difficulties recognized since before the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and had not led to any progress.

69. Appraising the way in which the Committee on Contributions had discharged the first task, his delegation felt that despite the considerable effort which it had made to break free of routine and find innovative methods, its achievements were too modest. A proliferation of options could scarcely be considered the best option.

70. It was clear, on the other hand, that alternative IV (variants of current methodology and their effects on assessable income) constituted a serious attempt to refine further the traditional method. It incorporated, as was expected, more or less all the elements of the first two tasks referred to. However the Committee had from the very start run into the complexity of integrating economic and social indicators.

71. A relatively new element was discussed in chapter III, section D.2, where adjustments for inflation and exchange rate fluctuations were considered. That raised serious questions which his delegation expected the Committee on Contributions to answer. If the Committee did not, neither the definition contained in paragraph 37 of the report, nor the table contained in annex III would elucidate the problem. The first question related to "pseudo" rates of exchange which, by definition, represented rates of exchange between the United States dollar and the local currency, taking into account a coefficient based on the relative price index, and the application of which would affect to a greater or lesser extent the assessment of all States, except one. Yet States would have to pay their contributions in a currency (the United States dollar) which was exchanged at a real rather than "pseudo" rate. He asked whether such a double calculation would have an adverse effect on actual payments.

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72. Moreover, certain States managed to keep low rates of inflation and domestic prices which were lower than average world prices. It seemed to his delegation that by applying the "pseudo" rates of exchange the Committee would put such States at a disadvantage. Was it correct to think that the "pseudo" rates would penalize States with stable economies, low domestic prices and low inflation rates?

73. The last question referred to a situation in which the United Nations had to spend a specific sum of money in the territory of a Member State. Where the domestic price of a product was X in local currency, that was equivalent to an amount Y in United States dollars. If the United Nations organized certain activities in that country, and had to buy the product in question, would it pay Y United States dollars, or more, or less?

74. In conclusion, he noted that the Committee on Contributions had made sincere efforts to meet all the requests contained in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. It had put forward a number of suggestions which touched upon all aspects of the methods for assessing contributions. Some of the suggestions were quite pertinent, while others were not, but the general impression gained by his delegation was that more questions had been raised than answered.

75. His delegation wished to make one last appeal. When the time came for the next scale of assessments to be worked out, the Committee on Contributions should be more explicit about the method used. It was to be hoped that the gap between theoretical considerations and practical calculations might then be successfully bridged through a common effort.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.