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SECOND COMMITTEE
19th meeting
held on
Thursday, 27 October 1983
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DIETZE (German Democratic Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 78: DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION (continued)
(A/38/3 (parts I and II), 57, 68, 106, 132 and Corr.1-2, 168, 186 and Corr.1, 209, 302, 303, 324, 325, 329, 425, 479, 494, 495; A/C.2/38/3)

- (c) INDUSTRIALIZATION: REPORT OF THE INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD (continued)
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- (e) FOOD PROBLEMS (continued) (A/38/19, 277, 280, 377; A/C.2/38/L.4)
- (g) ENVIRONMENT (continued) (A/38/25, 304, 305, 383, 403, 504; A/C.2/38/L.5)
- (h) HUMAN SETTLEMENTS (continued) (A/38/8, 278)
- (i) INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS: REPORT OF THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/38/8, 233 and Corr.1; A/C.2/38/L.9)
- (l) NEW AND RENEWABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY (continued) (A/38/44, 240)
- (n) NEW INTERNATIONAL HUMAN ORDER: MORAL ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT (continued)
(A/38/360; E/1983/68 and Add.1-3; E/1983/89; A/C.2/38/L.6)

1. Mr. TOLBA (Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme) welcomed the remarks made thus far in the debate concerning the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and said that UNEP would endeavour to live up to the expectations placed in it by Governments.

2. At the eleventh session of the Governing Council of UNEP in May 1983 it had been generally felt that UNEP had functioned reasonably well in the 10 years since its establishment, that the world was running out of time to deal with environmental problems, and that no significant exchanges had occurred since the evaluation of the environmental situation made at the session of a special character in 1982.

3. He welcomed the conciliatory attitude which had prevailed in the Governing Council regarding the most appropriate methods of collaboration at the international and regional levels. It was highly significant that Governments had reached by consensus agreements on issues which had been potentially divisive, a reflection of the fact that environmental issues affected all countries. He also welcomed the importance which all Governments attached to the integration of environmental considerations in development planning, project formulation and implementation and to international co-operation in environmental matters. That approach had been reflected in the Governing Council's decision that he should devote his 1984 state-of-the-environment report to the topic "The environment in the dialogue between and among developed and developing countries", with a view to giving new impetus to the dialogue.

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(Mr. Tolba)

4. Related to that question was the proposed Environmental Perspective to the year 2000 and beyond, namely, what basic goals the international community should set itself in environmental matters for the coming 30 to 40 years. The draft resolution which the Governing Council was recommending for adoption by the General Assembly had been the subject of very delicate negotiations in the Council, and he had been pleasantly surprised when the Economic and Social Council had decided to transmit the text without further substantive recommendations to the General Assembly. The draft resolution provided for the establishment of an intersessional intergovernmental preparatory committee to prepare the Perspective with the assistance of a Special Commission of eminent persons. The adoption by the General Assembly of the recommended resolution would not result in any increase in the regular budget of UNEP, since savings from the new streamlining arrangements of Governing Council sessions would offset the cost of intersessional preparatory committee meetings. Moreover, he had received firm indications that sufficient voluntary contributions would be available to finance the work of the Special Commission.

5. Agreement had been reached on the budget for the system-wide medium-term environment programme for the 1984-1985 biennium. It had also been decided that the Governing Council would not meet in 1986 and would decide in 1987 whether it should meet annually or biennially thereafter.

6. With regard to desertification, the situation in the Sudano-Sahelian zone was still far from satisfactory. Moreover, drought had compounded the desertification problems faced by countries in that area and others outside. The response to the call for financing of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification had been disappointing, and he had been particularly dismayed at the lack of response from Governments directly affected by desertification and drought. He urged Governments, particularly those most affected, to provide the Secretary-General with specific recommendations, particularly with regard to the proposal to establish an international financial corporation.

7. The Governing Council had made two specific recommendations concerning desertification. Firstly, it recommended that the mandate of the Consultative Group for Desertification Control should be expanded to include information exchange and, secondly, that the mandate of the Sudano-Sahelian Office should be expanded into the area of dealing with the environmental consequences of drought in the Sudano-Sahelian region as a whole. Noting that there had been some difference of views on the latter question at the Governing Council's eleventh session, he urged representatives of African States to hold consultations before the matter was discussed further in the Committee.

8. On the question of environmental law, he welcomed the offers from the Governments of a number of countries to host meetings in the context of the implementation of the Montevideo Programme for the Development and Periodic Review of Environmental Law and expressed the hope that other countries would come forward with offers of support for other meetings.

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(Mr. Tolba)

9. With respect to arms and the environment, he drew attention to the report by the Secretary-General on the problem of remnants of war (A/38/383), to which was annexed the study by a high-level group of experts which made specific recommendations on various issues, as requested by the General Assembly. Governments should discuss the report and the Secretary-General should report on their reactions to the General Assembly at its thirty-ninth session.

10. With regard to the Environment Fund, it was most distressing that UNEP encountered such difficulties in attracting voluntary contributions to the Fund. He urged Governments to make firm pledges of contributions for the years 1984 and 1985 before the end of 1983. At the end of September, only \$1.7 million had been pledged, a figure which did not permit very serious planning. The stagnation which had affected the voluntary contributions to the Fund during the past four years had resulted in a 10 per cent annual decrease in UNEP's capacity to carry out its programmes. Other sources of funding were being explored, such as the clearing-house mechanism whereby UNEP could provide assistance to recipient Governments in developing and evaluating projects that could be used to attract donor support. The Netherlands, Sweden and the Federal Republic of Germany had offered assistance of that type, and he hoped that the example of Argentina, as a developing country, would be followed by other developing countries with a view to tackling the serious environmental problems of those nations.

11. All in all, he could say with confidence that UNEP was heading in the right direction 10 years after its establishment.

12. Mr. CACCIA (Canada) said that the importance of food and agriculture to the development process and international stability was reflected in the comprehensive coverage given to food and agriculture problems at the summer session of the Economic and Social Council, and by the Food and Agricultural Organization Conference, to be held in Rome in November, and the World Food Council scheduled to be held in 1984 in Addis Ababa. The key to global food security lay in ensuring that the developing countries made every effort to raise their food production capacities with the active support of the developed countries. Canada would support such action vigorously in all forums where food questions were raised.

13. The grave food situation facing Africa, where drought, wars and other upheavals had worsened the slowing production trends of the past decade, had left many sub-Saharan countries in a critical situation, and his Government was committed to helping provide the short-term relief and long-term development assistance required. It urged other countries to do likewise.

14. On energy issues, it was in the interests of producer and consumer countries to take advantage of the current lull in world oil markets so as to enhance multilateral contacts, review projections of supply and demand and better appreciate the link between oil pricing and economic prospects. Even limited progress on narrow issues would help build mutual confidence and common perceptions. National and international action, particularly through the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, was necessary to implement the

(Mr. Caccia, Canada)

Nairobi Programme of Action. His delegation hoped that the work of the Committee on the Development and Utilization of New and Renewable Sources of Energy would contribute towards implementing the Plan and refining priorities still further, particularly for rural energy development. His delegation welcomed the establishment of an information centre within the Secretariat on new and renewable sources of energy which, it hoped, would provide a more coherent perspective of bilateral and multilateral programmes and projects.

15. His delegation also supported the work of the Second Committee on industrialization, human settlements and preparations for the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

16. Through UNEP it was possible to link environmental concerns with economic and political issues. His delegation accordingly firmly supported UNEP and its proposal to establish an international commission to prepare an environmental perspective to the year 2000 and beyond. The Special Commission would help to show that the long-term environmental and economic goals of nations were very similar, since the ultimate purpose of each was to enhance the quality of life. The earth's long-range economic security depended on attaining sustainable economic development. The Commission would be funded from voluntary contributions. He was pleased to announce that his Government planned to increase its annual contribution to UNEP by more than 25 per cent over the next four years, from the present \$800,000 to slightly over \$1 million per year.

17. The need for concerted international environmental action on a global scale had never been more obvious, since environmental deterioration was proceeding at accelerated rates in a number of components of the ecosystem.

18. The burning of fossil fuels, especially by the industrialized nations, had led to ever-increasing concentrations of carbon dioxide in the earth's atmosphere. UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) were studying the pollution problem but, in addition to their efforts, scientific work must be intensified so that appropriate action could be taken in time and so that countries could be told whether they should replace fossil fuels by renewable fuels.

19. Principle 21 of the Declaration of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment placed a responsibility on States to ensure that their activities did not damage the environment of other States or of areas beyond their boundaries. There were few nations in the world which could say that they were not in violation of that principle.

20. The phenomenon of international acid rain, which had affected large areas of Scandinavia, Germany and Poland, posed an immediate threat to Canada's aquatic resources, soils and forests; the damage caused by sulphur emissions which generated acid rain was estimated to amount to more than \$5 billion a year in the United States and Canada alone, and the potential permanent effects on soils and forest ecosystems were incalculable. Acid rain, while being international in cause and global in scope, affected primarily the northern developed countries which

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(Mr. Caccia, Canada)

were best able to afford the costs of environmental preservation. Since the developed nations know the causes of acid rain and had the capacity to act, it would be truly shameful if they failed to tackle the environmental problems caused by their seemingly insatiable appetite for resources.

21. However, acid rain was but one among many pressing global environmental problems needing solution. The Brandt Commission had suggested that maintenance of the oceans, the atmosphere and outer space and control of their use called for the establishment of international régimes. The Special Commission which UNEP had proposed had great potential as part of the United Nations system and would fit well into the current North-South discussion and the search for ways and means of reconciling the desire for a better life with the protection and even improvement of the environment and the conservation of natural resources. He suggested the following areas which the Commission might profitably study. Firstly, it could draft an environmental bill of rights which would tie the principles of the Stockholm Declaration into the institutional structures of individual nations, leaving them to develop their environmental bills of rights according to their own priorities, while the international expression of support for environmental bills of rights in general could focus interest on the development of an environmental law programme. Such a bill would assist government policy-makers in establishing rational priorities for legislative action in environmental law, and would complement the efforts of the United Nations in that sphere.

22. The second area which the Commission might study was monitoring; it could examine ways of strengthening Earthwatch, the global environmental monitoring system (GEMS). The present network of agencies participating in the system was too thinly spread out and the Commission might be able to help by persuading non-participating Governments and institutions to join the system, and by suggesting ways in which the information provided by the GEMS network could be more rapidly circulated and more effectively acted upon. Thirdly, the Commission might consider a framework for action and devise a procedure whereby UNEP would be better able to tackle environmental problems systematically, with provision for regular meetings of Government representatives to agree on multilateral environmental issues. The framework for ecological management, which would result from the application of that procedure, could provide the international community with a ready means of solving transboundary environmental issues, replacing the diplomatic approach that had been the rule hitherto.

23. The fourth possibility was an environmental protection board competent to judge whether a given environmental degradation had had a global impact serious enough to warrant an explanation by those responsible. Thus, entities responsible for global damage could be called to account for their actions and asked to change them. The environmental protection board could also serve as a high-level forum in which severe environmental problems could be discussed. In that way, the moral weight of the United Nations could be applied to the task of urging nations to exercise their sovereignty in such a way as to take global environmental concerns into account.

24. The United Nations was the most logical forum for the solution of global problems and its role, including that of UNEP, could only increase in the future.

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25. Mr. SAOUMA (Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization) recalled that, following an alarming decline in basic food production in a number of African States at the beginning of 1983, a special FAO/World Food Programme (WFP) group of experts had been appointed to study the situation. The group's second report, made in September 1983, showed that 22 African States, already stricken by the stagnation or virtual cessation of their food production, faced a further threat to their food supplies because of such factors as prolonged drought, crop blights, and animal diseases. In the southern part of Africa production of foodstuffs, particularly maize, had been particularly low for the second year running and hence stocks were much reduced. The populations concerned were among the least developed and had neither the administrative infrastructure nor the transport and distribution networks necessary to cope with emergencies. There was thus a risk that very soon a large part of the 150 million or so people in those 22 African countries would experience severe economic hardship with the risk of malnutrition and even famine, and that the process of development would thus be gravely impeded.

26. Imports of food into Africa had trebled in 10 years and, because of the world recession and the weakness of overseas markets, many countries could no longer use their exports to pay for the imports they needed to make good their food deficit. Food aid, on the other hand, had not kept pace, and actual deliveries had been below the amounts pledged. High interest rates and balance-of-payments difficulties combined to prevent those countries maintaining a reasonable level of production. A recent report on the food situation in Africa showed that the total food-aid requirements of those countries in 1983-1984 would amount to 3.2 million tonnes and that pledges received so far amounted to no more than 19 per cent of that quantity. In the past, pledges of food aid had always been below the amount required and, in turn, the amounts actually delivered had always been below the amounts pledged. A total of 1 million tonnes of cereals in additional food aid was required to take care of the food requirements of the 22 countries over the next few months and more than 700,000 tonnes of that amount represented the quantity required for immediate emergency purposes. Since delivery generally took several months, it was essential to plan immediately so that the promised deliveries could arrive in the recipient countries at a regular rate, account being taken of seasonal requirements which varied from region to region. A staggered delivery system on those lines would, in the long run, be helpful to the donor countries.

27. Food aid to countries with a net food deficit could reduce human suffering, but the countries would still be liable to periodic famine unless food production could be increased and, for that, each of the countries concerned must make a great effort to integrate the development of agriculture and the related sectors of the rural economy by the best possible use of land, water, livestock and human resources. A number of African leaders, in discussing the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action had expressed concern about the food problem and had emphasized their readiness to provide the political support required to back up the necessary corrective measures. FAO strongly supported the efforts being made to implement that Plan.

(Mr. Saouma)

28. Some 40 per cent of FAO's regular budget and about the same proportion of extrabudgetary funds were devoted to special projects in Sub-Saharan Africa, covering such matters as fertilizers, improved seeds, food security and plant protection. At the request of Governments, FAO in close co-operation with UNDP had prepared a complex of projects, the total value of which when completed would exceed \$1,000 million.

29. In general, however, food aid should be regarded as merely one component of an aid package the object of which should be to revive the rural economy, agriculture and animal husbandry in the stricken areas so that dependence on external food aid could be progressively reduced to vanishing point.

30. The challenge to the international community could thus be stated in very precise terms and he hoped that it would respond through either bilateral programmes or joint action with FAO.

31. At a similar meeting in 1980 he had formulated a number of principles for co-ordinated international action. Those principles had contributed to relieving the food crisis in Africa in 1980-1981 and were worth repeating: in the first place, the Governments of countries needing aid must mobilize all their resources, especially of local transport so as to avoid bottlenecks in distribution. Secondly, donors must do everything possible to speed up deliveries of food aid already pledged, in the light of seasonal requirements, with highest priority being given to countries where stocks were in danger of running out, and to the Sahel where food aid was vital, particularly for countries inaccessible in the rainy season. Thirdly, donors should review their aid deliveries and take on additional commitments to cover shortages forecast for 1983-1984. They should immediately inform FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) of their additional commitments. Fourthly, Governments and agencies financing development programmes in African countries should make a particular effort to provide emergency aid so as to encourage the resumption of food production in 1984, by such means as subsidies for the purchase of chemicals, tools and other supplies. Fifthly, FAO and WFP, with the co-operation of the recipient countries, would provide up-to-date information for potential donors. If necessary they would continue to organize multidonor missions as soon as crop forecasts were available, so that donors would have first-hand knowledge of where the largest deficits were likely to be. Sixthly, under the world information and emergency alert system FAO would continue to issue monthly reports on the general situation with particular regard to harvest prospects and the amount of food aid promised. Finally, WFP would continue to co-ordinate emergency food aid from bilateral and multilateral sources, particularly for the most-deprived countries.

32. Mr. DIOP (Senegal), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the countries of the Group realized that they themselves were primarily responsible for their own development. Accordingly, they had given high priority to agriculture and food production had increased steadily in the 1960s and early 1970s. More recently, however, natural disasters and adverse climatic conditions had put a stop to any further increase. The situation would remain unchanged so long as the

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(Mr. Diop, Senegal)

threat of drought persisted. He thanked the countries which had already provided assistance in that respect but added that, given the unprecedented food shortage which the countries of the Group would soon be facing, more assistance was needed. The Group therefore planned to submit a draft resolution on the subject and he hoped that the Committee would adopt it by consensus.

33. Mr. DA LUZ (Cape Verde), speaking on behalf of the members of the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, said that the food situation in Africa had been deteriorating steadily. The countries of the Sahel had had to increase their food imports substantially in the past two years; according to a recent FAO estimate those imports were likely to sky-rocket in the near future. The situation called for carefully planned long-term solutions. Those countries were making strenuous efforts to deal with the food shortage but they simply did not have the necessary resources and were having to look increasingly for external assistance. Such assistance should be provided not on an emergency basis but on a continuing and predictable basis. He thanked the Director-General of FAO for calling attention repeatedly to the gravity of the food situation in many African countries and expressed the hope that the international community would take timely action to alleviate the crisis.

34. Mr. van WELL (Federal Republic of Germany) said that it was not correct to say, as certain delegations had done in recent weeks, that the North-South dialogue had come to a stop. The dialogue was a continuing process and it had already led to a deeper mutual understanding and a stronger feeling of common responsibility.

35. Acceptance of the interdependence of North and South was essential for co-operation in environmental matters. Many developing countries had suffered environmental damage and that damage had also harmed their economies. Long-term damage resulting from irresponsible use of natural resources would affect the future of mankind. His delegation therefore advocated a forward-looking environmental strategy even during the present times of economic difficulty. Global environmental problems could be solved only through close international co-operation. The environmental problems which UNEP was tackling should be viewed in the broader context of development, population and resources, the interdependence of which would play a major role in the preparation of the Environmental Perspective to the year 2000 and beyond. Given the acute shortages which were likely to arise in a number of fields and given the growing gap between world food production and world population, the international community must take effective action to safeguard the environment and to prevent man-made global disaster. UNEP was playing an increasingly important role as initiator of and catalyst for such action.

36. He drew attention to the need to design projects for ecologically-sound industrial production, to develop resource-saving technologies and to curb migration to the towns. In the past few years his Government had substantially increased its development assistance; one component of such assistance related to environmental protection within the scope of development projects. In that connection, he drew attention to the seminar on environmental impact assessment and

(Mr. van Well, Federal
Republic of Germany)

development which was to be held in the Federal Republic of Germany the following year to discuss ways of integrating such assessment into development projects. Referring to the "clearing-house concept" he pointed out that a memorandum of understanding had been signed in February between UNEP and his Government. The latter had recently supplied expert assistance for environmental impact assessment in respect of the planning, execution and evaluation of development programmes in developing countries. Negotiations on contributions to be made under the clearing-house concept would be held in the near future. His Government had also co-operated with UNEP in organizing two seminars relating to the waste sector; those seminars were geared to the needs of third-world countries. The second seminar, on the handling, transport and disposal of hazardous wastes, had as its objective the formulation of guidelines to enable the developing countries to supervise effectively the international transport of toxic and dangerous waste and it might lead to the drawing up of an international convention on the subject. His Government was ready to participate actively in the meeting on international trade in potentially dangerous chemicals, especially pesticides, which was to be held in the Netherlands the following year and was preparing proposals for an international code of conduct on pesticides for submission at the meeting.

37. The problem of acid rain was one that deserved priority. His Government had taken measures to reduce the emission of pollutants at the source. However, those measures must be supplemented at the international level. His Government was co-operating closely with other industrialized countries in Europe to protect the environment. It planned to prepare an international conference with a view to pooling the experience gained in combating air pollution. His Government was ready to make its experience available to UNEP. One lesson his Government had learned was that environmental protection must be a long-term process. The objective was to avoid damaging the environment from the outset rather than merely to repair the damage.

38. His delegation welcomed the invitation, extended by the Executive Director of UNEP to industry, to convene a conference on industry and environment.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.