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Official Records*



FIFTH COMMITTEE
2nd meeting
held on
Tuesday, 25 September 1984
at 10.30 a.m.
New York

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

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

CONTENTS

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIRMAN AND THE RAPPORTEUR

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. The CHAIRMAN expressed his sincere gratitude for having been elected Chairman of the Committee.
2. In his report on the work of the Organization (A/39/1), the Secretary-General had addressed himself to the question of the efficient functioning of the Secretariat and the role and responsibilities of Member States in that respect. It was the responsibility of the Fifth Committee to ensure that the Organization was provided with adequate resources to undertake the programmes which the Committees of the Assembly deemed necessary, to provide the means necessary for the Secretary-General to ensure an efficiently functioning Secretariat to implement those programmes, and to create a climate which would encourage staff to co-operate fully with the Secretary-General, with representatives of Member States, with the public at large and with other staff members.
3. During the course of the current session, the Committee would no doubt be faced with difficult problems, and serious and genuine differences of opinion might arise. He was sure, however, that, in the spirit of camaraderie and compromise for which the Committee was well known, it would overcome all problems so as to safeguard the common interests of the international community throughout the entire United Nations system.

ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIRMEN AND THE RAPPORTEUR

4. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) nominated Mr. Bushev (Bulgaria) for the office of Vice-Chairman.
5. Mr. TOMMO MONTE (Cameroon) nominated Mr. Ditz (Austria) for the office of Vice-Chairman.
6. Mr. Bushev (Bulgaria) and Mr. Ditz (Austria) were elected Vice-Chairmen by acclamation.
7. Mr. ORTEGA (Mexico) nominated Mr. Mojtahed (Islamic Republic of Iran) for the office of Rapporteur.
8. Mr. Mojtahed (Islamic Republic of Iran) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/39/250; A/C.5/39/5; A/C.5/39/L.1)

9. The CHAIRMAN pointed out that, in document A/C.5/39/5, the President of the General Assembly drew the attention of the Fifth Committee to the recommendations on the organization of the session contained in section II of document A/39/250 and requested the Committee's co-operation in that regard. He (the Chairman) wished to highlight certain of those recommendations which were of particular relevance to

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(The Chairman)

the Fifth Committee. First, meetings should begin promptly at 10.30 a.m. and 3 p.m. (A/39/250, para. 3). It should be recalled that at the thirty-eighth session, the Fifth Committee had wasted the equivalent of 10 meetings as a result of late starts. When the same draft resolution was considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e. either in the Committee or in plenary meeting, unless that delegation's vote in plenary meeting was different from its vote in the Committee (para. 8). In that respect, he proposed that the Committee should continue its practice of indicating in its report to the plenary the names of delegations which had explained their vote in the Committee. The Assembly had also decided that statements made in Main Committees would not be reproduced in extenso (para. 10). On the subject of the programme budget, it had been recommended that the Fifth Committee should consider the possibility of accepting without debate the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) on the financial implications of draft resolutions up to a limit of \$25,000 on any one item (para. 13). In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 4.9 of the Annex to resolution 37/234, no council, commission or other competent body should take a decision involving either a change in the programme budget approved by the General Assembly or the possible requirement of expenditure unless it had received and taken account of a report from the Secretary-General on the programme budget implications of the proposal (para. 14). Lastly, he wished to draw attention to the General Assembly's decision that smoking would be prohibited in small conference rooms and that it should be discouraged in large conference rooms (para. 20).

10. He also drew to the attention of the Committee the provisions of Assembly decision 34/401 relating to the rationalization of the procedures and organization of the General Assembly, which had been incorporated in the rules of procedure of the General Assembly as annex VI.

11. On the subject of the Committee's own procedures, he suggested that it should continue to enforce the practices which it had adopted over the past few years, namely, that the list of speakers should be closed on each main agenda item not later than 48 hours following its introduction; that speakers should be heard in the order in which delegations had entered their names on the list of speakers, and if a delegation was not present when it was called upon to speak, it would go to the end of the list for that day; and that the Rapporteur should be authorized to report directly to the General Assembly on all items considered unless, in a particular case, the Committee decided to include a summary of the debate in its report.

12. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt his suggestions.

13. It was so decided.

14. The CHAIRMAN said that, in drawing up the tentative time-table for the Committee's work, account had been taken of a number of considerations, including the availability of documentation in all working languages (which topic was dealt with in document A/C.5/39/L.1), the schedules of the Committee Chairmen, and the

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(The Chairman)

distribution of the work-load over the session. Since it was the practice of Committee to give particular emphasis to personnel questions in non-budget years, he proposed that agenda items 116, 117 and 118, which related to personnel matters, should be clustered for consideration during a period of almost six weeks, beginning with the last week of October and extending throughout the entire month of November. It was expected that by the end of October the Committee would have disposed of items 108, 115, 114, 113, and 111, which would be taken up in that order.

15. It was his intention to take up agenda item 109, "Programme budget for the biennium 1984-1985", in early October, probably beginning on the eighth of that month, so that the Committee would be able to consider the various reports to be submitted under the item throughout the session as they, and the related reports of the Advisory Committee, became available. The last few days in November and the first two weeks of December should be set aside as far as possible, for the consideration of agenda item 109 on the financing of the United Nations peace-keeping forces in the Middle East, statements of programme budget implications of draft resolutions proposed by other Main Committees, the programme budget performance report and the drawing up of the revised budget appropriations for the biennium. Depending on the availability of documentation, item 110 on programme planning and item 112 on administrative and budgetary co-ordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency could be taken up in the last week of October.

16. The General Assembly had decided to allocate agenda item 113, on the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), to the Fifth Committee on the understanding that the reports of JIU dealing with matters assigned to other Main Committees would be referred also to those Committees (A/C.5/39/5, para. 6). With respect to JIU reports on items allocated to the Fifth Committee, he suggested that the Committee should follow the established practice of discussing them in conjunction with the agenda item to which they related.

17. Various parts of the report of the Economic and Social Council (agenda item 12), relating to administrative and financial questions, had been referred to the Fifth Committee. As usual, and to the extent possible, the various chapters of the report would be considered in conjunction with the agenda items allocated to the Committee to which they referred. If required, as in the case of the draft Statute of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), questions would be considered separately, upon receipt of the related ACABQ report.

18. Finally, with respect to appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments (agenda item 17), the Committee would have to deal with six such organs. Since consultations still had to be held with respect to various appointments and, in some cases, the Secretary-General had not yet received proposals for candidatures, he suggested that 30 November be set as the date for taking appropriate action on item 17.

19. Mr. DUQUE (Secretary of the Committee), referring to the documentation on items 109, 113 and 117, said that it was expected that the report of the Joint

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(Mr. Duque)

Inspection Unit, on staff costs and some aspects of utilization of human and financial resources in the Secretariat of the United Nations (JIU/REP/84/12) would be issued by mid October and the comments of the Secretary-General, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), and possibly also those of ACABQ, by the end of October. That information was not in document A/C.5/39/L.1 because it had not been available when that document had been prepared.

20. Mr. NYGARD (United States of America) observed that the documentation on one of the most important items on the agenda, 117, on the United Nations common system was not yet available, and, in particular, that the report of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and that of JIU on staff costs had not yet been issued.

21. His delegation viewed with deep concern the increase in post adjustment for the staff at Headquarters that had been recently announced. When discussing the report of ICSC, at the previous session, his delegation had pointed out that the cost-of-living surveys carried out in 1982 and 1983 had shown that the levels of post adjustment in force at that time for New York and Washington, D.C., had been adequate and that the indexes for Paris, Rome and Vienna had been too high. Despite that fact, ICSC had recommended a large increase in post adjustment for New York, the base city, which was not justified by a corresponding increase in the cost of living and which overlooked the need to freeze or reduce post adjustment in the European cities in question. Consequently, on the basis of ICSC's own data, the margin existing between United Nations staff remuneration and that of the comparator civil service had increased from 116 to 123.

22. Because of its special interest in studying in detail the criteria on which ICSC had based its recommendation, his delegation wished to emphasize the importance of receiving the reports to which he had referred as soon as possible.

23. Mr. KHALEVINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed his delegation's deep concern over the implementation of the recommendation of ICSC to increase the post adjustment by 9.6 per cent. Even though seemingly of a technical nature, that question had substantive repercussions because it meant once again a departure from the Noblemaire principle. Furthermore, the recommendation meant an increase in base salary of some 14.8 per cent, with financial implications of about \$12 million. Such a measure should have been submitted for consideration and approval by the General Assembly. For the time being, his delegation would confine itself to expressing its concern about the matter, but would revert to it when the relevant agenda item was taken up. In view of the importance of the issue, he hoped that it would be taken up earlier than anticipated in the tentative programme of work.

24. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) asked what the reason was for relegating item 116, "Personnel questions", to the end of the session. The argument that the documentation would not be available before the dates indicated was not acceptable. The Secretariat must anticipate such requirements and do everything possible to solve the problem.

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25. Mr. EL-SAFTY (Egypt), supported by Mr. ROY (India), said that with respect to the proposed time-table for the consideration of the items allocated to the Committee, the Committee would be dealing with seven items during the final week of October and seven in the first week of November. That was simply impossible.

26. His delegation was most interested in studying various personnel questions because it believed that there had not been sufficient agreement beforehand on certain decisions taken by the Secretary-General. Consequently, the Committee should begin consideration of those items earlier than planned in the proposed programme of work.

27. Agenda item 110, on programme planning, was also very important. For the first time the Committee would be considering programme planning implications in addition to financial and administrative implications. That item should be taken up two or three weeks earlier than planned so that delegations could hold consultations and reach agreement beforehand.

28. Finally, he shared the concern of the representative of Morocco with respect to the delay in the submission of documentation and hoped that a definitive solution would be found for that problem.

29. Mr. HOLBORN (Federal Republic of Germany), referring to the delays in issuing documentation, which grew worse with each passing year, asked why, since the deliberations of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) had been concluded in August, the relevant documents had not yet been distributed. It was necessary to give maximum priority to issuing them so that the Committee could take them up by mid-October at the latest.

30. Mr. TAKASU (Japan), supported by Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom), agreed that the consideration of items 116, 117 and 118 should be brought forward. In particular, items 117 and 118 should be taken up at least two weeks earlier than scheduled in the tentative time-table. To that end, it would be necessary, among other things, to circulate the report of ACABQ as soon as possible. Items 111 and 112 could be taken up at a later date.

31. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) observed that, in the case of two particularly important reports due to be discussed at the current session of the General Assembly, namely the reports of ICSC and the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board (UNJSPB), the principle that documents should be distributed six weeks before the opening of the session of the General Assembly had not been respected. Because of that delay, the General Assembly would be unable to consider those items during the current month, as it would perhaps have preferred if the documents had been available.

32. Mr. PINHEIRO-GUIMARAES (Brazil) said that it must be determined whether the delays in the submission of documents were due to the inefficiency of the Secretariat or to its lack of sufficient resources to meet its obligations on time. Such delays were detrimental to all Member States, especially those with limited resources which had fewer staff available to study United Nations documents. He asked the representative of the Secretariat to explain the reasons for the delays.

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33. Mr. ORSATELLI (France) said that the Secretariat should report on the steps to be taken to speed up the issue of documents. For its part, the Committee should organize its deliberations more rationally so as to avoid an overload of work in certain periods. Accordingly, agenda items should be taken up in order of importance.

34. His delegation felt that the General Assembly should be informed of decisions with financial implications sufficiently in advance so that Member States could communicate their comments on them to the Secretariat.

35. The CHAIRMAN said that, in view of the general interest in moving forward the consideration of personnel questions, he would ask the Secretariat to do its utmost to issue the relevant documents as soon as possible.

36. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management), replying to the questions asked and comments made during the meeting, said that, although it was true that ICSC and the Pension Board had met in August, it took time to process and issue their reports owing to their length and complexity. He pointed out that the rule concerning the issue of documentation six weeks before the General Assembly session actually applied to documents relating to the programme budget.

37. As to the status of documentation, the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/39/453), which was of basic importance in considering item 116, would be distributed very shortly. On the other hand, the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/84/12), which was a basic document for the consideration of various items before the Committee, could not be issued without the comments of the Secretary-General. The financial reports, which certainly would be the first item to be dealt with by the Committee, posed no difficulty at all, since they had all been issued. As to the documentation on personnel questions, the Chairman of the Committee had indicated that he would ask the Secretariat to do its utmost to speed up their issue so that the Committee could consider the relevant items sooner than planned.

38. With regard to the delays in the submission of documentation, he said that the timely issue of most documents depended on many factors, not only the efficiency of the Secretariat, which should no doubt be further improved. Moreover, as could be seen from the considerable number of reports listed in document A/C.5/39/L.1, the Secretariat had had to cope with an increased work-load. In many cases, if certain documents were to be made available earlier, the dates for the meetings of the bodies preparing them or the dates when those bodies received the documents they needed to prepare their reports would have to be moved forward. Documents concerning the budget were a special case, since the Secretary-General had to decide whether to wait to submit to the Committee the most recent and complete information which could be gathered or whether to submit documents which had been prepared at an early stage and which were neither complete or up-to-date. In most cases, the Secretary-General had felt that it was better to choose the first solution.

39. He suggested that the discussion on the status of documentation should be postponed for several days in order to allow the Chairman to find out how many documents could be made available to the Committee sooner than anticipated.

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40. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee was prepared to wait for a revised time-table for the consideration of the items allocated to the Committee to be prepared following consultations with the Secretariat to ascertain which documents could be issued more quickly.

41. Mr. PIRSON (Belgium) said that it was clearly stated in annex VI to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly that subsidiary organs should be required to complete their work in time for consideration by the opening of the session of the General Assembly. Non-compliance with that provision was preventing the consideration of urgent matters which should have been taken up by the end of the current month.

42. Mr. EL-SAFETY (Egypt) suggested that the Chairman, when taking steps aimed at speeding up the issue of the documents on personnel questions, the United Nations common system and the United Nations pension system (items 116, 117 and 118), should do the same with regard to the documents on programme planning (item 110).

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.