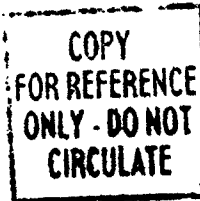


United Nations
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY

THIRTY-NINTH SESSION

Official Records*



FIFTH COMMITTEE
40th meeting
held on
Monday, 3 December 1984
at 10.30.m.
New York

DEC 21 1984

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 40th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

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

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/39/SR.40
6 December 1984

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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

AGENDA ITEM 109: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1984-1985 (continued)

Expansion of the conference facilities of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific at Bangkok (continued) (A/C.5/39/24, A/C.5/39/62; A/39/7/Add.7)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited delegations to explain their votes in connection with the decision taken at the Committee's 39th meeting on the proposed expansion of ESCAP conference facilities at Bangkok.

2. Mr. KHALEVINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking in explanation of vote, said that, unlike the reports on the expansion of ECA conference facilities at Addis Ababa, the reports of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee on the expansion of ESCAP's facilities at Bangkok had been unclear and made it very difficult to see where costs might be reduced. While his delegation was grateful to the Thai Government for its generous offer towards the proposed expansion, it had serious reservations regarding the expenditures envisaged for the United Nations. The project provided for the construction of a number of superfluous facilities. Meetings requirements could be met adequately by existing facilities and by the construction of a number of small conference rooms. His delegation was also opposed to the plans to build additional parking facilities. The two reports were also unclear as to the expansion factor. The proposed expansion was unnecessary because a number of floors in the existing ESCAP building were being leased to other United Nations organizations at below-market rents, even though there was no shortage of similar accommodation elsewhere in Bangkok. Accordingly, while his delegation could have supported a more rational and modest proposal, it had voted against what it considered to be an excessive proposal.

3. Mr. HOLBORN (Federal Republic of Germany) said that his delegation had abstained in the vote on the proposed expansion. While it did not question the recommendations contained in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee, it believed that, given the current limitations on the United Nations resources, a more modest proposal would have been preferable.

4. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) said that his delegation had voted in favour of the appropriations recommended by the Secretary-General and approved by the Advisory Committee because of the need for expanded and improved conference facilities at ESCAP. It none the less believed that substantial outlays, such as expenditures on construction work, should not be given high priority, in the current critical economic situation, and hoped that the project would be implemented rationally and economically.

First-class travel (continued) (A/C.5/39/16; A/C.5/39/L.13)

5. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/39/L.13, said that his delegation welcomed the recent adjustment made in United Nations practice with regard to standards of accommodation for official travel to take account of the widespread availability of business class. That adjustment offered clear

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(Mr. Murray, United Kingdom)

advantages both in financial terms and in terms of the public image of the Organization. His delegation also believed that there was a case for extending that practice to all those entitled to travel first class at United Nations expense, and not just to Secretariat staff. The draft resolution was designed simply to update Secretariat reporting on standards of accommodation for air travel to take account of the availability of business class, and to secure more stringent implementation of the rules on standards of accommodation. In future, the General Assembly would have to be informed of all exceptions made to allow either first-class or business-class travel, with detailed reasons for each exception and a statement of its financial implications.

6. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to adopt draft resolution A/C.5/39/L.13 without a vote.

7. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 111: FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE ON THE FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

(b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued) (A/39/622; A/C.5/39/10 and Corr.1)

8. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, observed that the lengthy debates in recent years on individual rates of assessment were a reflection of weakening support for the Organization, and the difficulties in reaching agreement on the scale of assessments contrasted sharply with the important tasks entrusted to the United Nations. If Member States were genuinely concerned about strengthening the United Nations, eliminating its financial problems ought to be one of the least difficult problems to solve in the coming year. In the light of the usual conspicuous absence of speakers on the item, his delegation was inclined to conclude that if Member States were to devote as much zeal to paying their assessed contributions as they did to debating the budget and their individual contributions, the Organization might be in a much sounder financial position.

9. As the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/39/10 and Corr.1) indicated, the so-called short-term deficit had reached its highest level ever and was approaching \$360 million. That was the result chiefly of two practices: selective withholdings and the late or incomplete payment of assessed contributions. The Nordic countries deplored the practice of withholding whether for reasons of principle or other reasons, for it added to the growing deficit, punished those Members who did pay, particularly contributors to peace-keeping operations, and undermined others' financial morale. Withholdings from peace-keeping operations in fact made up by far the largest share of the short-term deficit. The Nordic countries took a very serious view of that problem for, if some Member States, including those with a special responsibility for peace and security, were able to contravene Article 17 of the Charter with impunity, then others might follow suit. Once there was some indication that delegations were prepared to discuss the

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(Mr. Amneus, Sweden)

problem, the Fifth Committee must be prepared to handle the technicalities. In the mean time, the General Assembly's approach must be that, from the standpoint of the Charter, all withholding was illegal. The growing deficit was the result of the unwillingness of some Member States to assume their share of collective financial responsibility for the Organization, thereby jeopardizing the latter's financial integrity, viability and credibility.

10. With regard to the pattern of payments, Member States frequently invoked economic or financial difficulties as a pretext for late or incomplete payment of their assessed contributions. While there might be rare cases of genuine financial difficulty, the Nordic countries questioned whether the amounts generally involved were truly significant in relation to the objectives of peace, security and economic and social development. One obvious effect of late and incomplete payment was that it made it much more difficult for the Controller and his staff to ensure efficient financial and cash-flow management. Moreover, a shaky financial situation reflected badly on the Organization. While many proposals had been put forward over the years for solving the problem, the Nordic countries believed that, if only a handful of Member States continued to pay their assessed contributions in conformity with the Financial Regulations, the situation would continue to deteriorate. Accordingly, if there was no improvement in 1985, they would be prepared to consider revisions to the Financial Regulations, as suggested in the Secretary-General's report.

11. Some delegations claimed that the price of membership was too high and that the solution was to cut back on the programme budget. That was not a serious option, however, particularly since late and incomplete payers included not only those who advocated a reduced budget but also those who favoured budget increases. The Nordic delegations considered it disgraceful that there should be a financial emergency at all, let alone that it should be growing steadily more acute. Assessed contributions were the financial expression of Member States' shared belief in the vision of peace among nations. They were but a small price to pay in order to keep that vision alive.

12. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) said it was clear from the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/39/10 and Corr.1) that, far from improving, the Organization's financial situation had deteriorated steadily over the past year and the deficit now posed a distinct threat to sound financial management. The rate of payment of assessed contributions had been lower in 1984 than at any other time in the history of the United Nations, withholdings had increased and, with a projected deficit of \$360 million, the situation could not be allowed to continue. As one of the strongest supporters of the United Nations, his delegation agreed fully that the trend must be reversed if the Organization was to avoid bankruptcy on the eve of its fortieth anniversary. A comprehensive plan for solving the causes of the deficit must be worked out promptly. The chronic emergency could be solved only when all Member States pledged their commitment to shoulder their financial obligations fully, even if that required some of them to change their positions concerning certain United Nations activities.

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(Mr. Takasu, Japan)

13. The main cause of the emergency was the steadily growing deficit in peace-keeping operations and his delegation urged all Member States to show flexibility and to desist from their current withholding practice in the interests of the shared obligations of Member States. Member States should also do their utmost to pay their contributions in full and at the earliest possible date. At the same time, to be assured of their co-operation, the Organization must make efficient and effective use of its limited resources. Only if all the parties concerned acted responsibly could the heavy burden now borne by Member States, in particular by troop-contributing countries, be reduced and the Organization continue to serve world peace and global development.

14. Mr. BOKHARI (Pakistan) said that the Secretary-General's report was a stark reminder that the Organization was on the verge of financial collapse. It was indeed regrettable that the principle of collective financial responsibility, which offered the only solution to the situation, remained a subject of theoretical quibbling. That situation was mainly the result of deep-seated ideological differences among Member States with regard to peace-keeping operations and the withholding of contributions from such operations was in fact the main cause of the short-term deficit. In that context, his delegation deeply appreciated the efforts made by troop-contributing countries to ensure that such operations continued.

15. Repeated efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the financial problems of the Organization had failed to produce a formula that was universally acceptable. His delegation none the less hoped that delegations would take another look at the measures proposed to the General Assembly at its thirty-first session by the Negotiating Committee on the Financial Emergency of the United Nations (A/31/37), and would show renewed determination to find a solution.

16. His delegation had been associated with efforts to find a long-term solution to the Organization's financial difficulties. Since a genuine consensus on a comprehensive and universally acceptable solution had proved impossible, however, the only appropriate alternative appeared to be interim measures. Accordingly, the Committee might consider three types of measures aimed at restoring the financial integrity of the regular budget: (a) the level of the Working Capital Fund might be increased from \$100 million to \$150 million; (b) the Secretary-General might be authorized to retain budgetary surpluses temporarily in a suspense account and to suspend the application of financial regulations 4.3 and 5.2; (c) all or part of miscellaneous income might be transferred to a special reserve as another cushion against cash shortages.

17. Of course, the ideal source of replenishment of the Working Capital Fund would have been interest earned by the Organization, but that would not be possible in the absence of any willingness on the part of major contributors to pay early in the year. Other possibilities of increasing income from revenue-producing activities should therefore be explored. In that connection, his delegation was gratified to note that the project on the issue of special postage stamps, which it had introduced at the thirty-fifth session, had yielded a net income of \$1,250,000 and that funds allocated from it to UNEP and the United Nations Special Account had

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(Mr. Bokhari, Pakistan)

yielded positive results. It was sincerely grateful to all those who had helped to make the project a success. His delegation believed that, since postage stamps on the conservation and protection of nature and endangered species had been withdrawn from sale, the Committee might consider the possibility of issuing special postage stamps in 1984 on the critical situation in Africa. That would not only generate new revenue but also attract world attention to the plight of the many African countries which were facing the worst drought of the century and trigger aid for those countries. Part of the proceeds could be distributed through the United Nations system to drought-stricken countries in Africa and the remaining part placed in the Special Account.

18. His delegation continued to believe that a lasting solution to the Organization's cash-flow problem would require acceptance by all Member States of the principle of collective financial responsibility enshrined in Article 17 of the Charter. The measures he had just proposed might, however, offer a brief respite in which Member States could reach a consensus on the political problems underlying the financial emergency. They would also be tangible proof of Member States' determination to come to grips with the looming financial crisis.

19. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said that the continuing financial problems of the United Nations represented not so much an "emergency" as a failure on the part of Member States to exercise the necessary political will and to accept their responsibilities for the effective management of the Organization. Technical solutions could provide only short-term relief; the real need was for a change of attitude by all States towards the fulfilment of their duties and obligations.

20. Mr. ELHOUDERI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) noted that the short-term deficit of the Organization had increased by 3.7 per cent over the past year, and most of that increase pertained to the continued withholding of contributions from peace-keeping activities. However, that was not the sole reason for the financial emergency of the United Nations. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/39/10 and Corr.1), only 47.7 per cent of annual assessed contributions had been paid as at 30 September 1984. That figure represented the highest percentage of contributions outstanding since 1978, despite the fact that a number of measures had been taken in the intervening period to improve the cash flow. Those measures, however, had been only partial, short-term answers to the problem, and a long-term solution was urgently required. Some of the specialized agencies had achieved greater success in the collection of assessed contributions, and his delegation believed that the Secretariat must improve channels of communication with Member States and emulate those specialized agencies in finding ways of encouraging prompt payment.

21. The savings achieved from the suspension of the provisions of Financial Regulations 5.2 (d), 4.3 and 4.4 were not, according to the Advisory Committee's report (A/39/622, para. 6), sufficient to avoid the need for the Secretary-General to borrow from the account relating to peace-keeping activities. Such savings should in any case be regarded only as a supplementary means of resolving the financial emergency. Moreover, his delegation believed that the withholding of

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(Mr. Elhouderi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

contributions from peace-keeping reflected the fact that some Member States regarded such operations as an inadequate means of bringing about just and durable solutions, especially in the Middle East. The aggressor must be made to bear the full financial responsibility of supporting peace-keeping activities.

22. With regard to the special postage stamp project, his delegation wished to know why some issues had been withdrawn despite the continued high net revenue from their sales.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

- (a) COMPOSITION OF THE SECRETARIAT: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/39/453)
- (b) RESPECT FOR THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF OFFICIALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/C.5/39/17)
- (c) OTHER PERSONNEL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/39/483 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1; A/C.5/39/2, 4 and Corr.1 and Add.1, 6 and Corr.1, 9, 11 and 23)

23. Mr. SBIRUNOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation appreciated the answers provided by the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services to questions raised during the discussion of agenda item 116 but could not agree with his views concerning competitive examinations and the appointment of a senior co-ordinator on the situation of women in the Secretariat.

24. Regarding competitive examinations, his delegation firmly opposed the proposal to resort exclusively to the two working languages of the Secretariat, English and French, since that would discriminate against candidates presenting themselves for examination in other official languages. It should also be borne in mind that the working languages of the secretariats of the regional economic commissions were not confined to English and French. With a view to reducing delays in the examination procedure and the costs involved in translating written papers, a more equitable solution might be to appoint examiners proficient in the official languages used. That would eliminate the need for translation and avoid any linguistic discrimination against candidates.

25. His delegation welcomed efforts to achieve fair representation for women at all levels of the Secretariat. Like the question of improving the position of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States, that matter required special consideration. His delegation was somewhat surprised, however, by the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a senior co-ordinator on the question, and wished to know more about the financial implications of that decision and the extent to which it had been reached as a result of consultations with Member States. He had doubts, in particular, about the desirability of appointing a co-ordinator who would act independently of the Office of Personnel Services, since the latter had

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(Mr. Sbirunov, USSR)

primary responsibility for all aspects of personnel policy. Such an appointment would undoubtedly weaken the powers of OPS and was also inconsistent with General Assembly resolution 38/231, which requested the Secretary-General to strengthen the role of OPS in all personnel matters throughout the Secretariat. His delegation believed that the functions of a co-ordinator on the situation of women should be assigned to a senior female official of OPS, at the D-1 or D-2 level, who would make recommendations to the Secretary-General through the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services. That measure would help to improve the representation of women in the Secretariat without undermining the powers of OPS and without placing an additional burden on the United Nations budget.

26. Mr. BARRETT (New Zealand) said that the situation of women in the Secretariat was not improving; if anything, it was deteriorating. His delegation therefore welcomed the appointment of a special co-ordinator on that question, who must be given a well-defined mandate and a sufficient degree of independence. The initial duration of the appointment should be for one year, with the possibility of extension for a further two or three years as a maximum.

27. Mr. ODUYEMI (Nigeria) welcomed the fact that, in announcing the decision to appoint a co-ordinator, the Secretary-General had recognized the importance of the problem of unequal representation of women in the Secretariat. He had doubts, however, about the desirability of such an appointment, particularly at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. For example, he foresaw administrative difficulties under a system in which the co-ordinator and the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services had parallel responsibilities in the same area. Moreover, while there was an obvious need to promote the advancement of women, a strong case could also be made for a co-ordinator to consider the position of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States. Such an approach to each issue would eventually result in a plethora of co-ordinators in the Organization. Finally, his delegation would be grateful for further information about the specific measures envisaged by the Secretary-General, in accordance with resolution 38/231, to strengthen the role of OPS in all personnel matters.

28. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) agreed with the representatives of the Soviet Union and Nigeria. The appointment of a co-ordinator required careful consideration before a final decision could be taken. More information was needed about the respective functions of the co-ordinator and the Office of Personnel Services, bearing in mind the need to avoid duplication of effort and any weakening of the role of OPS.

29. Mr. FRASER (Guyana) agreed with previous speakers that no hasty decision should be taken on the appointment. Further consultations were required to determine the exact nature of the co-ordinator's functions and responsibilities.

30. Miss DURANT (Jamaica) observed that the United Nations had thus far been unsuccessful in implementing strategies for the advancement of women in the Secretariat. She recalled General Assembly resolution 35/210, which requested the Secretary-General to examine the possibility of designating "a senior official" to co-ordinate efforts in that regard, and asked for more information about the terms of reference of the proposed co-ordinator.

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31. Mr. NASHASHIBI (Jordan) said that his delegation was pleased that a co-ordinator on the situation of women was to be appointed but was concerned to preserve the authority of OPS. It should be noted that no action had been taken to improve the representation of developing countries at the senior level.

32. Mr. RAMBISOON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that his delegation wished to know the actual duration of the appointment and the qualifications required of the co-ordinator

33. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that the decision to appoint a co-ordinator was in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/210, which requested the Secretary-General to consider the possibility of designating a senior official to co-ordinate recruitment and promotion policy for women. The appointment had a limited duration of less than one year and the post would not therefore be an established one. Such temporary appointments could be financed within existing appropriations. The appointment was experimental, and the Secretary-General would report on it to the Assembly at the fortieth session, proposing a more permanent arrangement if the experiment proved successful.

34. It had been decided to appoint a co-ordinator for two reasons: first, because the considerable effort made by the Secretariat to enhance the status of women had not brought results; and second, because all countries, including unrepresented and underrepresented States, and all levels of the Secretariat were affected. The Co-ordinator would promote efforts to remedy that situation. There would be no duplication of existing functions: the co-ordinator's recommendations, endorsed by the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services, would be implemented by OPS. The precise functions were those detailed in General Assembly resolution 35/210, section V.

35. Mr. NEGRE (Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services) said that the proposal to use only English and French for competitive examinations was simply a recommendation, and a final decision would be taken by the Committee. Those languages had been selected since knowledge of either French or English was obligatory for all staff members. Further, experience had demonstrated that the use of six languages in the competitive examinations raised practical problems, largely relating to the difficulty of assessing papers in a consistent and objective manner.

36. Mr. EL-SAFY (Egypt) said that the information contained in document A/C.5/39/CRP.3 did not answer his delegation's question. He wished to have details of the distribution of nationals of Member States in geographical posts in 1980 and in 1984.

37. Although General Assembly resolution 35/210 referred to the possibility of designating a senior official on the situation of women, there had been an understanding at the time of its adoption that the Secretary-General would report back to the Assembly before actually taking any decision. Adequate information on the new appointee's terms of reference had not yet been provided. Nor was it clear how the post could be financed within existing appropriations. Was the Committee

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(Mr. El-Safty, Egypt)

to infer that there was a vacant post in OPS at the Assistant Secretary-General level? The decision should be reconsidered in the light of the points raised by Member States, particularly the need not to undermine the authority of OPS. Certainly, the proposed level of the appointment seemed excessive. It was also noteworthy that of the three priorities selected by the General Assembly - improving equitable geographical distribution, improving the situation of women, and appointing nationals of developing countries to senior positions - only one had been singled out for action. The implication was that the appointment of other co-ordinators might be appropriate.

38. Mr. ODUYEMI (Nigeria) said that his delegation was not opposed to the appointment but felt that account should be taken of the interests of developing countries. The new co-ordinator should place particular emphasis on recruiting women from Africa.

39. Mr. BOUYOUCEF (Algeria) said that he would welcome further clarification of the role of the proposed co-ordinator and the working relationship between the latter and OPS.

40. Ms. CONWAY (Ireland) said that the decision to appoint a co-ordinator was welcome. The explanations provided by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management would do much to quiet the fears expressed by delegations.

41. Mr. MOUSSAKI (Congo) said that the new appointment should be within the structure of OPS, to avoid any erosion of the latter's authority.

42. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom) inquired about the size of the support staff and the travel budget to be made available to the new Assistant Secretary-General. Although there would be no financial implications for the moment, the appointment would add a further layer to the administrative structure without necessarily bringing results.

43. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) said that his delegation, too, was concerned about the relationship between the new co-ordinator and OPS. Furthermore, it was not clear why there would be no financial implications, unless it was because a post was vacant at that level.

44. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) said that the central issue was how to increase the representation of women. It seemed unlikely that much could be accomplished in a year, and he wondered whether the rather rapid decision concerning the co-ordinator had been taken for publicity purposes. The relationship between the co-ordinator and OPS was not clear. Moreover there were bound to be major financial implications; he trusted that the post would be funded from voluntary contributions. He suggested that a decision should be deferred until the Secretary-General had submitted a brief document responding to the points raised by delegations.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.