



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba)

later: Mr. NTAKIBIRORA (Burundi)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 115: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES; REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
(continued) (A/41/32 and Corr.1)

1. Mrs. SHEAROUSE (United States of America) said that further rationalization of conference resources could be achieved without a significant decline in the quality of services. It was unfortunate that in the past most substantive proposals for rationalization had been rejected.

2. An encouraging change in the previous inability of the Committee on Conferences to take decisive action was apparent. Proposals had emerged which would promote the efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources. Subsidiary bodies must actively adhere to the Committee's recommendations. While the level of utilization of conference services by a number of organs had improved, the Committee on Conferences must be prepared to challenge those organs that ignored General Assembly mandates. The efficient use of conference resources was imperative. Her delegation endorsed the Committee's recommendations on planning missions, in particular, the recommendation that no missions should be dispatched to venues with United Nations facilities or where a comparable meeting had already taken place.

3. Her delegation noted the Committee's recommendations on limiting the number of subsidiary organs entitled to summary records. The use of meetings records should be kept to the absolute minimum. The United States supported the decision to establish a formal review procedure for organs which requested to meet at Headquarters during the General Assembly session.

4. The Committee on Conferences had decided, in paragraph 74 of its report, to review the conference services provided to organizations not funded from the regular budget, such as UNDP, UNICEF and UNITAR. There was, however, no corresponding reference in the draft resolution contained in the report, in view of which her delegation wished to be assured that a report on such services would indeed be submitted.

5. The United States attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Conferences and supported the renewal of its mandate for a further three years, on the assumption that it would continue to evolve into an effective mechanism for managing conference-servicing resources. It was imperative for the Committee to play an assertive role in that respect. Her delegation supported the draft resolutions proposed by the Committee.

6. Mr. BARABANOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, since the General Assembly was being asked to renew the mandate of the Committee on Conferences, it would be wise to consider what that Committee had actually accomplished in its 12 years of existence. It had produced a number of positive results, making recommendations which to a certain extent had imposed order on United Nations conference activities and made them more straightforward and economical. The Assembly's intention in setting up the Committee, however, had

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(Mr. Barabanov, USSR)

been to put an end to the ever-increasing number of sessions, meetings and conferences held by United Nations bodies at great expense to Member States, and that the Committee had failed to do. The number of meetings and conferences still grew from one year to the next, the volume of documentation increased annually by hundreds of thousands of pages, and since the Committee's creation the conference-servicing budget had increased by a factor of four.

7. The main reason was that the Committee shunned any serious discussion of the main issues relating to conference services in the United Nations, preferring to deal with secondary issues which generally lay within the competence of the Secretariat. As a result, discussion of the Committee's report by the General Assembly had become routine, with no serious exchange of views among States. It was no surprise, therefore, that the first recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (A/41/49) were devoted to ways of improving the way in which the Committee on Conferences operated. Some of the Group's recommendations needed clarification, for the Committee on Conferences should hardly be required to take on functions which actually belonged to ACABQ or the Secretariat.

8. The General Assembly, in extending the mandate of the Committee on Conferences for another three years, should clearly indicate what tasks the Committee should tackle and to which it should give priority. The first such assignment should be to reduce the number of special conferences held each year to the absolute minimum. The second should be to ensure optimum allocation of conference-servicing resources between the various areas of United Nations activity in accordance with the respective importance assigned to them by the Charter. The Committee should also, as a matter of priority, study the experience of other United Nations organizations and the possibility of applying what they had learnt to the United Nations.

9. Paragraph 76 of the Committee's report referred to a note from the Permanent Representative of Austria offering to make the new Austrian Conference Centre available to the United Nations free of charge as of 1 May 1987. In the Organization's present circumstances, such an offer was especially welcome. His delegation suggested that the resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly on the report of the Committee on Conferences should contain a separate paragraph expressing gratitude to the Government of Austria and instructing the Committee on Conferences to take due account of that kind offer in its future work on the schedule of meetings and conferences.

10. Mr. LI Yong (China) said that with the current financial difficulties it had become an important, if not easy, task to make the fullest possible use of available resources, to arrange meetings rationally and to control documentation. Deferral to 1987 of some of the meetings and conferences originally scheduled for 1986 had increased the total number of meetings in 1987 to 218, making it difficult to arrange a schedule for the year. His delegation agreed to the revised calendar proposed by the Committee on Conferences.

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(Mr. Li Yong, China)

11. Owing to the work of the Committee and the Department of Conference Services, marked improvements had been achieved in the utilization of conference services. His delegation supported the renewal of the mandate of the Committee for a further three years and the proposal on improved utilization of conference-servicing resources, contained in draft resolutions B and C recommended by the Committee in its report. He noted the reforms instituted by the Department to improve the control of documentation, as a result of which the distribution of documents was now more timely. With the same objective in mind, his delegation supported the proposed three-year extension of the limitation on meetings records imposed under resolution 37/14 C.

12. Although his delegation was deeply aware of the financial difficulties which had necessitated the postponement of the addition of a team of Chinese editors for official records, the Department should note that the backlog would grow worse if the team was not speedily established. Accordingly, he wished to propose the immediate redeployment of three posts from the Chinese translation service to establish the nucleus of the editing team. Such a redeployment would result in no additional financial burden, while the remaining posts could await a decision by the General Assembly.

13. Mr. HADWEN (Canada) said that the report of the Committee on Conferences reflected the current spirit of financial responsibility and reform, and constituted a step towards a more efficient Organization. Canada welcomed the efforts to control documentation and, specifically, consideration of the use of abbreviated summary records. Such records were adequate to reflect discussion, the critical concerns being accuracy and timeliness. The Committee on Conferences should continue to examine the proposal for the adoption of abbreviated records for a trial period of two years.

14. His delegation was dismayed at the level of use of conference services by some bodies. Figures such as the 65 per cent non-utilization by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, were indefensible, even where they represented an improvement over earlier utilization rates. The Committee on Conferences should include in its report a list of bodies which failed to make adequate use of resources as a first step in solving the problem.

15. The calendar of conferences appeared to be consistent with General Assembly resolution 40/243, although it was disturbing that eight special conferences were scheduled for 1987, rather than the five authorized under the resolution. The responsibility lay with Member States, which should exercise discipline. The draft resolution proposed by the Committee on Conferences appeared balanced. His delegation supported the work of the Committee and would welcome an expansion of its authority.

16. Mr. SEFIANI (Morocco) said that the calendar of conferences was a valuable tool for the practical pursuit of multilateral co-operation on a wide range of issues. Rationalization, while necessary, could not be at the expense of the endeavours of Member States to co-operate in an effort to resolve their differences.

(Mr. Sefiani, Morocco)

17. His delegation opposed the introduction of abbreviated summary records. However well-drafted, such records could not reflect the ideas advanced by delegations. Summary records served as the basis for the subsequent work of certain organs which needed an accurate account of the relevant deliberations. Morocco supported the view of the Committee on Conferences that the possible use of abbreviated summary records should not be pursued. However, his delegation favoured the elimination of summary records where they did not serve a useful purpose, as in the case of pledging conferences.

18. With respect to the question of the number of communications originating from Member States, it should be borne in mind that every State had a sovereign right to communicate its viewpoint in writing, and that no condition, save that of relevance to agenda items, should be imposed. In any event, the volume of communications from Member States depended on developments in the international arena. The Secretariat, in preparing its report on such communications, should take due account of the prerogatives of Member States.

19. The reduction in the volume of documentation at the current session was welcome and should facilitate stricter application of the rule requiring simultaneous distribution. It was surprising that reference had been made to flexible application of the relevant resolutions. No such flexibility was permissible, since it amounted to inequality of access to documentation and hence of participation in the work of the Organization. Real equality of languages and thus of delegations must be ensured.

20. Finally, his delegation was gratified by the quality of the interpretation services at the United Nations, and, in that connection, wished to know what criteria were employed in the recruitment of temporary staff.

21. Mr. LOZA (Egypt) said that, in general, his delegation endorsed the comments of the Committee on Conferences and the draft resolutions recommended in its report (A/41/32, para. 1). It regretted, however, the agreement reached by the Committee at its organizational session that proposed changes in the calendar that had no financial implications could be dealt with by the Secretariat in consultation with the officers of the Committee. At a time when the General Assembly was considering proposals to strengthen the Committee on Conferences, it was unfortunate that the latter should be giving up an essential part of its responsibilities as defined in General Assembly resolutions 32/72 and 35/10 A.

22. In discussing the impact of the changes in the calendar proposed by the Secretary-General and adopted by the General Assembly in decision 40/472, the Committee had been very reserved. His delegation would have preferred it to state clearly that, in its view, the postponement of certain meetings in 1986 would have an impact on the 1987 schedule which the General Assembly might wish to consider. It was dissatisfied with the guidelines for the dispatch of planning missions, which were imprecise and hedged about with qualifications.

(Mr. Loza, Egypt)

23. With regard to the remarks of the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services about the simultaneous distribution of documents in all the official languages, his delegation failed to see why implementation of the resolution requiring simultaneous distribution, which had been adopted after the consideration of a financial statement, should entail additional costs. It did not consider that there was any room for flexibility in implementing so basic a decision.

24. Mr. Ntakibirora (Burundi) took the Chair.

25. Mr. KASTOFT (Denmark), speaking also on behalf of the delegations of Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, expressed general support for the draft resolutions recommended by the Committee on Conferences. Although the 32-page limit for reports of subsidiary bodies had not been complied with in all cases, a number of committees had made substantial cuts in their 1986 reports. The Nordic countries could support a limit of 24 pages, and hoped that the Committee on Conferences would continue to give the matter its attention.

26. As to the introduction of an abbreviated form of summary record, it was clearly very difficult for the Secretariat to decide which parts of a Member State's statement should appear in such a record, but an alternative might be to reproduce statements in the original language and an abbreviated version in the other languages. The Nordic countries could agree to the abolition of summary records for pledging conferences and hoped that the Military Staff Committee would give serious consideration to discontinuing verbatim records. They would also support the continuation for a further three years of the experiment limiting the number of United Nations bodies entitled to summary records.

27. Regarding the proposed calendar of conferences, he said that the Nordic countries realized the difficulty caused by the decision to postpone a number of meetings and conferences from 1986 to 1987 as a result of the financial crisis. Unless there was sufficient improvement in the financial situation in 1987, however, the doubling of the number of conferences and meetings in 1987 resulting from that decision would create problems. While the Committee on Conferences could not take a final decision on whether a meeting should be held or not, it was clear that many of those postponed would have to be cancelled altogether. That problem should be discussed during the informal consultations on the resolution on the calendar of conferences.

28. It was unfortunate that more than five special conferences should have been planned for 1987. That would place a strain on the conference-servicing capacity of the Secretariat and the ability of small and medium-size countries to participate effectively in such conferences. The Nordic countries hoped that the General Assembly would instruct its subsidiary bodies to limit the number of special conferences to five in any given year, and that the Secretariat would be able to give those bodies guidance so that some of the conferences could be postponed.

(Mr. Kastoft, Denmark)

29. Although the statistics for the utilization of conference resources were limited, it would appear that a number of bodies had made better use of their allotted resources than in earlier years and had gone beyond the target of 75 per cent utilization. Those bodies which were still under-utilizing their resources must be directed to provide more realistic estimates of their needs.

30. The Nordic countries had no hesitation in supporting the renewal of the Committee's mandate for a further three years; they hoped, however, that its authority could be strengthened and its influence enhanced.

31. Mr. GAMA FIGUEIRA (Brazil) said that his delegation agreed fully with the recommendation of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts that the Committee on Conferences should be strengthened and given broader responsibilities. It was high time for it to acquire permanent status, with improved terms of reference and a membership elected by the General Assembly on the basis of equitable geographical distribution.

32. Regarding the revised calendar of conferences and meetings for 1987, his delegation had noted with satisfaction the decision of the Economic and Social Council to reduce the number of meetings of its 1987 spring session by 60 per cent. It regretted, however, that the Council had been unable to comply with Article 62, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter by holding the next session of the Commission on the Status of Women at its established headquarters in Vienna. His delegation welcomed the renewed willingness of the Committee on Conferences and the Economic and Social Council to co-operate in establishing the calendar of meetings. It expected, however, that in future the Committee on Conferences would draw attention in its report to any departure from the provisions of General Assembly resolution 40/243.

33. There was an unfortunate trend for some bodies to take decisions in disregard of provisions adopted to rationalize the calendar of conferences and reduce conference-servicing costs. It was also disturbing that some bodies should wish on occasion to enjoy a status not in conformity with the General Assembly rules of procedure giving the Fifth Committee competence for administrative and financial questions. His delegation attached great importance to the enforcement of the rules that United Nations bodies should meet at their respective headquarters, that pre-session documentation should be issued sufficiently in advance, that work programmes should be organized on a biennial basis, and that an adequate interval should be established between sessions of the same body. Accordingly, no meeting or session deferred in accordance with decision 40/472 should be added to the calendar already approved for 1987 if that meeting or session had been previously scheduled for the following year. Exceptions should be considered only if full justification was provided in terms of needs and priorities.

34. His delegation endorsed the proposal to abolish summary records for pre-empting conferences and the invitation to the Military Staff Committee to consider dispensing with verbatim records. It had no major objection to the recommendation in paragraph 15 of the report of the Committee on Conferences but it urged the

(Mr. Gama Figueira, Brazil)

Committee to keep under review the number of subsidiary organs entitled as an exception to receive summary records. The Committee should also look into the possibility of speeding up the issue of summary and verbatim records. Given current financial constraints, full attention should be directed to prospects for further rationalization of documentation and records.

35. Mr. TETTAMANTI (Argentina) said that his delegation supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences aimed at rationalizing the work of the Department of Conference Services and making it more efficient. It was ready to accept the calendar of conferences as proposed, but felt obliged to point out that the causes which had led to its modification still obtained. Indeed, it looked as though the situation in the coming year would be worse. The causes of and possible solutions to the problem would be taken up during the consideration of the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, but they should be borne in mind by the Fifth Committee in approving the calendar of conferences.

36. Efforts should be made to achieve a more balanced distribution of meetings throughout the year. His delegation was not sure that the proposed calendar attained that objective, which was fundamental not only as a means of making optimum use of available resources but also because, without it, delegations were unable to cover the various meetings adequately or be properly prepared for them. The Committee on Conferences should give due consideration to the matter in fulfilment of its mandate under paragraph 3 (e) of General Assembly resolution 32/72. While it was not for the Committee on Conferences to modify decisions adopted by United Nations bodies on their future meetings, it could give them appropriate advice when they were considering possible dates. Otherwise it might again be necessary to shorten or cancel sessions, to the detriment of the issues that ought to be considered.

37. Apart from any action which might be taken on the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts relating to the Committee on Conferences, the latter must be enabled to perform the task for which it had been created. The high costs of conference-servicing and documentation and the need for appropriate follow-up to the many decisions adopted on those matters should be borne particularly in mind when a decision on the renewal of the Committee's mandate was taken.

38. Mr. BROWNE (New Zealand) said that, in referring to a "marked improvement" in the utilization of conference-servicing resources (A/41/32, para. 24), the Committee on Conferences appeared to be overstating the case. A utilization rate of just 75 per cent for half of United Nations bodies did not, in his delegation's view, give grounds for the positive tone of that section of the Committee's report. The Committee should maintain close contact with those bodies whose performance was unsatisfactory and take every step to bring about improvements.

39. His delegation endorsed the guidelines on planning missions in draft resolution C recommended by the Committee on Conferences and expected to see them

(Mr. Browne, New Zealand)

scrupulously adhered to. It was concerned, however, that it should have been necessary to draft them in the first place since they should have been routine practice.

40. His delegation welcomed the Committee's decision, as reflected in draft resolution D, to give detailed consideration to the question of documentation. It also welcomed the decision to take up the matter of the number of communications from Member States in detail at a future session. The proposed study would be a useful step towards discouraging over-use of the privilege of having documents circulated when their content made their distribution more properly the responsibility of the Member State concerned. His Delegation had been willing in the past to accept that it should be up to Member States to exercise the appropriate restraint and discretion in the matter. That had, however, led to a situation where the Organization was faced with an unsustainable volume of paper and of expense. His delegation welcomed the promise of a renewed effort to work out clearer and more specific guidelines.

41. Turning to the calendar of conferences itself, he recalled that his delegation had repeatedly urged the United Nations to adhere strictly to the principle that all meetings should be held at established headquarters. It remained uneasy about the exceptions to that principle accepted by the Assembly in resolution 40/243 I. The figures provided to the Assembly at its resumed fortieth session testified to the excessive cost of holding certain meetings in Geneva rather than in New York. Such exceptions should, therefore, be reduced or eliminated.

42. His delegation had no specific objection to any of the special conferences scheduled for 1987, but it was concerned that although the General Assembly had adopted a resolution at the last session imposing a limit on the number of such conferences it now appeared that there was no mechanism to oversee or enforce it. When the Committee on Conferences recommended a revised calendar, it would be better if it would draw specific attention to the fact that a departure was being sought from the Assembly's decision.

43. Mr. TAIHITU (Indonesia) said that the questions of the limitation of documentation and the provision of meetings records were even more pertinent in view of the financial crisis. Resources must be used in a cost-effective manner.

44. Different points of view had been expressed on the interpretation of General Assembly decision 40/472 relating to entitlements to summary records. His delegation was of the opinion that the decision applied only to 1986, and did not refer to entitlements for 1987. Indonesia was encouraged by the decision of the Committee on Conferences to seek the further views of the governing bodies of various programmes on their need for summary records. In seeking better management of documentation, it was not enough to focus solely on the responsibility of intergovernmental organs. Improvement was needed in the Secretariat, particularly with regard to the timely issuance of summary records.

(Mr. Taihito, Indonesia)

45. His delegation could accept the explanatory footnotes contained in the draft revised calendar of conferences and understood that final approval of the revised calendar would be given only after the General Assembly had considered the item.

46. The recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts relating to the Committee on Conferences testified to the Committee's potential role in promoting the efficient use of conference services. Given the impact of the financial crisis, there was an urgent need to strengthen the Committee on Conferences as a step towards the rationalization of conference-servicing. His delegation believed that the Committee would be more effective as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, rather than of the General Assembly, since it would then prepare the calendar of meetings for the Council and be better placed to ensure the preparation of a well-planned calendar of meetings and the more efficient utilization of conference services.

47. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) said that the rationalization of meetings and the related documentation was important not only because it would reduce waste but because it would help Member States to participate more effectively in the work to be done at meetings.

48. His delegation greatly appreciated the work done by the Committee on Conferences to improve services in, for example, interpretation. At the same time, the current conference-servicing situation was far from satisfactory. Many United Nations bodies consistently wasted more than half the conference resources allocated to them. Too many meetings were concentrated between April and June each year, making it difficult for most delegations to participate fully. Many subsidiary bodies still met away from their respective headquarters, and a number still met in New York during the sessions of the General Assembly. The volume of documentation had long since exceeded the capacity of the average delegate to absorb it all. That, combined with the late distribution of many documents, greatly reduced the contribution documents were intended to make to a debate among Member States.

49. His delegation hoped the Committee would tighten controls over the rules and principles established by the General Assembly and ensure that subsidiary bodies eliminated waste, rationalized their work programmes and abided by the rules. It welcomed the recommendations of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts on the rationalization of conferences and meetings. It believed that the Committee on Conferences should not hesitate to recommend changes in the location, timing or duration of meetings.

50. His delegation understood the manner in which the Committee on Conferences had responded to General Assembly decision 40/472. At a time of financial crisis, however, the frequency and length of meetings should be kept to the minimum necessary for carrying out essential tasks. It would therefore be advisable to defer formal approval of the draft calendar of conferences until the financial situation of the Organization in 1987 became clearer.

(Mr. Takaau, Japan)

51. Summary record coverage should be limited to those bodies which could not function without records. Legal bodies engaged in codification might well need summary records. On the other hand, coverage could hardly be justified simply by the political importance of a body, and in such cases the report issued by the body concerned should suffice for the General Assembly's purposes. His delegation hoped that the governing bodies addressed by the report would respond favourably to the Committee's recommendations, and that bodies entitled to receive meetings records would limit coverage to the agenda items for which it was essential. It also hoped that those committees would co-operate fully if, in the light of the financial situation in 1987, the situation so required.

52. Mr. MELTKE (German Democratic Republic) said that United Nations conferences and sessions must be planned and conducted in the most effective possible way. His delegation commended the efforts made by the Committee on Conferences in pursuit of that principle. It accordingly supported draft resolutions A, C and D submitted by the Committee for adoption by the General Assembly.

53. The revised draft calendar of conferences for 1987 reflected efforts by the Committee on Conferences to optimize the timing of sessions held by individual bodies and to hold conferences almost exclusively at United Nations duty stations. Paragraph 3 of draft resolution A, which would authorize the Committee to adjust the calendar of conferences for 1987 in response to the decisions taken by the General Assembly at its forty-first session, was especially important. His delegation welcomed such an unambiguous determination of competences, since 1986 had seen the cancellation, deferment or shortening of several conferences, not always in conformity with the General Assembly's wishes.

54. Co-operation between the Committee on Conferences and all United Nations bodies in securing the better use of conference-servicing resources was an important way of enhancing the effectiveness of those bodies, and had already led to positive results. Improved use of allocated conference time, by beginning and ending meetings more punctually, would bring about real savings. The Department of Conference Services was to be commended for improving the co-ordination of conference services at United Nations Headquarters and other conference sites; the co-operation between Headquarters and the United Nations Office at Geneva should serve as an example for other United Nations duty stations. His delegation regarded with great satisfaction the guidelines elaborated for the dispatch of planning missions for conferences held away from United Nations Headquarters. The Committee on Conferences should analyse the results of such missions with great care, and report on its findings.

55. His delegation supported the approach of the Committee on Conferences to the control and limitation of documentation, in particular the detailed provisions contained in draft resolution D. On the question of summary records, it had already expressed the view that substance should not be sacrificed for the sake of brevity. His delegation therefore fully endorsed the conclusion reached by the Committee on Conferences in paragraph 8 of its report.

56. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) assured the Committee that he and his colleagues would study all the observations and suggestions made during the course of the debate, and take appropriate action.

57. Two questions had been raised: one regarding the costs of conference services provided to United Nations organizations and programmes not funded by the regular budget, and the other on the criteria used in selecting freelance interpretation staff. He assured the representative of the United States that the Secretariat did intend to add to the draft agenda of the Committee on Conferences for its 1987 session an item on the provision of conference services to organizations not funded by the regular budget at the United Nations, such as UNDP, UNICEF and UNITAR, and would prepare a report on the subject.

58. Concerning the Moroccan representative's question, he said that very strict criteria were applied to the recruitment of freelance interpreters. Most of the freelance interpreters used by the Department of Conference Services had passed the United Nations competitive examination but had either retired from service with the Organization or preferred not to work for it full time; the others had all passed interpreters' examinations set by other organizations in the United Nations system. The Department employed only experienced, responsible, internationally established conference interpreters, not those who were still at the training stage or lacked appropriate experience.

59. Bearing in mind the high level of professionalism and dedication prevalent among the staff of the Department of Conference Services, and the expressions of support he had heard from many delegations, he was confident that, even in the present difficult times, the Department would be able to function to the satisfaction of the Fifth Committee.

AGENDA ITEM 116: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (continued) (A/41/11)

60. Mr. GREGG (Australia) said that an Australian had served on the Committee on Contributions for a number of years, and would be ready to serve further if the Fifth Committee should so decide.

61. The General Assembly at its fortieth session had failed to adopt any resolution on the work of the Committee on Contributions, chiefly because delegations had been unable to agree how the scale of contributions might be determined in the future. All subscribed to the principle of capacity to pay, but difficulties arose when they tried to define that principle in a manner acceptable to all States. Such difficulties must not, however, deter the Fifth Committee from seeking a simpler, more transparent and more equitable scale of assessments. The study of alternative methodologies carried out by the Committee on Contributions afforded an opportunity to consider some new approaches.

62. Of the four proposals presented by the Committee on Contributions, his delegation particularly favoured the first, which would divide contributing States

(Mr. Gregg, Australia)

into three broad groups. The Chairman of the Committee had reported some hesitancy about that proposal among Committee members. On the other hand, there was considerable hesitancy about the current methodology, and his delegation was attracted to the "group" proposal precisely because it promised to help resolve some of the difficulties members felt.

63. The "group" proposal would not result in any significant new distribution of the financial burden between East and West or North and South. Such changes did not fall within the realm of practical possibility in the present political and financial climate. The principal advantage of the proposal was that it offered a simpler, more technical, more objective and coherent method of determining assessments within the three groups. His delegation believed that the process of contribution adjustment and redistribution could be handled more expeditiously within the groups, free from political and other impediments. It would also significantly reduce many of the statistical problems arising from the lack of comparability in national income statistics, and would generally make for a more "transparent" scale.

64. A number of difficulties would have to be overcome before any new or revised methodology could be put into effect. The proposals studied by the Committee on Contributions could not be dismissed on those grounds alone. His delegation believed that the Committee's current study must be completed, and firm recommendations made to the General Assembly. The Fifth Committee should direct the Committee on Contributions to elaborate on the proposals in its current report and submit a final report and recommendations to the General Assembly at its forty-second session.

65. Mr. Fontaine-Ortiz (Cuba) resumed the Chair.

66. Mr. WANG Lian Sheng (China) said that no methodology of assessment should depart from the principle of capacity to pay, as enshrined in General Assembly resolution 14 (I), which, after 40 years of constant refinement, had resulted in an increasingly rational sharing of expenses among Member States. Its adoption by the overwhelming majority of organizations within and outside the United Nations system demonstrated that it had become a generally recognized principle in the assessment of financial responsibilities. While it might be true that some shortcomings had emerged in the current methodology of assessment as a result of changes in circumstances, the correct response should be to introduce improvements to the present methodology, in order to bring it more closely into line with the principle of capacity to pay, rather than to call for radical changes or to abandon the current methodology altogether.

67. His delegation was firmly opposed to any increase in assessments for permanent members of the Security Council. The rights enjoyed by the permanent members were granted against the historical background of the Second World War and were linked with the obligations and responsibilities conferred on them by the Charter. It was their duty to shoulder the primary responsibility for safeguarding international peace and security, and they had already assumed extra financial obligations for

(Mr. Wang Lian Sheng, China)

peace-keeping operations. Any increase in their assessments would constitute a violation of the principle of capacity to pay, whereas the argument that an increase was justified in view of the privileges accorded to permanent members constituted an attempt to legitimize weighted voting by assuming that there ought to be a link between money and rights. His delegation shared the view, expressed in the report of the Committee on Contributions, that the United Nations should not base its assessments on the principle of commercial interest as applied by certain other organizations.

68. The question of sovereign equality had been introduced on the ground that Member States having too low a share in the expenses of the Organization would lack an adequate incentive to practise fiscal restraint in the adoption of the United Nations programme budget, and that the addition of the sovereign equality factor would raise the level of assessment of such States. However, even if only 5 per cent of contributions were shared equally by all Member States, the scale of assessment for each Member under that factor would be 0.03 per cent. Following addition of the portion due under the criterion of capacity to pay, the assessed contributions of the least developed countries would amount to at least 0.04 per cent, entailing a threefold increase in the current contributions of more than 70 countries.

69. His delegation believed that two issues should be clarified with regard to the sovereign equality factor. While consideration of the actual contributions paid showed that many developed countries paid far more than did the developing countries, a comparison between the ratios of assessed contributions to national income for different States demonstrated that the ratios of many developing countries were much higher than those of the developed countries. The latter comparison, which reflected each country's capacity to pay, provided a better indicator on which to base the appropriate level of assessment for the State concerned. On the subject of fiscal restraint, Member States considered the United Nations programme budget in the light of national or group interests, or the interest of the United Nations as a whole. Differences in opinion resulted from political and cultural differences, as well as disparities in levels of economic and social development, and did not necessarily have a direct bearing on the levels of assessed contributions. It was the view of his delegation that introduction of the sovereign equality factor would foster inequality without contributing to fiscal restraint.

70. With respect to the division of the budget into core and non-core portions, his delegation believed that the ultimate aim of technical co-operation activities, namely promotion of the progress of mankind and development of the world economy, were equally as important as international peace and security. A system of voluntary contributions would provide no guarantee of financial resources for the non-core budget, and the consequent adverse effects on technical co-operation and development activities would jeopardize realization of the objectives of the United Nations. In addition, an assessment on the basis of equal shares for the core portion of the budget would entail a sharp rise in the contributions paid by many developing countries, in violation of the principle of capacity to pay.

(Mr. Wang Lian Sheng, China)

71. His delegation agreed with the conclusion of the Committee on Contributions, as stated in paragraph 47 of its report, that alternative I fell squarely within the capacity-to-pay approach and so conformed essentially with the provisions of the Charter. Division of the membership of the United Nations into three groups should reduce the complexities involved in determining scales of assessment and alleviate somewhat related conflicts among groups. However, certain problems, such as absorption of the relief granted to developing countries, the number of scale periods to which the pre-determined shares for each group would apply and the allocation and adjustment of shares within each group, remained unsolved. His delegation believed that the Committee on Contributions should initiate a further study of all related questions and report its findings to the next session of the General Assembly. No further consideration should be given to alternatives II, III and IV, since they were at variance with the capacity-to-pay principle.

72. The current low per capita income allowance formula was in conformity with the principle of capacity to pay, with the result that most Member States were assuming financial obligations commensurate to their capacity. A preliminary calculation based on the proposal made by the representative of Saudi Arabia, as mentioned in paragraph 70 of the Committee's report, had shown that a graduated range of base relief gradients would cause an increase in the rate of assessment for many developing countries and a proportionate decrease in the relief burden borne by the industrialized States. As such, the proposal did not appear to adhere sufficiently closely to the principle of capacity to pay. However, his delegation was prepared to agree to a further study of the current methodology of assessment and to a revision of the low per capita income allowance formula if necessary.

73. Of the two major arguments on the question of assessments which had emerged during the past two years, one attempted to weaken or replace the capacity-to-pay principle, while the other stated that the enjoyment of certain rights should be accompanied by a higher rate of assessment. The outcome of both arguments affected not only the immediate economic interests of all States, and sensitive political issues, but also the future course of the United Nations and the realization of the objectives of the Charter. At a time of financial crisis, when the United Nations urgently needed reforms, it was the hope of his delegation that all Member States would co-operate with a view to developing a methodology of assessment more in keeping with the capacity-to-pay principle and the Charter. As the only developing country enjoying permanent membership of the Security Council, China was subject to an assessment which was low in comparison with those of other permanent members. His delegation was, however, willing to consult with other States in order to work out a more reasonable assessment.

74. Mr. Ntakibirora (Burundi) resumed the Chair.

75. Mr. KUBIZNAK (Czechoslovakia) said that his delegation strongly supported adherence to the criterion of capacity to pay for the determination of assessments. It did not see any need to examine the possibility of establishing a system of weighted voting based on the size of individual States' contributions to the United Nations. Voting among sovereign States should not take place on the

(Mr. Kubiznak, Czechoslovakia)

basis of the size of each State's shareholding. Neither did his delegation accept the option of dividing Member States into three groups for the purposes of determining assessments. Assessments should continue to be based on national income, which would serve as the principal indicator of the capacity to pay of individual States.

76. With regard to the problem of data comparability, his delegation believed that the 10-year period should continue to serve as a basis for national income comparison, so that new methods of comparison should be applied only to data which was provided for the first time. Such an approach would permit the avoidance of undue fluctuations in determining the financial obligations of Member States. His delegation remained convinced that the best way to alleviate the financial burdens of Member States lay not in a redistribution of the financial resources of the United Nations but in a more effective utilization of the resources currently available.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.