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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Fourth session

Item 36 of the agenda

HEADQUARTERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Dr. Maria Z. N. WITTEVEEN (Netherlands)

1. In accordance with instructions given by the General Assembly at its 224th plenary meeting, the Fifth Committee, at its 206th meeting held on 21 October 1949, considered a progress report (A/1009) on the financing, planning and construction of the permanent Headquarters of the United Nations submitted by the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of resolution 242 (III) adopted by the General Assembly on 18 November 1948.
2. In this report the Secretary-General, after reviewing the progress made during the preceding twelve months, informed the General Assembly that all phases of the permanent headquarters question had been fully discussed with the Headquarters Advisory Committee which had held four meetings in the course of the year for this purpose. The Secretary-General expressed his sincere thanks for the wise advice and steadfast assistance given by the Committee and his hope that its help would continue to be available in the future.
3. In the course of the discussion of the Secretary-General's report, a number of representatives expressed the hope that it would be possible to place certain contracts, in connexion with the construction and equipment of the Headquarters, in soft currency countries in order that the \$65,000,000 provided for this purpose might be used to the best possible advantage. The opinion was expressed that the Secretary-General should not be content merely with notifying chambers of commerce, consulates, and commercial representatives of Member countries, located in New York, of the anticipated needs of the United Nations for equipment, furnishings, etc., for the new Headquarters, but should take the initiative of advertising for bids in the newspapers of Member countries in the same manner as was adopted at the time of the construction of the Palais des Nations at Geneva. Efforts along such lines would, it was believed, obviate a great deal of subsequent criticism and would give to the peoples and the Governments of Member States a more active sense of participation in a common project. Members of the

/Fifth Committee

Fifth Committee were assured on behalf of the Secretary-General that all possible steps will be taken to give effect to such suggestions.

4. In response to an enquiry from a member of the Committee, an assurance was given that the Headquarters could be constructed, according to the plans adopted, within the sum of \$65,000,000 loaned by the Government of the United States for this purpose. Replying to a question with respect to the conversion of the Manhattan Building into a library, the Director of the Planning Office stated that, in his opinion, it would be difficult to transform that building into an ideal library within the limits of the funds available. If the amount set aside for the purpose was not sufficient, however, an extra sum might be made available by economizing in other directions.

5. With regard to control of expenditure from the loan the Committee was informed by the Assistant Secretary-General in charge of Administrative and Financial Services that the advice of the Chairman of the Board of Auditors had been consistently followed, that the accounts as of 31 December 1948 had been inspected by the auditors, and that a report on the expenditure incurred had been submitted to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on 22 September 1949. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee recalled the discussion held in the Fifth Committee during the third session of the General Assembly on the question of financial supervision. It had been pointed out that the resolution before the Committee subsequently adopted by the General Assembly as resolution 242 (III), would in no way modify the powers of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. It was the Secretary-General who was entirely responsible for expenditures from the loan; the Advisory Committee had no financial responsibility in this matter. The Secretary-General had reported on the state of the work to the Advisory Committee in September 1949 and that Committee had, on that occasion, drawn attention to the limits of its terms of reference.

6. Concern was expressed by some delegations regarding the legal aspects of problems arising out of the construction of the new Headquarters, including in particular the status of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities and the question of the recognition by the United States authorities of the validity of the United Nations laissez-passer. It was the view of the other members, however, that this matter did not fall within the competence of the Fifth Committee but was one which would be more appropriately raised in the Sixth Committee in connexion with the items on its agenda relating to privileges and immunities. The Fifth Committee rejected, by 18 votes to 6 /with 16 abstentions,

with 16 abstentions, a proposal that the Chairman of the Fifth Committee should consult with the Chairman of the Sixth Committee regarding these legal questions.

7. Several delegations expressed the view that the report presented by the Secretary-General did not contain sufficiently detailed information to enable the Fifth Committee to reach definite conclusions which it could usefully transmit to the General Assembly concerning the progress of the construction of the Headquarters. Reference was made to a number of major changes which had been made in the original plans, although in this connexion it was stated by the representative of the Secretary-General that any such changes had been decided upon only after consultation with the Headquarters Advisory Committee and that they had in no way modified the decisions previously reached by the General Assembly. It was the consensus of opinion, however, that it would be desirable for a more complete and detailed report to be prepared for consideration by the General Assembly at its next session.
8. After concluding its discussion of the Secretary-General's report, the Fifth Committee decided by 34 votes to none, with 6 abstentions, to recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following resolution:

HEADQUARTERS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The General Assembly

1. Takes note of the Secretary-General's report on the Headquarters of the United Nations (A/1009);
2. Decides that the Headquarters Advisory Committee, established by General Assembly resolution 182 (II) of 20 November 1947, shall be continued with the existing membership;
3. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the fifth regular session of the General Assembly on the progress of the construction of Headquarters;
4. Draws the Secretary-General's attention to the observations and suggestions made by the representatives of Member States during the discussion of the Secretary-General's report on the United Nations Headquarters at the fourth regular session of the General Assembly.