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Chairman: Prince WAN WAITHAYAKON (Thailand).

**Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions
of the General Assembly: memorandum by the
Secretary-General (A/2206, A/C.6/339/Add.1)
(continued)**

[Item 50]*

1. Mrs. BASTID (France) said that the serious objection to the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280) was that, if it were adopted, only paragraph 2 of the operative part of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1) would remain. The preliminary discussion of the item in the 387th and 388th plenary meetings had not saved any time; quite the contrary. Furthermore, the criticisms of the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206) showed that many delegations were not satisfied with the way in which it had been prepared. The French delegation considered the amendments to the rules of procedure, as proposed in the annex to the memorandum, quite acceptable, and Mrs. Bastid could not understand how delegations which were not satisfied with the memorandum could suggest further study, or how they could suggest that it should be left to the Secretary-General to submit proposals on the matter whenever he thought appropriate. In other words, she could not understand how those delegations could suggest reverting to a procedure the results of which had already been criticized. In the circumstances, she felt the Secretary-General would be well advised to take no further initiative in the matter. While the revised Norwegian draft resolution as a whole had some meaning, the adoption of the Syrian amendment thereto would simply lead to a new impasse. It would mean a decision to follow, in future, a procedure which in the past had led to results which most members of the Committee seemed to regard as unsatisfactory.

2. With regard to the distinction drawn by the Australian representative (349th meeting) between a "procedural motion" and a "point of order", she said that the "point of order" did not exist in the practice of

French assemblies. As for the "procedural motion", she explained that under the rules of procedure of the National Assembly an "interlocutory motion" could be made at any stage of the proceedings and had to be put to the vote immediately. Examples drawn from French parliamentary practice, however, could hardly be of much help to the Committee, in view of the rather limited powers of the President of the National Assembly in that parliamentary practice. The wording of rule 72 [112] of the General Assembly's rules of procedure was the result of a linguistic compromise.

3. Mr. MITCHELL (Liberia), explaining his vote, said that, in accordance with the purposes of the United Nations, his delegation believed that all peoples should have the same privileges and rights in every field. There should not be any suggestion that some Powers had greater sovereignty than others. In his speech at the 350th meeting, the representative of the Union of South Africa had given the impression that he was supporting such a theory, although he had tried to dispel that impression at the following meeting.

4. Mr. Mitchell did not believe that the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure would actually limit the duration of General Assembly sessions, and he would therefore vote in favour of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), with the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280) thereto.

5. Mr. SUAREZ (Chile) recalled that his delegation had stated at the 387th plenary meeting that it considered the proposals contained in the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206) to be reasonable. However, his delegation could not support any amendments which did not recognize the right of all Members to express their views freely, in accordance with the Charter. He would therefore vote in favour of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1) but against the amendment to rule 72 [112] relating to points of order, since that question called for further study.

6. He regretted that he could not support the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279) because it would

* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

fix a definite time-limit for Assembly sessions. In that connexion, he drew attention to paragraphs 12 and 48 of the Secretary-General's memorandum. His delegation would vote in favour of the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) to the Argentine draft resolution.

7. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he gathered that, in arguing against the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280), the French representative had admitted that the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206) was not satisfactory. He was therefore surprised that she should support the adoption of the proposals contained in the annex to the memorandum. The debate had clearly shown how little the proposed amendments had in common with their ostensible purpose. He supported the Syrian amendment and, if it was adopted he would vote against the remainder of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), which was quite unacceptable, against all parts of the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279) and against the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) thereto. The latter amendment did not in any way alter the meaning of the Argentine draft resolution, in spite of the Belgian representative's comments (349th meeting); those comments could not in any case alter the text. In particular, the Belgian amendment did not eliminate the first paragraph of the operative part of the Argentine draft resolution, which would lead to the postponement to the next session of all items not disposed of in the time-limit fixed at the beginning of a given session.

8. No one had been able to show that the existing rules of procedure prevented the Assembly from limiting the length of its sessions and that it was therefore necessary to amend those rules. All that had happened was that delegations had submitted supposedly inoffensive amendments, which had been proved to be not inoffensive at all.

9. Mr. TZOUNIS (Greece) said that, as had been announced at the 387th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, his delegation would support any proposal compatible with the principles of the Charter and likely to improve the Assembly's work. It would therefore vote for the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), which met both those requirements.

10. He was quite convinced that that text did not represent an attempt either to limit the right to speak or to silence the weaker nations. If that had been the case, his country, where the principle of freedom of speech had flourished ever since ancient times, would certainly have opposed the revised Norwegian draft resolution. There should be some distinction between a moderate and an excessive use of the right to speak. He recalled the saying of Socrates that quantity and quality did not always go hand in hand.

11. The amendments proposed to rules 73 [113], 75 [115] and 76 [116] of the rules of procedure simply confirmed the principles laid down in rule 35 [106]. There seemed, therefore, to be no danger in restating those principles, and he was surprised at the violent opposition of certain delegations, particularly since the proposed amendments would not in any way prevent the Assembly or the Committees from being the final authority.

12. His delegation would vote in favour of the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279), with the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) thereto.

13. Mr. HENAO Y HENAO (Colombia) said that any efforts unduly to limit the length of the Assembly's proceedings might have the effect of spoiling the quality of the work. He protested against the idea that delegations should be classified according to the length of the speeches made by their representatives. That idea was contrary to the principle of the equality of Member States. At San Francisco, his delegation had voted against those provisions concerning the voting procedure which ran counter to that principle and experience had proved his delegation right. It would be a great step forward when complete equality had been established among all States, and delegations should not attach too much importance to the question of time.

14. His delegation would therefore vote in favour of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), except for the proposed amendment to rule 73 [113], which suggested that the President or the Chairman should be allowed to limit the length of speeches. As regards the latter amendment, he would abstain from the vote. He would also abstain from the vote on the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279) and the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) thereto, because it was impossible to settle in a few weeks all the questions brought before the Assembly, and the Assembly's most important duty was to consider the substance of the items on its agenda.

15. Mr. RODRIGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) wished to reply to the observations made by certain representatives, particularly those of Norway (349th meeting), Australia (348th and 349th meetings) and the Union of South Africa (350th and 351st meetings).

16. During the general debate his delegation had suggested (347th meeting) that a special committee should be set up to study the question of measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the Assembly. That was not, as some had thought, because his delegation had not had time to give adequate study to the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206), which had been circulated early in the current session, but because it believed that governments should carry out all the required study and consultation before taking a decision on proposals which appeared simple but were actually far reaching in their implications. Those proposals, which were designed to restrict the rights and privileges of Member States, affected the very principle on which the United Nations Charter was based: that of the absolute equality of the rights of States.

17. The representatives of Norway (349th meeting) and Australia (348th meeting) had spoken of the Uruguayan delegation's fears regarding the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure and had tried to show that those fears were groundless. His delegation did not fear the proposals, but it entertained serious doubts about them. If an international organization composed of sovereign States wished to remain worthy of its name, it was hardly appropriate for it to insert in its rules of procedure a series of provisions giving the President of the General Assembly and the Chairman of Committees powers which, when exercised,

would prejudice the rights of Member States. Uruguay was proud to be a democracy founded on moral as well as legal principles; it did not see any very great difference between its own constitutional and parliamentary principles and the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter. For its part, it could not agree that the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should contain provisions which Uruguay's own institutions had rejected as being anti-democratic.

18. The General Assembly and its Committees were often faced with important political problems, and sometimes meetings were adjourned before the appointed hour because of a lack of speakers. If it were decided that, in such cases, the President or the Chairman should close the debate, delegations, whether they represented large or small Powers, would be prevented from making their contributions towards the solution of the problems under discussion.

19. The whole question of measures to limit the duration of Assembly sessions should be considered, not from the point of view of the expenditure or the time consumed, but in the light of the nature and importance of the problems discussed, the responsibility of Member States towards the Organization with respect to those problems and the fact that the number of items on the Assembly's agenda was increasing each year. That constant increase in the size of the agenda, far from being an evil, was proof that the Organization had fulfilled the hopes placed in it by mankind. The representatives of Member States, who were required by the Charter to study all questions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security and to try to solve the economic and social problems in the various parts of the world, could not agree to the imposition of a limit on the length or number of their speeches. And if some of them spoke oftener or longer than others, no one could doubt that they were inspired by their devotion to the cause of the United Nations.

20. The size of the contribution to the Organization's budget could not be a yardstick for participation in debates. Member States worked, within the limits of their resources, for the success of the joint enterprise, and some of them could make a moral and spiritual contribution to the Assembly's work which was more important than a material contribution. Any discrimination whatever between Member States was contrary not only to the Charter but to the conscience of mankind. Nor could there be any question of altering the existing system of distribution of votes by, for example, giving only one vote to the twenty Latin-American countries or forty-eight to the United States of America.

21. His delegation was not the only one which had doubts with regard to the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure. Several other delegations, for example, those of Syria (347th and 350th meetings), Afghanistan (350th meeting), Iraq (351st meeting) and India (348th meeting), had defended the same principles. The safer course, therefore, was not to take a hasty decision but rather to study the question further. His delegation proposed that the item should be referred to the eighth session of the General Assembly and should be studied in the meantime by a committee specially established for the purpose which, meeting

in New York, would consult the various delegations and the governments of Member States and submit to the Assembly proposals which would serve as a basis for future deliberations. He drew attention, in that respect, to the precedent of the Special Committee on Methods and Procedures of the General Assembly resolution 271 (III) of which his delegation had been a member. That Committee had spent a whole year on the study of amendments to the rules to enable the Assembly and its Committees to fulfil their functions more diligently and effectively. He added that, at its 372nd meeting, in connexion with the question of the organization of the Secretariat, the Fifth Committee had decided to postpone to the General Assembly's eighth session consideration of certain amendments to the rules of procedure.

22. In conclusion, he appealed to members of the Committee not to take a hasty decision on a matter in which such important principles were involved and to support his delegation's proposal.

23. The CHAIRMAN invited the representative of Uruguay to submit his proposal in writing.

24. Mr. LAUREL (Argentina) thought the draft resolution submitted by his delegation (A/C.6/L.279) offered the simplest and most practical solution for limiting the duration of Assembly sessions. The system described in rules 1 and 2 of the rules of procedure was not effective, since the Assembly was seeking new methods of limiting the duration of its sessions. The Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206) stated that limitation of the duration of sessions might be necessary and desirable. The Argentine draft resolution merely reflected that idea. He wondered whether the draft resolution was criticized because it would fix a maximum duration for sessions, or because it would set that maximum duration at six weeks. Limitation was equivalent to reduction. The Secretary-General in his memorandum had stated that the normal duration of Assembly sessions was at present eleven weeks. He was surprised that no delegation had proposed that the maximum duration should be fixed at a period mid-way between six and eleven weeks.

25. The measures suggested by the Secretary-General would perhaps limit the time of debate, without necessarily reducing the duration of sessions. The number of items on the agenda might be decreased by strict selection. But then the questions arose: What was to determine the selection and what guarantee was there that three or four items would not give rise to as lengthy debates as a greater number?

26. He was surprised that the Committee had not been informed either of the details of the unofficial consultations which had taken place between a number of delegations and the Secretariat or of the results of those consultations.

27. It should be possible in six weeks of conscientious work to deal with all important and urgent questions. If, however, that time-limit gave rise to apprehensions on the part of members of the Committee, he would, if necessary, accept the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281), which would still be an improvement over the existing situation, provided that the date fixed by the Assembly at the beginning of each session was not a target date—as was already provided by rule 2 of the

rules of procedure—but a final one. It would no longer be possible, except by following a special procedure, to decide to prolong sessions in order to deal with one or two important questions.

28. Finally, the South African representative had spoken (350th meeting) of the leading part which should be played in discussions by the great Powers, those which paid the largest contributions to the Organization's budget, and had further referred to the consequences of the existing system of vote distribution. Surely that representative was not entertaining the idea that the Latin-American States had to form a federation, with only one vote, or that each of the forty-eight states of the United States of America should have a vote. Those ideas were untenable, for they conflicted with the principle of the equality of all States, proclaimed by the Charter, and with political, historical and geographical reality.

29. The CHAIRMAN noted that there were no further names on the list of speakers and that the draft resolutions and amendments might be put to the vote. The only text not yet circulated was the Uruguayan proposal made during the present meeting. That proposal apparently would take the form of an amendment to the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1). Under the amendment, the two paragraphs of the operative part of the revised Norwegian draft resolution would be deleted and replaced by a paragraph providing for the appointment of a committee of fifteen members to study the matter.

30. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said it was impossible to vote on a text which had not yet been circulated. It was essential that delegations should have an opportunity of studying it. Moreover, that was their right.

31. Mr. MAKTOS (United States of America) thought the Uruguayan proposal, which had been submitted somewhat late, was equivalent to requesting adjournment of the vote on five very simple amendments, which had been discussed at length, which were not in the least obscure, on which delegations had already decided their position and which, consequently, should not require any further study. In those circumstances, by referring the texts to a committee for study, the Sixth Committee, a body of lawyers, would seriously impair its own prestige, particularly in the eyes of the General Assembly, which had requested it to come to a decision. A committee to study the matter would be superfluous and unnecessary. Every delegation already knew how it would vote and a new report on the five amendments taken up by Norway would not change the position. The situation would be quite different if the suggestion were to ask a committee to study other methods of limiting the duration of sessions.

32. The CHAIRMAN recalled that debate was now limited to procedural questions. The Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution would be put to the vote first. Adoption of that amendment would mean the total rejection of the first paragraph of the operative part of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1) and of the annex thereto. If, on the other hand, the Syrian amendment was rejected, a vote would be taken, prob-

ably in parts, on the five draft amendments in the annex.

33. Mr. DONS (Norway) again appealed to the Syrian representative to withdraw his amendment. Its withdrawal would not prevent the Committee, if such was its intention, from successively rejecting each of the five amendments in the annex, thereby meeting the Syrian representative's wish. By insisting, however, on a vote on the five draft amendments as a whole, Mr. Tarazi made it impossible for many delegations to express their views on each of those amendments. That appeared to be an undemocratic procedure.

34. Mr. TARAZI (Syria) considered, on the contrary, that his amendment respected democratic principles. Each delegation could say whether it approved or disapproved of the whole of the annex to the revised Norwegian draft resolution. He would therefore maintain his amendment, and he supported the interpretation given by the Chairman.

35. Mr. VALLAT (United Kingdom) thought it would be regrettable if the Committee were unable to take a separate vote at least on the amendment proposed to rule 38 of the rules of procedure, which merely confirmed an existing situation.

36. Mr. TZOUNIS (Greece) supported Mr. Don's observations.

37. Mr. CUTTS (Australia) said each of the five amendments should be voted on separately, but the only way of doing that was first to reject the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280). In respect of the Uruguayan proposal, which had been submitted rather late, the Chairman should perhaps use the powers given him in rule 119 [79] of the rules of procedure.

38. Mr. MAKTOS (United States of America) said the Syrian representative's attitude could be justified from the legal point of view, but that he might one day discover that it could operate to his disadvantage.

39. Mrs. BASTID (France) also thought the Syrian representative's right could not be disputed. Each delegation should remember, however, that it would have to vote against the Syrian text if it wished even one of the five draft amendments to be adopted.

40. Mr. EL-TANAMLI (Egypt) suggested, in view of the considerable difference between the scope of the amendment proposed to rule 38 and that of the other four draft amendments, that the annex to the revised Norwegian draft resolution should be considered as in effect divided into two parts.

41. Mr. BARTOS (Yugoslavia) thought the Syrian amendment should be put to the vote first because, being entirely negative, it was the text furthest removed from the original proposal. The adoption of the amendment would mean the rejection of the whole of the annex. He would regret that, but the Committee was bound by the rules of procedure.

42. Mr. TARAZI (Syria) accepted the suggestion made by the Egyptian representative and agreed that his amendment should not apply to rule 38, on which, in any case, a separate vote would be taken.

43. Mr. VALLAT (United Kingdom) said it was too late in the discussion for the Syrian representative to amend his own text. The rules of procedure should be applied strictly.

44. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) opposed what appeared to him to be an attempt to bypass a regular stage in the discussion. The general debate was closed, but he did not recall either that it had been decided to combine the general debate with the debate on the draft resolutions, or that the latter debate had been closed or had even begun. Delegations had the right to discuss resolutions. Until the debate had been closed, each delegation could make its comments and submit new draft resolutions and amendments. He would not perhaps have insisted so strongly on observance of the procedure if the United Kingdom representative had not adopted a particularly uncompromising attitude a few moments earlier.

45. The CHAIRMAN said the Uruguayan proposal, which was new, would be discussed in the normal way. But he took it that he was speaking for the Committee in saying that the other texts had been discussed during the general debate. He would ask the Committee to decide whether the Syrian representative should be

allowed to alter his amendment (A/C.6/L.280), as he wished to do.

46. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) could not accept the interpretation given by the Chairman. He fully maintained the point of view he had just stated.

47. Mr. MAKTOS (United States of America) said that, if the Committee agreed to the amendment of the Syrian text, he would also submit an amendment to that text which would have the effect of requiring each of the five draft amendments to be put to the vote separately.

48. Mr. TARAZI (Syria) withdrew the amendment to his amendment, and said he would maintain the latter in its original form.

49. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) moved the adjournment of the meeting.

50. Mr. BAZZAZ (Iraq) protested against the pressure which some delegations appeared to wish to exert by interfering with the normal conduct of proceedings.

The meeting rose at 6.20 p.m.