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Chairman: Mr. Juliusz KATZ-SUCHY (Poland).

**Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions
of the General Assembly: report of the Special
Committee (A/2402, A/C.6/L.292)**

[Item 54]*

1. The CHAIRMAN said that the Norwegian representative, who was the author of the Special Committee's report (A/2402), was the person best qualified to give whatever explanations Committee members might like to hear concerning that document.
2. Mr. DONS (Norway), after expressing regret that the Sixth Committee had not been able at the seventh session of the General Assembly to adopt definitive proposals on the basis of the Secretary-General's suggestions, recalled that, on the Committee's recommendation, the General Assembly, by its resolution 689 (VII), had instead set up a Special Committee to consider the question further.
3. As a first step, the Special Committee in its report (A/2402) proposed two formal amendments to the General Assembly's rules of procedure: first, an amendment to rule 73 (113), the purpose of which was to bring the rule into line with other provisions; and secondly, an amendment to rule 38 whereby the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee, when one was established, would be entitled to a vote in the General Committee. The change represented merely a confirmation of past practice. While not expressly proposing any other amendments to the rules of procedure, the Special Committee had expressed the view that the General Assembly might give a definitive interpretation, in the sense of their generally accepted meaning, of certain more or less clear rules, in order to avoid long procedural debates in the future. Lastly, without wishing to restrict the freedom of action of the officers of the General Assembly and the Main Committees by unduly rigid proposals, the Special Committee proposed that an outline of the practices recommended in its report and designed to avoid unnecessarily long sessions should be included, as suggestions, in an annex to the rules of procedure.
4. The Norwegian delegation, believing it desirable that the conclusions of the Special Committee's report should be adopted, was submitting a draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292) to that effect.

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

GENERAL DEBATE

5. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should first have a general exchange of views, and should then discuss the Norwegian draft resolution any any other texts that might be submitted.
6. Mr. CHAUMONT (France) agreed that some of the Special Committee's recommendations were likely to accomplish the purpose for which it was established, but he found it difficult to see a connecting link between that purpose, the Special Committee's terms of reference, and the two proposed amendments to the rules of procedure.
7. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked for explanations on several points.
8. First, he enquired whether the term "priority" as used in paragraph 15 of the report referred merely to the chronological order in which items on the agenda were to be considered, or signified that, because some items had been given priority, other items might not be debated. Secondly, he requested the Rapporteur of the Special Committee, or the Secretariat, to draw up a list of the annual reports, mentioned in paragraphs 17 and 18 of document A/2402, which the Secretary-General was expected to submit to the General Assembly. Commenting on paragraph 19 of the report he said that, admittedly, the question of defining aggression and the question of an international criminal jurisdiction had been postponed until the ninth session, but he wondered what the third item might be to which the paragraph in question seemed to be referring. Lastly, as there seemed to be some intention to consolidate the practices recommended by the Special Committee, he thought that the exact nature and extent of those practices should be defined.
9. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) recalled that there had been an *Ad Hoc* Political Committee during the three previous regular sessions of the General Assembly. That being so, he was surprised that in its amendment to rule 38 of the rules of procedure the Special Committee did not clearly define the legal status both of the present *Ad Hoc* Political Committee and of any other *ad hoc* political committees which might be established in the future.
10. Mr. DONS (Norway) said in reply to the French representative that, while the purpose of the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure might seem somewhat unconnected with the Special Committee's terms of reference, those suggestions appeared in the Secretary-General's memorandum which the Special Committee had been asked to consider.
11. In reply to the USSR representative, he said that the term "priority" could, of course, refer simply to the chronological order in which the agenda items were considered, but that it could also be taken to mean that the General Assembly should have the power to decide to deal first with the most important items, at the risk of devoting its entire time to them. A list of the

Secretary-General's annual reports could not be given without previous notice; but in any case the provision contemplated chiefly the future. The proposed consolidation would relate to all the concrete and practical recommendations to be found throughout the Special Committee's report, whether they had been adopted unanimously or by a majority. In any case, the Sixth Committee would presumably discuss the recommendations and decide which of them should be consolidated. Lastly, the third item postponed until the ninth session was the consideration of the report of the Collective Measures Committee.

12. In reply to the Peruvian representative, he explained that the proposed amendment to rule 38 of the rules of procedure only applied, and could only apply to the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee in the form in which it had existed for several sessions of the General Assembly. If other *ad hoc* political committees were established in future, it would be for the General Assembly to determine their status and the prerogatives of their Chairmen. There was certainly no cogent reason for denying to the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee the prerogatives of the Chairmen of the other Main Committees. One further advantage of the proposed provision would be that the number of members in the General Committee would be uneven, which would make voting easier.

13. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) explained that he had not meant to voice any objection to the idea that the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee should have the right to vote in the General Committee. He wished to know, however, for what weighty reasons the words "when one is established" had been inserted in the text of the proposed amendment, for, in a way, they tended to perpetuate the provisional character of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee, whereas that body should, on the contrary, be given a definite legal status.

14. Mr. SPIROPOULOS (Greece) pointed out that the Special Committee, not being qualified to assume that the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee was a permanent institution, had therefore been obliged to put in its report the words queried by the Peruvian representative.

15. Mr. RODRÍGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) said that the report submitted by the Special Committee, of which he had been Chairman, acknowledged the principle that the General Assembly—while respecting the evolution of material circumstances, inevitable in a young organization still seeking to set its course—should make any changes in its rules of procedure and decide on any measures to limit the duration of its regular session in the light of its own experience. Rigid theoretical formulas, based on preconceived notions, could not be adapted to changing needs. Whatever method was chosen, all reforms should be based on one fundamental rule. Whatever might be the drawbacks of occasionally excessively long debates, and consequently excessively long sessions, the absolute right, granted to all Member States by the Charter, to speak in any debate was inviolable, and no restriction could be imposed on the reasonable length of the speeches. From that point of view, no widening of the powers of the Chair was acceptable if its result were to permit a limitation of the right of speech in certain circumstances. It might be true that some delegations abused that right by indulging in digressions or in propaganda. Nevertheless, the right remained absolute and inviolable.

16. To forestall any criticism that his views were too rigid, he remarked that his country had a deep-rooted parliamentary tradition and that the Uruguayan Parliament would be unable to agree to limitations of a right confirmed by the Charter. On the strength of its constitutional experience, Uruguay had replaced the system of a single president by that of a presidium. It would be inconsistent if it agreed to the grant of discretionary or even of widened powers to individuals to curtail the unlimited right to speak in the General Assembly or in its Main Committees. That was why he had opposed in the past and would continue to oppose any direct or indirect limitation.

17. With particular reference to the recommended amendment to rule 38, he said that the change simply confirmed an existing practice and did not represent any innovation. The proposed text should be interpreted strictly; it did not in any way prejudice the nature of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee itself. So far as that point was concerned, it had been outside the competence of the Special Committee to claim rights which were the General Assembly's exclusively. The draft amendment, interpreted in that strict sense, could give rise to no objection, particularly in view of the special importance of certain political problems which the *Ad Hoc* Committee was set up to deal with.

18. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) said that he was not altogether satisfied with the explanations given by the Uruguayan representative concerning the amendment to rule 38.

19. He would like the provisions of rule 38 to be drafted in such a manner as to ensure perfect equality, not only as between the six Main Committees and the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee, but also as between those committees and any other *ad hoc* committee that the General Assembly might decide to establish.

20. Mr. SPIROPOULOS (Greece) said that before it was decided whether the proposals contained in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution should or should not be adopted, the Special Committee's report would have to be considered paragraph by paragraph, and each measure recommended by the Special Committee would have to be put to a separate vote. He also enquired who would draft the outline referred to in paragraph 3 of the Norwegian draft resolution, and what would be the scope of the measure proposed in paragraph 4.

21. Recalling that those questions had been discussed at length at the seventh session, he cautioned the Committee against the dangers of engaging in a detailed discussion which might result in a fruitless repetition of past arguments. It might perhaps be better simply to take note of the suggestions contained in the report without incorporating them in an annex to the rules of procedure.

22. Mr. AMADO (Brazil) commended the Special Committee for having refrained from giving a definition of a point of order. All definitions were difficult to draw up, but it was particularly difficult to define points of order, for they grew out of the discussion and hence their scope could hardly be delimited in advance.

23. The Uruguayan representative had expressed concern over the tendency to grant wider powers to the Chair, fearing, apparently, that those powers might be excessive. Actually, the chairman of a committee was not so much an individual as the representative of

a Member State who had the confidence of the General Assembly. It was in that capacity that he made his rulings; under the rules of procedure, any member could challenge the chairman's ruling, and it was for the committee itself to uphold or reverse the ruling.

24. The Brazilian delegation accepted the amendments recommended by the Special Committee to rules 38 and 73 (113) of the rules of procedure. It was, however, doubtful concerning the measures proposed in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution. It had pointed out on a previous occasion that, while it agreed that time should not be wasted, it was opposed to any measure that would in any way restrict the freedom of speech which should characterize a world forum, such as the General Assembly, except, of course, where necessary to increase the efficiency of the General Assembly's work.

25. Mr. LOUTFI (Egypt) felt that after the general debate the various points in the Special Committee's report should be examined separately, and most of them put to the vote.

26. Mr. SANSÓN TERÁN (Nicaragua) said that, while the measures proposed by the Special Committee would no doubt help to reduce the length of regular General Assembly sessions, the main question was how to persuade representatives that they should limit their speeches as much as possible, in particular in the functional commissions.

27. The Nicaraguan delegation endorsed the Peruvian representative's remarks; it would go even further and say that the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee should become a General Assembly committee on terms of equality with the six Main Committees, and should function even when the First Committee's agenda was not very heavy. The existence of two committees both concerned with political question would facilitate the thorough study required for the important problems that came before the United Nations.

28. Mr. SPIROPOULOS (Greece) thought that the Sixth Committee might save time if it proceeded at once to consider the different parts of the report. In that way the Committee would be able to make up its mind whether to accept the suggestions contained therein and, if so, whether they should be included in an annex to the rules of procedure.

29. Mr. MOROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) disagreed; the first point to be settled was whether the Committee wished to recommend that other measures, additional to those proposed by the Special Committee, should be set forth in an annex to the rules of procedure. The Brazilian representative had expressed doubts on that score. If, after the general

debate, the majority of the Committee was found to share the Brazilian representative's view, it would be unnecessary to consider the report paragraph by paragraph.

30. Mr. CHAUMONT (France) was in favour of the method of work suggested by the USSR representative.

31. Apart from the reasons given by the Brazilian representative, there was still another reason, taken from the text of the Special Committee's report itself, why that method was desirable. It was apparent from paragraph 52 of the report that the problem referred to the Special Committee was in a state of evolution and subject to later changes and that, consequently, that Committee's recommendations did not provide a final solution to be accepted once and for all. Moreover, in paragraph 54 of its report the Special Committee recommended that an outline of the proposed practices should be included in an annex to the rules of procedure. The first and basic task was to decide whether that recommendation should be adopted. The Committee might possibly decide that it would be inadvisable to adopt it and prefer simply to take note of the report. In that case there would obviously be no need for studying each of the recommended practices in detail.

32. Mr. SPIROPOULOS (Greece) while not opposed to that way of working, pointed out that some delegations might perhaps wish to discuss the various practices recommended for inclusion in the proposed annex, before deciding on the question in principle.

33. Mr. AMADO (Brazil) supported the remarks of the USSR and French representatives. The Committee should have an exchange of views in the light of which it would be able to express an opinion concerning the Special Committee's recommendations as reproduced in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution.

34. Mr. DONS (Norway) proposed that the Secretariat should prepare a working paper giving an outline of the practices recommended by the Special Committee. On the basis of the discussion of that text the Committee might decide whether or not to recommend the adoption of an annex to the rules of procedure.

35. The CHAIRMAN thought that that proposal might be somewhat premature. He suggested that a decision on it should be postponed until a later meeting.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.