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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/Rev.1) (continued)

[Item 54]*

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. WAHAB (Iraq) stressed his delegation's active interest in the question under discussion, as evidenced by the fact that it had unofficially attended some of the meetings of the Special Committee.

2. That Committee's report was an important document which required careful examination. He agreed with the representatives who had questioned the relevance to the item under discussion of the proposed amendment to rule 38. The question of the membership of the Assembly's General Committee had been outside the competence of the Special Committee and was outside that of the Sixth Committee. For that reason, while not opposed to the amendment as such, his delegation would abstain from the vote on paragraph 1 of the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1). Furthermore, apart from the question of its relevance, the proposed amendment to rule 38 would necessitate a consequential amendment to rule 39.

3. Commenting on paragraph 35 of the Special Committee's report, he said he could not agree with the proposition that a motion to limit the time to be allowed to each speaker and the number of times each representative could speak was merely procedural. A distinction should be drawn between rules 75 (115) and 76 (116) on the one hand, and rule 73 (113) on the other. He agreed, in that respect, with the representative of the USSR that the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113) would drastically limit the freedom of discussion which was a vital element in the democratic procedure followed by the United Nations. It was the only concrete measure proposed that might result in an actual saving of time, but the question was whether the little time that might be saved would justify jeopardizing the democratic principles on which the United Nations was based. Rule 73 (113) of the rules of procedure, if so amended, might lend itself to considerable abuse.

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

4. The provision in paragraph 3 of the Norwegian draft resolution for including various recommendations in an annex to the rules of procedure would serve no equal footing by the General Assembly, which should not be asked to make up its mind whether to debate or to defer any particular item. Moreover, the proposal might give rise to manoeuvring by blocs of representatives with a view to preventing the discussion of items affecting their interests, on the pretext of shortening the duration of the General Assembly. Nor could his delegation accept the suggestion in paragraph 23 of the Special Committee's report, for it might deny representatives an opportunity to submit proposals in the course of the debate.

5. For those reasons he could not support paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution, but would vote in favour of the amendment submitted jointly by Brazil and France (A/C.6/L.293).

6. Mr. RODRÍGUEZ FABREGAT (Uruguay) observed that in spite of all the work which had been done by the General Assembly, the Fifth and Sixth Committees, the Special Committee on Methods and Procedures of the General Assembly and the Special Committee on Measures to Limit the Duration of Regular Sessions of the General Assembly, of which he had been the Chairman, it had proved impossible to prevent regular sessions from growing longer.

7. In his memorandum (A/2206) submitted to the seventh session, the Secretary-General had made a series of drastic proposals for limiting the duration of session, proposals which would have the effect of restricting representatives' rights. In the view of the Uruguayan delegation the powers of regulating and limiting discussions thereby vested in the presiding officers of committees and of the Assembly were excessive. At the time the Uruguayan delegation had, in particular, criticized the proposal that certain questions within the competence of Main Committees should be considered directly in plenary meetings, for those meetings could hardly deal with such items as thoroughly as was required.

8. The prestige of the United Nations was at least as important as the time or money which might be saved through the Secretary-General's proposals or through such of those proposals as the Special Committee had endorsed in its report (A/2402). The United Nations dealt with such matters as the standard of living of the under-developed countries, which affected the destiny of millions and on which representatives should have ample opportunity to state their governments' views.

9. The reason why the General Assembly's agenda was growing longer with each session and constantly adding fresh questions to the accumulation of items deferred from earlier sessions was that the Charter had opened the door for such an expansion. Under the Charter the General Assembly was under a duty to consider all problems brought before it. Many of those problems were of world importance, and representatives could not confine their remarks upon them to a predetermined number of minutes.

10. Even if presiding officers were given the arbitrary powers proposed in the amendments contained in the annex to the Special Committee's report (A/2402) and in the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1), they were unlikely to have the effects desired. In spite of the drastic proposals made by the Secretary-General at the seventh session, the General Assembly had been obliged to suspend that session and to resume it twice, beyond the originally scheduled date, and had only finally brought it to an end because of the imminent approach of the date fixed for the beginning of the eighth session. That had occurred because the questions before the seventh session—the armistice in Korea and the whole problem of protecting the weak from aggression—were too big to be confined within the narrow system of regulations proposed, and it was consistent with the dignity of the Organization that they should be of such intractable magnitude. The United Nations was the forum in which the nations assembled together for the purpose of settling democratically the future of the world.

11. For all those reasons, the Uruguayan delegation was opposed to all the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure, and had opposed them in the Special Committee.

12. It was frivolous to think of drafting such restrictive provisions at a moment when the General Assembly was deciding matters of peace and war and the economic future of peoples. At the very moment when the Norwegian representative was introducing his proposal (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1) for imposing a fresh limitation on debates by means of an amendment to rule 73, the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee was deciding that it would be unable to settle the order of certain items on its agenda because the relevant documents had not been circulated. Subsequently that Committee had decided it would be unable to consider the first few items on its agenda for about a week. In view of such great delays it was pointless to try to pare mere minutes off representatives' statements. It was for representatives themselves, not for the Chair, to decide on the length of statements and debates. Representatives would be guided by their sense of proportion and moderation, and by reflections concerning the weight of their remarks.

13. Turning to the proposals and proposed amendments in detail, he pointed out that the annex contained in the Norwegian draft resolution had no legal validity and would merely act as a guide which the General Assembly would not be obliged to follow. The suggestion that certain matters within the terms of reference of Main Committees should be considered in plenary meetings was unlikely to be very helpful; only once had the General Assembly decided to deal with an item (one concerning UNICEF) itself. Lastly, if the amendment to rule 73 were adopted, it was hard to see what test the presiding officer would apply in deciding which two representatives should speak on either side.

Almost inevitably, however good his intentions might be, his decision would be arbitrary.

14. If the duration of the General Assembly's sessions were to be limited, it would be logical also to limit the sessions of the various subsidiary United Nations bodies, including the Economic and Social Council.

15. In conclusion, he emphasized that no restriction on the General Assembly's agenda or debates was imposed by the Charter.

16. Nawab Ali Yawar JUNG (India) said that every representative organ was called upon periodically to review its practices and procedures in order to make the best possible use of its time. Nevertheless, important as it would be to save time and money by limiting the duration of sessions of the General Assembly, it was still more important not to lose sight of the nature and scope of the functions of the United Nations. As several delegations had pointed out, the United Nations was an international organization, composed of representatives of sovereign States, and dealing with an extremely wide range of subjects. Furthermore, it was directly concerned with alleviating the world's political and economic tensions. It was therefore only natural that delegations should wish to exercise to the full their right to express the views of their governments on the weighty matters which came before the General Assembly.

17. Another consideration was that the General Assembly was a forum from which delegations addressed the peoples of the world; in order to keep them properly informed, delegations had to enjoy full freedom of speech, and restrictive proposals, such as those originally made by the Secretary-General, should therefore be regarded with great caution. It was noteworthy that the Special Committee had failed to accept many of them.

18. That Committee, after considerable labour, had arrived at only two concrete proposals, from which he drew the conclusion that there could be nothing seriously wrong with the rules of procedure. Those proposals were reproduced in the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1). The proposal to amend rule 38 seemed hardly relevant to the subject under discussion. He doubted whether the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113) would really have the effect of shortening the Assembly's sessions, but it would certainly have the effect of seriously impairing freedom of speech.

19. In his view, the way in which to avoid waste of time was to correct the practices, rather than the rules of procedure, of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. Such reform must be left to a gradual amassing of experience, the wisdom of the presiding officers and the conscience of the delegations. No steps should be taken to increase the feeling, which representatives of minorities were bound to have on occasion, that they had not been given a fair hearing.

20. Many delegations had expressed uneasiness over the proposed amendments, and the Indian delegation felt strongly that the need to make any change in the rules of procedure had not been established.

21. The Special Committee made a number of suggestions in its report which he could not accept, such as that certain items should be considered by *ad hoc* committees between sessions. It would not be wise to provide an opportunity for some delegations to remove from the agenda of the General Assembly itself items which they preferred not to be discussed.

22. He was strongly opposed, for two reasons, to the proposal made in the Norwegian draft resolution that the practices recommended by the Special Committee should be embodied in an annex to the rules of procedure. First, he did not agree with all the recommendations; secondly, they would have no binding force, and to place them in an annex, next to the rules yet outside them, would be an odd and ambiguous manner of providing guidance.

23. He suggested that the best method of dealing with the Special Committee's report would be to refer it to governments for comment, and to re-examine it at the ninth session in the light of those comments.

24. Mr. SPIROPOULOS (Greece) stated that his delegation was prepared to vote for the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1) as amended by the Brazilian and French delegations (A/C.6/L.293).

25. The first part of the draft resolution dealt with amendments to two rules. He had no hesitation in voting in favour of the proposed amendment to rule 38. After giving much thought to the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113), and after having been swayed by the arguments for and against, he had decided that, while it undoubtedly placed restrictions on the freedom of speech, those restrictions, applying as they did to the length and number of speeches, were relatively slight and would in the end save time. The existing rule 76, under which delegations could be prevented from speaking altogether, was much more drastic, yet it was applied. Moreover, the decision to limit speeches rested in each case with the General Assembly or the committee concerned, and could not be taken arbitrarily. The question was a very delicate one, and he could quite see that many delegations might not be prepared to accept the proposed curtailment of their rights. The Greek delegation was, however, ready to make that sacrifice for the sake of expediting the work of the General Assembly.

26. The second part of the Norwegian draft resolution dealt with a very different matter—the annexation of the Special Committee's recommendations to the rules of procedure. For his part, he failed to see that an annex was necessary. Since the Yugoslav representative had already dealt with many of those recommendations at the 361st meeting, he would confine his remarks to only a few. Some of the recommended practices, such as that referred to in paragraph 27 of the Special Committee's report, were excellent and were in fact being followed. Others, however, were unacceptable. Paragraph 19 spoke of the postponement of certain items for two years as though it were a current practice, and recommended its wider use, but the postponement in question had been dictated by necessity. It was not a matter on which a general decision could be taken, as the decision obviously had to be based on the peculiar circumstances of each case. The recommendation contained in paragraph 16 was too obvious to need putting into words, while the suggestion in paragraph 24 that matters only remotely or indirectly related to the items under discussion should be eschewed was somewhat out of place in a resolution one of the points of which—the proposed amendment to rule 38—had been termed irrelevant by a number of delegations. The truth was that the principle, while sound, was not always applicable. Lastly, the observation in paragraph 25 that the right and obligation of Chairmen to rule out of order extraneous remarks and proposals should be recognized was surprising, to say the least; that was

the primary duty of Chairmen, and surely needed no further recognition.

27. Obviously, therefore, the recommendations of the Special Committee would have to be carefully winnowed out if an annex were to be prepared. As the Brazilian representative had pointed out, however, even the delegations which had been in favour of the annex had not defended the idea wholeheartedly. He therefore failed to see why there should be an annex at all. If the Brazilian-French amendment (A/C.6/L.293) were adopted, the Committee would instead take note of the Special Committee's report, thus indicating that it had considered the various recommendations. Placing them in an annex would not give them greater value or binding force; they were already known to all and there was no legal obstacle to prevent the General Assembly and the Main Committee from applying them. There was, however, a weighty reason for not placing them in an annex to the rules of procedure, which was that a number of delegations, rightly or wrongly, saw in them an attempt to infringe their freedom of speech. He could not support a course of action which would arouse the resentment of many delegations, and felt that any such attempt should be postponed until the political climate was more propitious.

28. Mr. SAPOZHNIKOV (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that, as his delegation had explained at the seventh session, it would oppose any amendment to the rules of procedure which, on the pretext of shortening the duration of General Assembly sessions, would in fact limit the rights conferred on Member States by the Charter. The amendments proposed by the Special Committee would do precisely that. While sessions should not of course be unduly protracted, their length obviously had to depend on the nature of the items on the agenda.

29. After rightly recognizing in paragraph 13 of its report that the question of the duration of sessions should not be settled at the expense of the effectiveness of the General Assembly's work or the right of representatives to state the views of their governments, the Special Committee had illogically proceeded to recommend an amendment to rule 73 (113) which, as many representatives had correctly pointed out, would in fact limit that right. The representatives who supported the proposed amendment, while emphasizing that discussion in the General Assembly should not be limited, had been equally inconsistent. The Ukrainian delegation for its part was firmly opposed to the proposed amendment.

30. His delegation similarly opposed the Special Committee's recommendation for an annex to the rules of procedure, for the same reasons as those given by various other representatives; such an annex might lead to misinterpretations of the rules of procedure and so weaken them.

31. In view of those considerations, his delegation would vote against paragraph 2 of the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1) and in favour of the Brazilian-French amendment (A/C.6/L.293).

32. Mr. LAUREL (Argentina) said that, while his delegation was in favour of effectively shortening Assembly sessions, it would oppose any measure that might in any way impair or limit the right of delegations freely to discuss items on the General Assembly's agenda. Accordingly it had opposed most of the amendments to the rules of procedure suggested by the Secretary-General at the seventh session (A/2206).

33. The Special Committee had accepted only two of those suggestions. His delegation opposed the amendment to rule 73 of the rules of procedure, even in the somewhat milder form in which the Special Committee had transmitted it, because the proposed revision would restrict freedom of speech even more than the existing rule 73 (113) did. Whatever the representatives supporting the amendment might say, the fact remained that under the existing rules all sixty Member States could discuss a motion to limit the debate, whereas under the proposed amendment only five representatives could speak on such a motion. That meant that any arguments against the motion, beyond those put forward by the first two representatives speaking against it, would remain unheard. The fact that under another rule the number of speakers on a particular point could be limited was no justification for further limiting the rights of representatives. Consistency in the rules would be bought too dearly if it were obtained at the cost of undemocratic procedure. Furthermore, it was not certain how effective such a rule would be in saving time.

34. The other proposed amendment transmitted by the Special Committee was the one to rule 38. While considering it useful, his delegation felt, as it had pointed out at the seventh session, that it had nothing to do with the question of shortening the sessions and should,

if desired, be examined as a separate item. In that case his delegation would support it.

35. Referring to the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1), he noted that paragraphs 1 and 2 of the operative part hardly justified the expectations raised by the preamble, since the amendment to rule 38 would do nothing to shorten the duration of the General Assembly sessions, while the amendment to rule 73 would limit the right of representatives to speak fully and freely in debates. Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the operative part, dealing with the proposed annex to the rules of procedure, were totally unnecessary and would defeat their own purpose by complicating the rules of procedure. Furthermore, the proposed annex did not include the views expressed by the Special Committee, as recorded in paragraphs 7, 13 and 37 of its report, regarding the difficulties in connexion with any measure to limit the duration of the session. For those reasons he supported the amendment submitted by Brazil and France (A/C.6/L.293) to the Norwegian draft resolution.

36. In conclusion, he regretted that the Committee had not been able to hear the views of the Secretary-General on a subject which had a direct bearing on his work.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.