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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. AIKMAN (New Zealand) commended the Special Committee for its constructive report (A/2402), and in particular for having confined itself to making proposals for improving existing practices through co-operation between Members rather than through amendments to the rules of procedure, which might impair the freedom of speech.
2. His delegation agreed in the main with the report's proposals concerning the agenda. An excessively lengthy agenda prevented items from receiving the attention they deserved, and Members would prefer consideration of their proposals to be deferred rather than to have them dealt with sketchily. Accordingly, although any Member had the right to propose any question it wished for inclusion on the agenda, the General Assembly had to be left free to determine how many items it could profitably undertake to consider, which meant that it had to give certain items priority over others.
3. Though perhaps desirable, it was hardly practicable that the General Assembly should specify the interval after which items might reappear on the agenda. The same applied to the suggestion concerning informal time-tables for the completion of items.
4. He strongly supported the suggestion that committees should be encouraged to confine their discussion to their terms of reference, in order to avoid overlapping with other bodies.
5. It would be desirable for Main Committees to limit the time allowed for explanations of votes, which frequently turned into lengthy disquisitions and involved unnecessary repetition. Chairmen should therefore use the powers given them by rule 127 to limit the length of such explanations.
6. The New Zealand delegation felt that efforts should be made to ensure that meetings started on time. If

meetings were started strictly on time representatives would know that they would forfeit their right to speak if they were not punctual, and the sanction would very soon prove effective.

7. His delegation would support the proposals contained in the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.192/Rev.1) to amend rules 38 and 73 (113). The amendment to rule 73 (113) would not, it was true, affect the length of sessions to any great extent, but it would be a contribution towards limiting debates on purely procedural matters and should not prevent representatives from expressing themselves freely on matters of substance. The existing rule 73 already allowed the General Assembly to limit the length and number of a representative's statements, and the proposed amendment would merely give it the additional power to limit the number of speakers for and against a motion to limit debate. The General Assembly or a committee would remain free, if the amendment were adopted, to reject a motion for limiting debate under rule 73 if it so wished.

8. He would support the United Kingdom amendment (A/C.6/L.295), which followed from changes already made or proposed in other rules.

9. He welcomed the draft annex to the rules of procedure contained in the Norwegian draft resolution, but felt that some of the passages on points of order contained in section IX of the report should have been included. It was desirable to ensure that Chairmen of committees and representatives fully appreciated the precise nature and purpose of points of order. Perhaps the Norwegian representative might consider including those passages in the proposed annex. Subject to that suggestion, he would support the Norwegian draft resolution.

10. Mr. MACNAUGHTON (Canada) said that his delegation had consistently taken up the position that it would support any effective proposal to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly just as it would support any measure which would enable the United Nations to do its work more effectively and at less cost. At the same time it would oppose any unreasonable proposal to limit debate in the General Assembly or in its Committees which would deprive Members States of the right freely to state their views on issues that came before the United Nations.

11. On the other hand, the right of full debate had been abused in the past and as a result the length of regular sessions of the General Assembly had been extended. Those abuses would probably continue unless steps were taken to prevent their recurrence. One effective remedy might be to amend the rules of procedure, although, as some representatives had pointed out, the rules, however well drafted, would be ineffectual unless existing practices were improved and delegations were willing to co-operate in their enforcement.

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

12. The Special Committee's report (A/2402) made a practical contribution to the solution of the problem, and the Canadian delegation was in general agreement with the observations and moderate conclusions contained therein. It hoped that the report would be kept available for future guidance. It did not think, however, that an outline of the practices recommended in the report should be annexed to the rules of procedure, as proposed in the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1). In order to be useful the rules had to be unequivocal and binding on all Members of the United Nations. Apart from the fact that it would have no legal validity, the annex would make for ambiguity and consequently produce further delays. If, in the light of further experience, the United Nations subsequently decided to incorporate some of those suggestions in its rules of procedure, that would be a different matter. For those reasons, the Canadian delegation could not support paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution.

13. Paragraph 1 of the Norwegian draft resolution, relating to the amendment to rule 38, had met with little objection. A number of representatives had, however, opposed paragraph 2 on the grounds that the recommended amendment to rule 73 (113) would restrict the sovereign right of Members freely to state their views on any item on the agenda. His delegation did not share that opinion, since, as various speakers had pointed out, the proposal could have no other effect than to limit debate on the purely procedural issue whether the discussion of a given item should be limited. Hence it would in no way prevent a delegation from speaking on the substantive item under consideration. Procedural debates by their nature excluded consideration of the merits of the item on the agenda and their limitation would not affect substantive discussion. Lengthy procedural debates could contribute nothing to the discussion of an item and were not in the interests of the United Nations. Lastly, rule 73 (113), even as amended, would still be subject to the wishes of the majority.

14. In conclusion, he said that his delegation would support the Norwegian draft resolution, subject to the amendment submitted by Brazil and France (A/C.6/L.293), as it would help to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly without in any way restricting the rights of Member States under the Charter.

15. His delegation would also vote in favour of the United Kingdom amendment to rule 39 of the rules of procedure (A/C.6/L.295, point 1), which was consequential on the proposed amendment to rule 38, but he reserved his delegation's position on the proposed United Kingdom amendment to rule 98 (A/C.6/L.295, point 2) until it had studied the proposal further.

16. Mr. GÓMEZ PADILLA (Guatemala) said that his delegation also took the view that, while it was desirable to limit the duration of the regular sessions of the General Assembly, the measures taken to that effect should never be such as to infringe the rights of Member States in the General Assembly and in the Committees to expound with complete freedom their views on problems requiring the attention of the United Nations.

17. He could not accept paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1), providing for the inclusion of the Special Committee's suggestions in an annex to the rules of procedure. Not being legally binding, the annex would only serve to

confuse proceedings. On the other hand, while some of the suggestions were unacceptable, others might provide useful guidance, and he therefore supported the Brazilian and French amendment (A/C.6/L.293, point 2) according to which the General Assembly would take note of the Special Committee's report. If desired, the suggestions might also be issued as a separate document for general information, as the Mexican representative had suggested.

18. He supported paragraph 1 of the Norwegian draft resolution, containing the amendment to rule 38 of the rules of procedure; while the proposed provision was not directly related to the item under discussion it would confirm an existing practice.

19. Paragraph 2 of the Norwegian text was wholly unacceptable, because the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113) would limit freedom of discussion in the General Assembly and hence conflicted with the democratic practice of the United Nations. Each delegation had to decide for itself how much time it needed to explain its point of view on a given item. A question that might seem to be secondary to one country might be considered important by another which should not arbitrarily be deprived of the right to state its opinion thereon.

20. The argument that the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113) of the rules of procedure merely regulated the power held by the General Assembly under the existing rules of procedure to limit the time allowed to each speaker was not relevant; under the existing rules the General Assembly could use that power only in special circumstances and after full procedural debate, whereas under the proposed amendment limitation of the time to be allowed to each speaker might become a current practice. Consequently far more than a mere procedural change was involved.

21. For those reasons he supported the Norwegian draft resolution as amended by Brazil and France, except for paragraph 2 of that draft resolution.

22. He was submitting, jointly with the representative of Ecuador, a draft amendment (A/C.6/L.296) to the Brazilian and French amendment providing for the deletion of that paragraph.

23. Mr. MAURTUA (Peru) did not think that to limit the representative's right to speak was the proper way of solving the problem of shortening the duration of General Assembly sessions. The General Assembly was essentially a deliberative body and consequently should provide facilities for full discussion of all questions, even procedural motions. A better method would be a more careful selection of items to be included in the agenda, not by the Secretary-General—as proposed in paragraph 18 of the Special Committee's report—but by the General Assembly itself.

24. The Peruvian delegation agreed with the observation in paragraph 26 of the Special Committee's report that existing practices might profitably be re-examined, but it could not accept the suggestion in paragraph 35 of the report relating to procedural motions. While it was true that similar limitations had been established in previous revisions of the rules of procedure, those limitations had not helped to expedite the proceedings of the General Assembly. The sole effect of the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113) of the rules of procedure would be that it would leave the minority at the mercy of the majority.

25. Any limitation of debate in the General Assembly would be contrary to the basic purpose of an interna-

tion organization such as the United Nations, which served as a forum for the discussion of problems affecting the peoples of the world.

26. The Charter of the United Nations empowered the General Assembly to discuss all matters within the scope of the Charter; to hinder full and free discussion of questions of world-wide importance would therefore be in direct violation of the Charter. The Charter also recognized the sovereign equality of Member States and consequently their right to make themselves heard. International co-operation, which of necessity was voluntary, could not be achieved through a partial or limited consideration of matters of moment to the international community. The tendency to restrict free debate might well have a harmful effect on the most vital work of the United Nations. Its great danger was that, with the best intentions in the world, it might lead to the unequal treatment of international problems.

27. He was opposed to the proposed amendment to rule 38, since it perpetuated the present indefinite legal status of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee. Any serious reform should end the uncertainty of that Committee's position.

28. He noted, in passing, that the observations contained in paragraphs 44 and 45 of the Special Committee's report were in direct contradiction with General Assembly resolution 684 (VII).

29. In general, his delegation was unable to approve either the report or the Norwegian draft resolution; the latter, because it reproduced the conclusions contained in the report and because its paragraph 3 in particular provided for a most irregular procedure. Indeed, it would be inadvisable to attach to a clear and binding set of rules general considerations which had not been sufficiently debated and which had no legal value.

30. He therefore supported that part of the Brazilian-French amendment which called for the deletion of paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.293, point 4).

31. Khwaja Mohammed SAFDAR (Pakistan) endorsed the views expressed in paragraph 13 of the Special Committee's report (A/2402) as to the undesirability of saving time at the expense of the General Assembly's power to consider important matters submitted to it and of the right of delegations freely to express their opinions. Accordingly he was unable to support the report's recommendations.

32. The United Nations was a political body whose Members were not representatives of parties, as was the case in a national assembly, but of a large number of heterogeneous sovereign States.

33. It was impossible in most cases to reduce the time spent on procedural discussions without destroying the political character of debates. The same applied to attempts to reduce the length and number of speeches. Any undue attempt to control the latter would, in addition, impair the freedom of speech, which would be inconsistent with the principle of sovereignty that lay at the basis of the Charter.

34. The suggested time limit for the submission of draft resolutions was undesirable and probably unworkable, because it was frequently necessary to submit resolutions towards the end of a debate, in the interests of the ultimate efficiency of a body's work.

35. The suggestions made in paragraphs 24 and 25 of the report, concerning the scope of proposals made in Committees, though suitable to a national assembly,

could not be applied to the United Nations, where exhaustive discussion was required which could not always be kept within the strict confines of agenda items. Nor was it likely that the presence of the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee in the General Committee, as proposed in the draft amendment to rule 38, would be conducive to the speedier disposal of the agenda.

36. The proposed amendment to rule 73 (113), by which a restriction would be placed on the number of speakers, in addition to the restriction already contained in that rule, was undesirable because of the heterogeneous nature of Member States, which were not, as in a national body, divided into parties.

37. Consequently, his delegation considered that the report's recommendations would tend to limit freedom of speech and hamper discussion, while having little effect on the duration of sessions, and was unable to give them its support.

38. Mr. KHOMAN (Thailand) said that the recommendations contained in the Special Committee's report (A/2402) were, on the whole, most acceptable. The Special Committee had kept firmly before it, as its primary concern, the interests of the General Assembly and the right of representatives to express themselves freely. It had been faced with the task of reconciling the need to reduce the length of sessions, in the interests of the General Assembly and the Organization as a whole, with the need to take into account the international character of the United Nations and the prerogatives of its sovereign Member States. Views differed as to whether it had tipped the balance one way or the other.

39. The restrictions proposed by the report were in keeping with the existing rules of procedure, and their acceptance would appear to be a natural consequence of membership of the United Nations. They were necessary for the efficiency of the General Assembly's work and only constituted a very small addition to the already existing limitations. In any case, they were merely to act as a guide to help the General Assembly in circumstances of particular difficulty, and would not be applied rigidly. If they really were liable to result in a regimentation of the Assembly it would be the duty of all Members, and in particular of small States, to protest against them.

40. Commenting on the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1), he said that paragraph 1 appeared to command general support. The proposed amendment to rule 73 (113), contained in paragraph 2, was a definite improvement. Far from restricting representatives' rights, it would give them the power to decide whether or not to apply the proposed new limitation, which they did not possess under the existing rule.

41. His delegation would have liked some of the report's recommendations to be incorporated in an annex to the rules of procedure, as the Norwegian draft proposed. But since certain delegations were opposed to that course and it was desirable so far as possible to attain unanimity on such matters, he would support the Brazilian-French amendment (A/C.6/L.293).

42. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) observed that the very title of the Special Committee, of which he had been a member, indicated that it had a mandate to discover ways and means of shortening the General Assembly's session, and the Committee had accordingly set about its task as best it could in a pragmatical,

businesslike manner. It had felt confident, however, that its Chairman would provide a bulwark against any infringement of the sovereign rights of States, in particular small States.

43. The Special Committee had found that some of the existing rules of procedure went much further than the proposals it had included in its report, and amounted to a repression, not simply a restriction, of the freedom of speech. That was true, for example, of rule 76 and of the last sentence of rule 88, by which a representative was prevented from explaining his vote on his own proposal or amendment. The first sentence of rule 76 suggested at least the possibility of discourtesy by one Member State towards another Member State. Application of rule 88 would be harsh in the event of a proposal becoming so greatly altered in the course of a debate that its proposer was finally obliged to vote against it; he should surely, in that case, be permitted to explain the reasons for his vote.

44. The Special Committee had proceeded with the greatest caution. It had considered the possibility of written statements being submitted, and had decided that they might be employed as a remedial measure in cases where a representative had been denied the right to speak. It had discussed the question of explanation of votes, and had decided that such explanations should come after the vote but might, in order to save time, be submitted in writing, provided that they received the same treatment as oral statements in the records, in view of the fact that they did not affect the proceedings.

45. The Special Committee had also discussed the question of meetings starting after the scheduled time and adjourning early. It had been felt that informal discussions outside the meeting helped the discussion and ought not, therefore, to be discouraged by insistence on strict observance of the schedule.

46. Consideration had also been given to the desirability of draft resolutions being submitted at the beginning of a discussion. It had been felt that though early submission might result in such draft resolutions being extensively altered in the course of the debate, it would focus and tether the discussion and prevent it from becoming unduly abstract.

47. So far as the length of speeches was concerned, the Special Committee had felt that it was impossible to stop speeches which were made for purposes of propaganda, and that the only check was self-discipline, good will and moderation on the part of delegations.

48. So cautious had the Special Committee's approach been, that it had only proposed one important amendment that to rule 73 (113). Even in that case, it would lie with the General Assembly or committee itself whether or not to invoke the rule, so that the proposed amendment could not be regarded as undemocratic.

49. An objection to the proposed amendment to rule 38 had been that it would not limit the length of sessions. The Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee would, however, be able to speak with more authority than anyone else on questions within the competence of his Committee, and his presence would accordingly increase the efficiency of the General Committee's work and thereby save time.

50. The Philippine delegation would vote in favour of the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.292/Rev.1), except for the annex thereto, upon which it

would abstain. Containing as it did a full text, not an abstract, of the Special Committee's views, the annex was excessively unwieldy. Yet it ought not to be lost sight of entirely, and he suggested, therefore, that the Secretariat might issue, for distribution to governments, a special publication containing the text of that annex together with other earlier annexes to the rules of procedure, as a continuing study of the practice of the General Assembly.

51. He requested a separate vote on the annex to the Norwegian draft resolution.

52. He would vote in favour of the United Kingdom amendment (A/C.6/L.295).

53. Mr. UMAÑA BERNAL (Colombia) was unable to agree with a previous speaker who had considered the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Special Committee's report moderate. On the contrary, they represented an ambitious attempt to alter the very principles on which the United Nations had been founded. The danger of adopting the Norwegian draft resolution, in which they were reproduced, was not immediate, nor immediately apparent: it was that the suggested revision of the rules of procedure might open the door to further and much more drastic changes in the present democratic practices of the General Assembly. He warned delegations against the growing tendency to transform the United Nations into a bureaucracy—a development which had caused the downfall of the League of Nations, which towards the end of its existence had been little more than a central correspondence office and an international public relations agency. The advice of experts was no doubt valuable, but the important political problems with which the General Assembly had to deal were solved not by them, but by representatives of sovereign States who should be allowed full latitude to express the ideas of their governments and to work out common solutions in the light of those ideas.

54. The lengthiness of the sessions of the General Assembly was not a factor in, but a symptom of, the international situation. Thus, the seventh session had not been formally closed until just recently, not for any reasons having to do with the rules of procedure, but because of the war in Korea. A time of great international tension like the present was the very worst possible moment for introducing measures which many delegations, rightly or wrongly, regarded as an infringement of the freedom of speech.

55. For all those reasons, he was unable to accept the conclusions of the Special Committee and would therefore vote against the Norwegian draft resolution. Having been convinced by the USSR and Yugoslav representatives that the proposed amendment to rule 73 was unwise, he was also unable to accept the Brazilian-French amendment in so far as it supported that proposal, and welcomed the amendment submitted by Ecuador and Guatemala proposing to suppress it (A/C.6/L.296, point 2).

56. Mr. VAN REMOORTELT (Belgium) said that his delegation's position had been determined by the Greek representative's lucid analysis of the situation at the previous meeting. It would vote for the first part of the Norwegian draft resolution, but against paragraphs 3 and 4. Nevertheless, as it felt that the Special Committee's recommendations should not be relegated to oblivion, it supported the Philippine representative's suggestion that they should be issued in a special publication.

57. U KHIN HLA MAUNG (Burma) recalled that the idea of limiting the duration of sessions of the General Assembly had had its origin in a draft resolution (A/C.5/L.173) submitted by his delegation jointly with those of Cuba, Ecuador, Iceland and Norway at the sixth session. After studying the deliberations of the Sixth Committee at the seventh session and the Special Committee's report, his delegation still held the view that excessively lengthy sessions of the General Assembly could and should be discouraged.

58. The Special Committee, after going into the matter very carefully, had proposed amendments to two rules of procedure. He would say no more about the proposed amendment to rule 38, which appeared to be generally acceptable, than that he would vote for it. With regard to the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113); however, he felt that discussions were sometimes unduly prolonged through the fault of the delegations themselves, and that the answer lay in self-discipline rather than in a change of the rules, which could hardly be effective except through infringement of the democratic rights of Member States.

59. He was in agreement with the views expressed by the United Kingdom representative on paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution, and would accordingly vote for those paragraphs.

60. He failed to see that the suggestion made by the Indian representative at the previous meeting, to circulate the Special Committee's report to governments for comment, would serve any useful purpose. The Secretary-General had already consulted the governments on the subject, and there was no point in starting the whole cycle afresh.

61. Mr. HOLMBACK (Sweden) recalled that he had earlier expressed support for the Norwegian draft resolution. He would also vote in favour of the United Kingdom amendment (A/C.6/L.295).

62. Mr. POVETYEYEV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) had not thought that it would be necessary for him, after the statements made by a number of delegations, to explain why his own delegation was opposed to the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113). However, the remarks of the Greek and Philippine representatives in support of that amendment compelled him to go into the matter.

63. The Greek representative had made a show of objectivity; but although he had been unable to deny that the proposed amendment would in fact restrict the right of representatives freely to discuss all items on the agenda, he had surprisingly concluded that the amendment should be adopted. His excuse had been that the final decision to limit debate would lie with the General Assembly and would therefore not be arbitrary. That was evading the issue. The opponents of the proposed amendment realized that the final decision in that, as in all other matters, would rest with the General Assembly; their point was that, be-

fore the decision was taken, any proposal to limit the debate should be discussed fully, without the restrictions proposed in the amendment, since the data on which the General Assembly could base an intelligent decision usually came to light only during such a discussion. To argue otherwise, as the Greek representative had done, was to consider the General Assembly's decisions automatic, if not prearranged—a state of affairs which would be clearly contrary to the Charter.

64. He therefore urged all delegations not to be misled by specious reasoning and to join his delegation and many others in voting against the proposed amendment to rule 73 (113).

65. Mr. VALLAT (United Kingdom) said that the amendments submitted by his delegation (A/C.6/L.295) were purely consequential. The amendment to rule 39 was, as the Iraq representative had pointed out at the previous meeting, made necessary by the proposed amendment to rule 38, which introduced a reference to the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee. The amendment to rule 98 would replace the words "the target date for the closing of the session" by the words "the closing date for the session" in order to bring that rule into line with the new wording of rule 2—a detail which had been overlooked when that rule had been amended.

66. Mr. OLAVARRIA (Chile) said he would not comment in detail on a matter which had been so thoroughly analysed by preceding speakers. He would vote in favour of the Norwegian draft resolution and of the Brazilian-French amendment, his reason for supporting the latter being that he did not think it wise to place a text which was merely advisory and had no legal value next to the rules of procedure, which were binding.

67. He reserved the right to comment later on the more recent amendments.

68. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) wished to know the Secretariat's opinion of the suggestion which he had made earlier in the meeting and which the Belgian representative had supported. He was prepared to submit an amendment to paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Norwegian draft resolution which would carry that suggestion into effect.

69. Mr. LIANG (Secretary of the Committee) replied that the Secretariat had obviously not had time to give the suggestion careful study. It would seem to him, however, that any publication such as that mentioned by the Philippine representative would have to bear some relation to the rules of procedure. If it were issued separately it would be less useful, and would represent a departure from the previous practice of the General Assembly, which had been to publish recommendations as annexes to the rules of procedure. It was not clear to him what form such a publication would take and how and to what extent it would be related to the rules of procedure.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.