



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Friday, 30 April 1971,
at 3.10 p.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

AGENDA ITEM 16

Measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council (continued)* (E/4986 and Add.1-5, E/L.1382)

1. Mr. KHALID (Sudan) noted that ten years of deliberations on ways and means of improving the work of the Economic and Social Council had achieved very few positive results. Clearly the Council was becoming more and more ineffectual in superintending the economic and social activities of the United Nations in accordance with Chapter IX of the Charter. Through either devolution or default it had spawned myriads of subsidiary bodies; although some of them had done important work, the last ten years had been a story of wasteful duplication. It was all very well to talk about working methods, selective agendas, synchronized calendars, rationalized documentation and penurious budgets, but the real problem was political: the Council neither reflected world realities nor had a broad geographical basis. Because of its lack of authority, it was incapable of performing either its policy-making or its co-ordinating function. There were other bodies which enjoyed a greater degree of sovereignty and were more representative than the Council.

2. His delegation did not share the view that the Council, however it might be enlarged, could genuinely reflect the geo-political realities of the present-day world. It was not possible to strengthen United Nations organs without taking account of the structure of existing power relationships. Compromises will be achieved only when the political and economic realities and interests of the developing countries were taken into account. The experience of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was a case in point. His delegation would, however, support any effort to reapportion responsibilities more rationally between the major organs in such a way as to lessen friction and put an end to duplication.

3. There was also a need for a review of the Council's co-ordinating function. Admittedly, co-ordination within a system as geographically divided and functionally disparate as that of the United Nations was not easy. It was time the Council made a survey of all the bodies that had been set up to deal with the question so that it could decide on a rational division of labour among them, distinguishing carefully between the political and the functional and between administration and policy-making. A proper evaluation of the work of the specialized agencies, however, could be made only by the General Assembly, which alone had the machinery, the power and the political leverage to do so.

* Resumed from the 1743rd meeting.

4. Within a dynamic system, many institutions inevitably became redundant and lost their *raison d'être*; accordingly, delegations should review the composition, functions and effectiveness of, and even the need for, the Economic and Social Council, which had been aptly described as the fifth wheel in the United Nations system.

5. Mr. McCARTHY (United Kingdom) said that his delegation had little to add to the statement of his Government's views in document E/4986. It would be prepared to take part in the activities of the working group if one was set up. Such a group might, however, find it difficult to reconcile views concerning the role of the Council. For example, the representative of the Sudan seemed to take an unfavourable view of the increase in the number of specialized agencies and other bodies within the United Nations system and the consequent reduction of the powers of the Council. His own delegation felt that what that situation required was a strengthening of the co-ordinating role of the Council because, although its relative powers might have been changed as a result of those developments, its duties under the Charter had not. Various representatives also seemed to resent the fact that the specialized agencies, having greater financial resources and a broader geographical base than the Council, were so free to do as they wished. But they had the executive functions. It was when that situation led to extravagance, duplication and waste that the Council's function to correct was relevant. If the Council could keep that area under review it would be achieving its major purpose. In his view, therefore, the Council should in future concentrate on dealing with problems before it rather than spend time talking about what its role should be.

6. Mr. TARDOS (Hungary) said that his delegation, which attached great importance to improving the work of the Council, would endorse any measure which might enable it to promote economic and social progress more effectively.

7. Under the Charter, the Council had been given the key role in the development of international economic and social co-operation, but the discussion confirmed that it had not entirely fulfilled that function. His delegation felt that the Council's work could not be improved merely by one resolution; that had to be done step by step, through both short-term and long-term measures. Problems had first to be identified; then it would be a relatively easy task to decide on how the solutions should be implemented. That seemed to be the approach contemplated in operative paragraphs 2 and 5 of the USSR draft resolution (E/L.1382).

8. Some short-term steps could be taken immediately. First, the six-week rule regarding the issuance of documents should be strictly observed. Secondly, documentation should be kept at a level commensurate with the working

requirements of the Council and uniform rules for the editing of documents should be applied. Thirdly, a more rational and workable calendar of conferences should be prepared and the Council should enforce the resolutions adopted by the Assembly concerning the frequency of meetings of the Council's subsidiary bodies. Fourthly, the Council should so distribute its yearly workload as not to impede the work of the Second Committee. Specifically, the Council's resumed summer session should be held after the Second Committee had completed its work. Fifthly, the working relationship between the Assembly and the Council should be reviewed. Lastly, the Council's work programme should be adapted to the new responsibilities it would have under the Second Development Decade. To meet the challenge of the Decade, the Council would have to reconsider its priorities, reformulate its pattern of debates and evaluate the relative importance of the items on its agenda. Those elements of a short-term programme could be realized in the near future.

9. The long-term programme required much lengthier and more careful consideration, since many different and often conflicting proposals would have to be analysed in terms of their advantages and disadvantages. One of the most controversial problems was the question of institutional change. In his delegation's view, the Council could not arbitrarily enlarge either itself or any of its sessional committees, as that right was reserved by the Charter to the General Assembly. He had therefore been surprised when one Government, which had often in the past upheld the strict application of the Charter, had suggested transferring the rights of the Assembly to the Council. Perhaps the least controversial proposals for institutional change concerned the handling of questions dealing with science and technology. However, before establishing a sessional committee for the purpose the Council should make an over-all review of the present institutional arrangements in order to avoid duplication. The discussion of that problem should not be influenced by narrow interests or short-term considerations.

10. Another element of the long-term plan should be solution of the problem of programming, i.e. the establishment of priorities and programme budgeting upon which the effective functioning of the Council and its subsidiary organs depended. The existing system prevented the Assembly from exercising its budgetary authority and the present undemocratic situation, in which the majority view concerning the most effective use of available financial resources could be thwarted by the narrow interests of small bodies, had to be corrected.

11. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) said that the paucity of replies from Governments to the Secretary-General's questionnaire was no reason to delay the work of the Council. First, in the light of past experience the poor response was to have been expected. Secondly, the Council had been considering measures to improve the organization of its work for almost two years, formally and informally, and there was a wealth of ideas and documentation available that could form the basis of a genuine discussion, something which would be more useful than the presentation of formal statements. It was not necessary to take a formal decision to extend the time limit for the submission of replies by Governments: the Council should simply agree not to exclude from consideration any views submitted by a Government before

the matter was finally disposed of. It should decide to complete its consideration of the matter at its fifty-first session and agree on the recommendations it wished to make to the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session. To continue to discuss the subject indefinitely would only be a waste of time. It should be given an analysis and classification of all the ideas submitted so far on measures to improve the organization of its work so that conclusions might be reached in a working group, preferably of the whole.

12. Turning to the substantive aspects of the question under consideration, he said it should be borne in mind that although the Council was a principal organ of the United Nations it was subordinate to the General Assembly. Its function was to act as the chief organ in the co-ordination, execution, supervision and implementation of policy decisions, programmes and activities and in the formulation of policy recommendations. Its efforts to carry out that function had been characterized by duplication, lengthy inconclusive debates, competition with other bodies, and a feeling of non-involvement on the part of States which were not included among its members. He intended to examine the cause of some of those problems and offer specific suggestions for their short-term or long-term solution. With reference to short-term proposals, he observed that in attempting to carry out its co-ordinating functions the Council was hampered by the duplication of effort on the part of organs and committees with competing terms of reference, resulting in an excessive number of meetings, unnecessary administrative expense and lack of a sense of direction. Co-ordination was in the hands of three separate bodies: the Council's own sessional Co-ordination Committee, CPC and ACC. His delegation felt that ACC had not succeeded in co-ordinating the programmes and activities of the organs and institutions comprising the United Nations economic and social system. Its meetings were in the nature of a mere exchange of information as to what each specialized agency proposed to do, without bringing the agencies under the guiding and co-ordinating influence of the Council itself. In short, ACC was not sufficiently under the control of the Council, and, in fact, often confronted the Council with *faits accomplis*. If ACC was to serve a useful purpose, it must work within clearly defined terms of reference laid down by the Council in the light of policy objectives determined by the latter under the guidance of the General Assembly. In so doing, ACC would become an executing arm of the Council.

13. Secondly, the roles of CPC and the Co-ordination Committee called for reform. CPC often went beyond its co-ordinating role to discuss substantive and budgetary measures, thus duplicating debates which had already taken place in the specialized agencies and were likely to take place in the Co-ordination Committee and in the Council itself. Either the Co-ordination Committee should be abolished and CPC retained with its role strictly limited to co-ordination, or CPC should be abolished and its functions assigned to the Co-ordination Committee, which would then meet more frequently, preferably between Council sessions throughout the entire year. If the Co-ordination Committee was abolished and CPC retained, it would be desirable to enlarge the latter's membership so that it would be the same size as the Council. That would make it possible for the Economic and Social Committees of the

Council to discuss not only the substantive aspects of questions but also their co-ordination on the basis of information furnished by CPC. Their work should thus be facilitated, for it was evident from the experience of CPC that it was often difficult to separate the co-ordination aspects of certain questions from their substantive aspects. Furthermore, some improvement was needed in the Council's co-ordination of policy formulation. The Council had not yet taken on a key role in co-ordinating the policies of the specialized agencies with those of the United Nations. Even with the institutional and constitutional limitations which existed at present, some useful steps could be adopted. As the co-ordinating authority of the United Nations economic and social system, the Council should be given an opportunity to examine the plans and policy objectives of all the specialized agencies before their adoption to ensure that they took the Council's recommendations into consideration. In considering the plans and policies of the specialized agencies, the Council should relate them to the policies and objectives of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade (General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV)).

14. The proposals he had just made would, to some extent, reduce the Council's present volume of work. Eliminating the present duplication between the Co-ordination Committee and CPC would bring about an automatic reduction in the amount of documentation and would also save time and effort. If the Council's sessional committees worked intersessionally throughout the year, much detailed technical work would be lifted off the shoulders of the Council itself. In addition, the Council should seek to encourage more real discussion and consider whether it was always necessary to begin consideration of an item with a general debate; in his opinion, the general debate was essential only in exceptional cases. Furthermore, the Council should not attempt to consider in great technical detail questions involving highly specialized bodies. It should concentrate on broad policies, programmes and objectives and their co-ordination.

15. Reform was also possible in the presentation, timing and length of documentation. Documents on items under consideration by the Council should consist of a first part giving a description of developments to date and a second part setting forth recommendations and indicating the various decisions possible and the consequences of each decision. Where no decision was required, that should also be clearly stated. If some bodies were not in a position to adhere to such a format, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs should be able to analyse the reports they submitted and put those analyses before the Council. The function of the Department with regard to the Council should be to process and distil reports for the Council to decide upon and to prepare position papers on the future plans of the Council at its request. In fulfilling that function, the Department should be able to call on the secretariats of all the specialized agencies. In short, the Council should be organized along the lines of a board of business executives or a cabinet or central committee, which had no time for general debate or consideration of details but made policy, gave directions and guided action. The Council should insist on observance of the six-week rule for the submission of documents which should be

made available early enough to enable delegations to forward them to their Governments for study and instructions. Observance of that rule would mean that the calendar of meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Council and the specialized agencies might have to be modified. The Council should dispense with resumed sessions altogether, especially when they coincided with sessions of the General Assembly. The Council should not hesitate to ask the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and their affiliates to revise their calendars of meetings to fit in with its schedule. With those modifications, there was no reason why it should not suffice for the Council to meet in January, April and July, according to its present calendar of meetings.

16. His delegation supported the suggestion for greater involvement of more Members of the United Nations in the work of the Council. That could be brought about by enlarging the membership of the Council's sessional committees to enable non-Council Members to participate in their work. It would be wrong, however, for the Council to have a smaller membership than its subsidiary bodies, and for that reason, it might consider enlarging its own membership.

17. Turning to the fundamental, long-term problems that faced the Council, he expressed the view that it could never expect to control or even to co-ordinate the policies and programmes of the specialized agencies unless it also exercised control over their budgets. The fact that each agency was controlled by its own membership, which in some cases was greater than that of the General Assembly, could produce strange anomalies, and there had even been occasions on which delegations to agency conferences had taken positions that differed from the positions taken by their Governments' own delegations to the General Assembly. At present, there were at least fourteen centres of policy formulation in the economic and social field, and it would be extremely difficult for the Council to exercise any effective control or co-ordination unless the constitutions of the specialized agencies and the basic agreements governing their relations with the Council and the General Assembly were amended in such a way as to make them more subordinate to the global will as expressed in the Assembly. The inefficiency of the international development system was demonstrated by the fact that so much effort had to be expended on co-ordination. In his view, an institution should be largely self-co-ordinating, and the entire economic and social system of the United Nations needed to be re-examined with that object in view.

18. Neither the effective functioning of the Council nor its authority had been improved by the establishment by the General Assembly of subsidiary economic bodies such as UNCTAD, UNIDO and UNDP, whose links with the Council were somewhat nebulous. It was probable that such bodies would not have been established if the Council had at the time taken the appropriate action in response to the legitimate pressures exerted by the developing countries. The Council's functions might be improved, however, if the General Assembly were to delegate more authority to it, without prejudice, of course, to its own ultimate constitutional authority. He believed that, if more policy-making authority was delegated to the Council, there should also be

a modest increase in its membership, so that it would be more representative of the membership of the General Assembly. He did not think there was any need to establish new subsidiary bodies, because the various new topics that were coming to the fore in United Nations discussions, such as the environment and science and technology, could be dealt with adequately and, indeed, much more economically by the Council if it organized its work in a businesslike manner. He was not against a redefinition of the Council's functions or a strengthening of its secretariat to cope with new responsibilities. In any event, the functioning of the Council called for thorough reappraisal, and the various courses of action he had recommended would need to be carefully considered. Perhaps, therefore, a working group might be set up to undertake a study of the basic issues that now faced the Council as well as its long-term future.

19. Mr. SHAHI (Pakistan) felt that the Council's functions in its field of competence as well as its technical performance could unquestionably be improved and that a number of good ideas for improvement had been submitted by Governments to the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly. He tended to agree with the statement on the subject made by the United States representative: the Council was indeed suffering from a crisis of confidence, and although there were no doubt many minor or procedural changes that could be made, further erosion of the Council's position could not be prevented unless dynamic action were taken. His delegation therefore favoured enlargement of the Council's membership, which would have beneficial psychological and political effects. The fact that there were at present only twenty-seven members made it difficult, because of the principle of rotation, for developing countries to gain the necessary experience and thus improve the quality of their contributions. In comparison with the governing bodies of UNCTAD and UNIDO, the Council's membership was very small. That

was bound to be a matter of concern to many of the 100-odd developing countries which were eager to participate in plans for economic and social development. It was also important that greater authority should be given to the Council, and he therefore fully supported operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution submitted by the Soviet Union (E/1382). In conclusion, he urged the permanent members to consider the advantages in terms of renewed confidence that would be gained by an immediate enlargement of the Council's membership.

20. After a discussion on the possibility of establishing a working group, in which Mr. GATES (New Zealand), Mr. VIAUD (France), Mr. AKWEI (Ghana), Mr. ANTOINE (Haiti), Mr. RABETAFIKA (Madagascar), Mr. KITCHEN (United States of America), Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil), Mr. QUARONI (Italy), Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Mr. McCARTHY (United Kingdom), Mr. GHORRA (Lebanon), Mr. OSMAN (Sudan), Mr. AYOUB (Tunisia), Mr. SKATARETIKO (Yugoslavia) and Mr. AKRAM (Pakistan) took part, the PRESIDENT suggested that, as soon as the Secretariat had prepared an analytical summary of the replies from Governments, he should hold consultations with the officers of the Council, the regional groups, and, if necessary, the entire membership of the Council, with a view to preparing a list of priority topics for discussion when the Council resumed consideration of the item in the third week of its session. He assured the Council that his consultations would complement rather than duplicate the work being undertaken by the Secretariat on the same subject, and said it should be understood that his suggestion was entirely without prejudice to the right of any member of the Council to develop and submit its own ideas, suggestions or draft resolutions in the meantime.

The President's suggestion was adopted.

The meeting rose at 6.5 p.m.