



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Thursday, 6 May 1971,
at 3.10 p.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

AGENDA ITEM 11

Science and technology (*continued*):

- (a) Future institutional arrangements for science and technology (*continued*) (E/4959, E/4989, chap. VII);
 (b) Application of computer technology to development (E/4800 and E/4800/Summary)

1. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) said that the inconclusiveness of the document submitted by the Secretariat on the agenda item on future institutional arrangements for science and technology (E/4959) was perhaps not surprising, as the question was a difficult one. Bodies such as UNCTAD and specialized agencies such as WHO, FAO, WMO and IAEA each had their own arrangements for co-operation in science and technology and their own fields of specialization. As the USSR representative had said (1752nd meeting), the activities of the United Nations system in the field of science and technology were characterized by a lack of order and duplication. However, that lack of order could not be overcome merely by the establishment of new institutional machinery. What was needed was clear policy guidance from the Economic and Social Council; that would result in greater economy through the use of existing resources and expertise and would also re-establish the Council's authority with respect to co-ordination in economic and social matters. In that connexion, he had been surprised to hear some delegations which strongly opposed proliferation of United Nations bodies in other fields of activity express support for the establishment of new institutional machinery to deal with questions of science and technology.

2. He fully agreed with the USSR representative's contention that the time had come to bring order into the situation, first, by identifying common problems, secondly, by establishing priorities and facilitating the exchange of information and co-operation on scientific and technical matters, thirdly, by specifying which organs should have primary responsibility in matters of co-ordination, and, fourthly, by instituting a clear-cut system of co-ordination. With regard to the last point, it was possible that the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment to be held in 1972 would recommend the establishment of a body to co-ordinate activities relating to the human environment; if the Council set up such a body, however, it might well be faced with requests for the establishment of similar bodies to do the same for activities related to population and other problems certain aspects of which related to the work of different parts of the United Nations system.

3. His delegation was opposed to the establishment of a new institution. Consistent with the position it had taken

on agenda item 16 (Measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council) it felt that the Council itself should establish and co-ordinate policies on questions of science and technology. It could best do so by professionalizing the Department of Economic and Social Affairs so that it could not only conduct consultations with the specialized agencies on matters within their technical expertise but also—through the appointment of special consultants—prepare the background documents on which the Council could base its policy decisions. If the Secretariat could be so strengthened as to be able to prepare, for the Council's approval, policy guidelines on specific questions such as transport or on specific aspects of science and technology related to development, then it would be easier to ensure co-operation with the specialized agencies. The Council might, for example, instruct ACC to consider specific areas where co-ordination was necessary and possible and to report to it thereon through CPC.

4. The suggestion had been made that ACC should report to the Council through a new standing committee on science and technology or to a new body to be established under the authority of the General Assembly. His delegation could not but view with alarm the placing of any new body dealing with economic and social affairs under the authority of the Assembly, for that would inevitably make it far more difficult for the Council to carry out its already difficult function of co-ordination and would further reduce its authority. If any new institutional machinery was to be set up in the field of science and technology it should be placed under the authority of the Council. The USSR representative's argument in favour of the establishment of a new body to co-ordinate not only the economic and social aspects of science and technology but the political aspects as well was, he felt, untenable; it was true that some questions of science and technology had political aspects but those were clearly problems beyond the Council's mandate.

5. However, without establishing any new body, the Council could, once the Department had been professionalized and was performing the services expected of it, give its own Economic Committee responsibility for considering questions of science and technology related to development and entrust to its Social Committee responsibility for such questions as they affected social life. In that connexion, he said that his delegation would be opposed to the continuation of the Council's Co-ordination Committee if CPC was to be retained. The Council had a very broad mandate in respect of social questions; it could, on the recommendation of its Social Committee, suggest ways and means of achieving its over-all social objectives, such as promoting tolerance, equality and human dignity and eliminating *apartheid* and racial discrimination. It would surely be within the Council's terms of reference to consider how science and technology could contribute to

the attainment of such objectives. For example, the Social Committee and the Council might consider how satellites could be used to disseminate ideas of racial equality and human dignity, particularly in the Republic of South Africa. Surely the Council could recommend such a policy and refer it to the appropriate specialized agency for execution.

6. Obviously it was difficult to lay down clear and sound policy guidelines on matters on which scientists themselves were in disagreement. A case in point was the Supersonic Transport, or SST, recently debated and rejected in the United States Senate. The SST was undeniably a threat by science and technology to the environment and its effects were highly debatable; yet a number of countries were proceeding with its construction. Smoking and the permissible level of radio-activity in the human body were also matters of heated debate amongst scientists. In such fields, the Council might play an invaluable role by establishing scientific standards acceptable to all States based on expert technical recommendations. In regard specially to the SST, it might request ICAO to make a thorough study of the problem and recommend proposed international standards which the Council could adopt and undertake to apply throughout the United Nations system.

7. His delegation disagreed with the recommendation in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's note (E/4959) that the Council on the expiry of the present term of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development at the end of 1971, should create a sessional committee on science and technology. He doubted whether a strong case could be made for the establishment of a new sessional committee on science and technology or indeed for any other type of new machinery under the authority of either the Council or the Assembly. What was necessary was for the Council to rationalize its own work, giving priority and the necessary time and thought to the scientific and technical matters on its agenda.

8. Mr. LOUYA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) observed it was unfortunate that the authors of the Charter had not foreseen the future importance of science and technology, which were now recognized to be the pillars of development. Technology was not, of course, an end in itself but rather a means of stimulating balanced economic and social development and promoting the development of the human and natural resources of the developing countries which wanted their peoples to benefit from the scientific revolution. The transfer of science and technology depended on training and on the exchange of scientific knowledge among countries and research institutions. It was therefore to be regretted that there was no institutional machinery in the United Nations designed specifically to meet that need. His delegation favoured either the establishment of a new intergovernmental body or the transformation of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development into a sessional committee responsible for the formulation of policy, the establishment of priorities, the mobilization of public opinion and the dissemination of information. The interest in the proposal shown by the developed countries at a time when economic assistance to the developing countries seemed to be stagnating was encouraging. The new body

should have a specific responsibility to assist the developing countries, which had to overcome with great rapidity the lag separating them from the developed countries and which felt that science and technology held the key to their success. International co-operation with regard to scientific and technology development was necessary but was contingent on the initiative and determination of the developed countries. In his view, the time had come to attack the problems involved in the application of science and technology to the developed and developing countries alike in a systematic and concerted way.

9. Mr. TAIB (Malaysia) said that his Government attached great importance to the role of science and technology in promoting the development of the developing countries. It had therefore recently established a Ministry of Science and Technology to co-ordinate activities and to ensure the maximum utilization of science and technology in Malaysia's development efforts.

10. With regard to the question of future institutional arrangements for science and technology, his delegation was pleased to note that the need for intergovernmental machinery had been emphasized. However, there was some divergence of views concerning the form such machinery should take; his delegation would be in favour of a standing committee of the General Assembly. The significant problems which had arisen and the progress of technology in recent years called for a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach to the problem. A standing committee of the General Assembly would be best suited to meet those new challenges. Furthermore, the terms of reference of the committee must be clearly defined in order to ensure its effectiveness.

11. Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil) said that the enormous impact of new scientific and technological discoveries amply justified collective action by the international community in that field. Such action should be planned both at the sectoral level and on a global scale. At the sectoral level, the specialized agencies should be responsible for promoting the wider application of new scientific and technological advancements in their respective fields of competence. The desirability of a global approach was dictated by the increasingly interdisciplinary character of science and technology, the need for comprehensive planning and the fact that the developing countries had many common problems which called for common solutions.

12. United Nations activities would fall within the global category. The role of UNCTAD, under the guidance of the intergovernmental group set up by resolution 74 (X) of the Trade and Development Board, was already clearly defined with regard to the transfer of operative technology. His delegation endorsed the hope expressed by CPC in paragraph 80 of its report (E/4989) that the intergovernmental group would soon be in a position to start its substantive work, since the transfer of operative technology deserved the highest priority. The United Nations itself had the responsibility for providing an interdisciplinary link within the system. It should assist the international community and in particular the developing countries in planning the application of science and technology to development. In that regard, the Advisory Committee on the Application of

Science and Technology to Development had done pioneer work of great impact. That expert body had, however, recognized the need for intergovernmental guidance and follow-up. No consensus had been reached by CPC at its eighth session regarding a final recommendation on the exact place of the new body within the structure of the United Nations, although the majority of members had favoured the idea that it should take the form of a standing committee of the General Assembly. While United Nations activities in that sector related primarily to the application of science and technology to development, there were many problems involved which went far beyond purely technical or economic considerations. The limitations encountered so far in the application of science and technology were undeniably political in nature. Planning, because of its far-reaching impact on policies and on basic national and international options, was clearly a political task. Such factors justified the preference for a standing committee at the level of the General Assembly. A standing committee of the Economic and Social Council would not have the requisite political leverage and would suffer from the limitations inherent in the Council itself. The same applied to a sessional committee of the Council. At the level of the Council, the important thing was simply to ensure that sufficient time was allotted in the plenary or in the sessional committees to the question of science and technology and that representatives to those meetings had the expertise required.

13. The preference of his delegation was for a standing committee of the General Assembly responsible for all problems of science and technology not at present specifically entrusted to other intersessional organs of the General Assembly or to the specialized agencies. It would concentrate on the planning aspects of scientific and technological development. Its reports might be submitted to the Assembly through the Council so that the latter could act on those points of direct interest to it. Final action would, however, be taken by the Assembly. If such arrangements were adopted, the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee would have to be amended in order to transform it into an advisory body of the standing committee. The Advisory Committee might then constitute panels with specific sectoral expertise, following a general blueprint established at the governmental level.

14. Mr. MARSH (Jamaica) said that in the field of science and technology the gap between the developed and the developing countries was widening and that all efforts to enhance the role of the United Nations in that field had come to naught, apparently because of an inertia factor. A new organ should be created only if it could be endowed with the political leverage required to initiate the process of transferring technology to the developing countries. Any proposal on the subject must have the support of those who possessed the scientific and technological knowledge which the developing countries wanted to acquire. At present the transfer of technology at the bilateral level was limited. Attitudes therefore needed changing and channels of communication must be opened.

15. Within the United Nations, UNIDO had a distinct role to play. UNCTAD's efforts thus far had been abortive, although the UNCTAD/GATT International Trade Centre was continuing its activities. The representative of Ghana

had ably identified the contribution to be made by the specialized agencies. However, a central co-ordinating mechanism was needed within the United Nations system in order to avoid duplication and keep costs to the minimum. Even with such new machinery, the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, with its multidisciplinary expertise, should be retained.

16. The PRESIDENT said that, as he saw it, there was a consensus regarding the acceptance of the principle of an intergovernmental organ dealing with science and technology. However, it was not yet clear what its mandate would be nor under what organ of the United Nations it would be established.

17. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that the consensus seemed to be that the proposed body should deal exclusively with the application of science and technology to development. It should be made quite clear that other scientific questions, such as those relating to the sea-bed and outer space, which were dealt with by other organs of the United Nations, did not fall within the competence of the Council. The proposed new machinery would deal with those questions which now came within the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development.

18. The PRESIDENT said that the first stage was to gain acceptance in principle of the proposed intergovernmental body. Its mandate would be discussed at a later stage.

19. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece), supported by Mr. NDUNG'U (Kenya), said he did not think that a true consensus could emerge until all delegations had spoken.

20. Mr. McCARTHY (United Kingdom) said that he was not sure what type of body was required. A statement by the Director of the Office for Science and Technology on the points raised by the representative of Jamaica, particularly with regard to the inertia factor which the latter had mentioned, might help the Council to develop its ideas more clearly.

21. In his view, science could be divided into various categories. First, there was pure science, which was already international in nature. The international community of pure scientists had instituted a free exchange of views and information. There were also frontier areas of pure science where discoveries might be applied in the future to development. In that regard, he was not sure how an international organ could tackle the growing problem of the exchange of applied technology. New scientific discoveries were applied by government or private enterprises because the directors of those enterprises thought that they would be of use to society in their countries. The developing countries wanted the assurance that their interests in any new developments would be safeguarded and that they would have access to such development if they were applicable to their own societies. However, he thought that such access should be ensured either by bilateral arrangements or through the various specialized agencies rather than by the establishment of a new body. His delegation was disturbed by the proliferation of agencies and considered that new scientific developments could be dealt

with adequately either by the international scientific community, the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly or the existing technical organs of the United Nations.

22. Mr. GRESFORD (Director for Science and Technology), introducing the Secretary-General's report on the application of computer technology for development (E/4800 and E/4800/Summary), said that the report had been prepared in an order that would facilitate a coherent study of the subject-matter. The order was somewhat different in the summary, the chapter headings of which he drew to the Council's attention. During the preparation of the report, computer technology had been looked at as a whole for the first time and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) had already taken action for the protection of computer programmes.

23. In reply to questions asked by Mr. MARSH (Jamaica) and Mr. FAROOQ (Pakistan), respectively, Mr. GRESFORD (Director for Science and Technology) expressed doubt as to whether a representative of the International Computation Centre at Rome would be present during the Council's debates and said that the establishment of an international advisory board on computer technology for development would have financial implications: at the initial stage they would be modest, but they could not be estimated properly until the Council had expressed its views on the subject.

24. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that his delegation, which had long been a party to initiatives in the field of science and technology, was preparing a draft resolution on the subject together with other delegations. He hoped that consultations would ensue.

AGENDA ITEM 10

Public administration and development (*concluded*)* (E/4950 and Add.1, E/4989, chap. VI, sect. B; E/L.1392/Rev.1)

25. Mr. NDUNG'U (Kenya) introduced a revised text (E/L.1392/Rev.1) of the draft resolution which incorporated amendments proposed by the delegations of France and the United States. The word "fully" should be inserted after the word "implement" in operative paragraph 5.

26. Mr. OSMAN (Sudan), speaking as one of the sponsors of the draft resolution, said that the words "administrative aspects" in operative paragraph 4 should be replaced by "relevant provisions", in pursuance of a suggestion made by the United Kingdom.

27. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed his deep regret that the sponsors had not accepted his delegation's proposal to use the words "through a redistribution within the limits of the present manning table" after the words "necessary staff" at the end of operative paragraph 5. It was unfortunate that the sponsors had preferred to make obscure references to paragraphs 25 and 58 of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (E/4989). Paragraph 58 of

that report dealt with the question of a staff increase in a most cautious matter and referred to the fact that some members had disagreed with the idea. It was in sharp contrast to the Soviet delegation's proposal, the aim of which was to strengthen the Public Administration Division by using clear, simple language.

28. He hoped that a further effort would be made to amend operative paragraph 5, since otherwise his delegation would have to vote against it and abstain on the draft resolution as a whole.

29. Mr. NDUNG'U (Kenya) said that the sponsors had been unable to accept the USSR amendment because the concept of redistribution was different from that of an increase.

30. Mr. ORCIĆ (Yugoslavia) stressed that the sponsors had drafted operative paragraph 5 most carefully, so as to leave the decision for or against an increase of staff entirely open.

31. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that, if Kenya interpreted the wording of operative paragraph 5 as implying that there would be an increase in staff in any event, his delegation would have to withdraw its support, because it had agreed to staff increases for certain priority areas of the Secretariat on the strict understanding that ruthless reductions would be made in others.

32. Mr. McCARTHY (United Kingdom) said that, like the Soviet Government, his Government had serious reservations about increasing the staff of the Secretariat in view of the United Nations financial situation, and the refusal of the sponsors to incorporate the Soviet amendment had created difficulties for his delegation, difficulties which were increased by the addition of the word "fully" in operative paragraph 5.

33. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) said he shared the views of the Soviet Union, France and the United Kingdom with respect to operative paragraph 5 and suggested that it should be deleted. That action would not affect the substance of the resolution, since the sponsors had made it clear in operative paragraph 3 that their endorsement of the Public Administration Division's work programme was subject to the views of CPC and hence to the findings of the manpower utilization survey.

34. Mr. LENNON (United States of America) said that the best possible use should be made of existing staff resources and that he shared the Soviet Union's view that the only logical way of implementing that policy was to reallocate staff. Like the United Kingdom representative, he regretted that the word "fully" had been added in the final operative paragraph.

35. Mr. AYOUB (Tunisia) observed that the sponsors had taken every care in drafting operative paragraph 5 and had expressly referred to "the necessary staff" to implement the work programme rather than to an increase in staff. They had not incorporated the Soviet amendment because they felt that it was not right to hold back the public administration work programme should a redistribution of staff prove unfeasible. All delegations were agreed on the prime importance to be accorded to that programme and he

* Resumed from the 1750th meeting.

could not see why the inclusion of operative paragraph 5 was regarded as a stumbling-block.

36. Mr. FAROOQ (Pakistan) drew attention to operative paragraph 3, which alluded indirectly to paragraph 58 of CPC's report (E/4989). When taking action to strengthen the Public Administration Division, the Secretary-General would have before him the recommendations of CPC and the Council as well as the findings of the manpower utilization survey, and it would be for him to do as he saw fit. The primary intention of the sponsors in drafting operative paragraph 5 had been to ensure that the public administration programme would be carried out.

37. Mr. GATES (New Zealand) said that he was satisfied with the explanations of the sponsors and could vote in favour of the draft resolution.

38. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that he could not agree that the sponsor's explanation was satisfactory. Judging from what they had said, operative paragraph 5 was superfluous and the logical course would be to delete it.

39. Mr. FAROOQ (Pakistan) said he was categorically opposed to deleting operative paragraph 5. It might, however, be better to rearrange the order and to have operative paragraph 5 precede operative paragraph 4.

40. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) suggested in a spirit of compromise that the phrase "within the manpower resources of the Secretariat" should be added at the end of operative paragraph 5.

41. Mr. AYOUB (Tunisia) said that the sponsors were anxious not to preclude any action that might be necessary to implement the work programme.

42. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that, although in the light of their explanations, the sponsors' intention was abundantly clear to him, he wondered whether it would be as clear to the Secretary-General. Paragraph 58 of CPC's report stated that there had been a divergence of views within CPC as to whether any expansion of staff should be authorized. While any rigid solution was undesirable, it was essential to find a clear-cut formula that would enable the Public Administration Division to implement its work programme and, at the same time, remind the Secretary-General of the need for economy. It would therefore be better to postpone the vote on the draft resolution in order to allow the sponsors to find a unanimously acceptable wording.

43. The PRESIDENT suggested that a preferable procedure would be to vote forthwith on the draft resolution and to include in the Council's report and summary record of the meeting a reservation to which the Secretary-General's attention would be drawn. The reservation would read as follows:

"The adoption of operative paragraph 5 does not necessarily mean an automatic increase in staff and does not rule out the possibilities offered by a careful redistribution of personnel."

44. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he supported the French suggestion that the sponsors should reformulate operative paragraph 5 to reflect either his own delegation's amendment or the Greek representative's suggestion, both of which stressed the need for economy. If that suggestion was opposed, his delegation must insist that a separate vote be taken on operative paragraph 5.

45. Mr. VIAUD (France), supported by Mr. LENNON (United States of America), said that the wording of the reservation suggested by the President seemed entirely satisfactory and, taking into account the sponsors' explanations and the reservation, he would be able to vote in favour of the draft resolution.

46. The PRESIDENT invited the Committee to vote first on operative paragraph 5 of draft resolution E/L.1392/Rev.1, on which a separate vote had been requested by the representative of the Soviet Union, and then on the draft resolution as a whole.

Operative paragraph 5 was adopted by 20 votes to 2, with 2 abstentions.

The draft resolution as a whole, as orally amended, was adopted by 22 votes to none, with 2 abstentions.

47. The PRESIDENT said that if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Council agreed to his suggestion that the reservation on operative paragraph 5 which he had indicated earlier should be recorded in the Council's report and the summary record.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.