

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FORTY-THIRD MEETING

Held on Monday, 18 March 1968, at 11.15 a.m.

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Consideration of applications of non-governmental organizations not in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council interested in sending observers to the International Conference on Human Rights

Chairman:

Mr. WYZNER

Poland

Rapporteur:

Mr. BEEBY

New Zealand

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CONSIDERATION OF APPLICATIONS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS NOT IN CONSULTATIVE STATUS WITH THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL INTERESTED IN SENDING OBSERVERS TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS (A/CONF.32/PC.7; A/CONF.32/PC/L.23)

The CHAIRMAN said that the Preparatory Committee which had concluded the work assigned to it in General Assembly resolution 2081 (XX), paragraph 14, had been convened to carry out an additional task entrusted to it by the General Assembly in paragraph 11 of its resolution 2339 (XXII).

Mr. SCHREIBER (Director, Division of Human Rights) stated that the Secretary-General's role under paragraph 11 of resolution 2339 (XXII) was a limited one, as the responsibility for the implementation of that paragraph lay with the Preparatory Committee. The Secretariat had done everything in its power to bring paragraph 11 to the attention of non-governmental organizations not in consultative status: a press release had been circulated, and United Nations Information Centres throughout the world had been asked to inform the organizations in their regions.

Although the organizations had been requested in paragraph 11 to make application before 1 February 1968, the Secretary-General had included in his note (A/CONF.32/PC/L.23) some applications received after that date, since it appeared to him that final responsibility for excluding or accepting those applications lay with the Preparatory Committee. One application received on 13 March 1968 had not been circulated, since the Secretary-General's note had been issued before that date, and he would welcome a decision of the Committee in that respect. The texts of the letters constituting the applications had been reproduced in full; printed material attached to the letters had not been reproduced because of the difficulties of translation, but in each such case a foot-note to the letter indicated that the material might be consulted in the Division of Human Rights.

The non-governmental organizations that had submitted applications had been informed that they might send additional information if possible before 11 March 1968 and some of the additional information received had been included in the Secretary-General's note. Additional information received after the issuance

(Mr. Schreiber, Director  
Division of Human Rights)

of that note from the Bahá'í International Community, the Indonesian Institution for the Defence of Human Rights, the Joint Secretariat for the Upholding of Law in Indonesia, the United Nations Association of Cyprus, and the World Association of World Federalists would be circulated shortly. The United Nations representative in Cyprus had informed the Secretariat that the United Nations Association of Cyprus was not an international organization itself but part of the World Federation of United Nations Associations, that it did have a demonstrable interest in the items on the provisional agenda for the Conference, and that if the Preparatory Committee decided that it might send observers to the Conference, he would be grateful. He had been informed by the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic that supplementary information on the four organizations submitting applications Nos. 18 to 21 would be forthcoming in the immediate future. The Secretariat would circulate such information promptly.

The International Union of Students had submitted an application to the Director of the United Nations Information Office at Prague, Czechoslovakia, but the application had not yet been transmitted to Headquarters. A cable had been sent to the Director, and the application should soon be available.

Mr. NASIMOVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status that would participate in the Conference had a bearing on the question before the Committee, since the host country could accommodate only a limited number of observers and in previous discussions it had been suggested that thirty or forty organizations should be invited to participate. Accordingly, he asked the Director of the Division of Human Rights to indicate how many invitations had been sent to non-governmental organizations in consultative status, and to provide a list of those organizations as a working document.

Mr. BEEBY (New Zealand) remarked that the only task before the Committee was to decide whether or not the various non-governmental organizations that had applied met the criteria set out in paragraph 11. The Committee was not required to consider whether it regarded those organizations favourably or whether it wished them to have consultative status.

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(Mr. Beeby, New Zealand)

Of the three criteria set out in paragraph 11, that of international structure might cause the most difficulty. He did not think that applications received after 1 February 1968 had to be ruled out. Paragraph 11 should be interpreted not as laying down a mandatory time-limit, but simply as an appeal to the organizations to submit their applications in good time. The Committee must be satisfied on the basis of the information submitted that in each case there was a reasonable claim to meet the three criteria. The majority of the applications were very brief. Many organizations had not addressed themselves to the criteria in paragraph 11 or had given information only obliquely relevant to those criteria, and in a number of cases it would be extremely difficult for the Committee, even with the additional information provided by the Director of the Division of Human Rights, to decide whether or not to approve the application. The proper course therefore would be to ask the Secretariat to request those organizations which had not supplied sufficient material to furnish further information within a certain time-limit, and to consider the applications when that information was available.

Mr. SQUIRE (United States of America) suggested, in view of General Assembly resolution 2292 (XXII), that the Committee should dispense with summary records. If there was any objection, he would not press the suggestion, but he would then urge the Secretariat to make the records as brief as possible.

Mr. MOHAMMED (Nigeria) pointed out that the Committee had had summary records since its inception. The applications received were unsatisfactory because the non-governmental organizations submitting them had been ignorant of the contents of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII). If they had read the summary records of the discussion in the Third Committee stating the reasons why they were invited to submit applications, their applications would have been more meaningful. The Committee should not be penny wise and pound foolish.

The Committee's first task was to organize its work. The interpretation of the first and third criteria in paragraph 11 raised some difficulty, and the scanty information provided by the applications added to it. Application No. 12, for example, provided no information on which the Committee could base a decision. He

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(Mr. Mohammed, Nigeria)

asked the Director of the Division of Human Rights how the organizations had been informed of the General Assembly's invitation. The New Zealand representative's suggestion that the Committee should meet again after additional information had been obtained was not feasible in view of the imminence of the Conference and the cost of scheduling meetings. Yet the Committee could not accept such sketchy applications. In the discussions in the Third Committee, fears had been expressed that some non-governmental organizations not in consultative status were aided and abetted by secret bodies, and the Committee must therefore have information on the financing of applicant organizations.

Accordingly, the Committee should weed out forthwith applications that contained no information and applications from organizations that by their titles were clearly national in structure. On the other hand, it should, in the light of the discussions in the Third Committee, give special consideration to the two applications from organizations combating apartheid - the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the International Defence and Aid Fund. Although their applications did not give the required information, those organizations were well known to those United Nations representatives who sat in bodies which dealt with apartheid and racial discrimination in southern Africa. Lastly, the Committee must bear in mind that accommodations at Teheran were limited.

The CHAIRMAN said that, as the Nigerian representative had objected to the United States suggestion for the abolition of summary records, he would take it that the Committee wished to retain such records for the remainder of its current session.

It was so agreed.

Mr. SCHREIBER (Director, Division of Human Rights), replying to the USSR representative, said that, in implementing operative paragraph 10 of Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII), the Secretariat had contacted about 140 non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, of which

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(Mr. Schreiber, Director,  
Division of Human Rights)

twenty-four had so far indicated that they would send observers to the Conference. The Secretariat had communicated with those organizations which had sent observers to meetings of the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women and seminars and other United Nations conferences on subjects such as racial discrimination.

Replying to the Nigerian representative, he said that, to acquaint non-governmental organizations not in consultative status with the Council with the terms of resolution 2339 (XXII), the Secretariat had given that text the widest possible publicity in press releases, reproducing operative paragraph 11 in full. It had further invited organizations making applications to submit additional information on their activities for consideration by the Preparatory Committee. As a result, some organizations had sent additional information and members of the Committee were free to consult the archives. A certain amount of further information was available in the Non-Governmental Organizations Section.

Mr. PAOLINI (France) observed that the criteria for the invitation of non-governmental organizations in Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII) were perfectly precise and it only remained for the Committee to apply them. Among the practical considerations, however, was the question of the number of observers which could conveniently be accommodated at Teheran. While the host Government would have to bear a considerable burden, it would be difficult for it to set any limit for the number of participants. It could be assumed that the Conference would be well-attended with some 800 to 1,000 members of Government delegations. The Committee must therefore ensure that the number of non-governmental organizations invited was not excessive. While he agreed that the information on organizations making applications in document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23 was sparse, the Committee could not expect to obtain and evaluate additional information in time to take a decision before the opening of the Conference. It must base its decisions on the information now before it.

His delegation regarded the three criteria set forth in operative paragraph 11 of resolution 2339 (XXII) as of equal importance. The activities of all non-governmental organizations were, to some degree, concerned with aspects of human rights. It was not sufficient for such concern to be merely incidental in the case of organizations invited to the Conference; it must be a constant and principal feature of their activities.

(Mr. Paolini, France)

While it was clear that some organizations listed in document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23 were national in scope, his delegation felt it would be difficult to reject their applications a priori. Their interest in attending the Conference was sincere and, if feasible, they should be invited. A possible solution was for the Committee to suggest to purely national organizations that they should approach their Governments with a view to the inclusion of their representatives in national delegations.

There was no doubt that the Anti-Apartheid Movement, the International Defence and Aid Fund World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners and the World Assembly for Human Rights were international in character and had a demonstrable interest in the items on the provisional agenda for the Conference. The Committee should therefore endorse their applications.

As to the remaining applications in document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23, the Committee should first ascertain whether the organizations concerned satisfied the three criteria indicated by the General Assembly. In addition to possible legal difficulties, there was the question of accommodating additional observers and, if the Conference was to function in optimum conditions, the Committee should know as soon as possible how many members of national delegations were likely to attend.

Mr. SCHREIBER (Director, Division of Human Rights) stated that seven Governments had so far formally indicated that they would not be able to participate in the Conference. Eleven other Governments had stated officially that they would attend and the size of their delegations varied from one member to ten; the average size of delegations was thus likely to be four to five persons. It further appeared that not all representatives would be present throughout the Conference.

Mr. LAZAREVIC (Yugoslavia) thought that the question of inviting non-governmental organizations to the Conference should be considered in the light of the accommodations likely to be available. In addition to the national delegations, it was safe to assume that more than the twenty-four of the 142 non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council invited to attend, would do so. The problem of accommodation was acute, and the Iranian delegation had indicated in 1967 that some ten to fifteen non-governmental

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(Mr. Lazarevic, Yugoslavia)

organizations could be accommodated in addition to governmental delegations. He shared the French representative's concern as to the additional burden on the host Government; and there was the further question of space in the conference halls. Very little time was available for the collection of additional information on the organizations listed on document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23 and, before deciding whether they should be invited, his delegation would welcome some indication from the Iranian delegation as to how many non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council could be accommodated at the Conference.

Mr. MILTON (United Kingdom) believed that the Committee could afford to be flexible in applying the deadline for the submission of applications, and would therefore welcome circulation of the application received on 13 March, so that it too could be considered. While he agreed with the New Zealand representative that it would be helpful to have additional information from the organizations which had applied, it would take some time to obtain this. It would be difficult to convene further meetings of the Preparatory Committee too close to the opening of the Teheran Conference and it should be borne in mind that several members of the Committee were also represented on the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations which was scheduled to meet again on 1 April. The information at present available to the Committee would therefore have to serve as a basis for its decisions. He agreed with the Yugoslav representative that the Government of Iran should be asked how many representatives of non-governmental organizations could be accommodated, both in the conference premises and in hotels at Teheran; the accommodation pressure might, however, be eased by the fact that some organizations would select as their representatives residents of Teheran itself.

Miss MARTINEZ (Jamaica) said that three distinct problems were involved. The first was the purely practical question of how many representatives of non-governmental organizations, whether or not they had consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, could be accommodated. While the point just made by the United Kingdom representative was valid, that fact would do nothing to alleviate the pressure on the premises to be used for the proceedings of the Conference.

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(Miss Martinez, Jamaica)

The second problem was how to obtain adequate information on the organizations which had already applied; ideally, more information was required in order to make it possible to ascertain whether they complied with the criteria given in General Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII), but that need could not be met because of the third problem, which was that time was short. She understood that some additional information was available in the Secretariat; the Committee should decide whether it would be best for members to consult that information individually, or whether the Secretariat could report on those parts of it relevant to the three criteria.

Her delegation supported the Nigerian representative's view on the two organizations engaged in opposing apartheid. Jamaica had been one of the four sponsors of General Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII), and in introducing that resolution her delegation had made clear the sponsor's specific intention of allowing anti-apartheid organizations to participate in the work of the Conference, an intention which had been unanimously supported in the Third Committee. While believing strongly, therefore, that those organizations should be allowed to attend, her delegation would not object to the participation of any other non-governmental organization which could satisfy the Committee that it met the criteria laid down in the resolution.

Mr. NASINOVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) agreed that it was essential to ensure the participation of the organizations opposed to apartheid.

He was surprised and concerned at the information provided by the Secretariat that it had sent invitations to 142 non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, on the grounds that those organizations had a demonstrable interest in items on the agenda of the Conference; in his experience, meetings of United Nations bodies dealing with questions of human rights were normally attended by at most twenty-five representatives of non-governmental organizations. He therefore requested that the Secretariat should prepare a list of the 142 organizations to which invitations had been sent, and of the twenty-four which had accepted; the Committee's decisions should be taken in the light of the fact that the latter figure was bound to rise considerably

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(Mr. Nasinovsky, USSR)

in the period before the opening of the Conference. He would also welcome information on participation by Member States, and in particular a list of the Governments which had intimated that they would not be sending representatives to the Conference.

With regard to dealing with applications by non-governmental organizations not in consultative status, he remarked that General Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII) specified four, and not three, definite criteria, the first being that applications must be submitted before 1 February 1968. That time-limit should be maintained. Organizations whose applications had been received later could be informed that representatives they sent to the Conference at their own expense could observe its proceedings from the public gallery. The second criterion was that the organizations should be of recognized standing, which in his view meant that their activities should meet with the unanimous approval of the Committee; if there was any disagreement, the organization in question should not be invited. The third criterion - that the organizations should be international in structure - was not met by many of the organizations listed in document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23, whose titles proclaimed them to be national. The fourth criterion, that of demonstrable interest in the items on the provisional agenda for the Conference, was also not met in many cases, as was obvious even from the limited data given in the applications. Some of the organizations might attempt to use the Conference for attacks on certain Member States, thereby poisoning the atmosphere and embarrassing the host Government. There were three organizations which should definitely not be permitted to participate; they were the Bahá'í International Community, whose policies contravened the United Nations Charter and might offend the Government of Iran, the Armenian National Committee of America, which was a political organization engaging in systematic slander of some Member States, in particular Turkey, and the United Baltic Appeal, which was a purely political organization with policies directed against certain Member States and having nothing to do with human rights. There were many other such organizations, whose participation could only hinder the work of the Conference. The Committee should invite only those organizations aimed at in resolution 2339 (XXII), i.e. those which were opposed to apartheid.

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Mr. MAHMASSANI (Lebanon) said that while he agreed with the USSR representative's views on the Bahá'í International Community, he believed that many of the organizations which had applied had done so in good faith and that they defended human rights. He wished particularly to refer to the Society for Human Rights (Iraq), which was well-known for its support for human rights over a considerable period, was international in character, and had as much right to be invited as the organization opposing apartheid, with which it had many similarities.

The three criteria which the Committee must apply in selecting organizations were clear; the point was whether they should be applied in a flexible or a rigid manner. His delegation believed that except in the case of those organizations which would behave in an obstructionist manner or attempt to use the Conference for their own ends, the Committee should be as liberal as possible. While in many cases the information supplied was inadequate, the reason was that the organizations concerned had learned of the Conference through the mass media and were therefore not aware of what was required of them; however, he was convinced that most of them would meet the criteria, if flexibly applied.

Mr. N.N. JHA (India) remarked that he would welcome the list of non-governmental organizations requested by the USSR representative. He proposed that the limit for the submission of applications should be fixed at the last day of the Committee's current session.

On the question of criteria, he had noted the explanation given by the Jamaican representative with regard to the organizations opposed to apartheid, and agreed that their participation was essential. However, he was not in favour of an excessively rigid application of the criteria set out in paragraph 11; if it was found that there was room in the Conference premises for representatives of all the organizations which had applied, his delegation would not oppose the exclusion of some of them simply on the ground that they were national rather than international bodies. Document A/CONF.32/PC/L.23 contained applications from a number of national organizations which were performing excellent work in disseminating information on the evils of apartheid and colonialism, the two most important items on the provisional agenda for the Conference.

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Mr. SCHREIBER (Director, Division of Human Rights), in reply to the USSR representative, said that the States which had indicated that they would be unable to participate in the Conference were Ethiopia, Iceland, Luxembourg, Malta, the Republic of the Niger, Liechtenstein and Western Samoa.

With regard to the capacity of the Conference premises, the agreement with the Government of Iran provided for two large conference rooms and one small meeting room; the largest room contained space for 200 members of the public or representatives of non-governmental organizations, and the second for 150, while the small meeting room provided seating for sixty or seventy Government representatives.

With regard to the number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to whom the invitations had been sent, he pointed out that paragraph 10 of General Assembly resolution 2339 (XXII) invited organizations "that... have a demonstrable interest in the items on the provisional agenda for the Conference" to send observers. It had not been felt that it was for the Secretary-General to decide on the question of demonstrable interest, and the Secretariat had therefore merely transmitted the text of the resolution to the organizations concerned in order to ascertain their intentions.

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.

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