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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 1st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Pavļuta-Deslandes ..... (Latvia)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Organization of work** (A/C.4/79/1; A/C.4/79/INF/1 and A/C.4/79/INF/4; A/C.4/79/L.1)

1. **The Chair** drew attention to the documents relevant to the organization of work of the Committee and, in particular, to its proposed programme of work (A/C.4/79/L.1).

2. **Mr. Alvarez** (Argentina), referring to the time limits set out in paragraph 9 of the proposed programme of work, said that his delegation shared the objective of making efficient use of time and ensuring that all members were heard. However, reducing the time limit for speakers would not be an appropriate way forward. The current trend in that direction was a matter of concern; the time limit for rights of reply had already been reduced in the recent past. The Fourth Committee had unique characteristics that must be taken into consideration.

3. His delegation wished to know what other options existed to make an efficient use of time. For example, the first meeting of the session typically lasted some 30 minutes, meaning that 2.5 hours of meeting time went unused. His delegation also wondered whether any agenda item had been given insufficient time at the previous session; how many States or groups of States had used their full allocated time during that session; and how much time was expected to be saved through the reduction in time limits.

4. Decisions that affected the working of the Committee must be taken by consensus. The objections of numerous States to the proposed measure could not be bypassed, as doing so would undermine the principle of dialogue and cooperation.

5. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the proposed reduction in time limits for speakers was a matter of great concern. The Committee addressed a wide range of important issues, all of which were complex and political. Delegations should have enough time to set out their positions and formulate proposals that would enable the Committee to work towards its shared goals through genuine dialogue, diplomacy and high politics. A reduction in time limits would be incompatible with the spirit of dialogue and would, indeed, open the door to future reductions that would benefit only the Secretariat or a minority of States. Speakers would be obliged either to oversimplify their positions or to omit important points, something that would undermine the richness and quality of the deliberations.

6. His delegation greatly appreciated the support which the Secretariat provided to the Committee. However, the function of the Secretariat was to advise, guide and provide options for Member States, including the Bureau. It should on no account impose its vision or priorities. If the Secretariat needed to make cuts owing to a temporary liquidity crisis, such cuts should not undermine the right of Member States to express their positions fully and comprehensively. Moreover, the argument that adjustments to time limits were necessary owing to the liquidity crisis presupposed that no solution to the crisis was expected. In view of the information set out in a letter dated 6 September 2024 from the Chef de Cabinet of the Secretary-General, that did not appear to be the case.

7. The fact that the Committee's time limits were greater than those of other Main Committees could not on any account be invoked as an argument. Each of the Main Committees had its own dynamics, specificities and complexities. To apply the practices of one committee to another would be unacceptable and would, indeed, contradict the constant sermons against "one size fits all" solutions.

8. If the aim was truly to make the best possible use of the time available, one option would be for the Committee to take up the substantive items at its first meeting, immediately after considering the organization of work, rather than waiting for the second meeting. Moreover, given that not all delegations used all of their allotted time under every agenda item, it would have been useful for the Secretariat to have provided specific statistics to justify its insistence on reducing time limits for speakers.
9. The only way in which his delegation could even remotely countenance the proposal would be if there were a concomitant increase in the time limits for petitioners. However, in the proposed programme of work, the current time limit of three minutes for petitioners was maintained. The only beneficiaries were the Secretariat, the occupying and administering Powers, and a handful of Governments that wished to preserve an unsustainable status quo instead of making genuine progress.
10. While his delegation respected and would never challenge the decisions of the Chair, it was concerned that the vision of the Secretariat could be imposed and endorsed as the only option, over and above the views of Member States and without broad consultations. It would have been preferable to maintain the established practice at the current session and subsequently engage in genuine debate on a matter which, although it might seem merely procedural or formal, had political implications. Such a debate could have been held at the end of the session, under agenda item 121.
11. In any event, any decision taken at the current meeting should not be a precedent. His delegation hoped that, once the temporary liquidity crisis had been resolved, the Secretariat would not seek out artificial obstacles in order to avoid reverting to the Committee's established practice.
12. **The Chair** said that the Bureau had discussed the matter at length and was well aware of the sensitivities involved. The issue of time limits was not new; it had been raised at the previous session, including in informal discussions on working methods. While it was true that the liquidity crisis was temporary, the Committee needed to conclude its work by mid-November 2024. At previous sessions, the meetings had sometimes run over the allotted time and additional Secretariat services, including interpretation, had been needed. At the current session, no funds were available for additional meeting time. It was therefore essential to organize the proceedings efficiently and ensure that all delegations had an opportunity to express themselves within the allotted meeting time.
13. The Bureau therefore wished to suggest that representatives of Member States limit their general statements to 10 minutes when speaking in debates in their national capacity, 15 minutes when speaking on behalf of a group of States, 5 minutes for explanations of vote, 5 minutes for the first statement in exercise of the right of reply, 3 minutes for the second such statement, 3 minutes for points of order, 3 minutes for statements introducing draft proposals by sponsors, and 3 minutes for general statements during action on draft proposals. In addition, statements by representatives of Non-Self-Governing Territories would be limited to 7 minutes and statements by petitioners to 3 minutes. Statements made by representatives of Member States during the hearing of petitioners would be limited to 3 minutes. Those time limits would need to be applied strictly. The Bureau would, moreover, be grateful if delegations could, wherever possible, make a voluntary commitment to refrain from using the maximum time available.
14. **Ms. Berretta Tassano** (Uruguay) said that her delegation would commit to observing those limits, which reflected established practice.

15. **Mr. Ilichev** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation welcomed the return to the established format. It would have been a mistake to adopt the draft programme of work before discussing the proposal to reduce time limits for speakers, as that proposal was set out in paragraph 9 of the document. It was worth asking why the other Main Committees had not found it necessary to reduce time limits for speakers; one wondered whether they had found other solutions, such as ensuring that meetings began punctually, or enforcing the existing time limits.
16. **Mr. Mabebe** (South Africa) said that his delegation supported the idea of reducing the time limits in order to ensure that all delegations had the opportunity to take the floor.
17. **Ms. Baños Müller** (El Salvador) said that the consideration of agenda item 121 would provide a valuable opportunity to discuss ways to improve the working methods of the Committee, a task that would require the constructive engagement of all Member States. Her delegation understood the need to ensure that the Committee's work was efficient, and it agreed that time limits were an important means to fulfil that goal. However, given the special character of the Committee's remit, any changes to its working methods, including those related to time limits and the organization of work, must be based on consensus. Her delegation therefore supported the proposed return to established practice. It hoped that the current discussion would lead to the adoption of time limits that reflected the consensus of all stakeholders.
18. **Mr. Koudri** (Algeria) said that his delegation appreciated all the constructive ideas that had been put forward and supported the revised proposal in relation to time limits for speakers.
19. **Ms. Romualdo** (Cabo Verde) said that her delegation would commit to respecting the proposed time limits in order to allow that all delegations had an equal opportunity to express their views on all items before the Committee.
20. **Ms. Ukabiala** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the Secretariat advised the Chair and Bureau but did not impose decisions. The proposal to reduce the time limits had been put forward by the Chair in consultation with the Bureau. It was therefore unclear on what basis the Secretariat could be blamed for that proposal.
21. **The Chair** said that, under the current proposal, meetings would begin and end punctually and time limits would be strictly enforced. If she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee wished to approve the revised proposal in relation to time limits.
22. *It was so decided.*
23. **The Chair** said that, in the light of that decision, she took it that the Committee wished to approve the proposed programme of work.
24. *It was so decided.*
25. **The Chair** said that, as at previous sessions, the Committee would set up a working group of the whole to prepare draft resolutions for submission under agenda item 48, entitled "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space". She took it that the Committee wished to establish the group.
26. *It was so decided.*
27. **The Chair** said that the Working Group was traditionally chaired by the Chair of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. She therefore took it that the Committee wished to elect Mr. Sedky (Egypt) as Chair of the Working Group.
28. *It was so decided.*

**Requests for hearing**

29. **The Chair** drew attention to 215 requests for hearing under agenda item 58, relating to the questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, French Polynesia, Gibraltar, Guam, New Caledonia, the Turks and Caicos Islands, the United States Virgin Islands and Western Sahara.

30. She had been informed by the Department of Safety and Security that one request for hearing related to the question of Western Sahara involved an individual who had been barred from entering Headquarters after engaging in unauthorized activities on the premises. In view of that serious security concern, she suggested that the individual be removed from the list.

31. *It was so decided.*

32. **The Chair** suggested that, in accordance with the usual practice, the communications should be circulated as Committee documents for consideration at the subsequent meeting.

33. *It was so decided.*

34. **The Chair** said that she had also received communications from the representatives of the British Virgin Islands, French Polynesia, Gibraltar, Guam and New Caledonia, who wished to address the Committee under item 58. Their statements would be scheduled accordingly.

*The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.*

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