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Chairman: Mr. Sharma (Nepal)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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

Organization of work

Status of preparedness of documentation for the Fifth Committee during the first part of the resumed fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly (A/C.5/57/L.53/Rev.1)

Programme of work proposed by the Bureau

1. **The Chairman** drew the attention of the Committee to the revised list of documents for the first part of the Assembly's resumed session. All the documents had been issued. The report of the Secretary-General on the clarification of his proposal in action 22 for a single-stage intergovernmental review of the programme budget and medium-term plan, as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 57/300, would be submitted directly to the plenary Assembly, in accordance with the decision of the President of the General Assembly. An innovation, videoconferencing, would be used to introduce the reports of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). The informal consultations on agenda item 116, entitled "Pattern of conferences", had concluded successfully and a draft resolution would be circulated shortly for the final consideration and approval of the Committee.

2. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, expressed concern that documents were still being issued late. The problem was becoming chronic and would affect the Committee's ability to function smoothly and waste time and effort. The Secretariat should comply strictly with the six-week rule for issuing documents and with all relevant General Assembly resolutions and rules of procedure, particularly those which stipulated that the Organization should refrain from publishing documents on paper or on its web site until they were available in all its official languages.

3. Since informal consultations on the item "Pattern of conferences" had concluded successfully, outstanding matters connected with human resources management and the administration of justice should be given priority and allocated appropriate discussion time. The reports of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa (A/57/465) and on the management review of the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/57/488); of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) on the results approach in the United Nations: implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/57/372 and Add.1) and on support costs related to extrabudgetary activities in organizations of the United Nations system (A/57/442 and Add.1); and of the Secretary-General on measures to encourage Member States in arrears to reduce and eventually pay their arrears (A/57/76) should also be considered in depth. The reports of OIOS on issues related to human resources management should be clustered and considered together under agenda item 118, entitled "Human resources management" for ease of discussion.

4. Given the Committee's role in the consideration of administrative and budgetary reform issues, it was important for it to consider the report on the single intergovernmental review of the programme budget and medium-term plan. The Group of 77 and China would have been prepared to begin consideration of the report if all the relevant documents, including the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), had been made available in time and in all of the official languages, so that delegations could seek instructions from their capitals. That had not happened and the Group was therefore not prepared to consider the issue at the current part of the resumed session.

5. The Group of 77 and China looked forward to discussing the note by the Secretary-General on possible discrimination due to nationality, race, sex, religion and language in recruitment, promotion and placement (A/56/956 and Add.1). Consideration of the note should be deferred, however, until it had been presented in a manner consistent with General Assembly resolution 53/221.

6. The Group of 77 and China queried the inclusion of the report of the Secretary-General on a revolving credit fund (A/52/822) in the Committee's programme of work, since the subject had already been considered in connection with General Assembly resolution 52/12 B. Clarification of the matter would be welcome.

7. **The Chairman** said that it was his duty to ask the Secretariat to abide by the six-week rule for the issuance of documents. With regard to human resources management, account would be taken of the observations made by the Group of 77 and China.

8. **Mr. Zevelakis** (Greece), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland, said that, since the current session of the General Assembly was devoted to personnel issues, the Committee should concentrate on matters connected with the report of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform and with the relevant reports of OIOS and JIU.

9. The Committee had achieved a great deal during the previous year by rationalizing and streamlining its working methods and abolishing night and weekend meetings. In so doing, it had proved that, as the Committee entrusted with overseeing the effective and efficient functioning of the Organization, it could set an example by making optimum use of available resources.

10. **Ms. Arce de Gabay** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the programme of work had apportioned the Committee's time quite successfully, giving priority to the consideration of items that carried a deadline.

11. A continuing concern was the late issuance of documents. Although the Secretariat had been making efforts to address that problem, it should ensure compliance with the six-week rule so that all delegations had the opportunity to consult documents before they were taken up.

12. Since the current session of the Assembly was devoted to personnel matters, the Bureau should make more room for those items in the Committee's programme of work. The time set aside for agenda item 117 seemed excessive, particularly since the measures proposed to encourage Member States to pay their arrears involved technical difficulties that would make coming to a decision at the current session difficult. The time allocated to that item could be reallocated to other matters that needed more in-depth consideration in informal consultations.

13. The Secretariat should be able to provide all of the reports called for in General Assembly resolution 55/258, as their absence had held up discussion of the administration of justice in the Organization for two years.

14. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee wished to approve its programme of work, on the understanding that the Bureau would adjust it as necessary during the course of the session.

15. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 118: Human resources management
(continued)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management by the Department of Management (A/57/726)

16. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services), introducing the report of OIOS on the implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management (A/57/726), said that the report went beyond addressing the implementation of specific provisions on human resources management reform by providing a broader perspective on overall progress so far. In addition to traditional review functions, such as documentation and data analysis, OIOS also performed a number of activities to enable it to assess the progress of reform. Specifically, it had conducted external benchmarking against comparable organizations and an internal client survey. It had provided the Office of Human Resources Management with consulting services to support its transition from an administrative, transaction-based operation to a more strategically focused human resources management service.

17. Although it was too early to assess the full impact of the reforms, OIOS took a positive view of their implementation. In a relatively short period of time and with no additional resources, the Office of Human Resources Management had launched and promoted a number of integrated initiatives. Those had included streamlining rules and making them more accessible through an electronic human resources handbook, implementing a new staff selection system and the web-based Galaxy tool, developing Organization-wide competencies, introducing an enhanced electronic performance appraisal system, establishing a career development centre at Headquarters and administering the managed reassignment of young professionals.

18. The major challenges facing the Office of Human Resources Management were how to link the various initiatives and how to gauge progress towards the desired outcomes. Meeting those challenges would enable it to validate existing strategies or to refocus initiatives in order to better align them with its goals. While the Office of Human Resources Management had continued to develop a strategic focus and a partnership with client departments to determine human resources management needs, in addition to continuing its client survey, it would also need to further institutionalize mechanisms for measuring the impact of initiatives and judging whether the goals set had been achieved.

19. The report contained suggestions to help the Office of Human Resources Management achieve the next level of reform. The Office had taken immediate and decisive steps towards implementing many of those suggestions and had set a number of technical, administrative and policy priorities, including recognizing the limitations of the Galaxy system, an enhanced version of which would be released in the near future to correct its current shortcomings.

20. In order to facilitate the smooth implementation of the mobility programme, it was addressing related policy and administrative issues, such as conditions of service and spousal employment. Further streamlining of administrative procedures was needed to help staff initiate and carry out transfers throughout the Organization. It had included such areas among its priorities and had started reviewing and developing mechanisms to support implementation of the mobility programme.

21. For the Office of Human Resources Management to meet the future needs of the Organization, it needed to further leverage technology by automating processes and making them accessible to staff. In partnership with its client departments, it must take the lead in designing a knowledge-management strategy. It should emphasize capacity-building for the Organization's managers and the development of skills to enable its own staff to stay abreast of new human resources techniques. Many of those goals would require dedicating resources and staff to further define human resources requirements. Whether that was achieved by redeploying existing resources or by allocating new resources, OIOS believed that the expected benefits, such as greater professionalism and quality of staff, justified the investment.

22. **Mr. Kennedy** (United States of America) said his country was pleased to see the Office of Human Resources Management moving away from a static administrative function to assume a more strategic role. The United States supported efforts to address human resources issues within the context of streamlined regulations and career development as well as the proposal to expand the mobility programme to include exchanges with other United Nations bodies. Ways should also be sought to improve conditions of service at duty stations by reducing red tape and expanding training programmes. Increased staff satisfaction would ultimately enhance productivity for the whole Organization.

23. Despite increased awareness of transparency, practices persisted which were contrary to the concept of OHRM reform, such as extensions beyond the mandatory age of retirement. The Secretariat should inform the Committee of how many recently retired staff members had received extensions.

24. In the light of the growing number of external candidates seeking employment in the Professional category through the Galaxy system, the current practice of giving overwhelming preference to internal candidates needed to be reviewed. In that connection, it would be useful to know how many posts in the Professional category had been advertised over the previous three years and how many of those at each grade level had been offered to external candidates. The Organization should take advantage of the increase in applications to inject new blood, promote gender balance and increase the representation of countries that were underrepresented or close to becoming so, as was the case for United States nationals in Professional posts.

25. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the late issuance of the report made it impossible for the Group to make comments at the current stage. It would give its reaction at a later date.

Agenda item 122: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*) (A/57/465 and A/57/488)

26. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary General for Internal Oversight Services), introducing the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the management review of the Office of the United Nations

High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/57/488), noted that the increasing share of human rights activities supported through extrabudgetary funds could be destructive if voluntary contributions dwindled or were increasingly earmarked. In order to rationalize its activities and prepare for new challenges, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) should focus on three problem areas.

27. Firstly, rather than expanding its activities through the accumulation of new mandates and reaction to emergencies and ad hoc requests, OHCHR should draw up a comprehensive strategy, including guidelines for streamlining substantive activities. Secondly, the Office's opaque and unwieldy organizational structure should be made more functional, with clear and effective reporting lines. Thirdly, management should aim at improving follow-up to lessons learned and at being more consistent in general.

28. The Office had taken prompt action to address the report's recommendations and had submitted a report to the Secretary-General on the progress achieved in implementing them.

29. Introducing the report on his Office's investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa (A/57/465), which had been prompted by a report by two consultants who had been commissioned by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Save the Children (UK) to study the question of sexual exploitation and violence in the refugee communities in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, said that although the investigation had not confirmed the alleged widespread sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers, it had established that conditions in the camps and refugee communities made young, female refugees particularly vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation. UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had developed a number of remedial and preventive measures. OIOS had been asked to determine whether there was sufficient evidence of wrongdoing to bring criminal and/or disciplinary charges against specific individuals. Ten of the 43 cases investigated had been substantiated by the evidence, but none of those involved United Nations staff members. Factors that had contributed to sexual exploitation in refugee communities included living conditions, the structure and security of refugee camps,

the distribution of food and services, employment opportunities and the profile of camp workers.

30. The relative lack of evidence in the consultants' report had unfairly tarnished the credibility of the large majority of humanitarian workers in West Africa, who worked diligently under difficult circumstances. OIOS had confirmed, however, that sexual exploitation was a significant issue wherever refugees found themselves in similarly desperate circumstances. After several weeks of work, the multidisciplinary, international investigation team had failed to substantiate the stories reported by the consultants, as information was vague and general and the few sources that could be traced related mainly to third-hand accounts of events they had not themselves witnessed. However, some new cases had been identified, including the sodomizing of a 14-year-old returnee boy by a peacekeeper in Sierra Leone, who had since been repatriated. Another case concerned the rape of a 14-year-old refugee girl by a non-governmental organization (NGO) worker in Guinea. That case had been referred to the NGO for action and separately to the local police. A significant number of cases involved relationships between refugee girls and aid workers, especially schoolteachers and those involved in the distribution of food and other items, some of whom were themselves refugees.

31. Measures that had been taken by UNHCR to address the issue included the establishment of a task force on sexual exploitation under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Under the joint chairmanship of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, IASC was drafting a Secretary-General's bulletin setting out a policy to prevent and address cases of sexual exploitation and abuse in humanitarian crises. Other measures included introducing codes of conduct prohibiting exploitation, action against staff members suspected of involvement in sexual exploitation, and training of staff and refugees.

32. OIOS had encountered difficulties in monitoring the implementation of its recommendations. Responses were not always forthcoming and were often unsatisfactory. Non-governmental organizations had also been reluctant to take action against staff unless there was a successful criminal prosecution. For its part, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations must introduce strict measures to deal with peacekeepers found to engage in sexual exploitation. Given that

sexual exploitation could occur in any refugee camp in the region, UNHCR and its partners should broaden the scope of their remedial and preventive programmes and better coordinate their activities.

33. **Ms. Buchanan** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf of the delegations of Australia, Canada and New Zealand (CANZ), said that the value of the type of management evaluation found in the report had been reflected in the inclusion of the findings of OIOS in the Secretary-General's proposals for strengthening the United Nations. The CANZ delegations welcomed the progress made towards implementation of the recommendations and stressed the need for an integrated strategy to guide priority-setting across operational activities, technical cooperation and mainstreaming of human rights. OHCHR was also encouraged to establish a dedicated information management and communication section to improve coordination.

34. **Ms. Attwooll** (United States of America) said that the human rights programme, which was a priority for the Organization and her delegation, needed clear lines of responsibility and authority. Her delegation would like to encourage the Office in its efforts to increase the level of voluntary contributions. She wondered whether OHCHR regularly reviewed its mandates to determine whether any if them were obsolete, and whether any such reviews had resulted in the termination of certain mandates. It was up to programme managers to indicate which mandates were no longer relevant. The Office should also systematically reverse the trend in the amount of documentation produced for United Nations bodies. In particular, the large number of thematically duplicative documents should be a prime target in its reform efforts.

35. With regard to the claim that some sections of the Office were stretched thin in their attempt to fulfil an increasing number of responsibilities, there was in fact no shortage of posts at the Office and her delegation was of the view that, with proper reorganization, prioritization and thorough follow-up to the numerous recommendations made in internal and external reviews, the Office would be equipped to carry out its highest priorities. Her delegation would welcome an update on the issues that were already being addressed in Geneva.

36. **Ms. Lock** (South Africa), speaking on behalf of the African Group, said that the management review of OHCHR had provided an additional opportunity to evaluate and monitor the administration of the Office's resources. Any organizational or structural changes to OHCHR should be undertaken in consultation with Member States and should reflect the mandated activities of the Office, ensure high-quality reporting and lead to a more focused approach to human rights questions.

37. With regard to voluntary contributions, while she was encouraged by the assurances that OHCHR had observed the provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations, the declining trend in funding certain core activities through the regular budget and the heavy reliance on extrabudgetary resources could disrupt the core activities of the Office. The adverse impact of such reliance on the implementation of mandated programmes and activities should be addressed in its broader context, rather than through ad hoc reviews. In that connection, OIOS should be requested to undertake a comprehensive review of the issue for appropriate action by the General Assembly in the context of the programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007.

38. She noted with concern that the geographical distribution of project personnel and consultants at OHCHR did not reflect the international character of the United Nations. The Office should therefore devote more attention to human resources management issues. In particular, the petition system and the Research and Right to Development Branch should be strengthened.

39. The African Group welcomed the Secretary-General's initiatives to improve the work of the United Nations in the area of human rights and hoped that the Office would take the provisions of General Assembly resolution 57/300 and the outcomes of the major international conferences fully into account when implementing the recommendations of OIOS.

40. Turning to the report of OIOS on the investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa (A/57/465), the African Group strongly condemned any form of sexual and/or commercial exploitation of women and children by some humanitarian personnel in refugee camps and by some peacekeeping personnel in mission areas. As at 1 January 2002, Africa was host to almost 22 per cent of the world's population of refugees and other displaced

persons of concern to UNHCR. Member States had a collective responsibility to ensure that such vulnerable groups were not traumatized further and were able to reintegrate successfully into their societies.

41. Even though OIOS had found that the impression given in the consultants' report of widespread sexual exploitation by aid workers was misleading and untrue, the problem of sexual exploitation of refugees was real and conditions in camps and communities made them vulnerable to such abuses. The humanitarian community should therefore take every possible measure to prevent the risk of exploitation in every sector of refugee operations and to bring the perpetrators to justice. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations should institute similar measures with regard to its personnel. In that connection, she welcomed the Secretary-General's assurances that he was taking steps to address the issues raised in the OIOS report.

42. Lastly, in view of the findings of the investigation, the African Group encouraged OIOS to consider broadening the scope of its investigative and monitoring activities to include refugee camps in areas other than West Africa, as well as other vulnerable groups and refugees over 18 years of age.

43. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that the international community had been alarmed by the allegations of sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa. The investigation conducted by OIOS had shown that sexual exploitation did occur, although it was not widespread, and that refugee women and children were especially vulnerable. It was imperative to know how to prevent such unacceptable behaviour, reduce vulnerability to exploitation and hold those guilty of misconduct to account.

44. While he welcomed the report of OIOS (A/57/465) and the recommendations it contained, a number of aspects required clarification. He wished to know, for example, how many of the cases identified in the report had been investigated by OIOS, why the investigation had focused on female refugees under the age of 18 excluding other vulnerable persons, and what the situation of host communities was. More information was also needed on the staffing of the investigation team and on the arrangements made for ensuring confidentiality and protecting potential complainants. He noted that the very high standard of

evidence required by the investigation might have exceeded that needed to establish credibility.

45. OIOS had identified an overall protection gap in refugee camps, a problem that needed to be addressed not only in West Africa, but worldwide. The report also emphasized the need for effective and timely reporting systems, clear mechanisms, procedures and guidelines for the conduct of investigations, and closer communication with refugee populations to inform them of their rights. It called for a review of service provision in order to increase the involvement of women, reduce opportunities for exploitation and strengthen accountability to client populations. He would appreciate detailed information on the status of implementation of those recommendations, not only from OIOS, but also from the entities to which they were addressed.

46. He welcomed the Plan of Action drawn up by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises. The absence of a shared code of conduct for humanitarian workers, the existence of multiple oversight mechanisms and the lack of attention to and resources for protection were gaps that must be urgently addressed. He noted with satisfaction that the Plan of Action included measures to reduce vulnerability, including the increase in women's access to resources and in their participation in camp governance. Detailed information on the status of implementation of the Plan of Action would be welcome, as would the issuance of a Secretary-General's bulletin to provide broad guidance to the entire United Nations family.

47. Peacekeeping operations interacted constantly with local populations, and the issues addressed in the OIOS report were thus not new to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. It would be interesting to know how the Department viewed the observation in paragraph 49 that the low number of allegations of sexual exploitation involving peacekeepers seemed more indicative of a poor reporting system than of a lack of cases. Noting that the Department was currently reviewing its existing policies, procedures and guidelines on disciplinary issues, he requested detailed information on the outcome. Accountability should not stop with repatriation; it would therefore be helpful to know how the Department followed up cases of misconduct when troops were sent home. Given the complexity of the factors contributing to sexual

exploitation, it was important for the Department to strengthen its capacity to systematically integrate the gender dimension into peacekeeping operations.

48. The United Nations must be frank and transparent when dealing with allegations of sexual exploitation so as to avoid giving the impression of inaction, or worse. Sexual exploitation, whatever its incidence, was unacceptable and considerable work remained to be done to ensure that vulnerable populations were not put at further risk by those whose job it was to provide them with physical protection and material assistance. He appreciated the recommendations of OIOS in that regard, and trusted that the Office would draw to the attention of the General Assembly any further cases of sexual exploitation of which it became aware.

49. **Ms. Attwooll** (United States of America) commended OIOS for its prompt and thorough investigation into the allegations of sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa. She noted that, while none of the 12 cases referred to in the report had been substantiated, 10 new cases of sexual exploitation had been identified and verified by OIOS in the course of its investigation. Although no United Nations staff member had been implicated, the Organization should nevertheless endeavour to establish an environment that would prevent any future intimidation and violation of personal rights in refugee camps. There was also a need for measures to prevent sexual exploitation within the refugee population. Empowering women through education, employment and better access to health care was crucial for the successful management of refugee camps and should be both a short- and long-term goal.

50. She noted with satisfaction that UNHCR had initiated new measures, such as a humanitarian community action plan, standards of accountability to govern the conduct of all staff, training initiatives and mass information campaigns. She asked when those measures had been taken and whether there had been a noticeable decline in reported cases of sexual exploitation since that time. She would also welcome information on the status of implementation of the recommendations of OIOS.

Agenda item 111: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 118: Human resources management (*continued*)

Gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities (A/57/721 and A/57/735)

51. **Mr. Beissel** (Officer-in-Charge of the Office of Human Resources Management) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities (A/57/721), which concerned the situation during the period from 1 January to 31 December 2002. Table 1 provided data on type I gratis personnel, namely, interns, associate experts and technical cooperation experts obtained on a non-reimbursable loan. The overall number of such personnel had increased from 187 to 301 or by 60.9 per cent during the reporting period. The overall increase was mainly due to a 108 per cent increase in the number of interns, from 68 to 142. Table 2 provided information on type II gratis personnel in service as at 31 December 2002. In 2001, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia had engaged a hydrology expert, whose services were provided by the Government of Germany for a period of two years ending on 31 December 2003. Table 4 showed the number of regular staff in the department where the hydrologist performed his functions. The ratio of type II gratis personnel representation to regular staff was 0.4 per cent.

52. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/57/735), said that, in view of the steps taken pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/243 for the management of the employment of gratis personnel and the phasing out of the number of such personnel since the adoption of the resolution, the Advisory Committee was of the opinion that the Secretary-General should now be requested to provide that type of information in the context of his report on the composition of the Secretariat, submitted on a biennial basis. The information regarding type I gratis personnel should be expanded to include nationality, duration and functions performed.

Agenda item 117: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations
(*continued*) (A/57/76)

53. **The Chairman** recalled that the report of the Secretary-General on measures to encourage Member States in arrears to reduce and eventually pay their arrears (A/57/76) had been introduced at the main part of the Assembly's fifty-seventh session.

54. **Ms. Afifi** (Morocco), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed the obligation of Member States under the Charter to bear the expenses of the Organization and to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions. There was a need, however, to extend sympathetic consideration to those Member States that were unable to meet their financial obligations because of genuine economic difficulties. The Group of 77 and China endorsed the provisions of General Assembly resolution 57/4 B concerning multi-year payment plans, which were a useful tool for reducing unpaid assessed contributions. The submission of such plans should, however, remain voluntary.

55. Concerning the proposal for early reimbursement of troop-contributing countries current with their assessed contributions, she noted that the members of the Committee on Contributions had disagreed on the merits of the idea and endorsed the Secretariat's view that it would not be productive to consider the matter further in the context of the report before the Fifth Committee. Other measures, including the proposal that Member States in arrears should be ineligible for election to committees and that access by their nationals and enterprises to recruitment and procurement opportunities should be restricted, were not within the purview of the Committee on Contributions. The imposition of indexation of and interest on arrears would place an additional burden on developing countries, already facing difficulties in meeting their financial obligations. Such measures would also prevent full participation by a large number of Member States in the Organization's activities. If interest were to be imposed on arrears due to the Organization, the United Nations might also be expected to pay interest on amounts owed to Member States. As to the proposed retention of budgetary surpluses due to countries with outstanding contributions, the Group of 77 and China was not convinced of the value of introducing changes to the current system. Surpluses often did not reflect cash

resources and the Committee on Contributions had not agreed on the merits of the idea. Moreover, the benefits of retaining surpluses had not been proven and such an operation would be administratively burdensome.

56. **Ms. Arce de Gabay** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, associated herself with the statement made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Agenda item 117 was of fundamental importance to the future of the United Nations and Member States would have to make every effort to deal with it in a practical and constructive manner. The member States of the Rio Group reiterated their political will to fulfil their commitments under the Charter of the United Nations, including the obligation to pay their assessed contributions in a timely, full and unconditional manner. However, they also recognized the need to carefully study the situation of countries that were temporarily unable to meet their financial obligations on account of genuine economic difficulties.

57. She welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on measures to encourage Member States in arrears to reduce and eventually pay their arrears (A/57/76). However, given that certain Member States' arrears might have political or economic origins, the aim should be to encourage Member States to pay their arrears rather than to make things even more difficult for those who were willing to pay but lacked the resources to do so.

58. First, it was necessary to examine the impact of the proposed measures on the financial situation of the United Nations. Any amendment to the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations must be justified and she would like to hear the views of the Secretariat on the matter. The majority of States in arrears were developing countries that had been unable to keep up with their assessed contributions on account of the economic crises affecting them and tightening up the conditions of their debt would merely increase their burden.

59. The Rio Group was not, however, advocating the continuation of arrears. Many of its member States had provided troops for United Nations peacekeeping activities and, in that capacity, had contributed substantively to the financial health of the Organization. The payment of arrears would enable the repayment of a significant portion of the debt owed by the United Nations to troop-contributing countries and

would reduce the need to finance peacekeeping activities from the regular budget, a harmful practice which affected all Member States.

60. The question of incentives had been examined in a very limited manner and a more in-depth analysis of the issue was needed. As far as the early reimbursement to troop-contributing countries current with their assessments was concerned, she endorsed the Secretariat's view that it would not be productive to consider the matter further in the context of the current report. The adoption of such a policy, moreover, could have serious consequences for United Nations peacekeeping activities as it could discourage current troop-contributing countries from continuing to do so.

61. The Rio Group opposed the imposition of interest on arrears because the real impact of that measure on the financial situation of the United Nations was not significant enough to outweigh its negative effects on developing countries whose arrears were beyond their control. Moreover, if the arrears policy were tightened up, a growing number of developing countries would become subject to Article 19 of the Charter, a situation which would have political consequences for the Organization. If interest were to be imposed on Member States' arrears, the same policy should also apply to the reimbursements owed by the Organization to troop-contributing countries.

62. Lastly, she was not convinced that a change in the current system governing the retention of budgetary surpluses would result in any real gain. In that connection, a more detailed account should be provided of the extent to which the Organization's financial situation would be improved. A system of sanctions to ensure compliance with financial obligations was already provided for under Article 19 of the Charter and the Rio Group looked forward to participating in informal consultations on that issue.

63. **Ms. Pulido Santana** (Venezuela) associated herself with the statements made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by the representative of Peru on behalf of the Rio Group. Her Government was committed to its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and to paying its outstanding assessed contributions. The Committee should, however, show benevolence towards those States, including Venezuela, that were temporarily unable to meet those obligations owing to genuine economic difficulties. The Venezuelan bolívar

had been devalued by more than 100 per cent and the economic paralysis caused by the domestic political situation had markedly diminished the country's capacity to pay. However, the Government was in the process of obtaining additional credit, which would be used to pay its outstanding contributions to the United Nations.

64. She welcomed the Secretary-General's report on measures to encourage Member States in arrears to reduce and eventually pay their arrears (A/57/76), but felt that an examination of the real impact of such measures on the financial situation of the United Nations was needed. In addition, any amendment to the Financial Regulations and Rules must be realistic and fully justified. It should be borne in mind that many States with unpaid contributions were developing countries in the throes of economic crises and that tightening up the payment conditions would only increase their debt burden. It was also important to understand that the majority of States in arrears were not in control of their financial situation.

65. The proposed measure relating to the imposition of interest on arrears was unacceptable, since its positive impact on the financial situation of the Organization would not outweigh the serious burden it would place on developing countries with limited capacity to pay. It would also result in a growing number of developing countries becoming subject to Article 19 of the Charter, which would have political consequences for the United Nations. Moreover, if the Organization decided to impose interest on Member States' arrears, similar treatment could be requested for sums owed to Member States.

66. She echoed the concerns expressed by the representative of Peru regarding the proposed change in the current system governing the retention of budgetary surpluses and reiterated the need for a detailed justification of those changes and their positive impact on the financial situation of the Organization. It would be difficult to adopt any specific measures at the current session, since a more detailed study of their implications would be needed. Alternative solutions involving voluntary actions should also be examined.

Agenda item 112: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*)

Information and communication technology strategy (A/57/620)

67. **Mr. Toh** (Officer-in-Charge of the Office of Central Support Services) introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the information and communication technology strategy (A/57/620), which addressed the requests and observations made by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/239. The strategy built on the objectives and framework laid out in the report of the Secretary-General on information technology in the Secretariat: a plan of action (A/55/780) and was designed to support the Secretary-General's programme of reform, which relied heavily on information and communications technology (ICT). It focused on building the essential ICT infrastructure and systems within a matrix of standards and best practices and envisioned serving Member States better by supporting multilingual enhancements and improved meeting and document management. It would empower individuals to improve their performance, thereby increasing staff responsibility.

68. The investments in ICT would support three broad service-delivery areas: sharing and dissemination of the Organization's institutional knowledge; administrative and management processes; and servicing of the United Nations organs and governing bodies. The initiatives would, for example, provide direct support for more efficient retrieval of Internet-based information, enhancement of the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) and improved management of the electronic version of the *Journal of the United Nations*.

69. The objectives of the strategy would be achieved on the basis of four building blocks: a robust technical infrastructure at Headquarters and at offices away from Headquarters to ensure sustained and reliable service; a secure system to ensure the integrity of communications and data; reliable connectivity with the field; and the building and efficient use of a skilled human resources base.

70. The governance structure consisted of a central policy and standards-setting body, the Information and Communications Technology Board, to ensure that initiatives were harmonized and integrated into a global ICT programme for the Secretariat.

71. The Organization's substantive programmes would drive the strategy and its performance would be reflected in the performance indicators of those programmes. The development of technology and, even more importantly, the level of financial resources made available would also affect the scope and pace of implementation of the strategy. The Administration was confident that the strategy was consistent with the needs of the Organization.

72. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee would consider the report of the Secretary-General on the information and communication technology strategy (A/57/620) when it took up the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, since it had traditionally used the context of the consideration of the programme budget proposals to make detailed comments on information and communication technology. He noted that the Secretary-General's report had taken into account the observations and recommendations contained in the Advisory Committee's first reports on the proposed programme budget.

73. It would be helpful if the Fifth Committee could finalize during the current part of the resumed session any policy statements and guidelines relating to the report so that the Advisory Committee could incorporate them into its consideration of the proposed programme budget at the second part of the resumed session.

Standards of accommodation for air travel (A/57/485)

74. **Ms. Ferrena-Mahmud** (Chief of the Oversight Support Unit, Department of Management), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on standards of accommodation for air travel (A/57/485), emphasized that, although continuous administrative oversight had kept exceptions to a minimum, some exceptions were unavoidable. The Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly had engaged in more first-class travel between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2002 than during the previous year and the meeting of the Panel of Experts on Disability in April 2002 had entailed additional costs for business-class travel, as many of the disabled persons attending the meeting had to be accompanied by an assistant or escort. The number of exceptions authorized when the

regular standard of accommodation was not available and when prominent persons were donating their services free of charge to the Organization had also increased as compared with the previous year.

75. A new category of exceptions relating to eminent persons travelling in order to testify at the various tribunals had been included in the report. Four such exceptions had been granted between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2002 and several others had been granted since then. She wished to assure the Committee that, insofar as it was within his control, the Secretary-General would endeavour to keep the approval of exceptions to a minimum.

76. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had reviewed the Secretary-General's report and had decided to recommend that the General Assembly should take note of it, subject to such other guidelines as the General Assembly might wish to provide.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.