



General Assembly

Sixty-third session

First Committee

1st meeting

Thursday, 2 October 2008, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

Chairperson: Mr. Marco Antonio Suazo (Honduras)

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

Statement by the Chairperson

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): As members know, the focus of today's discussion will be the organization of our work for the coming weeks. This will be a short session, of only four weeks. The organization of our work and the efficiency with which we undertake it will determine the success of the Committee. I would like to express my readiness to work with all members throughout the next four weeks in a spirit of cooperation and effectiveness and, above all, in a constructive spirit.

It is of course a privilege and an honour for me, as a representative of my country, Honduras, and of the Group of Latin American and the Caribbean States, to preside over the work of this important Committee. I thank all members for the confidence they have placed in me. With their full support, I hope to guide the work of the Committee to a successful conclusion.

The Bureau for this session is composed of our three Vice-Chairpersons, Mr. Miguel Graça of Portugal, Mr. Ivan Mutavdžić of Croatia and Mr. Martin Zvachula of the Federated States of Micronesia, and our Rapporteur, Mr. Coly Seck of Senegal. I am certain that the Committee will benefit from their collective wisdom and expertise in disarmament issues.

I am also confident that the Committee will again receive the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management headed by Mr. Sergio Duarte

and Mr. Shaaban Muhammad Shaaban, respectively. Last but not least, the Committee will benefit greatly from the assistance of Mr. Jarmo Sareva, the Secretary of the First Committee, and Mr. Ioan Tudor of the Office for Disarmament Affairs. Both of them are experienced colleagues with long years of cooperation with the Committee.

Organization of work

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): In considering the Committee's work for this session, I wish to draw attention first of all to document A/C.1/63/1, containing a letter dated 19 September 2008 addressed to me by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann. The letter draws attention to the decisions taken by the General Assembly, at its 2nd plenary meeting, pertaining to the allocation of items to the First Committee. At that meeting, the General Assembly decided to allocate 16 disarmament and related international security agenda items — items 81 to 96 — to the First Committee for its consideration during the session.

Before I proceed to give a more detailed account of the programme of work and timetable as contained in document A/C.1/63/CRP.1, which is before members, I would like to recall that that document is based on the tentative programme of work and timetable that was adopted by the Committee on 2 November 2007, in the context of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



The one change that has been introduced at this point is to move forward to 16 October, the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and decisions. I will return to that point in due course.

The programme of work and timetable itself was prepared in keeping with past practice and taking into account a number of initiatives proposed over the past several years, including the General Assembly's decision 52/416 B, on the rationalization of the work of the First Committee. In this connection, I also took into account paragraph 36 of the annex to resolution 51/241, which reads as follows:

“The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly.”

However, members may have noted in document A/C.1/63/CRP.1, that on the Tuesday of the third week of the Committee's substantive session, to be exact on 21 October, both morning and afternoon meetings have been allocated to the First Committee. That is in line with the agreement that was made last year by my predecessor and his counterpart from the Fourth Committee, with a view to the successful completion of the work of each of the Committees.

In accordance with established practice, the First Committee will commence its substantive work on Monday, 6 October 2008. The General Committee recommended that the First Committee conclude its work by 4 November. Thus, including today's organizational meeting, the First Committee will have a total of 24 meetings to consider the agenda items allocated to it by the General Assembly. The Committee will also have to consider and take action on its tentative programme of work for the 2009 session, in accordance with agenda item 110, entitled “Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly”. With reference to item 119, entitled “Programme planning”, which has been allocated to all the Main Committees and the plenary of the General Assembly to enhance discussion of evaluation, planning, budgeting and monitoring reports, we will revert to this item if the General Assembly allocates any report under this item to our Committee.

I will make every effort to complete the work of the Committee, as recommended by the General Committee. I, therefore, earnestly appeal for the full cooperation of all delegations on this matter. I would

like to recall that, during the previous session, the First Committee had 25 meetings, during which it considered 18 disarmament-related agenda items. Consequently, I believe that with the cooperation of members, we will be able to accomplish our tasks in a timely fashion.

As has been done during previous sessions, the consideration of the items allocated to the First Committee will proceed in three segments, as currently reflected in the proposed programme of work and timetable. The first phase, the general debate on all items, will run from 6 to 14 October, for a total of seven meetings. The rolling list of speakers for this phase is currently open, and I am aware that quite a number of delegations have already inscribed their names on the list. I invite others to do the same as soon as possible, with a view to the opening of the general debate on Monday. Additionally, in order to efficiently use the resources allocated to us, I kindly request delegations to limit their statements to a maximum of 10 minutes for those speaking in their national capacity, and 15 minutes for those speaking on behalf of several delegations.

In this connection, it is my intention, somewhat reluctantly, to introduce the use of “traffic lights” for this first phase of our work, similar to that used in the General Assembly, even for heads of State. I would invite delegations that have longer statements to make the full statement available in written form for posting on the First Committee Quickfirst website and to read out an abbreviated version during the general debate. Quickfirst is available to all delegations, and we held an informational meeting on it yesterday.

I would like to remind delegations, as they inscribe their names on the list of speakers, that a rolling list means that members should make every effort to intervene, possibly even one meeting sooner than they had originally planned. Based on the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/63/CRP.1, it is my intention to close the list of speakers for the general debate on Tuesday, 7 October, at 6 p.m.

The second phase of the Committee's work will be the structured thematic discussion on item subjects, and introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions and decisions that will be submitted under disarmament and related international security agenda items. For the advance information of delegations, an

indicative timetable, based on the established practice of the Committee for the second phase of its work, has been circulated to all delegations in document A/C.1/63/CRP.2.

That second segment will cover the period from Wednesday, 15 October, to Monday, 27 October; a total of 10 meetings has been allocated for that purpose. In the event that the Committee completes its general debate ahead of schedule, that is, before the end of Tuesday, 14 October, I propose that we begin the thematic segment on 14 October with the discussion on the follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at its past session and the presentation of reports.

As indicated in document A/C.1/63/CRP.2, it is within this second thematic phase that time has been allocated for an exchange with Mr. Sergio de Queiroz Duarte, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and other high-level officials on the current state of affairs in the field of arms control and disarmament and the role of the respective organizations. Furthermore, a number of guest speakers have been invited. As in previous years and as outlined in document A/C.1/63/CRP.2, the meetings during the thematic segments will be divided into two parts. The first part will begin in formal mode with a panel or guest speaker, as applicable. It will be followed by an informal question-and-answer session. The second formal part will consist of interventions by delegations on the items under consideration, as well as the introduction of draft resolutions.

Following past practice, the discussion on the follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at its past session and the presentation of reports, which, time allowing, will take place on 14 October, as well as the 22 October panel on regional disarmament and security, the 23 October panel discussion on disarmament machinery and the 27 October meeting with the participation of non-governmental organizations, will be in informal mode. I plan on providing a more detailed explanation of this second phase of the Committee's work during the latter part of next week.

In order to facilitate the Committee's work and to provide sufficient time to delegations for consultations, as well as to give enough time to the Secretariat for processing of draft resolutions in all official languages, following discussions with the Bureau, I am proposing

that the deadline for submission of draft resolutions and decisions be Thursday, 16 October, at noon. This is a day earlier than the deadline indicated in the indicative programme of work for our current session, adopted last year. However, I believe that it is necessary in order to allow sufficient time for the processing and translation of the drafts so that they will be available as early as possible in all official languages for the consideration of delegations. I would also encourage all delegations to submit their draft resolutions and decisions before the deadline, to give delegations enough time to seek necessary instructions from their capitals and to consult sufficiently, so that the texts finally adopted will reflect the greatest possible degree of agreement. Early submission of draft resolutions or decisions would also offer all delegations the opportunity to make comments on them during the second phase, which is also intended for that purpose. I therefore appeal to all delegations to adhere strictly to the submission deadline of noon on Thursday, 16 October.

In particular, it is important that delegations submit those draft resolutions that might entail programme budget implications as early as possible to give the Secretariat sufficient time to prepare the necessary statements on programme budget implications. I would like to remind delegations that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of a draft resolution before it can be acted upon by the General Assembly.

In this connection, I would like to draw the attention of delegations to the guidance of the General Committee contained in its first report to the General Assembly (A/63/250). In paragraphs 40 and 41 of that report, the General Committee recalls resolution 45/248 B, on procedures for administrative and budgetary matters, in particular reaffirming that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters and reaffirming the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. The General Committee further draws the attention of the General Assembly to the views expressed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on the use of the phrase "within available resources" (see A/54/7, paras. 66-67). Accordingly, I would kindly

request delegations to avoid use of the phrase “within existing resources” in draft resolutions or decisions of the First Committee.

Finally, the third and last segment of the work of the Committee, namely, action on all draft resolutions and decisions, will be from Tuesday, 28 October, to Tuesday, 4 November. A total of six meetings have been set aside for this purpose. Last year, the Committee concluded this final phase, adopting 49 draft resolutions and three draft decisions, in five meetings. Consequently, I urge all delegations to take note of this fact, and I request their full cooperation so that we will be able to take action on all draft resolutions and decisions, particularly those involving programme budget implications, in a timely manner.

It is my intention to retain the voting procedure involving the grouping of draft resolutions by clusters, using as a basis the agreed seven clusters mentioned in the 5 November 2004 letter from the Chairman of the First Committee to the President of the session of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, pursuant to paragraph 3 — annex C — of resolution 58/316 on “Further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly”. The clusters are: nuclear weapons; other weapons of mass destruction; outer space (disarmament aspects); conventional weapons; regional disarmament and security; other disarmament measures and international security; and disarmament machinery. I will provide the Committee with specific information on this final phase of our work closer to the beginning of the action period.

It is my firm belief that, based on the proposed programme of work and timetable that is now before members, the Committee will be able to consider efficiently all the agenda items allocated to it, within the available time, and to wrap up its work, as recommended by the General Committee, by Tuesday, 4 November 2008.

I should like to remind delegations of the need to maintain the necessary spirit of compromise and flexibility in the process of implementing the proposed programme of work and timetable. In other words, I invite members to demonstrate the greatest possible flexibility, cooperation and constructive spirit so that our work can be successful.

I call now on those representatives who wish to comment on the proposed draft programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/63/CRP.1.

Ms. Rodríguez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I just wanted first to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, and the other members of the Bureau, but you in particular as a representative from our regional group. I would be grateful for a little more detail on how you intend to draw up the list of speakers.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election, as well as the other officers of the Bureau. You may rest assured that the Cuban delegation will fully support you in your work. We are grateful for the detailed information that you have provided concerning the way you intend to proceed. I have just one comment, a concern about the deadline for presentation of resolutions — Thursday, 16 October.

If I understand correctly, delegations will have less time available to formally present their draft resolutions than was provided in the past. We believe that such curtailment of the time will not promote the success of our work; on the contrary, it may impede the flexible and smooth functioning of the Committee. We feel that a shorter period of time being available for the submission of draft resolutions will mean in practice that delegations will have less opportunity to incorporate in their texts the proposals, suggestions and concerns voiced by other delegations before the document is formally issued.

Everyone knows that once a draft resolution or decision is formally issued, it becomes much more difficult to introduce changes. My proposal would therefore be that the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions should be on Friday, 17 October, rather than Thursday, 16 October.

Mr. Obisakin (Nigeria): On behalf of the African Group, I just wanted to congratulate you once again, Mr. Chairperson, and pledge our support. We will work assiduously with you, as usual.

However, I would also like to support what the representative of Cuba said. The Nigerian delegation wishes to appeal for the allocation of adequate time so that we can debate these issues, which are very important. We know that we hardly had enough time to do so last year. We are beginning to wonder how far we will get if our time is now to be curtailed. However, we know that, with your well-known wisdom and sagacity, we will get there. As the Chinese say, a journey of a

thousand miles starts with just one step. We in Nigeria add that it will be a step in the right direction.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the expressions of support and solidarity. I am committed, together with all members, to facilitating the work of the Committee in the best way possible.

With regard to the question posed by the delegation of Mexico, I believe that we have a rule that establishes the practice of inscribing speakers on the list of speakers. I believe it is a process that is respected in all bodies of the General Assembly. I should just like to stress that the following is also an established practice: regional groups, while they do not take precedence over national interventions, have the opportunity, because they are broad regional negotiating groups, to speak at the beginning of general debates, both in the General Assembly and in the Main Committees. It is not a practice written in stone, as all members are aware, but it is designed to help us achieve an overall view at the regional level of the major groups — in this case, the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Rio Group and the Group of 77 and China.

The chairmanship will abide strictly by the rules of procedure. However, I would like to know whether the Committee would have any objection if the regional groups were to speak early in the general debate so that we could hear regional views. This should not be called a negotiation; rather, it is a door that swings both ways. If we strictly apply the rules, we find that a national delegation can, if it so chooses, speak on behalf of a regional group such as the Rio Group, the Non-Aligned Movement or the European Union.

I shall respect the Committee's decision in this regard. Frankly, however, I would like the Committee to consider the possibility of giving regional groups the opportunity — even if they are not given priority — to speak a bit earlier in the general debate, in particular before national statements are made. At the same time, I propose that the order in which national representatives have been inscribed on the list be respected.

We can return to this issue in a few minutes time before taking a decision. However, I would be grateful to know whether that answer satisfies the delegation of Mexico.

Ms. Rodríguez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We have taken into account the points that you have just shared with us, Mr. Chairperson. We are aware of certain practices. The issue here is that, under the rules of procedure, the list is drawn up in the order in which delegations sign up. The rules make no distinction among regional groups, other types of groups or subgroups and national representatives.

We have considered all the points that you made. While it might be beneficial to consider regional statements first, an open practice is established in our rules of procedure, and it has proved to be a good one. It is the rule by which the Assembly operates. Obviously, if that practice has existed and has been followed in other circumstances and contexts, that does not mean that we, the delegation of Mexico, would consider changing the rules of the General Assembly in practice for this particular case. I wish to clarify this point as some might think that the delegation of Mexico is first on the list. That is not the case. Our wish is to defend the Assembly's rules of procedure, and that is why we are expressing our desire to abide by what is indicated.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): We have taken note of the concerns expressed by the representative of Mexico.

With regard to the second issue, raised by our friend from the delegation of Cuba, I should like to recall the following and, above all, to make an appeal. We are not substantially changing the timing of the submission of draft resolutions; we are making a change of only six hours. In document A/C.1/62/2, the First Committee's programme of work for 2007, deadline for the submission of draft resolutions was Wednesday, 17 October 2007, at 6 p.m. This year, we are moving that up to noon. If those six hours really are an obstacle to the flow of work and the draft resolution negotiating process, we can take that into account.

In any case, I wish to recall that this is a programme of work — it is a plan, an estimate. We can move ahead and even finish before the deadline. On the other hand, if there are some exceptional needs and we have to delay the submission of a draft resolution by four or six hours, I see nothing unsuitable in having room for flexibility. In any event, I believe that that would be the exception and not the rule when it comes to negotiating and submitting draft resolutions.

Once again, I would ask the delegation of Cuba whether they find that explanation acceptable and whether they consider the proposed hour and date acceptable.

Mr. Benítez Versón (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, the suggestion I made to extend the deadline for the submission of draft resolution to Friday, 17 October, is in keeping with the practice we have followed in earlier sessions in this Committee. Specifically, I recall that last year I explained that the deadline set for our programme of work was not adequate. A number of draft resolutions came in rather late. I am glad, Sir, that you indicated some flexibility regarding Cuba's suggestion, and I hope that our suggestion will make it easier for us to be seamless and effective in our work. I hope that this will be considered.

My delegation greatly appreciates your flexibility and hopes that this proposal, which is hardly controversial but is rather intended to make it possible for our work to proceed effectively, will be easily accepted by all delegations. I greatly appreciate your flexibility, Sir, regarding our proposal.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): I certainly want to show flexibility and cooperation. Right from the start that has been my position. So I think that we can adopt the draft programme of work as indicated. The Committee determines its own rules of procedure, and, if it seems necessary, then we can look again at the possibility of extending the deadlines.

The delegation of Nigeria expressed the same concerns as the delegation of Cuba. I definitely feel that we need to address those concerns, but I wonder whether we can adopt this programme as it stands, while at the same time exercising the flexibility that we have indicated: as Chairperson, I am certainly eager to maintain this spirit of flexibility where exceptional circumstances warrant it.

Ms. Rodríguez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am sorry to have to take the floor again, but I did not want my silence to be misinterpreted. Once again, I would like to ask about the way in which the list of speakers will be established. Our position is that the list should be drawn up in accordance with our rules of procedure. Before we take a decision on the programme of work, Sir, my delegation would like to know precisely how you will be establishing the list of speakers.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): As I think we have already noted, we shall follow the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

May I take it that the Committee wishes to approve the proposed draft programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/63/CRP.1?

It was so decided.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like now to draw attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in decision 34/401, especially its provisions dealing with explanations of vote, rights of reply and budgetary and financial questions, which I intend to apply, with the cooperation and assistance of all members of the First Committee.

In order to make full use of the time and facilities allocated to the Committee, I intend, with the full cooperation of members, to begin our meetings promptly at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and to end at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m., respectively.

I would also like to draw attention to agenda item 5 of the agenda of the General Assembly, entitled "Election of the officers of the Main Committees", and also to rule 99 (a) of the Assembly's rules of procedure, as amended by resolution 56/509 of 10 July 2002, which reads as follows:

"All the Main Committees shall, at least three months before the opening of the session, elect a Chairman. Elections of the other officers provided for in rule 103 shall be held at the latest by the end of the first week of the session."

In view of the above, I would like to propose that the First Committee, in accordance with the aforementioned resolution, consider this item some time in May or June 2009, about three months before the opening of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly. I see that, although we have barely begun our work, we are already talking about electing a new Chairperson.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Committee wishes to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): Concerning the submission of draft resolutions, as outlined in the

technical briefing given by the Secretariat yesterday, we are introducing the electronic submission of draft resolutions and draft decisions at this session. Relevant information and pre-formatted draft resolutions are available on the First Committee Quickfirst website. Any questions on this can be directed to the Secretariat.

At this stage, I shall give the floor to the Secretary of the First Committee to inform the Committee of certain procedural matters.

Mr. Sareva (Secretary of the Committee): First, I would like to reaffirm the commitment of the Secretariat to assist delegations in the smooth functioning of the First Committee.

As members may recall, we provided some procedural information at the informal briefing that was held yesterday, and I certainly do not wish to repeat everything here, but rather to highlight some key points and deadlines. As presented at yesterday's briefing, the Secretariat is continuing to support the Quickfirst dedicated website for the First Committee. We encourage delegations to make use of it and hope that it will facilitate participation in the First Committee. Mr. Sergei Cherniavsky, who provided the briefing on Quickfirst yesterday, will continue to be the Secretariat contact for all issues relating to the website.

I would also like to draw attention to the handout that is before delegations, dealing with the new system of electronic submission of draft resolutions and draft decisions.

As the Committee heard in the informal briefing yesterday, we have now introduced the new procedure for e-submission, and I will repeat the main points. First of all, delegations should submit electronic versions of draft resolutions and decisions to the e-mail address that was given to you and which also appears in the handout: 1cdrafts@un.org. The drafts should, if at all possible, be accompanied by a scanned copy of the list of signatures of the main sponsors of the draft. The hard copy of the list with original signatures

should be provided to the secretariat either on the same day or the following business day. The e-mail message accompanying the draft should also indicate whether or not the draft is open for additional sponsors.

Delegations with technical questions regarding the submission of drafts may contact Mr. Cherniavsky for assistance on this matter. The focal point for receiving all draft resolutions and decisions from delegations through this dedicated e-mail account is Ms. Tatyana Shestakova.

The handout before members is intended to be a useful tool. It outlines the steps that delegations should take in the new e-submission process. We have even included boxes for delegations to check as they go.

Once initial drafts and lists of sponsors have been submitted, the secretariat will maintain the hard copy of the sponsors list, which will be available for co-sponsorship in the conference room during meetings and in room S-2977, the First Committee secretariat's Office, between meetings. Or, as an alternative, the sponsoring delegation may keep the master list and submit it at a later date. In order to avoid any errors or misunderstandings, the secretariat would prefer to have only one master list for each draft resolution. All questions regarding sponsors lists should be addressed to Ms. Emer Herity.

Finally, on the list of participants, I would like to kindly remind delegates to submit to the secretariat the list of delegations to the First Committee as soon as possible. The cut-off date for the processing of the delegates list is next Thursday, 9 October, for issuance on 16 October. Any submissions after that cut-off date will be issued, as in past years, in an addendum after the Committee's session.

The Chairperson (*spoke in Spanish*): As has been decided, the Committee will begin work on Monday, 6 October, at 10 a.m., here in Conference Room 4. I look forward to working with all colleagues in the most constructive fashion possible.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.