



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Forty-sixth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

1592nd meetingWednesday, 28 May 1969,
at 11 a.m.

CONTENTS

Agenda item 18:

Work programme of the United Nations in the
economic, social and human rights fields
(concluded) 1

President: Mr. Raymond SCHEYVEN (Belgium).

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Maramis
(Indonesia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

AGENDA ITEM 18

Work programme of the United Nations in the economic,
social and human rights fields (concluded) (E/4612
and Corr.1-6, E/4612 (Annex), E/4612 (Annex)
Add.1, E/4612 (Summary), E/4612/Add.1, E/4612/
Add.2 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.3 and Corr.1, E/4612/
Add.4 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.5 and Corr.1, E/4612/
Add.6-8, E/4642, E/4670 and Corr.1)

1. Mr. CHRISTIANSEN (Norway) said that, since his delegation was not a member of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, it had not been able to express its views on the problems dealt with by the Committee, as several other delegations had done. It was regrettable, however, that members of the Council had not had more time to study all the issues and consult their Governments and other delegations before taking a stand. It would therefore be preferable to limit the discussion to preliminary comments at the present stage and to postpone a more detailed consideration of the whole question to the forty-seventh session of the Council.

2. His delegation had read with interest the account of the general debate (E/4670, para. 32-52) held during the first part of the third session of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, which had centred on the report of the Secretary-General on the work programme of the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields and its budgetary requirements. It was clear that those discussions had been quite lengthy and had been unusually frank. Without wishing to reopen the debate, his delegation would like to state its position on some aspects of the question.

3. The Norwegian Government considered the United Nations family of organizations to be an essential tool for the promotion of international co-operation and understanding in the political, economic, social and human rights fields. Any tool, however, might vary in price and quality, although the price did not necessarily have any bearing on the quality. One also had to consider whether the tool used was the best one for the task; in some cases, a very simple tool was preferable to a more complicated one. The main concern of the Council and all the co-ordinating bodies, including the Committee for Programme and

Co-ordination, should therefore be to identify and scrutinize programmes in order to avoid duplication and establish priorities. It was clear, however, that not everything could be done at once, and even if the United Nations possessed unlimited resources, it would not have the technical and administrative capacity, either at the national or the international level, to achieve a rapid expansion of programmes and activities in a rational and co-ordinated manner and without that proliferation of organs and committees which merely complicated matters. Actually, the problem was not so much one of finances as of organization.

4. With reference to the report of the Secretary-General on the work programme of the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields and its budgetary requirements (E/4612 and Corr.1-6, E/4612 (Annex), E/4612 (Annex)/Add.1, E/4612 (Summary), E/4612/Add.1, E/4612/Add.2 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.3 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.4 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.5 and Corr.1, E/4612/Add.6-8), and in particular the section devoted to overall trends for the period 1958-1959 (E/4612, chap.I, sect. B), it was disturbing to note that during that period the increase in the number of posts allocated to social development questions in general had not kept pace with the increases in other areas and that the same applied to outlays on operational activities for social development. That trend no doubt reflected the decisions taken by Member States concerning priorities as well as the establishment of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 1964 and of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization in 1966, which had brought about significant changes in the relative order of priorities, favouring programmes in trade and industry. His delegation felt that the time had come to consider expanding social development activities, particularly in the context of the Second United Nations Development Decade, so that the United Nations could play its role in that sphere as effectively as possible.

5. Because of the rapid increase in the world population, United Nations population activities, including family planning, had acquired special importance and urgency. The Secretary-General had emphasized in his report that the resources required for assisting Governments engaged in programmes of family planning went far beyond what was presently available for that purpose under the regular budget of the United Nations and from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funds. The Norwegian Government welcomed the agreement reached between the United Nations, UNDP and the specialized agencies concerned regarding their respective areas of responsibility in connexion with projects financed from the population trust funds, and, in view of the importance which it attached to United Nations activities in that field, it had decided to make a contribution of \$200,000 to the United Nations Trust Fund for Population Activi-

ties. His Government nevertheless considered that the Fund was a special case and that in general it would be better not to create special funds for specific purposes, financed by voluntary contributions, but to use the regular budget of the United Nations to the extent possible.

6. The section of the Secretary-General's report, dealing with the development of criteria for the determination of priorities (see E/4612, chap. I, sect. F) clearly demonstrated the complexity of the procedures involved in determining and comparing the marginal return of projects. In that connexion, one had to agree with the Secretary-General that the application of medium and long-term planning to all United Nations activities in the economic and social fields was an essential requirement. The adoption of such a strategy would call for a much more active role by the Secretary-General in planning, reviewing and co-ordinating current and projected activities, as indicated in the Secretary-General's report, but it would also call for more active participation by Governments in the process of determining priorities. Such participation would, however, be facilitated by the fact that the problems and programmes would then be presented in a much broader perspective.

7. In general, his delegation thought that the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had carefully considered the various aspects of the United Nations work programme and taken them into account in formulating its conclusions. Each delegation inevitably attached special importance to certain areas—for example, in paragraph 123 of the Committee's report (E/4670 and Corr.1) the Norwegian delegation would have preferred to see more emphasis on the edible protein project—but that was a point of detail which did not detract from the quality of the work done by the Committee when considering the various sections of the work programme. Since there had not been time to give proper attention to the conclusions reached by the Committee, the Council should revert to them at its forty-seventh session. It was perhaps unfortunate that the Committee had not been able to make more progress in its consideration of the United Nations work programme or to indicate more clearly the priorities of the various sections. However, the Norwegian delegation agreed with the view expressed by the Committee in paragraph 49 of its report, although it was not possible to propose a coherent system of priorities at that time, primary importance should be attached by the United Nations family to the preparation of the strategy for the Second Development Decade. The difficulties which the Committee encountered showed how far the Organization was from solving the problem of co-ordinating its own activities and those of the United Nations family and determining priorities. Those were obstacles encountered by every organization of any size, but, in the case of the United Nations, they were complicated by the fact that in many fields of activity it was difficult to measure input and output in concrete terms; in addition, Governments did not necessarily attach the same importance to the different fields of activity.

8. There was no doubt that the problem of co-ordination would in future demand increasing attention

from the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, and although no one expected that problem to be solved once and for all, there was undeniably a need for stronger co-ordination machinery covering all the activities of the United Nations family of organizations. At its resumed second session, the Enlarged Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had put forward some very interesting ideas on the subject. It should be borne in mind, however, that in the final analysis it was the Governments of the Member States which were responsible for the choice of priorities and for co-ordination; the work programme should therefore be organized in such a way that they could take decisions on the basis of long-term plans rather than on the basis of *ad hoc* solutions.

9. With regard to the expansion of United Nations economic, social and human rights activities, it was his delegation's view that the multiplication of activities without any order could only result in overloading the system and that more meetings, more committees and more documentation did not necessarily produce more development. The problem of organization was more serious than the financial problem. By introducing greater efficiency, the United Nations would enable the Member Governments to obtain a clearer view of its work and of the objectives it was seeking, and consequently to realize that a gradual expansion of the activities of the United Nations was not only desirable and necessary but also one of the best investments which they could make. The Norwegian Government felt that, in view of the responsibilities facing the international community, particularly in relation to the developing countries, a gradual expansion of the activities of the United Nations on the basis of a planned and co-ordinated strategy was both natural and necessary.

10. Mr. CONNOLLY (Ireland) said that his delegation had not had time to digest fully all the documentation which was before the Council concerning the item under discussion, and that it was very difficult for it to assess precisely where the United Nations currently stood with regard to the requirements of an integrated system of long-term planning, programming and budgeting as recommended by the *Ad Hoc* Committee of Experts to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies.^{1/} In any case his delegation continued to have complete confidence in the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and hoped that its work would lead to the adoption by the Council of measures which would enhance the effectiveness of the Organization in the economic and social fields.

11. He welcomed the high standard of the annual reports submitted to the Council by the Secretariat concerning the activities and expenditure of the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields. However, that material alone did not provide a basis for the determination of priorities, and, as the budgetary resources were not unlimited, the United Nations inevitably had to be selective in its allocations to the various areas of activity. The development of a system which would reconcile

^{1/} See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-first Session Annexes*, agenda item 80, Document A/6343.

programme formulation and resource allocations in accordance with a rational set of priorities was in fact one of the outstanding problems facing the Organization. Some progress had been made in that connexion—for example, the Secretary-General had taken steps for streamlining the administrative formalities—and the Irish delegation would urge the Secretariat to strive for the fullest implementation of the recommendations made by the Ad Hoc Committee to Examine the Finances of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies.

12. Concerning the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (E/4670 and Corr.1) his delegation had noted that the Committee felt that it would not be possible for it to elaborate a comprehensive set of priorities until the completion of its review programme, which was likely to take four years. It was understandable that the Committee should feel reluctant to prejudge the final results of its work; nevertheless, in the meantime, the Organization had to define the guidelines for its future activities. In that respect the Second United Nations Development Decade could provide a framework for determining short-term policies and priorities. His delegation therefore fully endorsed the view of the Committee that primary importance should be attached by the United Nations family of organizations to the preparation of the strategy for the Second Development Decade, so that the high hopes for the Decade could be translated without undue delay into courses of practical action. The Council and the other programme-formulating bodies should make a concerted effort to ensure the success of the forthcoming Decade.

13. It was of course impossible to give the United Nations carte blanche to spend at will the limited resources at its disposal. It must accordingly exercise some self-discipline and maintain a sense of proportion in allocating the resources to the various areas of activity. There had perhaps been in the past some degree of haphazard expansion in some areas; that highlighted the need for the development of more sophisticated evaluation technique. Nevertheless, any consideration of budget levels, especially in the context of the economic and social programmes for the Second Development Decade, had to be put in perspective. In reality, while the level of the regular budget, for example, had increased substantially in recent years, it was still at a relatively modest level. In any case, the maximum degree of scrutiny should, of course, always be applied to each area of expenditure, and particularly to areas in which increased expenditures were proposed. His delegation would continue to examine all programmes of activity on their merits and would not, in principle, be opposed to modest increases in budget appropriations.

14. Mr. YUNUS (Pakistan) said he agreed with the view expressed at the preceding meeting by the representative of Yugoslavia that the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had not been very successful in complying with its terms of reference. The question of why that had been so was difficult to answer at the present stage. However, his delegation, which had taken part in the work of the Committee

had been able to identify some of the basic problems which, in its opinion, needed to be clearly defined and solved if the Committee was to achieve the aims for which it had been established.

15. First there was the problem of the relationship between the available resources and the programme of work. There were two opposing points of view in that respect. Some said that resources should be made available according to the programme requirements while others maintained that, on the contrary, programme requirements must be determined in relation to the level of resources available. It did not seem possible for the Committee to achieve a reconciliation of those two viewpoints. On the contrary, the experience of the recent session seemed to show that the problem was becoming more acute.

16. The question of priorities was the source of the second problem. The Committee had always regarded the establishment of a system of priorities as the main basis of its work. Although it had discussed the question exhaustively, it had not yet succeeded in adopting a formula on which all parties were agreed. The controversy related particularly to the following questions: what should the Committee take as a basis for changing the priorities previously assigned to a programme by a legislative organ, and should it duplicate the substantive consideration of the issues which had already been discussed in the legislative body before the establishment of priorities?

17. A third problem remaining to be solved concerned the evaluation of the various programmes and, in particular, the stage at which evaluation should take place—before the formulation of the programme, during its execution or after its completion?

18. While it was fully aware of the difficulties mentioned by the representative of Yugoslavia, his delegation did not take a pessimistic view. However, the time had come to review the functions of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination in the light of experience, so that henceforth, in accordance with the expressed wish of all the delegations, it might carry out its task completely and effectively, ensuring the fullest and most rational utilization of the resources available to the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields. He hoped that the consideration of that question by the Council at its forty-seventh session would provide a basis on which the Committee would be able to move further towards its ultimate goal.

19. The PRESIDENT proposed that the Council should adopt the following draft resolution:

"The Economic and Social Council,

"Having had a preliminary discussion on the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on the first part of its third session (E/4670 and Corr.1),

"1. Transmits the report to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in order to assist it in its current review of the Secretary-General's budget estimates;

"2. Decides to consider this report further at its forty-seventh session.

20. Mr. DIALLO (Upper Volta) said that while he realized that the calendar of meetings of the Council and of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions did not allow the Council to consider the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination more fully, he would like to request that his delegation's reservations concerning operative paragraph 1 of the draft resolution should be entered in the meeting record. The ultimate decisions of the Advisory Committee on Administrative

and Budgetary Questions should not prejudice any conclusions which the Council might reach at its forty-seventh session.

21. The PRESIDENT said that, in the absence of any objection, he took it that the Council agreed to adopt the draft resolution.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.