



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 20th MEETING

Chairman: Ms. ERIKSSON (Sweden)

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AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/40/3, 19, 108, 109, 173, 190, 276, 303, 321, 329, 340, 342, 347, 353 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and Corr.1, 363, 366, 367, 374, 381, 384, 392, 407, 409, 420 and Corr.1, 458, 476, 477, 489, 525, 534, 633 and Add.1, 735; A/C.2/40/L.2-L.6)

1. Mrs. SCHOO (Netherlands) said that, 40 years after the founding of the United Nations, the world still faced serious economic problems. Although some countries had achieved quite satisfactory economic results, the current economic situation was characterized by a number of diverse factors which adversely affected most developing countries and called for a variety of actions. The question arose as to what role the United Nations could or should play in the development process of the developing countries. Discussions on a new international economic order and a new round of global negotiations had demonstrated that economic processes were too diverse to allow for a single, all-encompassing approach. The Organization should not try to devise grandiose schemes but rather look for pragmatic ways of dealing with the economic problems of the developing countries.

2. Better use must be made of the Organization's potential, and she endorsed the call by other speakers for improvements in the working methods of the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee. It was generally recognized that the adoption of a text on a problem did not necessarily bring a solution any closer. Resolutions should be adopted only if new elements had appeared, and those which had financial implications should reflect a genuine consensus. Moreover, the Council and the Committee should concentrate their discussions on only a few items and should increasingly be used to analyse, in a frank and non-political way, recent developments in the world economy and their bearing on the position of the developing countries.

3. The challenge posed by the economic crisis in Africa might well be dealt with in the pragmatic manner she had described. Debt was one of the major problems facing African countries, with its rate of expansion higher than in other developing countries, including those in Latin America. A short-term approach to solving the debt problem could not be successful, since debt in Africa was part of a structural development problem requiring structural solutions. Since the debt situation was different in every sub-Saharan country, it must be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. The joint programme of action and the special African facility of the World Bank could form the focal points of such an approach, but additional concessional flows were needed. It was to be hoped that the agreements reached at the meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank at Seoul to provide \$2.7 billion in IMF funds to the poorest African nations and to start a new round of talks on funding for the International Development Association would help to ease those countries' most pressing financial problems.

4. Although the food situation in Africa had improved somewhat, it still required serious attention. In the years to come, ways should be found to stimulate local food production with special emphasis placed on the role of women in that process. The United Nations had done a good job in co-ordinating emergency aid, and could be even more helpful by assisting African countries in establishing market policies aimed at developing the agricultural sector.

(Mrs. Schoo, Netherlands)

5. The Organization also had an important role to play in helping Governments formulate population policies and in providing assistance in the population field, in particular through the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Since the Fund was the main financial instrument for implementing the recommendations made by the International Conference on Population, 1984, and its policy and programmes were fully consistent with the principles and objectives set forth in the World Population Plan of Action, she had recently submitted to the Netherlands Parliament a budget proposal to increase her country's 1986 contribution to the Fund by more than 10 per cent. It was to be hoped that other donor countries would continue and even increase their support to the Fund to help it overcome the financial difficulties it now faced.

6. The commitments made by the international community, at the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, to improve the lot of rural women called for a multi-sectoral, system-wide and co-ordinated approach. If rural women's economic activities were to be successful, women must have access to investment, finance and credit facilities, land, know-how and other productive resources.

7. All aspects of the African problem could be brought together by adopting an integrated approach to development at the country level and by holding a general conference on Africa. Co-ordination was essential: multilateral and bilateral donors should, with the assistance of UNDP or the World Bank, harmonize their efforts under the overall guidance of recipient countries and, in so doing, should recognize that they might have to relinquish their own projects for the sake of an integrated and balanced development effort. Experience gained in the recent past, in particular through the activities of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa, was highly relevant now that efforts to address the economic situation in Africa needed to be focused on reconstruction and long-term structural development. A conference on Africa should deal with such sectors as commodities, debt, food and financial flows. Long-term development strategies, which could be established for each country, would pave the way for a smooth transition from the emergency assistance stage through rehabilitation and reconstruction to the ultimate aim of sustained economic development. A special session of the General Assembly on the critical economic situation in Africa could play an important role in that development process.

8. Ms. FANG Ping (China) said that, in spite of the numerous efforts made to solve the world food problem, the international community was still a long way from accomplishing the goals set by the 1984 World Food Conference held in Rome. Many African countries were facing food shortages and hundreds of thousands of people were on the verge of starvation. Although the international community had reacted to the emergency situation in a timely fashion, ways and means must be found to attack the root cause of the food shortage problem. The efforts of the developing countries themselves were important but must be supported by the international community. It was even more important to create an international environment conducive to the development of food and agricultural production. Her delegation therefore fully endorsed the draft resolution on food and agricultural problems (A/C.2/40/L.4).

(Ms. Fang Ping, China)

9. Desertification and drought also called for urgent solutions. Although the question of desertification had received wide attention since the adoption of the Plan of Action to Combat Desertification by the General Assembly, desertification was spreading in many areas in Africa. The United Nations Environment Programme and other competent agencies and bodies of the United Nations system should continue to assist the affected countries and seek effective measures to combat those scourges.

10. With regard to the closely related problem of water, even though many countries had formulated national programmes to achieve the goals of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, supplies of drinking water and sanitary services in the developing countries were insufficient. The report of the Secretary-General on progress in the attainment of the goals of the Decade contained a number of good recommendations which should be adopted. Her delegation was in favour of the draft resolution on the Decade (A/C.2/40/L.5) and hoped that the international community would support relevant national plans and programmes, with emphasis on the needs of the Sub-Saharan African and the least developed countries, and implement the Mar del Plata Action Plan.

11. In view of Africa's economic development problems, both the Transport and Communications Decade in Africa and the Industrial Development Decade for Africa were of far-reaching significance, even though progress in attaining the goals of the two Decades had been held back by such reasons as insufficient funds. Her delegation called on the international community, particularly the developed countries and the organizations concerned, to provide financial, technical and other forms of assistance to those programmes.

12. With regard to the situation of the Palestinian people, Israel had appropriated natural resources and confiscated property in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. The international community must not allow such violations of the rules of international law and disregard for United Nations resolutions to continue unchecked. The Chinese Government and people had consistently given moral and material support to the Palestinian people in their struggle for their legitimate national rights, including the right to return to their homeland, and appealed to the international community to do likewise.

13. Pursuant to General Assembly decision 39/443, the special session of the Commission on Transnational Corporations had been reconvened in June 1985. Although work on the international code of conduct had still not been completed, differences on certain issues had been narrowed. Countries concerned should refrain from insisting on rigid conditions unacceptable to the developing countries, so that work on the code might be completed as soon as possible. The public hearings recently conducted by the Centre on Transnational Corporations on their activities in South Africa and Namibia had clearly exposed the true relationship of collusion existing between the corporations and South African racism. Her delegation appealed to the Governments and transnational corporations of the developed countries which were still working closely with the South African régime to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, to sever their ties with the South African racist régime and to stop their investments in South Africa and Namibia.

(Ms. Fang Ping, China)

14. She welcomed the efforts that had been made in the past two years to revitalize the work of the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee, but they were not sufficient. Governments, in particular those of the developed countries, must demonstrate the necessary political will to establish a favourable atmosphere in the organization conducive to serious negotiations on international economic problems.

15. Mr. DOLJINTSEREN (Mongolia) said that the Economic and Social Council should focus its attention on alleviating the critical economic and social situation in many developing countries, restructuring the unjust economic relations on an equal and democratic basis and improvins the international political climate. The Council's first regular session of 1985 had been devoted to one of the principle international events of the year - the fortieth anniversary of the victory over the forces of fascism and militarism in the Second World War. The world community had been reminded, once again, that the removal of the threat of war was the most important condition for solving the socio-economic problems of many countries. At its second regular session of 1985, the Council had rightly turned its attention to such urgent issues as money, finance, debt and trade, as well as food problems. Mongolia fully shared the concern of many delegations, that the arms race was diverting large amounts of resources from use for development purposes, and it supported the developing countries' call for an international conference on monetary and financial problems. The Council's detailed consideration of the critical economic situation in Africa and its resolution 1985/80 on that subject had been among the positive results of its second regular session of 1985.

16. Diverse factors, such as high interest rates and the artificial increase in the rate of the dollar, had had a negative effect on the economic security of many countries, in particular the developing countries. The current debt problems of the newly independent States were hampering their efforts to eliminate economic backwardness and hence threatened their economic security. Moreover, many countries were being subjected to economic aggression, boycotts, embargoes and other coercive measures which undermined their economic stability. Such illegal actions were often used as a means of interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. The General Assembly's adoption of the draft resolution entitled "International economic security: a major condition for accelerating the economic decolonization of developing countries", which had been transmitted to it by the Economic and Social Council (A/C.2/40/L.2), would focus the international community's attention on urgent problems of the world economy and would help to mobilize efforts to promote development. The Council had also transmitted to the Assembly another important draft resolution, entitled "Conducting constructive and action-oriented international economic negotiations". The Assembly's adoption of that resolution would be of particular importance at a time when some Western States were refusing to engage in constructive dialogue on the establishment of a just economic order.

17. Support for national-liberation movements was an important activity of the Economic and Social Council. In particular, his delegation commended Council resolutions 1985/52 and 1985/59, as well as its resolutions on assistance to the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples, and expressed its solidarity with the struggle of Arab peoples whose natural resources were being exploited by Israel.

(Mr. Doljintseren, Mongolia)

18. In spite of its many positive achievements, the Council had not been able to adopt a draft resolution on food and agricultural problems. Mongolia appealed to the Western Powers to take a constructive approach and not hinder the General Assembly from adopting that draft resolution which was contained in document A/C.2/40/L.4.

19. An important way of limiting the ruinous activities of foreign monopolies in the developing countries was the regulation of their activities, in particular by the early completion of a code of conduct on transnational corporations. His delegation urged certain Western States to abandon their obstructionist position and to facilitate the successful completion of the code. The Public Hearings on the Activities of Transnational Corporations in South Africa and Namibia had revealed the pernicious effects of transnational corporations co-operating with South Africa, and the United Nations should continue to hold such hearings.

20. As a member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Mongolia took an active part in its activities. On the initiative of Mongolia and other socialist countries, the Commission had recently adopted a number of resolutions regarding the strengthening of the State and co-operative sectors and on the social aspect of development. His delegation would continue to support the efforts of the Commission to eliminate the economic backwardness of the developing countries, accelerate their socio-economic progress and develop equitable co-operation among all countries of the region.

21. Mr. ONOBU (Nigeria) said that the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1985 had reached a consensus that there was an urgent need for the international community to assist and supplement the ongoing efforts and activities of African countries to address the long-term problems of economic growth and development. Underlying that consensus was the realization that Africa was not in a position to finance its own development. The Council had also given special consideration to the interlinked issues of money, finance, debt and trade. Although no consensus had been reached on policy measures and steps to deal with existing problems of multilateral economic co-operation and development in those areas, his delegation believed that the Council had reached a new and higher level of understanding of the impact of those issues. The international community should continue to encourage that positive attitude which had been expressed by many delegations.

22. The Council had transmitted a number of resolutions to the General Assembly for consideration, including a resolution on food and agricultural problems. No serious elements of controversy remained in that extensively negotiated draft, and the Second Committee should adopt it without further delay. Similarly, the Committee should adopt by consensus the draft decision on long-term trends in economic development (A/C.2/40/L.10).

23. The report of the Secretary-General on the critical situation of food and agriculture in Africa 1984-1985 (A/40/329) placed too much emphasis on the causes of the long-term decline of that important sector and appeared to censure the

(Mr. Onobu, Nigeria)

African countries agricultural, pricing and population policies, while the adverse impact of the global economic environment on those countries had been mentioned only in passing. A report of that kind should contain proposals not only on the recovery and rehabilitation phase but also on the long-term development of the food and agricultural sector.

24. According to the report on the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (A/40/633), the Decade had fallen far short of its goals. The importance of a well-developed system of transport and communications to the overall development of Africa and the alleviation of its critical economic and social conditions could not be over-emphasized. Nigeria therefore urged the donor community to support the full implementation of the programmes included in the Decade.

25. With regard to the recent public hearings on the activities of transnational corporations in South Africa and Namibia, his delegation believed that the Chairman of the Panel of Eminent Persons should present the Panel's report to the Committee as soon as possible. The report should also be circulated among Member States during the current session of the General Assembly in order to enable Governments to give it their full consideration before it was taken up by the Commission on Transnational Corporations at its twelfth session.

26. Mr. MUTALIK (Director, WHO Liaison Office) said that overcrowding, shortage of food and water and poor sanitary conditions in parts of Africa had led to severe malnutrition, anaemia, diarrhoeal diseases and epidemics, thus compounding an already serious health situation. Furthermore, there was an inadequate health infrastructure, a scarcity of trained health personnel and a shortage of essential drugs.

27. In providing emergency health aid to over 20 crisis-stricken countries in Africa, WHO had never lost sight of the need to find long-term solutions to Africa's health problems. The organization's programmes were always incorporated into national and regional health strategies that had been devised by the countries themselves. In accordance with its policy of attaining health for all by the year 2000, WHO sought to assist countries, particularly those in greatest need, to develop a health system based on a sound infrastructure, and the primary-health-care approach. As a result of the considerable health problems created by the prolonged drought in the Sahel and the large number of displaced persons and refugees, the 1984 World Health Assembly requested the Director-General to work with the relevant agencies of the United Nations system, donor countries and governmental and non-governmental organizations in improving international support for the countries stricken by drought and famine. In April 1985, WHO had joined the Emergency Task Force of the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa in emergency relief work.

28. At the country level, WHO representatives were working closely with other agency representatives, particularly those of UNICEF, and special representatives had been sent to Ethiopia and the Sudan. At WHO headquarters, the Director-General

(Mr. Mutalik)

had established a group to facilitate co-ordinated support for emergency relief, including the mobilization of resources. A plan of action for emergency relief operations had been discussed by 40 countries in Lusaka in September 1985. The plan of action also included measures to improve the disaster-preparedness capability of all the affected countries. It made provision for a trained staff member in each of the three subregional centres in Africa who could act as the focal point in emergency health situations, train national and WHO personnel in disaster management and ensure the availability of supplies and technical material.

29. The financial crisis in the African countries had led to sharp budgetary cuts in the social sector. WHO was studying the impact of those cuts and it was also completing a study of the health consequences of adjustment policies. The World Health Assembly held in May 1985 had appealed to the international community to carry out its relief work in a co-ordinated manner, taking fully into account the long-term development perspective. The Assembly had also urged the Director-General and the Regional Directors concerned to co-operate with the Governments of the affected African member States and to respond to the health consequences of the crisis in such a way that their activities were an integral part of regional and global strategies.

30. Mr. AL-SALLAL (Kuwait) expressed appreciation for the statements by the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Director-General of FAO and said that further efforts must be made by the international community to alleviate the suffering of the African people.

31. On the question of permanent sovereignty over national resources in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, he noted that the report in document A/40/381 singled out various acts of brutality by the Zionist régime as contrary to basic human rights and an infringement of international law. He commended the accurate and objective account of Israel's legal and economic practices given by the Egyptian representative and the PLO representative's clear picture of Israel's attempts to create an unbearable economic situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in order to drive out the local population so that the land could be settled by Israelis. According to the Secretary-General's report (A/40/381), at the time of the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights virtually all the Syrian population and 16,000 Palestinians had been forced to leave. Since then, Israel had established 30 settlements in the area. Moreover, whereas in 1947 less than 10 per cent of the land of Mandatory Palestine had been in Jewish hands, in 1983 the amount had increased to 85 per cent. The Israeli authorities had tried to prevent the Palestinians from enjoying their right to the land and the Arab farmers from using their land by imposing restrictions on water use and the digging of wells. The Jewish settlers, on the other hand, were allowed to use water freely and were granted permission to dig wells. Those were a few examples of the Israeli practices covered in the Secretary-General's report which, in his delegation's view, posed a threat to international peace and security.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.