



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 38: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL
FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE GROUP OF HIGH-LEVEL
INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND
FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 38: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE GROUP OF HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/41/49, 663 and 763; A/C.5/41/25)

1. Mr. HADWEN (Canada) asked whether unofficial reports on the same subject-matter as the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, such as the report of the Afro-Asian Consultative Committee, had been taken into account by the Secretariat as background material.
2. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that there was a plethora of reports and suggestions on the subject of the situation of the United Nations; however, if they were not official documents, they could not be taken into account officially, and the Secretariat could be guided only by the report of the Group of Experts and the Fifth Committee's comments.

The meeting was suspended at 3.15 p.m. and resumed at 3.20 p.m.

3. Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway), Chairman of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations, said that the Group had made it clear that with the submission of its report (A/41/49), the Group had completed its work. The views of the members of the Group on various issues were set forth in the report.
4. At the outset the Group had decided that its meetings were to be closed and that there would be no records, so as to encourage a direct exchange of views. He had no mandate or authority to speak on behalf of the Group, or to refer to the informal discussions which had taken place behind closed doors.
5. He recalled that the Group had been established in February 1986 on the basis of a unanimous decision taken by the General Assembly at its fortieth session, following lengthy consultations on the nature, mandate and composition of the Group in which all the regional groups had been involved. The decision to establish the Group had been an example of consensus-building in the United Nations at its best and had truly reflected the collective political will of the General Assembly. It had been strongly emphasized that the Group should be intergovernmental in nature, so as to ensure that its work and recommendations reflected the views of the Member States; the Group represented all five regions, and also the countries holding the current and forthcoming chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement and the chairmanship of the Group of 77, the five permanent members of the Security Council, and most of the major contributors to the United Nations budget. It had also been strongly emphasized that the Group should be made up of experts; its members had included political leaders, former cabinet ministers, senior officials and permanent representatives, representing an impressive body of knowledge of all aspects of the United Nations.

(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

6. The Group had been given a limited amount of time to perform its task and had been required to submit its report to the General Assembly at its current session; yet it had not worked in haste since the members were all fully aware of the importance of their task and had acted with the highest sense of responsibility. The recommendations were the result of very long and thorough deliberations, and the Group had had before it a large volume of documentation, which had been closely studied. The report was a consensus report, except for two recommendations in chapter VI. It was a well-balanced document consisting of a number of equally important and interrelated elements.

7. The Group's objective was to make a realistic attempt to find solutions to the problems of the Organization so that it could function in accordance with the Charter, as a truly effective forum for global co-operation. In the current grave financial situation, that goal was of paramount importance for the future viability of the United Nations.

8. The Group had realized that it could not carry out an in-depth study or make specific recommendations on all aspects of the subject; thus in some areas, problems had merely been highlighted, and it had been suggested that more comprehensive study was needed, while in others, specific recommendations had been made.

9. Several representatives had said that the report departed from the established priority goals of the Organization, particularly in recommendation 19, concerning Namibia. Nothing could be further from the truth; it was stated explicitly in the report that the aim of the recommendations on the Secretariat structure for Namibia was to enhance the Organization's capacity to deal with that important matter without in any way limiting the programmes and services in that area. The situation in which issues relating to Namibia were dealt with by several departments and units of the Secretariat was not the optimal way of dealing with the issue.

10. The fears expressed by several representatives that some of the recommendations on personnel might be discriminatory were completely unfounded. The Group had stressed that the Secretary-General, in selecting and managing the staff, should be guided by Articles 100 and 101 of the Charter, and that in any question regarding personnel policy, the responsibility and prerogatives of the Secretary-General as chief administrative officer of the United Nations must be acknowledged and his authority under the Charter must in no way be prejudiced. The Group had endeavoured to rectify some of the existing imbalances, as should be clear from recommendations 46, 47 and 51.

11. Many comments had seemed to question the judgement of members of the Group. He had already noted that the Group was truly representative, and expert, in nature, and had been able to reach consensus on nearly all the recommendations.

(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

12. Some delegations had asked what was meant by ensuring the highest level of membership on the Committee on Conferences (recommendation 1). That expression was frequently used in the United Nations and implied that the current level of representation was inadequate and that Member States should ensure that they were represented by senior officials with considerable knowledge and experience of the United Nations. No particular level was suggested, since it was a matter for each Member State to decide.

13. Several delegations had asked how it would be possible to effect a significant reduction in the number of conferences and meetings without affecting the substantive work of the Organization (recommendation 2). It had been quite clear to the members of the Group, who had considerable experience of all parts of the system, including the Secretariat, that the number of meetings could be significantly reduced. They believed that it was not necessary for various intergovernmental bodies to meet as often as they did, or for different bodies to take up the same subjects. Many conferences and meetings did not utilize the time allocated to them. At the request of the Group, the Secretariat had provided information showing that in some bodies 60 to 70 per cent of the time allotted remained unused; the funds wasted would be much better used for other purposes. Such bodies, and the time unused, included the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean (65 per cent), the Special Committee on Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Principle of Non-Use of Force in International Relations (50 per cent), the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference (70 per cent), the Commission on the Status of Women (44 per cent), the Industrial Development Board (54 per cent) and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (56 per cent). The Group had included specific provisions in recommendation 2, intended to ensure that useful activities and bodies were not adversely affected.

14. It would be for the General Assembly to decide how to implement recommendation 3 (f). The Group felt that it was important to draw the General Assembly's attention to the problem, as had been done before, since too many resolutions were being proposed and adopted by the General Assembly each year. When the General Assembly could not agree on a certain line of action, it was an easy way out to ask the Secretariat to study the matter, seek views and report back. Such studies involved considerable effort and expenditure which should be spent on other activities to benefit Member States.

15. Decisions on construction (recommendation 5) were not for the Secretary-General to take, but for the General Assembly. In a situation where limited funds were available, the General Assembly would have to decide on priorities, and construction work should not be one of them.

16. It had been asked what body would undertake the study proposed in recommendation 8 and whether the least developed countries would be properly represented; it was for the General Assembly to decide whether to entrust the task to an existing body or establish a new body and then decide on its size and composition; the Group had completed its work and therefore would not be available to undertake the study.

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(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

17. A number of delegations had asked what scientific or other basis had been used in suggesting a reduction of 15 per cent in the number of regular budget posts (recommendation 15). The recommendation was based on information provided to the Group about the number of staff members and posts, tasks, and the necessity of the work performed; the Group had also discussed the matter with the Secretary-General. The Group was fully aware of the need to avoid any adverse effects on the efficiency of the Organization's activities and had therefore recommended that the Secretary-General should submit to the General Assembly a plan for the implementation of the proposal, taking into account that requirement.

18. The review suggested in recommendation 16 should clearly be carried out by the Secretary-General, since all matters pertaining to the Secretariat were his responsibility under the Charter. The same applied to the reviews suggested in recommendations 25 and 37.

19. The suggestion made in recommendation 22 was definitely not aimed at weakening the obligation of Member States to contribute to special economic assistance programmes, which in any case were largely funded from voluntary contributions. The activities carried out under such programmes were very similar to those undertaken by UNDP, and UNDP had the knowledge and infrastructure to deal with such assistance. The process suggested had already been started, and a decision on the subject had been taken by the Economic and Social Council at its summer session in 1986. The Group wished to ensure that the resources of the United Nations were used as effectively as possible, without affecting the programmes or reducing their effectiveness.

20. Recommendation 24 referred to the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator (UNDRO) because that office was affiliated with the United Nations and its posts were funded from the regular budget. The Group wished to ensure the best possible use of funds, and had merely requested UNDP to consider the feasibility of taking over the functions of UNDRO.

21. The review suggested in recommendation 25 would be undertaken by the Secretary-General; the purpose was to make the best possible use of available resources and avoid duplication. The Group had suggested that the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade should be invited to participate in the review because it dealt with the same and related questions as the other bodies referred to.

22. Regarding recommendation 29, it had been asked why the functions of the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters could not be merged with the Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Political and General Assembly Affairs. That possibility had been considered at length, but the Group had finally decided on recommendation 29.

23. There was no scientific basis for the suggested 20 per cent reduction in official travel (recommendation 38); clearly, however, there were too many missions, involving too many staff members, especially from the Department of

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(Mr. Vraalsen, Norway)

Public Information. The Group felt that the reduction could be made without prejudice to the quality of the services of public information coverage.

24. Commenting on chapter IV of the report, he said, with regard to recommendation 41, that the Secretary-General would retain ultimate responsibility for all staff matters. There was no doubt that political pressure had influenced the selection of staff. In recommendation 45, the Group of Experts had concluded, taking account of the rights of staff members, that a period of three years was sufficient to determine suitability for a permanent appointment. In pursuance of recommendation 46, the Secretary-General could give preference to female candidates in recruitment.

25. Recruitment on a post-by-post basis, mentioned in recommendation 48, limited flexibility. Employment on the basis of occupational groups would make it easier to transfer staff members in response to changing needs, ensuring optimum use of their qualifications and experience.

26. In formulating recommendation 61, the Group of Experts had considered the question of total entitlements, and had concluded that total remuneration had reached a level which gave rise to concern. In particular, consideration should be given to the elimination of the education grant for post-secondary studies and the establishment of a four-week annual leave system. Should the recommendation be adopted by the General Assembly, the question should be thoroughly reviewed by ICSC before a final decision was taken.

27. Turning to chapter V, he said that the Group had concluded that the Joint Inspection Unit should place more emphasis on evaluation, and that it should be renamed accordingly. Although the Group of Experts could not guarantee that adoption of the recommendations in chapter V would mean that Member States would pay increased attention to JIU reports, it would be a step in the right direction.

28. With regard to chapter VI, the development of procedures to facilitate agreement on budgetary matters was of the greatest significance to the future of the Organization. While differences existed over how current deficiencies could be corrected, the chapter offered a firm basis for agreement, and it was his hope that a consensus would emerge at the current session.

29. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee noted the observation by the Group, in paragraphs 11 and 13 of its report, to the effect that it had not had sufficient time to conduct a comprehensive study of some of the complex problems put before it and that, accordingly, examination in greater depth of some questions was required.

30. Mr. WIJEWARDANE (Sri Lanka) said that, as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean and of the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference, he wished to assure the Fifth Committee that both bodies had made productive use of their time, notwithstanding the remarks of the Chairman of the Group of Experts. It was strange that the Group had criticized the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, since the sensitive nature of the task entrusted to it necessitated

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(Mr. Wijewardane, Sri Lanka)

extensive use of informal consultations. The Group should have consulted the Secretary-General, who was aware of the situation. In any event the Ad Hoc Committee had established a working group to consider its use of conference-servicing resources. With regard to the Ad Hoc Committee on the World Disarmament Conference, certain States had chosen not to attend, which no doubt explained the so-called waste of resources.

31. Mr. ETUKET (Uganda) said that all the Group's recommendations appeared to concern expenditure. It would be of interest to know why the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts had apparently failed to take account of the income aspect. With regard to staff entitlements, it appeared that the Group had not consulted the International Civil Service Commission before formulating recommendation 61. If that was indeed the case, his delegation would welcome an explanation.

32. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said that the Organization was currently the target of attacks on all fronts, a factor which the Group of Experts should take into account in formulating its conclusions, if it was not to expose the United Nations to unjust criticism. In that connection, he wished to know on what the Group had based its assertion that higher-level staff were not qualified. The Group had also stated its intention not to discriminate against elements of the staff by recommending measures that would affect particular categories. However, the recommendation concerning the education grant did precisely that, so that the staff members concerned might feel that they were the victims of discrimination and their morale and efficiency might suffer. His delegation failed to understand how the Group could have overlooked the fact that such proposals would impair the effectiveness of the Organization.

33. The Group had been mandated to consider the relationship between the structure of the Organization and its resources, on the one hand, and its effectiveness, on the other. Yet that link had not emerged clearly from the Group's recommendations. In particular, the basis on which reductions in the staff had been proposed was not apparent. The representative of the Secretary-General had stated that the proposed staff reductions would adversely affect programme delivery and the geographical distribution of posts, in view of which he wished to know whether the Chairman of the Group still maintained the contrary.

34. With respect to the utilization of conference-servicing resources, time spent on informal consultations was time lost, in the view of the Committee on Conferences. However, the Fifth Committee, from its own experience, was aware of the value of informal consultations in making its formal meetings more effective. Statistics were just that, and care should be taken in drawing conclusions from them.

35. His delegation did not regard the recommendation to the General Assembly to cut down on the number of resolutions as well founded, and welcomed the fact that the Group had said that it was for the Assembly to decide on the matter.

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, Cameroon)

36. He was glad to hear the admission that the figure of 15 per cent recommended for the desirable cut in staff had not been arrived at in a scientific manner. Since the Group had consulted with the Secretary-General, did that mean that the figure had been suggested by the Secretary-General?

37. He asked why the Group of Experts had not tackled the question of arrears and withholding of contributions and whether its failure to deal with the scale of assessments was a conscious decision or the result of an overly narrow interpretation of its mandate.

38. With respect to chapter VI of the report, he believed that two things were necessary: existing resolutions on planning and budgeting should be implemented and the Secretary-General should be asked to continue to report on the programme and financial implications of his budget to the Fifth Committee through the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Advisory Committee.

39. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that he had communicated to the Chairman of the Group of Experts questions raised during informal consultations as to whether the issues of scale of assessments, withholding of and arrears in payment of contributions on the part of Member States had been considered and, if they had been, why they had not been mentioned in the report. He had also asked whether the Group perceived a link between those issues and deficiencies in the administrative and financial functioning of the Organization.

40. Mr. MUDHO (Kenya), commenting on recommendation 1, needed, above all, in the Committee on Conferences was a high level of expertise. Such expertise could be gained only by serving on the Committee.

41. With respect to recommendation 5, it had always been his understanding that decisions regarding construction projects were the responsibility of the General Assembly rather than of the Secretary-General. He asked whether the Group of Experts believed that among the many activities undertaken by the United Nations, construction of conference facilities should be deemed to have the lowest priority.

42. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) asked whether he was correct in assuming that the Group's failure to address the subject of the scale of assessments reflected its belief that there was no need for change in that respect at the present time. If not, was it a result of other considerations?

43. He had been struck by the diversity of the matters covered by the report and by the fact that all the recommendations appeared to have been put on an equal footing. The result was that the General Assembly's attention had not been directed to the central issues. He fully agreed with the statement in the note by the Secretary-General (A/41/663) that the report of the Group of Experts provided a crucial basis for a process of change that could bring about improvements in the administrative and financial functioning of the Organization. How the recommendations should be implemented was a matter for the Fifth Committee and the Secretary-General to decide.

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44. Mr. ODUYEMI (Nigeria) said that it would be interesting to know how the breakdown given in paragraph 6 regarding activities financed through assessed contributions under the regular budget had been arrived at.

45. Concerning the consultation procedure, he asked how many programme managers and subsidiary bodies had been consulted and how the Group of Experts had linked the mandates and programmes of work of the various departments with their capacity to carry out their work programme. It was his impression that the conclusion that there were too many units handling economic and social matters for example had been arrived at somewhat arbitrarily. The Chairman of the Group had stated that the Group had consulted extensively with the Secretary-General prior to arriving at the conclusions reflected in recommendations 15 and 61. Yet it was becoming apparent that the Secretariat itself was somewhat wary about some of the recommendations. The two facts were hard to reconcile. There also appeared to be a problem of prejudgement on the part of the Group in respect of recommendation 25, in which it was suggested in the same breath that the functions of the Office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation should be reviewed and also that the Director-General's authority should be enhanced. He would welcome an explanation.

46. He asked whether it was the view of the Group of Experts that in times of financial constraint construction was not a priority. In any event, he did not believe that the Group's recommendations were intended to be applied retroactively to construction projects, such as those for ESCAP and ECA, which had already been approved by the General Assembly.

47. Finally, he asked whether the Group had consulted with the programme managers concerned before reaching the conclusions reflected in recommendations 60, 63, 65, 67 and 68 and what input the Group had received from such officials as the Controller, the Director of the Budget Division and the regional commissions. In the light of the Secretariat's responses he asked the Chairman of the Group of Experts whether he still deemed the assertions made in those recommendations to be valid.

48. Mr. HADWEN (Canada) asked whether he was correct in assuming that the recommendations were intended to point the Organization in a certain direction but not to be regarded as complete in themselves. His Government generally supported the thrust of the recommendations. It was true that there were some issues which the report did not address. One delegation had suggested that that might have been because those issues did not require change. There might, however, be other reasons too. Perhaps the Group had felt that the issues required further study or that they were already on the agenda of the General Assembly and that a decision on them was imminent.

49. Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen) said that the recommendation concerning enforcement of the principle that United Nations bodies should meet at their respective established headquarters would appear to be unfair in view of the fact that several regional commissions had been requested to organize regional seminars and conferences. He would appreciate comments on the matter.

50. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that his delegation had already stressed its acceptance of the report produced by consensus by the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts during the discussion in the plenary Assembly. He believed that the report could help in achieving the two purposes of ending the United Nations long standing financial crisis and of genuinely improving the Organization's administrative and financial functioning. His delegation's questions in the Fifth Committee, therefore, were designed simply to clarify the recommendations so that the General Assembly could take a fully informed decision.

51. Recommendations 1 and 2 concerned conferences. The remarks of the representative of Sri Lanka had already illustrated the complexity of that subject. Obviously, the best use was not being made of the existing resources and it was necessary to reflect further on the best means of dealing with the matter.

52. Regarding recommendation 5, he said that he had already asked the Secretariat whether the method suggested, whereby construction projects would only be envisaged when the money was available, was in conformity with existing planning and budgetary procedures. The Secretariat's answer had been that it was not. He asked the Chairman of the Group, therefore, to explain the proposed method further.

53. The Chairman of the Group had already indicated the difficulties experienced in connection with recommendation 15 and explained that there had been no precise scientific basis for the percentage reductions proposed. He would like to know, therefore, what basis had been used and how the Group proposed to avoid adverse effects on programme implementation.

54. His delegation had some difficulty in envisaging the combination of relief functions and long-term development activities proposed in recommendations 22 and 24. He asked the Chairman of the Group to indicate how those functions could be combined in a single organ. Recommendation 32 should perhaps be regarded as premature as the Group had not been able to reach agreement on chapter VI.

55. It had been suggested that recommendation 52 should be referred to the International Civil Service Commission. He asked whether it was intended to apply to Under-Secretaries-General and Assistant Secretaries-General. His delegation found it difficult to understand why the Joint Inspection Unit's statute needed to be amended in order to emphasize something which was already included in it, as was proposed in recommendation 63. In chapter VI, his views were exactly those expressed earlier in the meeting by the representative of Cameroon.

56. It was his understanding that the scale of assessments and the practice of withholding contributions had been discussed in the Group. He asked whether the Chairman of the Group had been aware of all the implications of that practice and the problems which it caused for the normal functioning of the Organization. Although the implications were particularly grave at the present moment, withholding was a long-standing problem. It was necessary to look at all the constraints under which the Organization was labouring and to stress all their implications for the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations.

57. Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway), Chairman of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, said that he was intensely aware of the consequences of withholding and the late payment of contributions for the financial solvency of the Organization and had made the most strenuous efforts to improve the situation. He could not accept the criticism implied in the question which had been asked.

58. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that the sole intent of his questions was to stress the difficulties facing the Organization. He entirely accepted the assurance of the Chairman of the Group.

59. Mr. EDON (Benin) asked the Chairman of the Group to explain the legal basis for recommendation 3 (c). He also asked whether recommendation 5 would have retroactive effect on decisions already taken, if it was adopted as it stood. Since the expression "when sufficient resources are available" could be interpreted in a number of ways, the recommendation should perhaps be reworded.

60. He noted that the Chairman of the Group had already told the Committee that there was no precise basis for the percentage reductions suggested in recommendation 15. Regarding recommendation 41, he wondered whether the Secretariat had brought to the Group's attention the various decisions of the General Assembly concerning personnel policy and management. If the Group had been aware of them, he would like to know whether the recommendation was based on an analysis of those decisions.

61. He asked whether the Secretariat had been consulted about the problems raised by recommendation 61. The Secretary-General had expressed his views on the matter very clearly, in the second and third sentences of paragraph 9 of his note (A/41/663), views which his delegation endorsed.

62. As many previous speakers had already noted, the Group's recommendations, chiefly reductions and consolidations, stressed only the expenditure aspect of the financial crisis. Nothing was said about the income aspect. He asked whether it had been the Group's view that the income aspect had nothing to do with improving the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations.

63. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom) said that, though not perfect, the report represented a very considerable achievement. During the informal discussions, the opinion had been expressed that attempts at reform often tended to make matters worse. The Group had not taken that pessimistic approach although the Chairman had commented that previous experience had not made him enthusiastic. He asked whether, if the Chairman was able to go back to February 1986, he would volunteer for the responsibility of chairing the Group.

64. Mr. DJAVHARI (Indonesia) said that his delegation had requested in the plenary Assembly, in connection with recommendation 1 on strengthening the Committee on Conferences, that the latter should be made a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council as well as of the General Assembly, like CPC. Such a relationship would enable it to draw up the calendar of meetings more effectively. It would also lighten the load of the Council which currently had to spend valuable time at its summer session on the schedule of meetings of its subsidiary bodies.

65. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) said that the questions addressed to the Chairman of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts were in no way intended as criticism of him or of the Group. He asked whether the fact that most of the percentages set as targets in the recommendations had not been scientifically arrived at meant that they should be treated rather warily.

66. Mr. NTAKIBIRORA (Burundi) said that he had already put a number of questions to the Chairman of the Group in writing but two points had not been touched upon. Regarding recommendation 19, he would like more information on the way in which activities relating to Namibia should be regrouped. If the answer was that that was a matter for the Secretary-General, he would like to know whether the Secretary-General had been consulted.

67. Regarding recommendation 59, he said that surprise had been expressed in the informal discussions at the suggestion that the activities of the Staff Union posed a challenge to the prerogatives of the Secretary-General. He would like further details on that point. He also felt that the last part of the recommendation was not clear.

68. Mr. ABOLY (Côte d'Ivoire) said that, in his preliminary remarks in response to the questions raised during the informal discussions, the Chairman of the Group of Experts had said that although the Group had not reached agreement on chapter VI, the three alternatives outlined in it could form a useful basis for discussion. He asked whether the Fifth Committee's mandate was to negotiate in order to arrive at an agreement and to put forward a single proposal for decision by the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.