

UNITED NATIONS
General Assembly
FORTY-SIXTH SESSION
Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
6th meeting
held on
Thursday, 10 October 1991
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 113: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned
within *ten days of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC 2750,
2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a separate official bulletin for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/46/SR.6
21 October 1991
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH

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

AGENDA ITEM 113: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/46/32)

1. Mr. MERIFIELD (Canada) said that he recognized the important role of the Committee on Conferences, which was to ensure that the Secretariat provided services of the highest quality despite the limited resources available to the United Nations for carrying out all the tasks entrusted to it by Member States, and hence the importance of ensuring that representatives used those services responsibly.
2. He reiterated the comment made by his delegation the previous year, that the prime necessity was to use those services efficiently, and at the same time questioned the advisability of excessively detailed statistics. Whether the benchmark was 75 per cent or 80 per cent was not important, but he was pleased by the overall improvement in the use of facilities.
3. The essential point was that users of the services should be frugal in their demands and responsible in estimating their requirements. To that end, those bodies which regularly used fewer conference services than they had requested should take steps to assess their real requirements properly instead of basing their calculations on requests made in previous years. They should also look seriously at the possibility of reducing the length of meetings that were clearly not required.
4. He fully endorsed the Committee on Conferences' recommendation that the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council should consider the possibility of biennializing their work. It was also time to re-evaluate the organization of debates in the Main Committees of the General Assembly and in all subsidiary bodies. The work of the United Nations should be rationalized, and some of the more routine reports should be reduced in order to liberate conference services for constructive debate on the important new issues which Member States were asking it to deal with.
5. His delegation agreed with the Committee that the Governing Council of UNDP and the Executive Board of UNICEF should be asked to better estimate their requirements and that, as far as possible, summary records should be cut back. The consecutive scheduling of meetings would be especially appropriate for meetings that were merely routine or procedural.
6. After noting that, in the Committee's opinion, the introduction of new technology in the Department of Conference Services had yielded uneven results, he expressed support for the Department's efforts and hoped that there would be real, measurable improvements in productivity once the programme was completed.
7. His delegation proposed that, in its resolution, the Fifth Committee should endorse the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences and urge

(Mr. Merifield, Canada)

all United Nations organs to review their meetings and documentation requirements, with the overall objective of improving the Organization's ability to meet the new expectations of the international community.

8. Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria) said that the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1992-1993 prepared by the Committee on Conferences followed the guidelines of General Assembly resolution 43/222 B regarding the need to stagger conferences and conference services throughout the year. However, there was still room for improvement: conferences should be more evenly distributed among the various conference centres of the United Nations, with a view to making optimum use of conference services and activities. Similarly, as recommended by the Committee in paragraph 135 of its report, new technologies should be introduced evenly throughout the United Nations system. Although it would be costly in its initial stages, the acquisition of new technologies would make it possible to increase productivity and would, in the long run, ensure that better use was made of financial resources.

9. She noted with satisfaction that, in 1990, the conference services utilization rate had been 78 per cent and she urged those bodies which consistently underutilized the conference resources at their disposal to engage in a serious review of their meeting requirements. If the continuing waste of resources by those bodies did not end, she would be in favour of taking more concrete measures along the lines proposed by the Group of 18. Given the shortage of available resources and the need to use them rationally, she supported the proposal that the utilization target, currently set at 75 per cent, should be raised.

10. Although she recognized the undoubted advantages of the new methodology approved in 1990 for calculating the utilization factor, which was to be applied in parallel with the existing one for an experimental period of three years, she believed there was still room for improvement; she therefore supported the introduction of an "availability index" for the documentation of each body, and suggested that the factor time lost due to late starting and early ending should be subdivided since the early ending of a meeting could be an indication of efficient conduct of work. After a warning that no statistical methodology, however accurate, could give a complete picture of how an organ performed, she urged all United Nations organs to avoid any waste of conference services.

11. Her delegation strongly supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences in paragraph 55 of its report that, whenever possible, meetings should be scheduled consecutively within one three-hour meeting period; that was an important step towards making optimum use of conference services.

12. Turning to section 32 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 (Conference and library services), she stressed the need to review the ratio of permanent to temporary staff at European duty stations and the increasing demand for interpretation services of bodies meeting at Vienna.

(Ms. Rotheiser, Austria)

She would await with interest the Secretary-General's concrete proposals in that regard. She also took note of the information provided by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments on the outcome of the negotiations between the United Nations, the Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the establishment of a unified conference service in Vienna and said that she was confident that all the organizations concerned would soon reach an agreement.

13. A review of the Department of Conference Services by the Committee on Conferences could play an important part in providing fresh ideas to improve its functioning; her delegation was willing to cooperate with the Department and with other delegations to achieve such an improvement. In the recent past, a more efficient use of conference resources had been achieved and that progress would be continued if the new proposals of the Committee on Conferences, which her delegation strongly supported, were taken into account. She urged the Secretariat and all the members of the Committee on Conferences to continue their efforts to improve conference servicing.

14. Mr. NASSER (Egypt) said that he was gratified to note the improvement in the availability of documentation for the current session of the General Assembly and the overall improvement in the utilization rates of conference-servicing resources; although modest, that improvement represented a positive trend which should be enhanced in the future. It might be opportune to consider raising the benchmark figure for utilization of such resources.

15. He endorsed the recommendation in paragraph 13 of the report of the Committee on Conferences concerning the adoption of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1992-1993 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences, and agreed that the Committee should be authorized to make any adjustments to it that might become necessary as a result of actions and decisions taken by the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session.

16. However, other recommendations and paragraphs of the report deserved careful consideration. In particular, the experimental methodology being used to measure the utilization factor was too complicated. Moreover, the Committee on Conferences should have paid more attention to the question of existing conference resources, services and facilities within the United Nations and formulated concrete proposals and conclusions on the subject. That matter should be examined in conjunction with the question of the application of new technology to conference servicing. The Department of Conference Services should introduce such new technology in the different United Nations centres concurrently; the investment made by the Organization in that field should help offset the growing workload of the Department of Conference Services, at least in part.

(Mr. Nasser, Egypt)

17. The role of the Committee on Conferences had been thoroughly discussed during previous sessions of the General Assembly and had been formalized in resolution 43/222 B, which set out the membership and mandate of the Committee. The composition of the Committee must be based on equitable geographical distribution. That resolution had not invested the Committee with powers commensurate with its role as envisaged in recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of the Group of 18. Under General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, the Committee on Conferences did not have any authority to overturn mandated programmes or meetings already approved or any budgetary powers. Given that background, he wondered whether consideration by the Committee of section 32 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 was compatible with resolution 43/222 B.

18. In spite of such points of disagreement, his delegation was prepared to cooperate with all interested parties in strengthening the Committee. The Fifth Committee had the right to change the role of the Committee on Conferences but it would be premature to review its role at the current session. An opportunity to undertake such a review might present itself at the forty-seventh session.

19. Finally, he said that improved utilization of United Nations conference-servicing resources might be achieved by continuing the process of reforming the intergovernmental structure, as envisaged in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

20. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco), speaking also on behalf of the other Member States of the Arab Maghreb Union (Algeria, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania and Tunisia), noted the important part played by the Committee on Conferences and the Department of Conference Services in increasing the effectiveness of the Organization and enhancing its prestige. Rationalization of the calendar of conferences and meetings, control of the quality and timely issuance of documentation and introduction of new technology were all factors that affected the deliberative and decision-making processes of the various United Nations bodies.

21. In view of the increasingly prominent role of the United Nations, the Organization must make every effort to ensure the best possible utilization of its available resources and, in particular, of its conference-servicing resources. He noted with satisfaction that, in the opinion of the Committee on Conferences, the new methodology for calculating the utilization factor for conference services made possible a more satisfactory assessment of the accuracy with which committees predicted the actual number of fully serviced meetings that they would require during a session. He endorsed the proposal regarding the development of an availability index in order to assess the connection between the availability of documentation and the utilization rates of conference services. It was regrettable that meetings of certain committees and commissions had to be cancelled because the necessary documentation had not been issued or had been issued late; the Department of

(Mr. Zahid, Morocco)

Conference Services should see to it that such situations did not recur. Those regrettable delays affected documentation on economic and social questions in particular, subjects that were of particular importance to the countries of the Arab Maghreb Union.

22. He was aware of the limited resources available to the Organization, due to the protracted financial crisis, and recognized the negative impact that that had on conference services. That made it imperative to utilize the available resources more rationally. The members of the Arab Maghreb Union were prepared to consider any proposal for an in-depth review of the functioning of the Department of Conference Services aimed at increasing its efficiency. Introducing new technology, in particular, should contribute to achieving that aim.

23. He shared the concern expressed in the report of the Committee on Conferences about bodies which had consistently low rates of utilization for conference-servicing resources; however, the number of meetings allocated to such bodies should not be reduced, since that might prejudice their work. Moreover, it would not be within the Committee on Conferences' competence to take such a measure. On the other hand, the bodies could be asked to review their conference-servicing requirements. The members of the Arab Maghreb Union supported the recommendation to that effect in paragraph 29 of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

24. Establishing a biennial cycle for meetings of the subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council would be very useful in easing the work of the Council and would enable it to consider the reports that it received in greater depth, the more so now that it had to do in one month what had formerly taken almost two. Nevertheless, that recommendation should be considered in the Second and Third Committees, not in the Fifth Committee.

25. The sessions of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) should be prolonged by a few days in order to avoid the repeated extensions which rightly worried the Committee on Conferences, and the same recommendation should be made with respect to the joint meetings of CPC and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

26. The members of the Arab Maghreb Union believed that implementation of the guidelines adopted by the Committee on Conferences for consideration of requests from various organs for inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings would enhance the Committee's work, and they also supported the Committee's recommendation made in paragraph 79 of its report.

27. With regard to meetings of organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget, the Governing Council of UNDP and the Executive Board of UNICEF should be asked to examine their conference-servicing needs in the light of their considerable financial implications and the goal of augmenting

(Mr. Zahid, Morocco)

the efficiency of the two agencies, which were of great importance for the developing countries. The members of the Arab Maghreb Union were ready to consider any proposals designed to increase efficiency which did not harm programmes and projects.

28. Mr. KARBUCZKY (Hungary) said that the Committee on Conferences was one of the most important permanent subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, and its recommendations had significant budgetary consequences. Thus the Committee should and could serve as a tool for more efficient use of conference services.

29. The Committee's most recent report gave the impression that more often than not it simply rubber-stamped everything requested of it, which was not exactly the mandate assigned by the General Assembly in resolution 43/222 B. In fact, the Secretariat units which originated the requests possessed more knowledge and data about conference services and requirements than most members of the Committee. Regrettably, the attendance at the short August session had been very low, and only the well-prepared documentation, the expert guidance of the Chairman, and the work done by the members present had ensured that the report, which was the lowest common denominator of the diverging views of the members of the Committee and the Secretariat, did represent a measure of progress in some fields. On the other hand, only a comprehensive reform of the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the whole United Nations system would make it possible for organs like the Committee on Conferences to have any real major role.

30. Although his delegation agreed that the Committee's role should not be limited to study of statistics, it recognized that statistics could lead to useful conclusions. The setting of a higher conference utilization benchmark would send an unmistakable signal to the users, and the proposal of a rate of 85 per cent seemed reasonable given the present utilization factor. However, if any organ consistently used less than 60 per cent of its allocated conference resources, that would indicate a serious malfunction, and the Committee should request the organ concerned, or other competent bodies, to examine the situation in order to be able to make to the General Assembly the necessary recommendations, which should include a reduction of the conference time allocated to the organ in question.

31. The suggestion of taking a fresh outside look at the productivity and efficiency of the Department of Conference Services was a timely one, and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) should make a study of that very complex issue. Better coordination of existing conference resources could obviously enhance cost-effectiveness, but it should not be carried to the extreme of infringing on the authority of other organizations. Savings could also be made by minor restructuring of manning tables, with corresponding changes in the budget. One example would be the recruitment of a second team of interpreters in Vienna, which would be less expensive than using short-term staff.

(Mr. Karbuczky, Hungary)

32. The Committee should examine carefully any request for a departure from the approved calendar of conferences, extension of meetings, additional conference facilities, or exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, and it should reject any unfounded request. With the convening of the Conference on Environment and Development, 1992 would be a special year, and careful consideration would have to be given to the proposal to hold the summer session of the Economic and Social Council earlier.

33. Mr. RAE (India) said his delegation was glad that the Department of Conference Services was able to cope with the difficult job of meeting, with limited resources, ever-increasing demands for conference services; nevertheless, the Department's functioning, efficiency and productivity could be improved even further. At the same time, Member States must try to make maximum use of the services provided for intergovernmental meetings. It was a matter for satisfaction that the overall utilization factor for conference services had risen to 78 per cent, surpassing the level of 75 per cent set by the Committee on Conferences.

34. The new methodology for assessing the utilization of conference facilities showed an improvement over the earlier methodology in that it compared the requirement for meetings estimated at the planning stage with the actual utilization. An analysis of the meeting ratio and the planning accuracy factor would help the Department secure optimal allocation of its services to different bodies.

35. However, the results of the new experimental methodology would have to be compared with those achieved by the old methodology. Although the overall utilization factor had risen, there was still considerable scope for improving the use of conference services by intergovernmental bodies. The Committee could request, through the General Assembly, that bodies whose utilization factor had been consistently low over the last few years should try to cut back the total number of meetings programmed.

36. In order to reduce the time lost when meetings began late the quorum rules should be applied with flexibility, bearing in mind the need to ensure maximum use of conference facilities. The cases of conference time lost because meetings ended early were due to the inflexible rule of providing only for three-hour meetings. Shorter meetings, or several consecutive meetings within a three-hour period, could be scheduled.

37. The officers of the Committee should approve requests for inter-sessional departures from the calendar of conferences which had no budget implications, provided there were no technical problems and the requests were justified. Furthermore, the officers and the Committee as a whole should respond promptly to such requests.

38. His delegation supported the view contained in the report that the Department should continue to provide conference services to bodies not funded from the regular budget, in order not to cut the resources which such bodies

(Mr. Rae, India)

used for operational activities; however, they should be informed about the volume of services provided to them from the regular budget, so as to impress upon them the need to make maximum use of the facilities.

39. Priority should be given to the introduction of new and more productive technology in conference services, particularly at headquarters stations where labour costs were very high. In that context the Indian delegation was puzzled by the recommendation contained in paragraph 135 of the Committee's report that the applications of new technology should be introduced evenly throughout the United Nations. That would be easy to do if there were no financial constraints, but not in the present circumstances. It would be preferable to proceed gradually, beginning with the stations where the introduction of new technology would be most productive and cost-effective.

40. Mr. WIBISONO (Indonesia) said that his delegation fully agreed with the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that the Economic and Social Council should reconsider the possibility of introducing a two-year cycle for the meetings of its subsidiary bodies.

41. The United Nations organs whose use of conference services fell below the benchmark of 75 per cent should evaluate their requirements better. Since the current methodology for compilation of data on the utilization of conference services had not given satisfactory results, the Indonesian delegation supported the decision taken by the Committee in 1990 to use a new methodology, in parallel with the current methodology, on an experimental basis for three years.

42. His delegation agreed on the need to request the Governing Council of UNDP and the Executive Board of UNICEF to review their meetings and documentation requirements in the light of their substantial financial implications.

43. With regard to requests for exceptions to section I, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243, subsidiary organs should make the necessary arrangements to complete their work before the start of the regular sessions of the General Assembly and to utilize fully the conference services allocated to them.

44. His delegation urged the Secretariat to keep in mind the objectives of the application of new technologies mentioned in paragraph 134 of the Committee's report and to ensure that, as far as possible, the new technologies were introduced evenly throughout the system.

45. In the present circumstances the mandate given to the Committee in resolution 43/222 B was the best, and the Secretariat should take note of paragraph 104 of document A/44/222, which stated that it was planned during the biennium 1990-1991 to invite a fresh outside look to determine whether the productivity and efficiency of the Department of Conference Services could be further enhanced.

46. Mr. ZARE (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the most important task of the Committee on Conferences was to increase the efficiency of the use of conference-servicing resources within the framework of the organizational and procedural methods of the United Nations system. The current political and economic circumstances in the international community and the increasing seriousness of world economic problems required the Organization to adjust its functioning in order to eliminate those problems. The activities of the United Nations must be decentralized, the number, frequency and duration of conferences and meetings must be reduced, and more resources must be allocated to the regional offices and their conference services improved. Furthermore, closer coordination was needed between the Committee on Conferences and the Economic and Social Council with regard to the preparation of and changes in the calendar of conferences and meetings.

47. In view of the differences between the planned and actual utilization of conference services by the various United Nations organs, each organ should keep in mind its terms of reference when requesting such services. In that regard his delegation supported the recommendations contained in paragraphs 29 and 92 of the Committee's report. The Committee should maintain its contacts with all United Nations organs in order to ensure the most efficient use of conference-servicing resources.

48. In accordance with the recommendations of the Group of 18, the Committee should coordinate the working procedures for conference services in the various United Nations offices and should, in particular, plan and coordinate conferences and meetings by staggering them throughout the year and taking into account the availability of resources. However, since some meetings dealt with complex and important issues requiring lengthy negotiation, they might, as exceptional cases, be excluded from the criteria just described.

49. According to paragraph 7 of resolution 45/238 B, the reports of subsidiary organs should not exceed 32 pages. While bearing in mind special cases, the Committee on Conferences should bring that rule to the attention of organs whose reports exceeded the limit. Moreover, the Secretariat should restrict the length of reports and consider possible reductions in their number and frequency. For their part, Member States must limit their requests for circulation of communications as United Nations documents and keep such communications as short as possible. The reduction of documentation in general would make it possible to cut external printing costs, which were very high. It was also necessary to continue investing in new technologies designed to augment efficiency in terms of cost-effectiveness, especially in the regional offices. Furthermore, the timely distribution of documents in all the languages would prevent a considerable waste of conference-servicing resources.

50. Mr. TOYAMA (Japan) said that his delegation welcomed the improvement in the conference-servicing utilization factor. However, as pointed out by the representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Community, the utilization ratios of some bodies, for example the Committee for Development Planning, the Disarmament Commission, the Board of Trustees of

(Mr. Toyama, Japan)

UNITAR, and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, were very low. Special measures must be taken to improve the situation with respect to those bodies, and his delegation therefore strongly supported paragraphs 30, 31 and 32 of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

51. In order to improve the utilization of conference-servicing resources bodies should show some flexibility, for example by scheduling meetings for four or four and a half days, on the basis of their real needs, instead of the normal length of five days. The careful preparation of meetings under the guidance of their officers and the punctual issuing of documents would help to improve the utilization ratios. The six-week rule for distribution of documents should be strictly observed. Accordingly, the Committee should consider ways of reducing the volume and length of documents, for that would reduce the time needed for their preparation. His delegation fully supported the proposal of the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments concerning the promotion of interdepartmental cooperation in the Secretariat with regard to documentation.

52. It was necessary to indicate the availability of documentation for each meeting and to give Member States precise information about each stage of document production, from drafting to distribution. His delegation noted with interest the proposal to prepare an "availability index" which would identify the percentage of pre-session documents issued within the six-week deadline, as described in paragraph 21 of the Committee's report. Such information would help to improve the organization of the work of meetings. It was to be hoped that the Fifth Committee would take action to pursue the proposal.

53. His delegation thought that the utilization rate for the various facilities and resources at each conference centre, i.e., New York, Geneva and Vienna, should be clarified. Information should be provided on such matters as the number of days in the year that each conference room was used and the number of days that each staff team of interpreters worked. The calendar of conferences adopted by the General Assembly should be strictly observed in order to ensure effective use of conference resources. His delegation fully supported what was said in paragraph 44 of the Committee's report with respect to departures from the calendar by subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council.

54. Inter-agency exchanges of conference-servicing resources should be promoted in order to optimize the use of such resources throughout the United Nations system. His delegation therefore noted with appreciation the information provided by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments concerning the negotiations between the Secretariat and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) with a view to promoting joint conference services. It was to be hoped that in the near future the Secretariat would submit to the General Assembly proposals reflecting the agreement reached with those two organizations.

(Mr. Toyama, Japan)

55. His delegation took note of the decision of the UNIDO Industrial Development Board of 5 July 1991 to the effect that any change in the present conference-servicing arrangements for the Vienna-based organizations would need to be examined in the light of the efficiency, economy and quality of services that it would bring. The quality of the conference services in Vienna should therefore have been examined exhaustively from the standpoint of the "clients" of such services, i.e. the Member States. It was regrettable that the Committee had never been expected to make any recommendation on the matter in its report. It was also regrettable that ACC had so far not tried to establish a complete inventory of conference-servicing facilities which could be shared in order to utilize the United Nations system to the full.

56. Two years previously, the Committee on Conferences had held a special informal session to review the medium-term plan for the period 1992-1997 and had made recommendations to the General Assembly. There had been no such session in 1991 to examine section 32 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993, relating to conference services. The General Assembly should require the Committee to play a more important role in reviewing budgetary matters. The Committee should also examine the projections and statistics relating to workload in section 32 of the proposed programme budget for 1992-1993, since it was competent to do so as a central organ for scheduling meetings.

57. With regard to the possibility of inviting "a fresh outside look" to determine whether the productivity and efficiency of the Department of Conference Services could be further enhanced, his delegation's understanding was that the Committee on Conferences had been expected to perform that task and that there should be no recourse to outside private organizations. As five years had elapsed since the idea had first been proposed, the time had come to abandon it unless the Committee determined that there was an effective and practical way of carrying it out.

58. With regard to the application of new technology to conference servicing, he reiterated that that could not be an end in itself. It could only be useful to the extent that it improved productivity and efficiency. He looked forward to hearing from the Secretariat about the results achieved to date.

59. Mr. ZHANG Wenjun (China) said that, in principle, his delegation supported the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 1992-1993 and the relevant resolutions of the Committee, in particular its recommendations that the Economic and Social Council should again consider the possibility of the biennialization of the meetings of its subsidiary organs and that the Trusteeship Council should also be asked to review its meeting requirements.

60. His delegation was pleased to note the increase in the utilization rates of conference-servicing resources. He pointed out, however, that the utilization rates for some organs remained low and in some cases had even dropped, and supported the Committee's request that the organs concerned

(Mr. Zhang Wenjun, China)

should provide an explanation. In the case of those bodies that failed to give satisfactory reasons, the Committee should adopt effective remedial measures. The 75 per cent utilization rates set as a target by the Committee in 1983 could be raised somewhat, despite the fact that some organs had not yet attained them. His delegation also agreed that the Committee should consider taking additional measures within its mandate to improve still further the efficiency and effectiveness of the utilization of conference-servicing resources.

61. His delegation was deeply concerned by the fact that the provision that pre-session documents should be distributed simultaneously in all official languages of the organs of the United Nations not less than six weeks before meetings were held, as required by General Assembly resolution 45/238 B, had yet to be fully implemented. There had been cases where meetings could not proceed as planned and where meetings had had to be cancelled altogether owing to the lack or late issuance of documentation. The Committee's proposals to the General Assembly on the evaluation of the utilization rates of conference-servicing resources should include effective measures aimed at reducing the number of meetings delayed or cancelled because of the unavailability of documentation.

62. In the past year, the Committee on Conferences had approved almost every request for extended sessions or additional meetings. He hoped that in future the Committee would examine such requests thoroughly and that the organs making them would do their utmost to ensure the best possible use of conference-servicing resources.

63. He agreed entirely with the Committee's conclusion that "the continued application of new technologies was not to be considered as an end in itself, but rather as a tool with which the Secretariat could achieve improvements in efficiency and cost-effectiveness". The results of introducing new technology could not be perceived overnight and it would therefore be advisable to make an overall evaluation of the application of new technology after an experimental transitional period.

64. The Committee on Conferences and the Department of Conference Services had done a great deal to draw up a balanced calendar of conferences and meetings and to provide the necessary conference services; he hoped that they would continue to play an active role within the context of their respective mandates.

65. Mr. RAZVIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Committee on Conferences was continuing to show inexplicable timidity in implementing various key elements of its mandate, and that was preventing it from generating new ideas to improve efficiency in the utilization of conference-servicing resources. The concern shown by a number of delegations which suggested that external consultant services should be used to provide a fresh and unbiased overview of the work of the Department of Conference

(Mr. Razvin, USSR)

Services was justifiable. However, before taking that course, it was necessary to exhaust all the internal resources of the United Nations Secretariat, including the Department of Conference Services, and the possibilities offered by the Committee on Conferences which, if it fulfilled its mandate in every respect, could play a very important role in reviewing the conference activities of the United Nations system.

66. The Committee should shift its emphasis from reviewing the immense volume of statistical data and perfecting its methods for collecting and processing them, towards the implementation of such essential elements of its mandate as the identification of ways and means to ensure the optimum utilization of conference facilities and services and improve the coordination of conferences within the United Nations system. Such a change of emphasis would place new demands both on the Committee itself and on other intergovernmental bodies of the Organization. The recommendations made by the Group of 18 would permit the Committee to be transformed into an influential forward-looking organ of the General Assembly which, on the one hand, would seek to ensure the more rational and efficient use of existing conference-servicing resources and, on the other hand, would not allow purely financial considerations to impede the dynamic development of the machinery of international dialogue. The Group's recommendations must not fall into oblivion. There were resources within the Secretariat and the United Nations system that had still not been tapped. For example, there was the Joint Inspection Unit, which had great experience in preparing the kind of studies required. The internal analysis and evaluation mechanisms within the Department of Conference Services could also be used to formulate new ideas and proposals aimed at a more effective and optimum utilization of conference services.

67. What was important in that respect was to increase cost-effectiveness, not to reduce expenditures for the sake of doing so. For example, he wondered how justifiable were the Secretariat's plans to introduce new technology in virtually every area of conference services. He regretted the fact that the report of the Committee on Conferences threw no light on such questions as the real increase in productivity resulting from the new technology, the consequent redistribution of human resources within the Secretariat to streamline its activities and save resources, the relationship between the amount of hardware and the number of personnel that would ensure minimal costs and maximum efficiency for the Organization, and how the massive introduction of new technology in practically all areas of United Nations activities, including conference services, had affected and would affect the workload standards for staff in units where such standards existed, and the development of such standards where they did not exist or were not clearly defined.

68. While not denying the possible usefulness of an independent outside review, he did not think that it would be a panacea for internal problems. What was required was the political will of the intergovernmental bodies and of the Member States themselves. The services of external consultants could be used to carry out an unbiased analysis of activities relating to the

(Mr. Razvin, USSR)

coordination of conference services within the United Nations system. Progress in that area had so far been insignificant. He looked forward to the report of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications that would be submitted to the Committee on Conferences in 1992. He also hoped that the proposals made by the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, which had considered the question in detail, would be reflected in the documentation on the subject.

69. As the Group of 18 had recommended, the United Nations Secretariat should again consider the question of consolidating all editorial services of the Secretariat in the Department of Conference Services. A clear-cut centralization of conference services within a single department would make it possible to increase efficiency and save resources, as well as reduce unacceptable delays in the issuance of documentation.

70. In 1992, the Committee on Conferences would review the situation in regard to documentation. He hoped that the Committee and the Secretariat would make a detailed analysis of the situation, in particular the utility of a number of publications, the rationalization of publishing services through the introduction of new technologies, the redeployment of the human resources made available as a result, the number of documents issued late, and staff workloads.

71. The Soviet Union had always attached great importance to the conference-servicing activities of the Secretariat. The new element in its position was its rejection, on the practical level, of purely ideological and propaganda considerations in dealing with those activities, and its emphasis on the importance of improving services to delegations and the quality of the documents issued in the Russian language. From a purely practical point of view, there was a need to increase the readers' confidence in United Nations documents issued in Russian by improving the quality of translations, and making them more accurate and readable. To do that, the Russian language services would need skilled specialists of the highest professional standard. There were such opportunities and it was for the Secretariat to take advantage of them.

72. Mr. SENA CARDOSO (Brazil) said that the report of the Committee on Conferences included a series of timely and useful recommendations and conclusions for continued improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations. Although the recommendations did not meet all the expectations of some delegations, they reflected an intermediate position among the various points of view represented in the Organization.

73. Much still remained to be done in respect of the availability of documentation and efforts in that direction would help to reduce costs. He therefore welcomed the request in paragraph 32 of the Committee's report, which would make it easier to evaluate the utilization of conference services.

(Mr. Sena Cardoso, Brazil)

74. The report noted that a substantial number of United Nations organs and programmes whose activities were not funded from the regular budget were receiving conference services free of charge. To the extent of its limited possibilities, the Government of Brazil supported the activities of those organs and programmes, which had often helped Brazil to overcome its social and economic imbalances. Nevertheless, it was a matter of concern that resources were transferred from the regular budget to finance extrabudgetary activities and, in that sense, he shared the view that the United Nations should be reimbursed for the conference services it provided.

75. The report reflected the general concern about the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of United Nations activities. While he shared that concern, he was also convinced that the Committee should refrain from encroaching on the sphere of competence of other intergovernmental bodies and should instead concern itself with maintaining the necessary level of quality in services. In order to attain the desired level of efficiency, an effort should be made to eliminate undesirable consequences, for example, situations in which the limited capacity of many Member States to be represented at and participate in meetings held simultaneously might be exceeded. That was the case with the current prolonged and unexpected overlapping of substantive meetings of the Special Political Committee and the Fourth Committee.

76. At the forty-first session of the General Assembly, his delegation had explicitly supported recommendation 1 of the Group of 18, namely, that the Committee on Conferences should be strengthened and given broader responsibilities, and had endorsed the idea that the Committee should be on an equal footing with other intergovernmental organs in order to be able to bring about a better distribution of resources, facilities and conference services in the longer term.

77. Brazil also endorsed the idea that some agenda items should be considered biennially and supported the work of the Committee on Conferences in that connection. It therefore looked forward to the possibility of working with other delegations to select those agenda items allocated to the Fifth Committee which could be dealt with in that way.

78. Mr. AKOLZIN (Belarus) said that he attached great importance to the work of the Committee on Conferences and was in favour of strengthening its powers as an intergovernmental organ responsible for the rational and economic planning and provision of conference services. It was cause for satisfaction that the members of the Committee, in cooperation with the Department of Conference Services, had recently achieved some notable advances and positive results in that field. In the past year alone, many valuable and useful recommendations and proposals had been put forward, the implementation of which could contribute to the preparation of a better organized calendar of conferences and to increased efficiency and effectiveness in the utilization of the corresponding resources and services.

(Mr. Akolzin, Belarus)

79. In particular, his delegation fully supported the Committee's recommendations that the Economic and Social Council should resume consideration of the biennialization of the meetings of its subsidiary organs, in the context of the ongoing restructuring and revitalization exercise, and that the Trusteeship Council should review its requirements for conference services. In that connection, it was very important for the Committee on Conferences to play an active role in the implementation of those recommendations and to provide those organs with the necessary assistance in reviewing the calendar of conferences and reducing documentation.

80. He also welcomed the Committee's somewhat belated decision to request those organs and programmes of the United Nations whose activities were funded from voluntary contributions, in particular the Governing Council of UNDP and the Executive Board of UNICEF, to review their meeting and documentation requirements, in the light of their significant financial implications for the Organization's budget.

81. The Committee's decision to continue to promote contacts with United Nations organs to help them to make more effective use of the services provided to them was undoubtedly important and useful. The results of those contacts were well known; whereas, in 1983, the average utilization factor for available conference resources had been 64 per cent, in 1990 it had risen to 78 per cent. At the same time, he endorsed the proposal of other delegations that the minimum acceptable utilization rate for conference services should be 85 per cent, and requested those bodies which used less than 60 per cent of the services at their disposal to review their planning of meetings.

82. With regard to the work of the Committee on Conferences itself, and its special status among subsidiary organs of the General Assembly, his delegation shared the concern expressed by other Member States that the efficiency of the Committee's work had not yet fulfilled the expectation that a considerable reduction could be achieved in conference services, which accounted for 20 per cent of the United Nations regular budget. That serious deficiency could not be attributed solely to the way the Committee conducted its work or to the skilful resistance put up by the Department of Conference Services. In his opinion, the main reason for the less than encouraging results achieved was that most Member States applied a double standard in that regard. On the other hand, when the action taken was coherent and based on a desire to introduce order and discipline, as well as to make the most economical use of available resources, positive results could be achieved. In that context, his delegation endorsed the proposal of the United States representative and other delegations that the Fifth Committee should do its best to rationalize its own work and thus give moral and practical support to the work of the Committee on Conferences.

83. As far as using outside experts to study ways of improving United Nations conference services was concerned, his delegation had serious reservations as to the usefulness of any measure of that kind; it would involve additional

(Mr. Akolzin, Belarus)

expenditure for the Organization and its practical results would probably suffer a similar fate to that suffered by many of the studies and recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit. Obviously, the problem was not that the Committee on Conferences and the Fifth Committee were unaware of the problems relating to conference services or had no idea how to solve them. On the other hand, it was vital that efforts to do so should have the support of all Member States and all organs of the United Nations system.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.