FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
3rd meeting
held on
Friday, 4 October 1991
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. MUNTASSER

(Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

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

CONTENTS

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

AGENDA ITEM 113: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

AGENDA ITEM 104: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS

This record is subject to correction

Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned sorthin one seek of the date of publication to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section. Room 16 (2.8) 23 inted Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the circlotathe sectors of a separate corregulation for cacher communic

Distr. GENERAL A/C.5/46/SR.3 8 October 1991

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/C.5/46/8; A/C.5/46/L.1)

- 1. The CHAIRMAN said that document A/C.5/46/8, pertaining to the allocation of agenda items to the Fifth Committee, drew its attention to the recommendations of the General Committee on the organization of the session (A/46/250, sect. II). The Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations had stressed the need to utilize available services fully, and the General Committee had made recommendations on the schedule of meetings to that end. He intended to abide closely by the various recommendations and to ensure that meetings started promptly.
- 2. With regard to working methods, he intended to have related items, such as agenda items 107 and 108, 109 and 110, and 116 and 117, introduced together as clusters, and he asked delegations wishing to speak on them to consider preparing one general statement for each cluster. He also hoped that the practice of groups of States making joint statements on certain agenda items might be extended.
- 3. Moreover, he proposed to designate a coordinator for each agenda item, as necessary, who would preside over informal consultations in case of need. Such consultations would be held whenever controversial issues were involved, but, as they could be time-consuming, he urged that alternative methods of producing texts for consideration by the Committee should also be explored.
- 4. He proposed that the list of speakers on any item should be closed no later than 48 hours after its introduction and that speakers should be heard according to their order on the list, those not present when they were due to speak being moved to the end of the list for that day. Finally, he proposed that the Rapporteur should be authorized to report directly to the General Assembly on all items considered and concluded by the Committee unless, in particular cases, the Committee decided to include a summary of the debate in its report.
- 5. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to proceed accordingly.

It was so decided.

7. The CHAIRMAN, turning to the tentative schedule of work which had been distributed, said that its preparation had taken account of such factors as the availability of documentation and Committee Chairmen, and the distribution of the workload throughout the session. Document A/C.5/46/L.1 indicated the current status of documentation for the Fifth Committee. Since the documentation for agenda item 105 (Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations) would not be

(The Chairman)

ready in time, its introduction might be deferred until after that of agenda items 107 and 108 with which it had been grouped.

- 8. With regard to agenda item 111 (Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency), he proposed that the Committee should await the reports of both ACABQ and ACC before taking a decision on the interim study by the Panel of External Auditors on the development of accounting standards in the United Nations system (A/46/341), the only matter that would be before the Committee under that item. He also suggested that agenda item 115 (Personnel questions) might be introduced a week earlier than originally scheduled so as to meet the preference recently expressed by certain delegations. Finally, he thought that 6 December might realistically be set as the date for taking action on all the sub-items of agenda item 18 (Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments) so as to provide time for the necessary consultations on all the appointments concerned.
- 9. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) asked if the Committee's working methods would be sufficiently flexible to allow items to be dealt with earlier than scheduled if the necessary documentation was available and work permitted.
- 10. The CHAIRMAN said that he proposed to be very flexible and would consider any such possibilities.
- 11. Mr. NASSER (Egypt) expressed satisfaction that the status of the Committee's documentation was considered to be good but noted that one of the reports required for consideration of agenda item 104 (Financial reports and audited financial statements, and reports of the Board of Auditors) was overdue. While accepting that progress had been made, he hoped that efforts to produce documentation on time would be intensified.
- 12. The suggestion that informal consultations need not be held on all items was also good, but he would like to be sure that when draft resolutions produced by other methods were introduced, the rules of procedure would be observed and those not involved in drafting the text would be able to express their views.
- 13. Mrs. GOICOCHEA (Cuba) said that her delegation agreed in principle with the programme of work outlined by the Chairman and with the views expressed by the representatives of Mexico and Egypt. The need for the Secretariat to provide documentation in good time was particularly important in the case of agenda item 107 (Proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993), parts of which would be affected by decisions taken in other Committees. Her delegation would like some indication from the Secretariat as to how the necessary consultations would be integrated with the Committee's programme of work. That programme was very heavy, and she hoped that it would be possible to avoid any repetition of what had occurred at the forty-fifth session, when decisions and resolutions were being adopted in the plenary meeting on items which the Fifth Committee was still discussing.

- 14. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the Twelve States members of the European Community, said that they fully supported the statement made by the Chairman at the Committee's 2nd meeting and, in particular, endorsed the process of decision-making by consensus. The proposed programme of work was generally acceptable but the Twelve suggested that discussion of agenda items 111 and 112 (Joint Inspection Unit) should be deferred until the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly in order to facilitate the work of the Committee. The interim study by the Panel of External Auditors on the development of accounting standards (A/46/341), listed to be considered under agenda item 111, should be discussed instead under agenda item 104.
- 15. With regard to suggestions regarding the Committee's working methods made at informal meetings held earlier in 1991, the Twelve particularly welcomed the suggestions that resolution coordinators to be nominated as early as possible and that a strict deadline should be maintained for the submission of statements of programme budget implications. They fully supported the appeal made by the President of the General Assembly for such statements to be submitted to the Fifth Committee no later than 20 November.
- 16. Mr. INOMATA (Japan) expressed concern that the work programme might be determined by the availability of documentation, especially in the case of agenda item 107. He would therefore like the Secretariat to indicate, at the Committee's next meeting, when exactly the more than 20 outstanding documents under that item, which all merited detailed discussion, would be issued.
- 17. His delegation could not understand the suggestion made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the States members of the European Community that consideration of agenda items 111 and 112 should be deferred, since they related to matters of great importance for the whole United Nations and postponement would mean that the General Assembly was not discharging its duties.
- 18. Ms. SHITAKA (Kenya) endorsed the comments made by the representatives of Mexico, Cuba and Japan on the need for flexibility in the Committee's working methods, the need to avoid a repetition of the Committee's experience at the end of the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, and the unacceptable suggestion that consideration of agenda items 111 and 112 should be deferred until the forty-seventh session.
- 19. Mr. RAE (India) said that he agreed with the Chairman's proposals on the work programme and with the comments made by previous speakers in favour of flexibility in the Committee's working methods and against deferring consideration of agenda items 111 and 112. It was not clear from document A/C.5/46/L.1 when the documentation for agenda item 136 (Financing of the activities arising from Security Council resolution 687 (1991)) would be available but, given the importance of that item, delegations must be allowed sufficient time to study the documents before the item was introduced in the Committee.

- 20. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) supported the suggestion that consideration of agenda items 111 and 112 should be deferred.
- 21. <u>Pr. PIDNY</u> (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) suggested that the Chairman might like to consult others informally, in a broader context than that raised by the suggestion that consideration of agenda items 111 and 112 should be deferred, about the useful idea of discussing certain agenda items on a biennial rather than an annual basis.
- 22. Mr. SY (Senegal) endorsed the request by the representative of Japan for a further statement on the status of the Committee's documentation. With regard to the suggestion that consideration of agenda items 111 and 112 should be deferred, he questioned whether the Committee had the right to take that course rather than abide by the decision of the General Assembly.
- 23. The CHAIRMAN said that, if there were no further comments, the Committee would proceed in accordance with the schedule of work as revised to take account of the comments and suggestions which had been made.
- 24. It was so decided.
- 25. Mr. FORAN (Acting Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that he would provide an oral updating of the status of documentation of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/46/L.1) at the next meeting.
- 26. The CHAIRMAN said that, in connection with agenda item 116: United Nations Common System, he had received letters from the President of the Coordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA) and the General Secretary of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Association (FICSA), requesting permission to present relevant documents and an opportunity for their representatives to address the Committee. Also, in connection with agenda item 115: Personnel Questions, he had received a letter from the President of the Staff Committee of the United Nations Staff Council asking permission to address the Fifth Committee. The requests were consonant with General Assembly resolution 32/213 and the Committee's practice in recent years. He asked whether the Committee wished to approve those requests.
- 27. Mr. MICHALSKI (United States of America) requested that the decision should be deferred until a later meeting, since his delegation had not yet received any instructions in that connection and the schedule did not call for those items to be taken up in the near future.
- 28. The CHAIRMAN said that the decision would be postponed until a later date.
- 29. He noted that, at the previous meeting, the representative of Ireland had asked for certain information concerning the Organization's financial situation and the payment of assessed contributions. He invited the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management to respond to that request.

- 30. MR, FORAN (Acting Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that the Controller and his staff were currently finalizing a paper on the financial situation of the Organization for consideration by the Committee in connection with agenda items 109 and 110, and the Secretary-General's forthcoming address to the Fifth Committee would no doubt contain his views on the subject. At the Committee's previous meeting, he himself had referred to the Organization's financial situation as precarious, and the representative of Ireland had asked whether the Committee could, at its next meeting, be provided with a summary of the current situation. While he was ready to give such a summary, he hoped that further discussion of the matter would await the introduction of the aforementioned paper.
- 31. As of 30 September 1991, unpaid assessed contributions to the regular budget totalled \$723.5 million, of which \$389.9 million was owed for 1991 and \$333.6 million for 1990 and prior years. Also at 30 September 1991, unpaid assessed contributions for peace-keeping operations totalled \$518.2 million. Given the extraordinarily high level of unpaid assessed contributions and significant delays in payment throughout 1991, it had been necessary to draw upon the Working Capital Fund and the Special Account to meet current operating requirements. Those cash reserves, together totalling some \$236 million, had been completely exhausted by mid-August 1991.
- 32. As a result, from mid-August on, the Organization had been obliged to borrow, without interruption, from the few peace-keeping funds that possessed cash in excess of their immediate requirements in order to meet both regular budget obligations and the cash requirements of other new peace-keeping operations.
- 33. He noted, in that connection, that even the funds received in September 1991 from a number of Member States had not been sufficient to make it possible to repay, except to a very limited extent, the amounts borrowed from peace-keeping accounts. The possibility of borrowing any additional funds from peace-keeping accounts was currently extremely limited, as the funds were needed to meet the requirements of those operations. The amounts borrowed from peace-keeping funds in 1991 to date far exceeded any amounts borrowed in the past.
- 34. There was great concern that there appeared to be a growing complacency on the part of many Member States about the financial situation. The pattern of payments of assessed contributions, particularly for the regular budget, had deteriorated considerably: the 1990 pattern of payments had been less satisfactory than that for 1989 and the 1991 pattern was worse than that for 1990. At the end of September 1989, 64 Member States had paid all their assessed contributions to the regular budget; at the same point in 1990, only 60 Member States had paid in full, and at 30 September 1991, only 57 Member States had paid all their assessed contributions to the regular budget. Of the 102 Member States which had not paid their contributions to the regular budget by 30 September 1991, 61 owed more than the current year's assessment. Thirty-seven Member States had made no payment to the regular budget in 1991.

(Mr. Foran)

- 35. Another measure of the deterioration was that, at 30 June 1991 less than 40 per cent of the current year's regular budget assessed contributions had been paid, the lowest mid-year percentage since 1982. At 30 September 1991, three-quarters of the way through the year, just under 60 per cent of the year's regular budget assessments had been paid. Furthermore, a number of Member States, which had in the past paid their assessed contributions early and in full, in accordance with their legal obligations, had failed to do so in the current year, and some Member States which had formerly paid their assessed contributions in full had chosen, in 1991, to pay in instalments.
- 36. As he had noted, unpaid assessed contributions for peace-keeping operations totalled over \$518 million at 30 September 1991. The payment of assessed contributions for the four new peace-keeping operations launched in 1991 had not kept pace with the cash requirements for those operations. As a result, it has been necessary to borrow from other peace-keeping funds to meet cash requirements for the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM II). The contributions paid to date for those operations, as well as for the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) and the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL), were insufficient to meet the expenditure requirements for each of those operations in October.
- 37. In summary, there was a need for additional cash receipts in October 1991 of \$100 million to meet the expenditure requirements of the regular budget and the four peace-keeping operations he had mentioned. Of that amount, at least \$50 million was required before the middle of the month.
- 38. For the reasons he had just outlined, he considered it fair to say that the financial situation of the United Nations was, indeed, precarious.
- 39. THE CHAIRMAN said that the Committee would have an opportunity to discuss the matter further in connection with agenda items 109 and 110, which would be introduced later in October.

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

- 40. Mr. DANKWA (Chairman of the Committee on Corferences), introducing the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/46/32), said that during the past year the Committee had focused on issues related to the planning, coordination and organization of the meetings programme at Headquarters locations and at the seats of the regional commissions. It had also reviewed various reports from the Secretariat on internal procedures, practices and projected activities in regard to conference servicing.
- 41. Annex II of the report contained the draft calendar of conferences for 1992-1993 as recommended for adoption by the General Assembly. The changes that had been made in the scheduling and meetings pattern of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs and the forthcoming United Nations

(Mr. Dankwa)

Conference on Environment and Development scheduled for June 1992 had had a significant effect upon the calendar as compared with that for 1990-1991. If any proposals affecting the calendar were made during the consideration of draft resolutions of the Main Committees at the current session, the Committee on Conferences would meet to discuss their possible effect on the 1992 programme and advise the Assembly accordingly.

- The Committee had again reviewed the utilization statistics of a core 42. sample of United Nations organs that had been meeting on a regular basis for the past nine years. Overall performance during 1990 had been extremely encouraging, a collective utilization factor of 78 per cent having been achieved. Letters were to be sent to the presiding officers of bodies covered by the meetings statistics, presenting an individualized analysis of each body's utilization factor and, where the analysis warranted, welcoming or urging improvements, with a view to discerning patterns and identifying the reasons for relatively low utilization. The replies received would be presented to the Committee at its next substantive session. Since it had been observed that some subsidiary organs had been unable to make full use of the resources allocated to them, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly should request all subsidiary organs to review their meeting requirements in order to achieve a more effective and coordinated use of conference facilities and services.
- 43. In its resolution 45/238 A, the Assembly had requested the Committee on Conferences to consider additional elements for incorporation in the new methodology on conference-servicing utilization rates. A preliminary review had indicated that a number of meetings were cancelled because documents were not available. The Committee had accordingly incorporated in the statistics an "availability index" that would identify the percentage of pre-session documentation issued within the six-week deadline established by the General Assembly. The calculation would quantify, in percentage terms, the number of documents available at varying dates prior to the opening of the session.
- 44. In its continued search for improvements, the Committee had reviewed existing conference resources, services and facilities within the United Nations, and the practices and procedures employed throughout the Organization for providing services and facilities outside the approved calendar. Some thought had been given to the possibility of central planning and coordination of all organizational aspects of conference servicing, with a view to ensuring optimum efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Detailed analysis of that topic would have to await the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 45/264 on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, but there was evidence of increasing coordination at both intergovernmental and Secretariat levels.
- 45. At the Secretariat level, the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), at the instance of the Committee on Conferences, was examining possible improvements in the coordination of conferences within the United Nations

(Mr. Dankwa)

system. It was noped that ACC would submit a report as soon as possible. the intergovernmental level, the Committee on Conferences, as a subsidiary body of the Assembly, continued to advise the Assembly on the design and implementation of the calendar. Under its terms of reference, however, it had no mandated role with regard to the Economic and Social Council at either the planning or the implementation stage of the calendar, although, on the basis of Council decision 1988/103, the Committee reviewed the Council's draft biennial calendar of conferences and meetings and submitted recommendations thereon to the Council. In essence, therefore, the Committee acted in an advisory capacity at the preparatory stage. However, existing procedures with regard to inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary organs did not benefit from coordination by the Committee on Conferences. Formally, it was the Bureau of the Council which decided on any departures, although, in practice, the Bureau had referred requests for such departures to the Committee on Conferences since 1979. The Committee therefore recommended that the Assembly should invite the Economic and Social Council to consider formalizing the procedures for inter-sessional departures by granting the Committee on Conferences authority to act on its behalf when it was not in session, and consulting the Committee on Conferences whenever the Council itself was seized with such requests.

- 46. Pursuant to paragraph 8 of resolution 45/238 A, the Committee had begun consideration of further measures to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the use of conference-servicing resources by assessing the experience gained and the results achieved to date. Its review had included recommendations on the servicing of meetings, the coordination of the meetings programme, and the provision of documentation, including publications. In order to maximize the utilization of available conference resources, the Secretariat had been requested to schedule meetings, whenever possible, consecutively within one 3-hour meeting period.
- 47. The Committee had requested the Secretariat to take into account the proposals made and the views expressed on documentation and publications when it prepared its reports on related items for the Committee's consideration in 1992 and had decided to consider the entire matter in more detail in 1992 on the basis of further information.
- 48. On the question of inter-sessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and meetings, the Committee noted that changes, especially those involving extensions of ongoing sessions, could disrupt the meetings programme. It therefore urged subsidiary organs to complete their work within the approved period. The guidelines adopted and conclusions reached appeared in paragraphs 77-79 of the report.
- 49. As indicated in chapter III of the report, the Committee had reviewed the question of meetings of organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget of the United Nations. Meetings outside the calendar of conferences

(Mr. Dankwa)

would continue to be scheduled and serviced on an ad hoc or reimbursable basis. In view of the substantial amount of conference servicing involved, the Committee appealed to the Governing Council of UNDP and the Executive Board of UNICEF to review their meeting and documentation requirements. It would return to the issue as and when necessary, depending on further developments.

- 50. The Committee had also considered the question of requests for exceptions to section 1, paragraph 7, of General Assembly resolution 40/243 (chap. IV). In accordance with existing procedures, the chairmen of subsidary organs wishing to meet at Headquarters during a regular session of the General Assembly submitted their requests to the Committee on Conferences for consideration and recommendation to the Assembly as appropriate. As noted in paragraphs 100 to 102 of the report, the Committee had decided to advise subsidiary organs to re-evaluate their reporting cycles, and the Secretariat had been requested to explore and report on the possibility of adjusting the cut-off dates for financial information, so that the annual programmes of work of such bodies could be completed prior to regular sessions of the General Assembly.
- 51. Chapter V of the report covered the Committee's consideration of the programme performance of the Department of Conference Services (DCS) during the biennium 1988-1989, the proposed programme budget for conference and library services for the biennium 1992-1993 and the role of the Committee on Conferences in the review of DCS. The Committee's conclusions and recommendations were set out in paragraphs 122 to 124 of the report. Noting that a change had been made in paragraph 124 after the Committee's adoption of the report, he said that, although he was grateful for the Secretariat's efforts at clarification, he believed that final reports should respect the language and decisions agreed to by the intergovernmental body concerned. The words "which mentions the plan to invite" and the words "during the biennium 1990-1991 to determine whether the productivity and efficiency of the Department could be further enhanced" should be deleted.
- 52. As indicated in chapter VI of the report, which dealt with the application of new technology to conference servicing, the Committee had summarized the goals in that area as the achievement of improvements in efficiency and cost-effectiveness, including in the quality of the work done and the ability of the Secretariat to produce an increased volume of work with the same staffing resources. The Secretariat was requested to present a report on the extent to which new technology assisted in compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation. In the course of the deliberations, it had become clear that there was an uneven application of technologies throughout the system. The Committee advised, therefore, that the applications of new technologies should, to the extent possible, be introduced evenly throughout the United Nations, and requested that it should be informed in future of the instances where that was not achieved and be given an explanation of the reasons involved.

(Mr. Dankwa)

- 53. The Committee on Conferences had thus examined a broad range of the Organization's activities and practices in the field of conference servicing. At each stage, and for each item considered, it had approached the deliberations with the aim of providing guidance to subsidiary bodies and directives to the Secretariat that would reflect the needs of delegations and the requests of the Assembly and would enhance their collective ability to benefit fully from a consistently high level of conference servicing.
- Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that the remarkable events of recent years and the growing international recognition of the United Mations had led to a renaissance of the United Nations as the primary forum for dealing with the many issues now facing the world. The Department of Conference Services (DCS) was proud of its essential role of facilitating the work of the Organization. Despite the extraordinary demands placed on the staff of the Department in 1991, he was happy to say that it had responded successfully on all occasions. achievements, however, had not been without cost. The heightened activity of the Security Council and the overnight processing of its substantial documentation, as well as the release of some DCS staff, such as cartographers and linguists to other areas of the Secretariat, combined with the regular workload, had the Department's capacity for absorption stretched to the limit. He hoped that the Committee would bear those considerations in mind when it considered the items on the pattern of conferences and the programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993.
- 55. Among the pressing matters considered by the Committee on Conferences during its August 1991 session was the review of the draft calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 1992-1993 (A/46/32, annex II). That calendar reflected the efforts of DCS to balance the preferences of intergovernmental bodies with the capacities of the Department's documentation and meeting services, as well as the need to control reliance on temporary assistance. In addition, as the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences had just mentioned, it had been necessary to take into account the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in June 1992 and to work towards the implementation of resolution 45/264.
- 56. Moreover, as mandated in General Assembly resolution 45/238, DCS had made progress on the coordination of the conference and meeting activities of the United Nations common system. On its own initiative, it had brought to the attention of the 1991 Inter-Agency Meeting for Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications (IAMLADP) such matters as the schedules of conferences and meetings of each of the organizations; the use of free-lance staff and the possible inter-agency exchange of language staff; the rates applied to contractual services; and the harmonization of new technologies used in meeting and documentation services. In response to General Assembly resolution 45/248 A, it had also brought up the matter of elaborating unified workload standards for conference-servicing staff in the common system. IAMLADP had unanimously agreed to take concrete measures to reinforce

(Mr. Wyzner)

collaboration in those areas, including the establishment of a Geneva-based working group to pursue the development of system-wide workload standards comprising a range of figures to reflect specific work requirements. The results of those efforts would be reported to the Administrative Committee on Coordination for transmission to the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session.

- 57. With regard to the timely availability of documentation, he recalled that delays in the submission of manuscripts for processing had been identified as one of the leading causes of the late issuance of documents. In response to General Assembly resolution 45/238 B, DCS had initiated the establishment of an interdepartmental group charged with seeking better coordination between author departments and processing services and with identifying means of ensuring more timely submission of documents. Those efforts, together with considerable changes in the production stages, had made it possible to publish certain essential documents in a more timely fashion. Nevertheless, by the start of the General Assembly, DCS had received for processing less than 50 per cent of the pre-session documentation for the forty-sixth session. In view of the steady increase in the volume of documentation over the preceding five years and the post reductions made during the same period, the continued late submission of documents was perhaps not surprising.
- 58. The Department had welcomed the decision of the Committee on Conferences to review the programme performance of DCS for the biennium 1988-1989, section 32, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1992-1993 (A/46/6/Rev.1, sect. 32) and the application of new technology to conference servicing. It appreciated the Committee's remarks with respect to the number of special conferences and their effect on the calendar of conferences; the need to make every effort to reflect in future programme budgets the gains in productivity, efficiency and quality attained through technological innovations; and the increasing need for interpretation services for bodies meeting at Vienna.
- 59. The Department relied greatly on the expertise of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and would welcome JIU undertaking new reviews or updating earlier ones on such matters as the control and limitation of documentation, translation processes, and publishing practices and policies, including publication in electronic media. In addition, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) had, as always, provided valuable insights into the financial and managerial functioning of DCS. He was proud to say that the Advisory Committee's review of the DCS budget proposals for the upcoming biennium had been generally positive.
- 60. Referring to the difficulties in evaluating the efficiency of conference services, he pointed out that DCS controlled neither the volume nor the timing of its work. Its output depended on the workload, which could, and did, vary. For example, the workload generated by Security Council resolutions 661 and 687 had often made it necessary to place staff "on alert" for many hours

(Mr. Wyzner)

for meetings that in the end did not take place or which lasted only a few minutes. The apparent output of that staff bore no relation to the time spent.

- 61. In addition, DCS had incurred unforeseen expenses owing to the authorization given to some United Nations bodies to hold additional meetings subsequent to the establishment of the calendar. Moreover, the return to the practice of holding annual, rather than biennial, sessions had meant an additional financial burden.
- 62. Consultations were continuing with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) regarding the establishment at Vienna of a unified conference service administered by the United Nations. An accord reached during the course of the year with IAEA on the conditions under which the United Nations would provide interpretation services to IAEA had been approved by that body's Board of Governors and would enter into force on 1 January 1992. UNIDO, however, had decided to defer any action regarding the unified service arrangements for Vienna-based organizations until those organizations had had an opportunity to study the detailed cost analysis. It had also recommended that any change in the present conference-service arrangements should be examined in the light of the efficiency, economy and quality of services. As a consequence, the joint advisory committee on conference services at Vienna had resumed its analysis of the conference-servicing requirements of the Vienna-based organizations. A detailed report would be submitted to the Fifth Committee, through ACABQ, during the session, as requested.
- 63. Concerning the Department's budget estimates, he wished to point out that the final figures set out in section 32 of the proposed programme budget (A/46/6) were low and had passed rigorous scrutiny both within the Secretariat and in ACABQ and the Committee on Conferences. They represented a slim 0.2 per cent real growth and only 8.6 per cent of the total United Nations expenses, when extrabudgetary funding was included.
- 64. Staff reductions in the 1980s had been premised on the assumption of a lower workload dictated by financial constraints. In fact, since 1990 there had been an upward trend in the demand for conference services. DCS resources were stretched to their limits and optimum efficiency and cost-effectiveness were a daily concern. In that context, the application of useful new technologies and techniques had become even more pressing.
- 65. During the period 1992-1997, DCS would be using advances in technology and communications to establish a global network of conference and library services. High priority would be given to the phased introduction of an optical disc system for the storage, retrieval and high-speed transmission of conference documents. That system would be operational in Geneva and New York by the end of the first quarter of 1992 and would be further expanded during the biennium 1992-1993.

(Mr. Wyzner)

- 66. Now that the text-processing units had been fully automated, the primary objective would be to enhance the ability to move documents in electronic form from the drafting through the printing stages. The Department also hoped to extend the Document Records Information and Tracking System (DRITS) to subsystems in the processing units.
- 67. The DCS Publishing Division would be embarking on a new programme involving the installation of a networked electronic system to create in-house capacity for manuscript preparation, typesetting, proofreading, graphic design and cartography, which would significantly reduce reliance on external printing. It would also be upgrading existing automated plate-making equipment to accept documents electronically. In response to General Assembly decision 45/451, outside printers were now used only when technical requirements could not be met with in-house machinery. Also, as a result of redoubled efforts to improve marketing strategies and techniques, the net revenue from the sale of publications already exceeded \$500,000 a dramatic increase over the \$120,000 in net revenue reported for the biennium 1988-1989.
- 68. Other technological innovations were planned for the Dag Hammarskjöld Library. They included the modernization of the United Nations Bibliographic Information System and, resources permitting, the establishment of a joint New York-Geneva library network of information services.
- 69. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints would limit the implementation of technological innovations in the translation and editorial services, where networked, multi-function workstations were needed to provide access to a microcomputer-based multilingual database and to the optical disc full-text retrieval system. In that regard, it should also be noted that the United Nations lagged considerably behind a number of specialized agencies and intergovernmental organizations in the area of computer-assisted translation.
- 70. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the Twelve States members of the European Community, said that the Committee on Conferences was potentially an important instrument in improving the administrative and financial effectiveness of the United Nations. The terms of reference of the Committee, as defined in General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, gave it the mandate to determine the ways and means of ensuring optimum utilization of conference facilities and services. While the Twelve fully appreciated the efforts of the Committee in reviewing the calendar of conferences and meetings, they thought that its recommendations could have been formulated more precisely and firmly. Indeed, the report raised some questions about the Committee's effectiveness in helping to rationalize the meetings and conferences of intergovernmental bodies.
- 71. Conference utilization was a case in point. The 75 per cent benchmark set by the Committee was too low and should be raised to 85 per cent. While the Twelve were pleased to note a slight overall improvement in the conference-servicing utilization rate, they noted that a number of hodies had

(Mr. Spaans, Netherlands)

a utilization rate far below the already modest 75 per cent benchmark. In 1990, the Twelve had asked the Committee to consider measures to reduce the duration and frequency of conferences and meetings of bodies that had a consistently low utilization rate. It appeared from its report, however, that the Committee did not think it had a mandate to propose such measures. For purposes of clarification, the Twelve would welcome another look at the terms of reference of the Committee in the light of recommendations 1, 2 and 3 of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, as endorsed in General Assembly resolution 41/213.

- 72. The report also seemed to indicate that the Committee agreed in general to any request for an extension of a meeting of an intergovernmental body or for additional conference facilities. The Twelve wished to reiterate their position that the Committee should take an active role in enhancing the conference calendar, rather than simply rubber-stamping requests. As an intergovernmental body established expressly for that purpose, it was perfectly entitled to review and decide on requests from other intergovernmental bodies.
- 73. The Twelve wished to see improved arrangements for the planning of world conferences. It would be recalled that the General Assembly had approved a recommendation by the General Committee that there should be an overall limit of five special conferences in a given year. The Fifth Committee should be consulted about the overall mechanism for the scheduling of special conferences. The Twelve also supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that the Economic and Social Council should review the biennialization of its subsidiary bodies. The discussion of the restructuring of the Council's subsidiaries could lead to changes in the pattern of conferences.
- 74. With regard to meetings of organs and programmes not funded from the regular budget of the United Nations, UNDP and UNICEF should review their meeting and documentation requirements in view of their significant financial implications for the budget of the United Nations.
- 75. The Committee would recall that, further to the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts, it had been intended to take a fresh outside look at the Department of Conference Services during the biennium 1990-1991 to determine whether its productivity and efficiency could be further enhanced. The Twelve would welcome clarification of why that review had not been carried out, and intended to propose the inclusion in the resolution on the pattern of conferences of an urgent request for that fresh outside look.
- 76. The Twelve wished to recall that the Committee on Conferences was supposed to work closely with ACABQ in preparing the calendar of conferences, as recommended by the Group of 18. The competence of the Committee on Conferences with regard to section 32 of the proposed programme budget for the

(Mr. Spaans, Netherlands)

biennium 1992-1993 meant that it inevitably had a budgetary role. Programme productivity should be evaluated both qualitatively and quantitively. It would then be easier to assess the impact of new technology and the desirable ratio of equipment to staff.

- 77. The Committee on Conferences had not had a substantive discussion of the question of the control and limitation of documentation. With the introduction of new technology, the Committee's report for the following year should show evidence of improved productivity and reduction of costs in the area of conference servicing. In that connection, there was an urgent need to eliminate publications of minimal usefulness. Member States should also keep any submissions as brief as possible and curb their requests for the circulation of communications as United Nations documents.
- 78. Mr. DUHALT (Mexico) said that conference services were essential to the functioning of the United Nations. The importance of their activities had been reflected in General Assembly resolution 43/222 B, which had consolidated the functions of the Committee on Conferences and altered its membership. Further improvements in the functioning of the Committee were, however, Difficultics resulted from the low level of attendance at its meetings and from the differences which persisted concerning the scope of the Committee's mandate. Some Member States wanted the Committee to have a greater say in the control of conference services and the reduction of expenditure on conference servicing, while others thought that its primary function was to ensure that various bodies were provided with the services they needed. While his own delegation did not think that the Committee on Conferences should become the arbiter of the resources needed by other organs, it believed that its activities in the areas of technical assistance, planning and coordination should be strengthened in order to make the best possible use of the services available. Otherwise the Committee might become merely a forum for rubber-stamping proposals relating to the calendar of meetings.
- 79. His delegation supported the recommendations made by the Committee in its report. It welcomed the improvement in the overall rate of utilization of conference services, although it maintained its reservations concerning the validity of the methodology used to assess the effectiveness of the use of such services. In that connection, he welcomed the introduction of a documentation "availability index", which would show the timeliness with which the Secretariat distributed the documentation needed for meetings of each organ of the United Nations. The availability of more detailed statistics would be extremely valuable.
- 30. The Committee on Conferences should devote more attention to the question of meetings of organs and programmes which had their own budgets and whose conference servicing was provided by the United Nations, a question that had both budgetary and political implications.

(Mr. Duhalt, Mexico)

81. His delegation was well aware of the importance of the item before the Fifth Committee. Additional effort was necessary in order to device a pattern of conferences which would be more rational and efficient.

AGENDA ITEM 104: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (A/46/5 and Add.1, Add.3-5 and Add.7, A/46/298, 299, 404 and 510)

- 82. Mr. ZAVELBERG (Chairman of the Board of Auditors), introducing the reports of the Board of Auditors, said that, in addition to submitting reports on those organizations which had annual reporting periods and on the Joint Staff Pension Fund, the Board had prepared interim reports on some organizations with a biennial budget, for which regular reports would be prepared in 1992, after the end of the current biennium. With regard to the latter group, the Board had decided to submit interim reports on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in response to the concern expressed that their change to a biennial budget procedure would delay audit findings of relevance to decision-making, and to repeated requests to put more emphasis on management issues. The special report on the International Trade Centre (ITC) conserned the question of whether or not ITC had to apply United Nations administrative instructions.
- 83. As requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 13 (a) of resolution 45/235, the Board had evaluated the efficacy of specific measures taken by administrations to implement previous recommendations of the Board. The Board had continued its practice of providing a summary of its principal findings, conclusions and recommendations, with an indication of relative urgency, but considered it difficult to provide any timetable for remedial action, as requested in paragraph 22 of resolution 45/235, since that was within the discretion of the organizations concerned. Accordingly, it was for the various administrations to make such information available. The Board had taken particular care to provide audit coverage of all extrabudgetary expenditures, including trust funds.
- 84. The Board had provided information on the liquidity position of those organizations for which regular reports had been prepared, and similar information would be provided for other organizations in 1992. The Audit Operations Committee of the Board had maintained a continuing dialogue with the administrations of the various organizations and with their internal audit services, and had exchanged information with the Joint Inspection Unit. The study requested in paragraph 5 of resolution 45/235 on accounting principles and standards for consistent application in the United Nations system had been prepared by the Panel of External Auditors, and would be considered under a separate agenda item.
- 85. Turning to the Board's findings, he said that the bulk reporting of other trust funds in the financial statements of the voluntary funds administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (A/46/5/Add.5) did

(Mr. Zavelberg)

not permit adequate disclosure. In order to improve transparency, the reporting of "Other trust funds" in schedule 1 should be expanded to disclose separately any trust fund with a favourable balance of \$US 500,000 or above at year end. The Board had noted that supplies valued at some \$US 300,000 stored by UNHCR in a host country pending transshipment had allegedly been confiscated by customs officials of the country in question. UNHCR should take appropriate measures to recover the confiscated goods, and ensure that warehousing was available prior to the shipment of goods. A review by the Board of cases of fraud and presumptive fraud had revealed internal control weaknesses in some field offices and some implementing agencies, as a result of which the Board had recommended the strengthening of procedures for the management of cash resources in field offices.

- 86. With regard to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/46/5/Add.3), the Board had noted that the total amount of outstanding pledges was equal to about 16 per cent of total expenditure incurred in 1990. Outstanding pledges should be disclosed in a note to the financial statements. Furthermore, an average of \$US 20 million in cash was kept available in current and call accounts for unforeseen events. Such funds should be placed in higher-yielding time deposits to the extent possible.
- 87. The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (A/46/5/Add.4) had not fully adhered to the rules and regulations on budgetary controls. Deficits had been incurred in the General Fund and the Special Purpose Grants Fund. Vigilance must be exercised in the monitoring of such expenditures to ensure that they were incurred only within approved budget and released allotment advices. In fact, expenditures amounting to more than \$US 200,000 had been incurred before allotments had been issued. The Board recommended that the system of allotment advices should be reviewed, and that the procedure for reimbursing expenditure in field offices should be improved. Given the downward trend in the number of donor countries, realistic assumptions should be made with regard to revenue resources in the preparation of budget proposals.
- 88. Turning to the various interim reports prepared by the Board, in the first place that on UNDP (A/46/5/Add.1), he said that none of the standard formats used as a basis for agreements between UNDP and its executing agencies ensured the appropriate degree of accountability. In particular, the agreements did not ensure that adequate information regarding audit findings was made available to UNDP and its external auditor, so that it was not possible to assess properly how funds had been spent by executing agencies.
- 89. It was essential for all executing agencies of UNDP to sign basic agreements covering their responsibilities in executing UNDP-funded projects. Existing agreements should be amended so as to ensure that both the accounts and the effectiveness and efficiency of project management could be audited by the external auditors. Audit findings should be available to both UNDP and

(Mr. Zavelberg)

its auditors. UNDP itself should be able to review project implementation by its executing agencies.

- 90. The Board's analysis of the Office for Project Services had revealed considerable overexpenditure on some projects, while others had unspent balances. That indicated deficiencies in project management. The number of projects undertaken by the Office should be strictly controlled so that management capacity was not exceeded.
- 91. The Economists for Africa Programme of UNDP had suffered from various deficiencies since its inception. Despite the lack of reliable results, it had been extended, yet even after five years of implementation no adequate evaluation of the programme was available. New development initiatives should be designed in such a way that reliable results could be obtained during a trial period as an essential prerequisite to a decision as to whether to proceed with full-scale implementation.
- 92. Commenting on the report on UNFPA (A/46/5/Add.7), he said that the designation and execution of certifying and approving functions in field offices were flawed in many cases and that there was considerable weakness in supervision by headquarters in that regard. The Board had recommended appropriate improvements.
- 93. Lastly, with regard to the report on ITC (A/46/5), he said that, although the Board had repeatedly raised the question of whether or not ITC had to comply with United Nations administrative instructions, no significant attempt had been made to find a solution. The uncertainty constituted a serious weakness in the functioning of the internal control system and there was an urgent need to decide whether ITC had to comply with United Nations administrative instructions, or, if not, what other directives should be followed.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.