

General Assembly

FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
43rd meeting
held on
Friday, 29 November 1991
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 43rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 116: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 117: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM (continued) (A/46/30 and A/46/275; A/C.5/46/28, A/C.5/46/31, A/C.5/46/33, A/C.5/46/35 and A/C.5/46/45)

AGENDA ITEM 117: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM (continued) (A/46/9 and A/46/614; A/C.5/46/15, A/C.5/46/31, A/C.5/46/33 and A/C.5/46/45)

1. Mr. BEL HADJ AMOR (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) expressed appreciation for the Committee's strong endorsement of the role of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) as the central body mandated to coordinate conditions of service in the common system. While the General Assembly had reaffirmed the Commission's central role on a number of occasions, it was important to reiterate that view to ensure that any further erosion of the common system was arrested. The Commission endeavoured to take into account the different goals and operational requirements of the various organizations. If Member States, executive heads and ICSC worked together in a spirit of cooperation, the goal of a common system in which all staff were treated on an equal basis could be realized.
2. The Committee's endorsement of the Commission's attempts to strengthen its role as an independent technical body was heartening. Yet ICSC could only be as strong and as independent as Member States, the organizations and the staff bodies wished it to be, since without their full cooperation the Commission would not find it possible to fulfil its mandate with the required objectivity, impartiality and independence.
3. Referring to the suggestion that the Commission's secretariat should have totally independent conditions of service so as to ensure impartiality in the preparation of ICSC studies which affected the conditions of service of some 50,000 common system staff members around the world, he said that there would be practical disadvantages. In any event, the Committee could rest assured that the ICSC secretariat was performing its functions objectively, impartially and with integrity.
4. The General Assembly, in its resolution 44/198, had approved the establishment of a floor net salary level for staff in the Professional and higher categories by reference to corresponding base net salary levels of comparable officials in the base city of the comparator civil service. The introduction of the base/floor salary scale concept had also affected some of the allowances which were determined by reference to base salaries. At its August session, the Commission had found justification for recommending an upward adjustment to the scale of 8.6 per cent. An informal note was available explaining the rationale underlying the Commission's recommendation and the cost implications by sources of funds.

(Mr. Bel Hadj Amor, ICSC)

5. The suggestion that the salary increase received by the Senior Executive Service in the comparator country had affected the remuneration of all Professional staff in the United Nations system was erroneous. United Nations salaries in New York, the base of the system, were not adjusted in accordance with movements in United States federal civil service salaries, but changed whenever a post adjustment increase fell due as a result of cost-of-living changes and was granted subject to margin range considerations. The January 1991 increase in Senior Executive Service salaries had merely resulted in a reduction of margin levels at the P-5 to D-2 levels, which, in turn, had resulted in a slight reduction of the overall margin figure. Further details of the latest grade equivalency study were available if required.

6. The inflation assumptions used by the Commission must be treated with caution. The projections of post adjustment and consequent margins could be recalculated using alternative inflation assumptions. The rule of thumb was that when inflation exceeded the comparator's salary increases only slightly, the probability of the margin exceeding the 120 limit was low, whereas if inflation greatly exceeded the comparator's salary increases, then there would be a high probability of the margin exceeding the upper limit of the range, with a consequent freeze on remuneration.

7. Lastly, regarding the pensionable remuneration of ungraded officials, ICSC had not been provided with the calculations used by the different organizations. The Commission had made recommendations, in paragraph 71 of its report (A/46/30), for the regularization of the procedure for determining the pensionable remuneration of ungraded officials on a common system basis.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

8. Mr. O. B. ANDERSEN (Denmark) said that the Committee was not carrying out the important tasks assigned to it as it should. Specifically, the Committee had no comprehensive plan of work for its meetings, which were frequently announced late, without a clear indication of which items would actually be taken up. In informal consultations there had been much discussion of matters that did not address the core problems. The late issuance of documentation had also hindered delegations in their work. The general confusion was illustrated by the rumour currently circulating that the Committee might not end its work by the Christmas holiday. Accordingly, he proposed that the Bureau should prepare a plan of work for the remainder of the session, even if it was subject to change.

9. Mr. DELCORDE (Belgium) said that he fully supported the views of the representative of Denmark. It was of particular importance for the Committee to have some idea in advance of how its activities were to be scheduled if it was to complete its work on time.

10. Mr. BELHAJ (Tunisia) said that his delegation, while not attributing any fault to the Bureau of the Committee, was concerned about the manner in which meetings were announced and decisions were taken, as evidenced by the hasty approval of the budget outline at the forty-fifth session. He agreed that a plan of work for both formal and informal meetings would assist the Committee.

11. Mr. SPAANS (Netherlands) said that any such plan of work would need to be based on the expected date of conclusion of specific items and on agreement on draft resolutions. In practice it was very difficult to say that consultations on a specific item would end on a particular date. Adoption of such a plan of work presupposed agreement on deadlines for the end of consultations and the adoption of draft resolutions.

12. The CHAIRMAN said that those issues were also of great concern to him. The Committee was attempting to adhere to its tentative programme of work, but reaching a consensus took time. Despite holding informal consultations almost every day, the Committee had not yet concluded even a single item. The Bureau would meet to discuss the situation. With regard to the uncertainty as to which items were to be taken up in formal meetings, he trusted that the coordinators would be able to keep delegations abreast of changes that needed to be made to accommodate priority items, such as consideration of the programme budget. It should also be understood that the Committee's progress depended on the availability of documentation and on the state of preparedness of delegations and departments. In that connection, he appealed to all delegations to expedite the work of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.