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**Chairman: Prince WAN WAITHAYAKON (Thailand).**

**Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly: memorandum by the Secretary-General (A/2206, A/C.6/339/Add.1) (continued)**

[Item 50]\*

1. Mr. BURBRIDGE (Canada) said that the Canadian delegation favoured any practical and effective measures to economize time and expenditure in connexion with regular sessions of the General Assembly. It agreed with the representative of Norway (347th and 349th meetings) that General Assembly sessions should be shorter, not only for financial reasons, but also because senior government representatives could not absent themselves from their duties for long periods.

2. He agreed that drastic limitations on the right of representatives to express their governments' views freely and adequately on all issues before the United Nations might be very unfortunate and retrogressive. Any measures which would interfere with the right of representatives to speak freely and fully would be resisted by his delegation. In that sense, it opposed any unreasonable suggestions or proposals to limit debate in the General Assembly or any of its Committees. On the other hand, if business was to be conducted in an orderly manner, there should be some restrictions on the right of debate. That right had been abused in the past, and to prevent any recurrence the rules of procedure governing the methods of debate should be clarified.

3. The Canadian delegation had been impressed with the reasonableness of the observations made in the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206) and particularly with the moderate and restrained suggestions contained therein. It was in general agreement with many of the suggestions for improvement made throughout that memorandum. The proposals which were contained in the annex and which called for the amendment of a number of the rules of procedure did not involve a substantial change in those rules in their

present form but merely provided necessary clarifications.

4. He admitted that the amendments to the rules of procedure proposed by the Secretary-General would not in themselves greatly contribute to shortening the duration of Assembly sessions. On the whole, however, those sound and moderate proposals represented a step in the right direction and would effect an improvement if all representatives were willing to comply with them and all presiding officers were willing to enforce them. Of course, measures which would automatically limit the duration of regular sessions might be self-defeating unless they led to an improvement in methods and practices and elicited a genuine willingness on the part of delegations to co-operate. Moreover, the special character of the Assembly and the number and complexity of the problems before it made it important to approach the question of shortening sessions from the point of view of the efficient transaction of the General Assembly's business. The purposes of the United Nations were not always best served by those who spoke the most and the longest. In fact, unlimited debate could sometimes seriously impede progress.

5. He agreed with the tenor of the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1).

6. His delegation saw no great need for the appointment of an *ad hoc* committee of experts but would not oppose such a suggestion if the majority favoured it.

7. The Canadian delegation would support the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) to the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279). It was neither practicable nor wise to attempt to fix a period of six weeks for the Assembly's sessions, for the scope and complexity of the problems which would come before future sessions were unforeseeable. Nor would it always be possible or feasible to transfer to the next regular session items not considered at a given session. If the Belgian amendment was adopted, the Canadian delegation would vote in favour of the Argentine draft resolution as thus amended.

8. The Canadian delegation would also support the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/

\* Indicates the item number on the agenda of the General Assembly.

Rev.1) incorporating five of the six amendments to the rules of procedure contained in the annex to the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206). Those very moderate amendments should help to limit the duration of Assembly sessions if they were properly enforced and if there was a general desire on the part of delegations to co-operate in their application. Without such co-operation, rules of procedure, no matter how perfectly drafted, would be of little help in limiting the duration of sessions.

9. The Canadian delegation had considerable sympathy for the motives inspiring the revised Australian amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution. The proposed amendment to rule 74 [114] had been improved by the substitution of "may" for "shall" but the wording of the amendment was still difficult to interpret, and the amendment was therefore unlikely to serve a useful purpose. The second Australian amendment, suggesting a change in rule 88 [127], was also open to doubt. At first sight the Canadian delegation had felt that, for the sake of curtailing the duration of Assembly sessions, the right of a representative to explain his vote—especially if he had previously spoken as many as eight or more times in the debate on the item being put to the vote—should be dispensed with. The Australian proposal had much merit. It would not unduly restrict the right of any delegation freely and adequately to express its government's views. It was doubtful, however, if it would have any real effect in limiting the length of debate. In fact, it might encourage longer debate because representatives might feel obliged, after speaking in the general discussion, to state their views on every draft resolution and amendment that might be subsequently introduced. The Canadian delegation would therefore be compelled to abstain from the vote on the second Australian amendment.

10. For the reasons already stated, the Canadian delegation would also vote against the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution.

11. Mr. BARTOS (Yugoslavia) noted that earlier (348th meeting) in the general debate the Yugoslav delegation had expressed support of most of the amendments proposed by the Secretary-General and stated that it favoured measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the Assembly, provided that such measures did not curtail delegations' rights.

12. The problem could be considered either from a purely technical or from a political point of view. The Yugoslav delegation had urged (348th meeting) that political considerations should prevail. If the General Assembly was to fulfil its functions, governments must have the guaranteed right to express their views freely. Of course, other delegations were at liberty to consider that technical considerations outweighed political necessity. The representative of the Union of South Africa had, however, not confined his statements (350th meeting) to the technical aspects of the question but, in presenting his arguments, had introduced certain political ideas of principle which could not go unchallenged.

13. The first question was whether freedom of speech, the freedom to express views, was enjoyed in the United Nations equally by large and small States. It

was improper for the representative of the Union of South Africa to preach sermons on the position of the smaller States or to say that those States spoke more in United Nations debates than the large States. Each government instructed its delegation to speak whenever the latter felt it should. The question whether small or medium-sized States should present short or long statements on frequent or rare occasions was determined by those States themselves. States which felt least protected and secure would probably speak more frequently and at greater length, because they felt impelled to explain their position in greater detail. The principle of the sovereign equality of States, which was basic to the Charter, would be upheld only if it was understood that each State had the right to speak as much as it considered necessary. The Yugoslav delegation was opposed to abuse of freedom of speech in the United Nations but would not allow anyone to limit the right to speak.

14. Secondly, the representative of the Union of South Africa had classified States according to the frequency and length of their statements in the United Nations. He would not trouble to challenge the accuracy of the South African representative's statistics, but he certainly took exception to the classification of States according to race. Nor could he accept the conclusion that some States made moderate use of the right to speak while others wasted the Assembly's time.

15. Thus, in his statement, the representative of the Union of South Africa had contravened two fundamental principles of the United Nations: the sovereign equality of States and the principle of non-discrimination.

16. He noted that, in criticizing the Yugoslav delegation's position on the amendments proposed by the Secretary-General, the representative of the Union of South Africa had attempted to represent Yugoslavia's views as absurd by stating that if all other delegations spoke as long as the Yugoslav delegation debates would last for six weeks. It had never been the contention of the Yugoslav delegation that all States Members should speak on every question. The Yugoslav position was that each sovereign State must be guaranteed the right to express its views freely, without regard to the calculation of time made by the representative of the Union of South Africa.

17. It had to be borne in mind that any amendments to the rules of procedure would apply not solely to the Sixth Committee but to the General Assembly and all its organs. If government representatives were deprived of their right to speak, statistics showing the cost in dollars for each minute of the General Assembly's time would not impress the peoples whose destinies were at stake. Mechanical solutions based on economy alone would be inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

18. Mr. Bartos referred to the amendments and proposals which had been submitted since the Yugoslav delegation's earlier statement (348th meeting). The revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1) was unchanged in substance; consequently the Yugoslav delegation maintained its position on that text. Both the revised Australian amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) were more moderate than the revised Norwegian draft resolution but were based on

the same concept of the discretionary power of the President or the Chairman to grant or withhold the right to speak. Because it would be unbecoming if a representative who had been refused permission to speak directed his hostility against the presiding officer, the Yugoslav delegation would be unable to support the Australian amendments. It could also not accept the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279) or the Belgian amendments (A/C.6/L.281), which did not alter the position of that draft resolution.

19. Mr. LACHS (Poland) referred to the Polish delegation's statement on the Secretariat memorandum (A/2206) in the 388th plenary meeting. The Polish delegation's view that the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure were not designed to promote full and democratic debate had been confirmed by other delegations which believed that those amendments would do more harm than good.

20. Clearly, the crux of the problem lay not in the rules of procedure but in the nature and complexity of the problems confronting the United Nations. The experience of seven sessions of the General Assembly had made it evident that the length of debate did not depend on purely technical and procedural considerations. The rules of procedure were only tools, and no technical devices or strict formulae would solve the problem.

21. The real purpose of the proposed amendments was to divert attention from the main issue. Instead of producing positive results, they would limit freedom of discussion. Some had argued that the proposed amendments were not substantive but merely stylistic. In any event, regardless of the formula used, the tendency to make changes in the rules of procedure at every session was dangerous.

22. It was obvious that all delegations were genuinely eager to make sure that each General Assembly session did not continue indefinitely. It was, however, impossible to shorten sessions by limitations which would undermine and seriously prejudice democratic discussion. The proposed amendments would limit freedom of speech and hamper discussion. On no account should the Committee allow itself to be influenced decisively by such purely material considerations as the saving of time.

23. The South African representative (350th meeting) had quoted a number of figures to illustrate the amount of time taken up by the speeches of various delegations, or groups of delegations. He would be better advised to consider what would be the result of applying the absurd suggestion that the length of delegations' statements should be proportionate to their countries' contributions to the United Nations budget. The length of speeches was purely relative, depending upon a number of factors: the interest the particular speaker's country had in any given question, the speaker's individual characteristics, the language used by the speaker—not all languages lent themselves equally to brevity of expression.

24. The Australian representative had admitted that he had no illusions that the acceptance of his revised amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) would help to shorten the discussions. Others had claimed that there was nothing new in the proposed amendments, which

simply formulated what was already contained in the rules of procedure. Those speakers did not perhaps realize that their arguments were self-defeating; if there was nothing new in the amendments, they were obviously not needed and the rules would be better left as they were. The Polish delegation, for its part, saw much that was new in the proposed amendments—a new and dangerous tendency to limit the rights of speakers and an attack on the equality of States Members.

25. Commenting on the individual amendments to the rules of procedure, he opposed the attempt, in the proposed amendment to rule 72 [112], to define a point of order. Points of order were a most useful device whereby delegations could claim rights, protest against violations of rights and demand action to safeguard the conduct of the debates. The present attempt to define a point of order was based on the erroneous assumption that points of order related only to matters within the competence of the President or the Chairman. Points of order could, however, concern matters within the competence of the whole Assembly or Committee. A distinction should be drawn between the formal and the substantive aspects of a point of order. Motions for the adjournment of a meeting or a debate, for example, had to be put to the vote, which meant that the Assembly or the Committee, not the presiding officer, ruled on the substantive questions. Again, if any delegation challenged the President's or the Chairman's ruling on a certain point, the challenge would be put to the vote. Thus the presiding officer was an intermediary, as it were, between any particular delegation and the Assembly or Committee as a whole. The proposed definition of a point of order was fraught with the gravest danger, for a number of complicated issues were involved and, as had become clear during the discussion, many of the delegations themselves were not at all sure what questions could be regarded as points of order. Any attempt, therefore, to amend rule 72 [112] would tend rather to lengthen than to shorten debates, for it was liable to give rise to long procedural discussions to decide whether any given point did or did not constitute a point of order. It was the considered view of the Polish delegation that points of order were intended to serve the interests of all delegations and should therefore be given the widest possible interpretation.

26. The whole trend of the proposed amendments was towards giving the President or the Chairman more rights than he should properly possess. It had always been considered that the presiding officer was the servant rather than the master of the Assembly or the Committee. In the few books that had been written on the subject of international conferences, the principle was clearly stated that the chairman's rights should be as restricted as possible. If, for example, the chairman was given the right to move resolutions, he became a party to the discussion and ceased to fulfil a purely supervisory role. Hence, it was in the interests of the proper conduct of proceedings that the powers of the President or the Chairman should remain as they were established in the existing rules of procedure.

27. The Polish delegation opposed also the proposed amendment to rule 73 [113]. The limitation of the time allowed to speakers and the number of times each representative could speak on a given item were funda-

mental questions, upon which all representatives should be allowed to state their views. It was incorrect to draw an analogy between rules 73 [113] and 76 [116]; whereas the latter, governing the closure of a debate, was meant to be applied only in the last stages of a debate, the former could be invoked at any stage and it would be dangerous to limit the number of speakers on the motion to two in favour and two against.

28. As for the proposed amendment to rule 38, in order to include the Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Political Committee in the membership of the General Committee, the Polish delegation firmly contended that such a question could not be regarded as coming within the item entitled "Measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly", and it urged the Committee, whatever might be decided on the other amendments, to declare the revision of rule 38 to be outside the scope of the item.

29. Turning to the revised Australian amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), he drew attention to the danger of the proposed change in rule 74 [114]. The amendment to the rule would make it possible for the President or the Chairman to close the list of speakers, not necessarily when the discussion was exhausted but when, for some reason or other, no representative was prepared to speak at that meeting. It would be particularly hard on the smaller delegations which had to serve on many committees and were unavoidably absent from one committee or another from time to time. The Polish delegation would therefore vote against the proposed amendment, to rule 74 [114], since it was not of a constructive nature and constituted an attack on the right of all delegations to express their views.

30. The Polish delegation opposed also the amendment to rule 88 [127] proposed by the Australian delegation. The explanation of vote was a basic right of all delegations, regardless of whether they had taken part in the discussion. The Australian representative (349th meeting) himself had admitted that it was sometimes necessary to explain a change of attitude, but had said that that should be done before the vote. The Polish delegation failed to see how that would save time: it would simply change the stage at which the explanation was given.

31. The Polish delegation saw in all the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure a dangerous tendency to limit the free exchange of views and to prejudice every delegation's right to state its government's position. It would therefore oppose all those amendments.

32. Mr. CACERES (Guatemala) found it difficult to justify the various amendments to the rules of procedure proposed in the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206). The general considerations set forth in the early part of the memorandum made it clear that the length of General Assembly sessions was due mainly to the complexity and number of problems with which it was called upon to deal and to the atmosphere of international tension in which the sessions were held. It was also admitted in the memorandum that measures which would automatically limit the duration of the regular sessions, though not difficult to devise, were liable to be damaging and self-defeating. Again,

paragraphs 40 and 41 of the memorandum stated that, in the case of points of order, which had frequently been the cause of unnecessarily long discussions, the difficulty lay, not in any defect in the rules of procedure, but rather in the incorrect application of those rules. There was no need to give the President or the Chairman greater powers in that connexion, for, while those offices were at present held by representatives of unquestionable integrity and ability, it would be unwise to introduce any amendment that might not be applied in the future in the spirit of the Secretary-General's proposals.

33. The Guatemalan delegation would vote against all the amendments proposed in the Secretary-General's memorandum. It would support the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), provided that the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280), deleting paragraph 1 of the operative part, was accepted. It would vote against the revised Australian amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1). It would vote against the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279), since it did not consider that there should be limits to the duration of the Assembly's discussions; it would consequently vote also against the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281).

34. Mr. ROBERTS (Union of South Africa) thanked the Yugoslav and Polish representatives for the considered way in which they had presented their arguments. At the previous meeting, however, he had been shocked at the reaction his statement (350th meeting) had produced; it had indeed illustrated his point that the language problem made it very difficult for all representatives to understand each other's views. He had submitted facts and figures, not as the only criteria but simply to focus attention on certain aspects of the subject. His remarks had been interpreted as a declaration that the smaller Powers should speak less; he had furthermore been accused of racialism. Yet he had distinctly said that, as a small nation, the Union of South Africa would resist any attempt to interfere with the rights of small Powers or to prevent the reasonable expression of their views. He had spoken also of the valuable contribution that the eminent experts of some of the smaller Powers could make to the discussions. He had had no intention of suggesting that any nation, large or small, should be debarred from the full expression of its views. As for the charge of racialism, nothing had been further from his mind. He had quoted the average length of the interventions of the Scandinavian and Asian countries—the former 43 minutes and the latter 39 minutes—and had pointed out the significance of those figures in view of the fact that neither group was able to use its own language in the discussions.

35. He agreed with the Yugoslav representative that political considerations were of great importance. The nations that were less free and more exposed naturally felt the need to speak more frequently and at greater length. He had not suggested that the reticence of any country was a sign of superiority. Minutes and hours were certainly not the sole criterion; there were undoubtedly political, personal and language reasons for the length of interventions. He had said, furthermore, that there should be a continued endeavour to investigate all the difficulties that kept nations apart

and prevented the United Nations from attaining its basic objectives.

36. Mr. AMADO (Brazil) agreed with the United States representative (347th meeting) that no rules of procedure could effectively shorten the duration of General Assembly sessions without the goodwill of delegations. The General Assembly had been set up as an international forum essential to the fulfilment of the Principles and Purposes of the Charter. That function postulated representatives' unlimited right to speak. The General Assembly also had the duty under the Charter to adopt resolutions and to make recommendations. The problem, therefore, was how to make the General Assembly a more efficient organ without impairing its quality as an international forum. The Brazilian delegation would never undertake to tell another delegation how long its statements should be. Even if a representative spoke for the purpose of obstructing action, he did so as a matter of policy, and the other delegations had not the right or the means to prevent him from speaking. It was true that valuable time might be lost in that way, but there remained the hope that the discussions in the General Assembly would gradually become more objective and shorter.

37. The Brazilian delegation would never countenance any proposal to expedite the General Assembly's proceedings at the expense of delegations' freedom of speech. It was clear from the statements made by the authors of the various proposals before the Committee that that was not their intention. Nor indeed was it the intention of the simple and modest proposals contained in the Secretary-General's memorandum (A/2206). Those proposals for the most part merely restated a procedure already followed in practice.

38. The proposed amendment to rule 73 [113] of the rules of procedure was both logical and practicable. The purpose of motions to limit the time to be allowed to each speaker was to save time. That purpose would be defeated if such motions could be followed by unlimited procedural discussion; they should be subject to the same limitation as motions for adjournment. The amendment to rule 74 [114] had advisedly been omitted from the Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278 and Rev.1). The Brazilian delegation was opposed to the amendment for the reasons stated by the representative of Poland. It was equally opposed to the proposed amendment to rule 72 [112], which would not prevent abuse of points of order and would merely give rise to endless discussion over what was within the President's or the Chairman's competence. He favoured the proposed amendment to rule 38.

39. He supported the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), except for the proposed amendment to rule 72 [112]. The Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279) was too rigid and unrealistic and he would vote against it even with the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281). The closing date set by the General Committee could never be anything but tentative. He could not accept the two paragraphs of the revised Australian amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution. The first paragraph would give too much power to the President or the Chairman, and the second paragraph would prevent representatives from explaining their

attitude if, in the light of the discussion, they decided to vote in a manner contrary to their original position.

40. The Brazilian delegation saw no need to refer the question to a committee of experts. The proposed amendments were an attempt to improve a situation; further remedies could be worked out only in the light of experience.

41. Mr. CUTTS (Australia) noted that his revised amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution had not met with much support. The chief objection seemed to be that excessive powers would be conferred on the President or the Chairman, who might use them to curtail the freedom of speech of delegations, particularly the smaller ones. While he did not share those fears, he appreciated the feelings of representatives who did. He took exception, however, to the Syrian representative's insinuations at the preceding meeting concerning the allegedly sinister purpose of the Australian amendments. He was glad that those amendments had been correctly interpreted by a number of other delegations.

42. The Australian delegation, as one of the smaller delegations of small countries, had a record of defending the freedom of speech of delegations in the United Nations. It would never submit a proposal which in its opinion would have the effect of restricting that freedom. Its amendments would admittedly give more extensive powers to the President or the Chairman but, judging from past experience, presiding officers of General Assembly bodies could be trusted to exercise their powers judiciously and fairly.

43. Nevertheless, because of the general misgivings and in order to save time, the Australian delegation would withdraw its revised amendments (A/C.6/L.282/Rev.1) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution. He would, for the reasons he had stated earlier (348th meeting), vote for the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1) and for the Argentine draft resolution (A/C.6/L.279), with the Belgian amendment (A/C.6/L.281) thereto.

44. Mr. MÓROZOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the supporters of the Secretariat's proposals had in their excessive zeal disclosed the true intentions of those proposals. Thus the representative of the Union of South Africa had gone so far as to imply that delegations should take a part in the debate proportionate to the size and importance of their countries. He was glad to note that the South African representative had now retreated from that position.

45. He wished to take the opportunity to stress once more the danger of adopting insufficiently-thought-out and harmful proposals which had no bearing on the problem and were contrary to the principles of the Charter. Technical improvements would have been another matter. As the Egyptian representative had rightly pointed out (350th meeting) it was impossible to separate the rules of procedure from the Charter principles which they were to serve. He therefore urged all members to reject the proposals before the Committee.

46. Mr. BAZZAZ (Iraq) said that the item under discussion was not so simple as might appear at first sight. The conflicting statements of some representatives made it all the more confusing. He was glad

that the representative of the Union of South Africa had been able to clear up the misunderstanding caused by his earlier statement (350th meeting).

47. He supported the Syrian amendment (A/C.6/L.280) to the revised Norwegian draft resolution (A/C.6/L.278/Rev.1), for the reasons stated by the Polish representative. The sessions of the General Assembly were lengthy, not because the rules of procedure were

faulty, but for the reasons stated by the New Zealand representative (350th meeting). The fact that committees discussed certain subjects at length did not necessarily mean that they were wasting time or that they organized their work poorly. Financial considerations were important, but still more important was the right of delegations to state their views freely.

The meeting rose at 1.5 p.m.