



General Assembly

Fifty-third Session

103rd plenary meeting
 Tuesday, 29 June 1999, 3 p.m.
 New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Operti (Uruguay)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Mra (Myanmar),
 Vice-President, took the Chair.*

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

Agenda item 113 (continued)

Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999

Report of the Fifth Committee (A/53/485/Add.5)

The Acting President: If there is no proposal under rule 66 of the rules of procedure, I shall take it that the General Assembly decides not to discuss the report of the Fifth Committee that is before it today.

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Statements will therefore be limited to explanations of vote or position.

The positions of delegations regarding the recommendation of the Fifth Committee have been made clear in the Committee and are reflected in the relevant official records. May I remind members that, under paragraph 7 of decision 34/401, the Assembly agreed that

“When the same draft resolution is considered in a Main Committee and in plenary meeting, a delegation should, as far as possible, explain its vote only once, i.e., either in the Committee or in plenary meeting unless that delegation’s vote in plenary meeting is different from its vote in the Committee.”

May I also remind delegations that, also in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Before we begin to take action on the recommendation contained in the report of the Fifth Committee, I should like to advise representatives that we are going to proceed to take a decision in the same manner as was done in the Fifth Committee.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution recommended by the Fifth Committee in paragraph 7 of its report.

The Fifth Committee adopted the draft resolution, entitled “Question of East Timor”, without a vote.

May I take it that the Assembly wishes to do the same?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 53/240).

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

Ms. Shearouse (United States of America): My delegation enthusiastically welcomed the establishment of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) when it was founded last month. We commend all those

who have brought us to this point, where a process of consultation is in place that will allow the East Timorese to determine their own future.

In May, we strongly endorsed the General Assembly's decision to authorize the Secretary-General to enter into commitments up to \$35 million for this new operation. Now, we have similarly endorsed this funding resolution, appropriating \$52.5 million for this important Mission. My Government has pledged a voluntary contribution of \$10 million.

As we stated in May, it is our expectation that the expenses for UNAMET can be met through voluntary contributions. However, we have supported this resolution, which recognizes that any outstanding balances will be assessed. We also expect that this Mission will be carried out with the strongest management controls and in full compliance with applicable regulations and rules.

We wish this Mission great success.

Ms. Incera (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I wish to reiterate the full and unreserved support of my delegation for the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) and for the implementation of the popular consultation process in East Timor. We are extremely pleased to welcome the Tripartite Agreements and confident that the Mission will be successful.

Like the Secretary-General, we believe that this represents an historical opportunity to solve the problems of East Timor peacefully and should be seized in the most positive and determined way. However, my delegation also wishes to express its concern at the fact that the resolution we have just adopted fails to indicate that voluntary contributions must not be conditioned by donors. We believe that the Secretary-General should have enough flexibility in his use of the necessary resources in order to comply with the Mission's mandate.

We hope that this omission will not set a negative precedent in the future, because we consider such a provision to be necessary to guarantee the effective and independent functioning of the Organization, particularly with respect to a Mission that is expected to be financed mainly through voluntary contributions.

Furthermore, we note that the negotiating process that led to the adoption of this resolution showed a lack of will on the part of some delegations to consider the proposals made by other members. Unfortunately, the pressure, haste

and lack of time in the brief debate favoured a rather inflexible spirit in our negotiations. We trust that this situation will be addressed in depth in the Fifth Committee with a view to creating a positive spirit and opening the way to the important negotiations to take place at the coming session.

Ms. Buergo Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The political support of my delegation for the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was the basic reason why we accepted the adoption of this resolution without a vote, despite our serious reservations about the negotiating process that led to its adoption and about the text of paragraph 3.

As everyone knows, this is the sole Mission in the recent history of the United Nations to be financed almost exclusively from voluntary contributions, in spite of the collective commitment of the Member States to financing mandated activities, as recognized in Article 17 of the Charter. The reasons for this formula are well known. Nevertheless, we believe that this arrangement could set an extremely negative precedent that will basically hold hostage the developing countries and the Organization as a whole.

We feel that the text adopted is inadequate, since it does not recognize the need for voluntary contributions to be unrestricted and unconditional, thus allowing for the flexible use of resources and ensuring its full implementation in the terms foreseen.

In the context of negotiations, the delegation of Cuba proposed a paragraph recognizing that principle, without any intention of criticizing those States which are making contributions. Indeed, those States are clearly recognized in paragraph 5. Our proposal was not adopted due to the positions of several Member States that exploited the political sensitivity of this issue in order to avoid its inclusion. Given the importance we accord it, we will return to this matter in due time at the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

Furthermore, we wish to express my delegation's serious reservations with respect to the negotiating process. During the informal informals, one delegation, representing a group of Member States, referred critically to the decision-making process of the Fifth Committee adopted in resolution 41/213. We await with interest the proposals which that delegation may wish to make on that process, at which time we will also put forward a set of proposals that we believe will facilitate negotiations.

Mr. Armitage (Australia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the delegations of Canada, New Zealand and Australia in explanation of vote.

Our delegations welcome the adoption today of the resolution securing the financing of the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET). It establishes a reliable source of funding to ensure that this important activity receives the resources it needs to meet a demanding timetable for the holding of consultations.

Our delegations are strongly committed to supporting the 5 May Agreements between Indonesia, Portugal and the United Nations. The establishment of UNAMET represented the crucial next steps towards a peaceful and orderly resolution of the East Timor issue. UNAMET's responsibility for organizing and conducting the popular consultation gives it a central place in helping the East Timorese people make an historic decision about their constitutional future.

Given the importance and sensitivity of this Mission, we believe that the Fifth Committee has a responsibility to remain focused on its own role in ensuring that the mission

is provided with adequate resources to fulfil its mandate and not stray into broader issues. We were disappointed that, during the consultations preceding the adoption of this resolution, the Fifth Committee had some difficulty maintaining this focus. Once again, the attention of the Committee became diverted to concerns, however legitimate, which lay beyond the scope of the item under discussion. UNAMET is a unique mission in many respects, including its financing, and we do not consider it an appropriate basis from which to draw conclusions about policy issues relating to the financing of United Nations activities.

In closing, we would like to pay special tribute to the Chairman of the Fifth Committee, the Permanent Representative of Armenia, who conducted the necessary consultations with great energy and professionalism. Ambassador Abelian was instrumental in ensuring that the Fifth Committee reached a timely and transparent decision on the matter.

The Acting President: We have thus concluded this stage of our consideration of agenda item 113.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.