

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 2nd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. BUJ-FLORES (Mexico)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

OPENING STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

1. The CHAIRMAN said that the work of the Committee was now under way. He welcomed the admission of Zimbabwe and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the membership of the United Nations. He thanked the Committee for the honour it had bestowed on the Group of Latin American States, on his country and on himself by electing him Chairman. He pledged that he would serve all Member States and his sole guidelines would be objectivity, fairness and the desire to enable all points of view to be expressed freely under the protection of the rules of procedure and the provisions of the Charter. He paid tribute to the previous Chairman, Mr. Pirson of Belgium, whose chairmanship would provide him with much inspiration.

2. At the current session the Committee would have to deal with two major problems, namely personnel questions and the status of documentation. The latter subject was a matter of particular concern, as it seemed that the Committee's programme of work would be governed not by political expediency or criteria based on rational planning but by the availability of documentation. In that connexion he had expressed his concern at the highest level, including to the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, who had assured him that every effort would be made to overcome the existing delays. In that connexion it should be borne in mind that 1980 had been a particularly busy year for the United Nations. The Security Council had been convened repeatedly and the General Assembly had held two emergency sessions and one special session. He asked that delegations co-operate with him in dealing with the problem so that the Committee could successfully complete its agenda on schedule in December, without the need to hold a large number of night meetings at the end of the session.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

3. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) nominated Mr. El-Houderi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

4. Mr. El-Houderi (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

5. Mr. WILLIAMS (Panama) nominated Mr. Golovko (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) for the office of Vice-Chairman.

6. Mr. Golovko (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

7. Mr. BOUZARBIA (Algeria) nominated Mr. Pedersen (Canada) for the office of Rapporteur.

8. Mr. Pedersen (Canada) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/C.5/35/11; A/C.5/35/L.1)

9. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the letter from the President of the General Assembly in document A/C.5/35/11 setting out the General Assembly's decisions with regard to the allocation of items to the Fifth Committee and drawing the Committee's attention to the fact that the recommendations on the organization of the session were contained in section II of document A/35/250.

10. It was his firm intention strictly to apply the decision regarding the scheduled times for the start of meetings so that the Committee would continue to be cited as an example of punctuality and, if possible, even improve on its record of the preceding year, when it had lost only five and a half hours owing to late starts of its meetings.

11. With regard to explanations of vote, dealt with in the recommendation contained in paragraph 5 of document A/35/250, he suggested that the Committee should continue the practice adopted at the preceding session of indicating in its report to the General Assembly the names of countries which had explained their vote on each draft resolution.

12. The date set by the Assembly for the completion of the work of the Main Committees, namely, 5 December, did not apply to the Fifth Committee, which would complete its work only after considering the financial implications of draft resolutions presented by the other Main Committees.

13. He drew attention to the provisions of General Assembly decision 34/401 concerning the exercise of the right of reply and to the recommendation in paragraph 7 of document A/35/250 to the effect that the practice of reproducing in extenso, as separate documents, statements made in Main Committees should be discontinued. He also drew attention to paragraphs 12, 13 and 28 of General Assembly decision 34/401, mentioned in paragraphs 10 and 11 of document A/35/250, which had a direct bearing on the working procedures of the Fifth Committee. In addition, he recommended that the Committee should follow the procedures outlined in paragraphs 14, 16 and 21 of Assembly decision 34/401, even though they were not expressly mentioned in document A/35/250.

14. Lastly, he suggested that the Committee should endorse the following traditional arrangements: (a) the list of speakers for each main agenda item would be closed 48 hours before the item was taken up; (b) the speakers would make their statements in the order in which they were listed; and (c) the Rapporteur would be authorized to report directly to the General Assembly on all questions for which no summary of the debate was to be transmitted to the Assembly.

15. If there was no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt his suggestions relating to the organization of work.

16. It was so decided.

17. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to document A/C.5/34/L.1 containing the tentative weekly programme of work, which had been drawn up on the basis of expectations with

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(The Chairman)

regard to the availability of documents. He invited members to communicate their suggestions on the proposed tentative programme to the officers of the Committee, who would take them into account before drawing up a more definitive programme.

18. As at preceding sessions, the Secretariat would be asked to issue by the beginning of the following week a list of all the documents that would be submitted to the Committee by the Secretary-General or by United Nations bodies.

19. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that agenda item 90, entitled "Financial reports and accounts, and reports of the Board of Auditors", was scheduled to be taken up during the week of 22-26 September, while the relevant documents were not yet available in Russian. That situation created difficulties for the Soviet delegation, which would not be in a position to discuss the item at the next meeting, as scheduled. One possible solution would be to move forward the consideration of agenda items for which documentation was already available in all working languages, such as items 97 and 96.

20. The question of documentation was discussed year after year, and yet very little progress had been made in remedying the situation. He appealed to the Chairman to do his utmost to ensure that the Committee's work was not hampered throughout the session by the failure of the Secretariat to issue documents in all working languages in good time.

21. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) observed that the Chairman was in no way responsible for the delay in issuing documents, or for the arrangement of the programme of work as set out in document A/C.5/35/L.1. However, his delegation would have preferred to see the order of items reversed. The failure to submit documentation in good time showed a lack of seriousness on the part of the Secretariat and even a lack of deference to the Fifth Committee. As the representative of the Soviet Union had pointed out, even documentation needed the following day was not ready in all languages. He appealed to the Chairman to ensure that the Committee's right to a timely submission of documentation was observed, and to exert every possible pressure on the Secretariat fully to assume its responsibilities.

22. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) pointed out that it was not only a question of availability of documentation which governed the programme of work, but also of officials to participate in the Committee's discussions on certain items.

23. He suggested that the Secretariat should prepare a list showing the documents available for distribution which could be displayed at the documents' distribution window.

24. With respect to the discussion of item 90, he asked whether the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (A/35/437) would also deal with the report of the Board of Auditors on the United Nations International School (A/C.5/35/5).

25. Subitem (f) of item 17 referred to the "designation" of the Chairman of the

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(Mr. Garrido, Philippines)

International Civil Service Commission (ICSC); however, it was his understanding that the Committee merely confirmed the appointment made by the Secretary-General.

26. Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia) said that it seemed to have become the custom to express concern at the beginning of every session about the unavailability of documentation. It was particularly disappointing to have to do so at the current session, in view of the fact that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly had adopted the necessary measures to ease the burden and to improve the situation. The high expectations raised by those decisions seemed to have proved illusory. He therefore associated himself with those speakers who had expressed deep concern about the document situation, and expressed his delegation's willingness to participate in any effort to remedy it. In view of the statement by the representative of the Soviet Union, he believed that a further check was needed to ensure that documents required for the first week were indeed available in all languages.

27. The tentative programme for the week of 20-24 October seemed to be a little light. He wondered if some other items could perhaps be moved forward to that week, subject of course to the availability of documentation, in order to avoid a multiplicity of night meetings towards the end of the session. The previous year the Secretariat had provided members of the Committee with a chart setting out the programme of work and, provided that that would not place too heavy a burden on the Secretariat or have financial implications, he requested that a similar chart should be provided for the current session.

28. He noted that item 92 contained a number of elements which were not necessarily interlinked. He wondered how the Chairman intended to proceed with the debate on that item, and in particular whether delegations would be expected to deal with all the elements simultaneously. In view of the fact that that part of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (A/35/38) dealing with operational activities would also be discussed by the Second Committee, it might be advisable for the Chairman to hold some consultations with the Chairman of that Committee in order to decide which aspects of the report would be dealt with by which Committee, thereby avoiding any possible confusion.

29. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) said that if the situation with regard to the documentation in English was bad, in Arabic it was appalling. He hoped that the Arabic version of all documents would be readily available to members of the Committee so that Arabic-speaking delegations would not be impeded from making a contribution.

30. He noted that it was not intended to take up item 98 on personnel questions until the week beginning 27 October. Obviously, the Committee would not be able to discuss the item until the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat was issued, and he therefore hoped that the Secretary-General would do his utmost to ensure that the report was submitted as early as possible so that delegations could give adequate attention to that very important matter.

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31. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) expressed the hope that the Committee would be able, by and large, to follow the tentative programme of work set out in document A/C.5/35/L.1.

32. He trusted that the Chairman, in his representations in the General Committee, would interpret the wish of the Fifth Committee that the decisions taken at the previous session with respect to the mandatory deadline for the submission of draft resolutions with financial implications would be strictly observed by the other Committees in order to avoid overburdening ACABQ and the Fifth Committee at the end of the session, thereby eliminating the need for hasty decisions and an inordinate number of night meetings.

33. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) said that the Chairman and all Member States should convey to the departments of the Secretariat concerned the need to adhere strictly to the time-limit for the submission of documentation, even if the programme of work was to retain a certain degree of flexibility.

34. He felt that the tentative programme set out in document A/C.5/35/L.1 should be restructured to some extent. Some of the shorter items should be taken up in late September or early October, in order to leave sufficient time later in October for discussion of personnel questions and other complex items. He had some specific proposals on various items and subitems, including item 101 and the question of United Nations accommodation, which he would give to the Chairman. Unless the Committee could adhere to the kind of programme he was proposing, it should seriously consider postponing forthwith certain items until the next session.

35. He requested information from the Secretariat on the status of the budget performance report. Normally, that document arrived very late indeed and the Committee had no time to discuss it properly. He wondered whether it could be discussed at least one week earlier than proposed in the tentative weekly programme of work.

36. Mr. HOUNA GOLO (Chad) said that, despite its heavy programme of work, the Committee had last year found itself discussing agenda items which fell more properly within the competence of other Committees. He requested that the Chairman should ensure that the other Main Committees did not pass on substantive items to the Fifth Committee.

37. His delegation associated itself with those speakers who had deplored the difficulties with respect to documentation. He was sure that the Chairman would take account of all the comments that had been made.

38. Mr. DEBATIN (Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management) commented that the delay in the availability of documentation was a matter of great concern to the Secretary-General. Of course, it was the responsibility of the Secretariat to overcome the difficulties and the situation was being closely monitored to ensure that documentation was available to delegations as early as possible. There were, however, reasons why documentation was delayed. For instance, on personnel questions the reports were not ready because the deliberations on what were extremely complex questions had not been concluded. Intensive discussions were in progress, and it was hoped that the work could be completed as soon as possible.

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39. With respect to the designation of the Chairman of ICSC, mentioned by the representative of the Philippines, he clarified that it was the General Assembly which appointed the members of the Commission and also designated the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen.

40. The CHAIRMAN commented that the representative of the Philippines had identified a critical problem in noting that the availability of officials was also a factor governing the programme of work. It was true, as the representative of the Soviet Union had said, that the report of the Committee on Contributions had been ready for some time; however, for reasons beyond his control, the Chairman of that Committee would not be available until the second week in October.

41. Although the report of the Committee on Conferences was ready, the addendum had not yet been issued. He would like to avoid discussing the item in two parts, since that might complicate the work of the Fifth Committee. The availability of documentation had been uppermost in his mind during the preparation of the programme of work, which was only tentative and therefore subject to amendment.

42. All the documents related to item 90 (Financial reports and accounts, and reports of the Board of Auditors) would be available in all the languages on 23 September, and he hoped that the Committee would begin consideration of the item on that day. As Chairman, he would never subordinate the work of the Committee to anyone's personal wishes. At the same time, however, the Committee could not be inflexible. By agreeing to hear the introduction to item 90 on 23 September, the Committee would be accommodating the Chairman of the Board of Auditors, who had to return urgently to his country.

43. In reply to the representative of the Philippines, he said that since the accounts of the United Nations International School were not United Nations accounts, the Advisory Committee would not be submitting a report thereon. He agreed with the comments made by the representative of Indonesia concerning the medium-term plan. However, the elements of item 92 all related to the medium-term plan. During the debate, delegations would be free to refer to the item as a whole or to the various elements in turn. He would soon be meeting the Chairman of the Second Committee to decide which aspects of the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination were to be dealt with by the Fifth Committee and the Second Committee respectively.

44. He assured the representative of Egypt that all efforts were being made to ensure the earliest submission of the report on the composition of the Secretariat. Informal consultations were taking place at the highest level with a view to finding a solution that would be readily accepted by the Committee. He appealed for understanding and flexibility. If the report was issued earlier than expected, the item would be taken up earlier than scheduled.

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(The Chairman)

45. He assured the representative of Italy that he would faithfully convey the wishes of the Committee and see to it that the terms of General Assembly decision 34/401 were fully respected. He would do his best to avoid night meetings, which were anathema to him too.

46. He would read attentively the suggestions to be submitted by the Polish delegation and do what he could to bring forward consideration of item 101 (Financing of the United Nations peace-keeping forces in the Middle East). In reply to the representative of Chad, he said that he would be working in close consultation with the Chairmen of the other Main Committees to ensure that matters beyond the competence of the Fifth Committee were not referred to it.

47. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines), referring to General Assembly decision 34/401, paragraph 14, asked the Chairman to indicate the items for which the debate would be summarized in the Committee's report to the Assembly.

48. The CHAIRMAN said that it was for the Committee to indicate such items in the light of the General Assembly decision.

49. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that he did not understand how the Committee could take up item 90 (Financial reports and accounts, and reports of the Board of Auditors) on 23 September if the relevant documents would be available in all the languages only on that day. It would take some time to read and digest the documents. If members of the Committee heard the introduction to the item without first studying the documents, they would be no more than passive participants. His delegation might, however, be prepared to hear on 23 September the introduction to the subitems, excluding subitem (a).

50. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that he did not fully understand what the Chairman had meant by consultations at the highest level in connexion with the report on the composition of the Secretariat. He was also anxious to know what kind of solution would be submitted to the Committee. A deferment of the question of the composition of the Secretariat would certainly not be acceptable.

51. The CHAIRMAN said he was confident that the Soviet representative would quickly be able to read the remaining documents related to item 90. The Soviet delegation was never a passive participant. Everyone, including the Chairman, would like all the documents to be available in all the languages at least six weeks before the beginning of the session. That, however, had not been possible. If the Committee did not begin its substantive work as soon as possible, there was the danger of night meetings and hasty decisions towards the end of the session. Some of the documents related to item 90 had been distributed very early. A demonstration of goodwill and co-operation as the Committee began its work would be extremely helpful. In appealing to the Committee to allow the Chairman of the Board of Auditors to introduce item 90 on 23 September, he was certainly not trying to rush delegations or to deny them the right to participate in the debate.

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52. In reply to the representative of Morocco, he said that the consultations in question were between the Chairmen of delegations and the Secretary-General. The Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services was also involved. An effort was being made to find a satisfactory formula, on which the presentation of the report would depend. No secret bargains were being made.

53. Mr. STUART (United Kingdom) asked whether the Soviet delegation would agree to the Chairman's proposal concerning item 90 if the list of speakers was closed three days after the introduction of the item.

54. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that his delegation was always understanding and co-operative in all matters related to the work of United Nations bodies. What he failed to understand was why the work of a body as important as the Fifth Committee should be subordinated to the personal wishes of an individual. The Chairman of the Board of Auditors was appointed to serve the interests of the General Assembly and the United Nations as a whole. The choice being offered to the Fifth Committee was either to hear the introduction by the Chairman of the Board of Auditors on a given day or not to hear it at all. That was neither a serious nor a responsible approach. The speed with which a particular representative could read was irrelevant. The fact that a particular delegation needed time to digest the documents so as to be more than a passive participant when the item was introduced was the more important consideration. The appeal for co-operation smacked of coercion. It would be improper to subordinate the wishes of a delegation to the personal desires of an individual appointed to serve the United Nations.

55. The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objections, he would take it that the Committee agreed not to hold the meeting tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, 23 September.

56. It was so decided.

57. Mr. JASABE (Sierra Leone) said that the commendable decision taken should be a useful precedent for the Committee.

58. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the meeting of the Advisory Committee scheduled for 23 September would be cancelled.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.