

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. BUJ-FLORES (Mexico)

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

CONTENTS

- AGENDA ITEM 92: MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1980-1983 (continued)
AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)
AGENDA ITEM 91: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)
AGENDA ITEM 96: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

* This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room A-3550, 866 United Nations Plaza (Alcoa Building), and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate fascicle for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/35/SR.10
10 October 1980

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 92: MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 1980-1983 (continued) (A/35/6 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and 2, A/35/7, A/35/38; A/C.5/35/1 and Corr.1 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1 and 2, A/C.5/35/2, A/C.5/35/3 and Corr.1, A/C.5/35/4 and Corr.1)

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (Chap. XXVIII, A/35/3/Add.28)

1. Mr. ALBORNOZ (Ecuador) expressed surprise at the drafting of the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983 (A/35/6) referring to the subprogramme on international marine political and security problems. Despite the new wording of lines 6 to 9 of paragraph 4.47 set forth in the corrigendum to that document (A/35/6/Corr.1), his delegation remained convinced that the Secretary-General, in making such a statement, was going beyond his terms of reference, in that the exact wording, to form part of the future convention, was the subject of negotiation and careful study at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. His delegation therefore wished to record its formal reservation on paragraph 4.47, should the Committee decide to adopt document A/35/6 in its present form.

2. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) observed that the Secretariat was taking the necessary steps to solve the problems encountered in the creation of an effective medium-term plan. The programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1978-1979 in document A/C.5/35/1, especially the part of it which dealt with activities that were completed or terminated during that period, was an important step in the right direction. Nevertheless, many delegations, including his own, had rightfully pointed out the lack of success of the Secretariat in that field. The General Assembly had long recognized the overriding importance of the identification and elimination of programmes which were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective in order to improve the work of planning and budgeting in the United Nations. In its report, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination noted with concern that the Secretary-General had reported retrospectively to the Committee on activities that had been terminated during the biennium 1978-1979 but had not identified those activities in the current and future work programmes which could be considered obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective. Although CPC had expressed the hope that such information would be provided in a separate report, such information was not forthcoming. Unfortunately, as CPC pointed out in paragraph 16 of its report, "there was resistance to planning in the Secretariat" because of fear on the part of Secretariat officials that such planning might have a negative effect on their careers. Obviously, the Secretariat must find ways of persuading the programme managers to undertake that work.

3. His delegation noted with satisfaction that CPC had tentatively adopted criteria for identifying programmes which were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective, and expressed the hope that the Secretariat, on the basis of those criteria, could supply the necessary information before the end of the current session. With regard to information on resources which had been freed by

/...

(Mr. Palamarchuk, USSR)

terminating such activities, his delegation felt that the allocation of resources to new programmes fell within the competence of the Member States, not the Secretariat.

4. In spite of a number of short-comings in the document itself and in the methodology for programme implementation control, his delegation supported the report on programme performance and expressed the hope that once those short-comings had been eliminated, the programme performance report would become the basis for evaluating individual programmes and the point of departure for each new planning and programming cycle.

5. His delegation expressed doubt with regard to the advisability of indicating the percentage of output implemented as programmed. That indicator would entail unnecessary difficulties for both programme managers and delegations. He, therefore, supported the opinion of other delegations that at the present stage it would be wiser to concentrate on activities which had been completed or had not been completed in order to identify the reasons impeding their completion and improve the process of programming.

6. The Soviet delegation supported the idea that in the implementation of approved programmes, especially those financed from the regular budget, a strict order of priority should be established on the basis of importance, urgency, the possibility of implementation within a defined period, and the availability of financing sources or means of implementation within the United Nations system through greater co-ordination with the specialized agencies and the elimination of duplication of effort. Medium-term plans should take into account funds from various extrabudgetary sources. New programmes unrelated to the maintenance of international peace and security - which was the main task of the Organization - should be financed from the resources made available as a result of the completion, elimination or adjustment of activities. The funds which States were able to provide for the implementation of programmes should serve as the basis for determining the size and priority of those programmes. In order to be able to develop a system of priorities, the Committee must receive from the Secretariat all necessary information and support. The Secretariat must define the programme elements which had the highest and the lowest priority. Programmes, especially subprogrammes, must be kept independent of one another in order to permit individual evaluation. While supporting the idea for establishing comparative programme priorities, his delegation felt that the system of comparative programme growth rate indicators should not be completely discarded since it was an important means of limiting budgetary expenditures. Furthermore, the Soviet delegation was not in favour of the table on proposed relative real growth rates, in which the importance of activities for the maintenance of international peace and security was reduced.

/...

(Mr. Palamarchuk, USSR)

7. Regional, sectoral and other bodies must effectively participate in the preparation of the medium-term plan at all stages of programme planning and implementation. The regional and sectoral international bodies must combine the preparation of the medium-term plan and programme budget with the preparation of their own work programmes in a single programme planning system comprising the medium-term, biennial and operative levels. The work programmes of the regional and sectoral bodies must be based on the medium-term plan and must be directly connected with the medium-term plan and the programme budget. In evaluating programme performance, the regional and sectoral bodies must refer to the corresponding sections of the medium-term plan and programme budget. Progress reports based only on the work programmes of those bodies must be replaced by programme performance reports based on the programme formulations contained in the programme budget.

8. With regard to the evaluation of individual programmes, his delegation expressed satisfaction that CPC had approved the methodology for preparing reports which had been devised by the Secretariat. Nevertheless, he expressed concern that CPC had not recommended the continuation of such evaluation in spite of the fact that a special unit had been established recently in the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs in order to make such evaluations. His delegation felt that that situation did not encourage optimum co-operation between CPC, the Secretariat and the Fifth Committee.

9. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon), in commending the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) on the report on its twentieth session (A/35/38), stressed that the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan contained in document A/35/6 and addenda had had no major impact on the over-all perspective of programmes, although significant changes had been made in certain activities. There was little point in discussing whether the plan should be fixed or rolling. One was not a contradiction of the other; essentially, it had to be both. The definition of a rational, coherent framework and the design of suitably flexible machinery were more deserving of the Committee's attention. The regular review and use of prospective studies when preparing the plan, as well as suitable periodic evaluations of programmes, could certainly help, in large measure to ensure that the plan remained both fixed and rolling in nature.

10. He noted that the proposed revisions on which CPC had commented and made recommendations in paragraphs 368 to 377 of its report derived from various major international meetings which had taken place since the adoption of the plan. With particular reference to the industrial development programme mentioned in paragraph 270 of the CPC report, he believed that it could be accepted without delay, despite the fact that it was based on a decision taken by roll-call vote. His delegation attached great importance to the various programmes under the major programme of science and technology for development, which was one of the rare areas where the North-South dialogue had shown a glimmer of hope. The objectives of the Vienna Programme of Action should be translated into projects, without delay.

/...

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, United
Republic of Cameroon)

11. The report of the Secretary-General on programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1978-1979 contained in document A/C.5/35/1 and addenda usefully complemented the budget performance report that the Secretary-General usually submitted to the Committee. It was evidence of the obvious link which existed between the plan and the budget. Unfortunately, the current methodology for preparing the budget did not permit the use of output indicators, the key to a successful planning process. Indeed, the document revealed all the defects stressed by CPC in its report.

12. As for the quantification of programme performance, the important thing was not the percentage or the performance indicator per se, but its significance and impact. A proper assessment would depend on the use of a weighted indicator using an importance coefficient.

13. The more pragmatic approach underlying the measures suggested by the Joint Inspection Unit for the purpose of identification of output in future programme budgets (A/C.5/35/2) seemed to present an acceptable solution for the time being. Constant refinement of that formula could help the Secretary-General to complete the delicate task of drawing the attention of intergovernmental bodies to activities which might be deemed completed or of marginal usefulness.

14. In considering the model medium-term plans, CPC had rightly expressed a preference for an objective-based structure with time-limited objectives.

15. As for the calendar for the preparation of the next plan, his delegation could accept the procedure suggested in paragraph 86 of document A/C.5/34/4 which had been taken up and supplemented by CPC in paragraphs 21 and 319 to 321 of its report. All the organs concerned should participate actively in preparing the plan and, where the African region was concerned, take the opportunity to implement the major plan of action adopted at the OAU economic summit held at Lagos, which had already appeared as an annex to the consensus text on the new international development strategy.

16. The very thorny problem of priorities had raised considerable controversy in CPC and the recommendations contained in paragraphs 322 to 325 of its report were therefore accompanied by a number of reservations. CPC had still not succeeded in designing criteria for priority-setting, its approach to the subject remaining essentially pragmatic. To the extent possible, those priorities should reflect the will of the deliberative organs rather than being established as a function of relative growth rates for the regular budget. The degree of priority in the planning process should, first of all, clearly indicate the urgency with which a programme was to be executed, the highest priority being assigned not to the programmes which required the greatest resources but to those which were most important. The true basis for a table of priorities must be that which enabled the programme to become a catalyst for other sectors. The determination of the volume of resources required was a totally different operation from that of priority-setting. In accepting the temporary solution to the difficult, but fundamental, question of priorities set out in paragraphs 27 and 325 of the CPC report, he welcomed the

/...

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, United
Republic of Cameroon)

fact that CPC intended to study the matter in detail at its twenty-first session. The essential elements of the methodology to be used in evaluation were virtually complete, but the Secretariat must take care to ensure a wise mixture of internal evaluation and of special in-depth studies based on feedback from users, obtained by means of questionnaires. To that extent, evaluation could become a useful stage in the planning process by constantly indicating the appropriate margin of change and new orientations. It would be desirable if the evaluation report highlighted the contribution of any given programme to the achievement of the objectives of the international development strategies and of the new international economic order. In that way, evaluation could become a dynamic instrument for advancement. He was happy to note that the evaluation unit in the Office for Programme Planning and Co-ordination had been fully established; it should constantly improve its methods and consider ways and means of ensuring better distribution of output to users.

17. The cross-organizational programme analyses were aimed, first and foremost, at identifying areas where joint planning was possible and, by continually improving co-ordination between the various agencies of the system, at avoiding overlap or duplication. The measures recommended by CPC in paragraphs 357 to 361 with respect to energy programmes and rural development programmes were justified. With respect to regional co-operation and development, he noted the comments made by CPC in paragraph 175 of its report. However, he believed that the regional commissions needed to be strengthened in terms of their competence and resources in order to respond to immediate and urgent multisectoral needs identified by the regional intergovernmental bodies in a very practical manner.

18. It was a pity that the volume of resources devoted to transport and communications in Africa in no way matched the hope which had inspired the proclamation of the Decade. As the Organization prepared to draw up a new programme budget and its next medium-term plan, consideration of the over-all problem of decentralization should be given real momentum.

19. Effectiveness of action by the United Nations system largely depended on the volume and quality of resources available to it. His delegation therefore subscribed to the view expressed by CPC in paragraph 138 of its report that resources for operational activities should be made available on a predictable, continuous and assured basis. As preparations were made to launch a new development decade, it was of the utmost importance that every effort should be made to achieve the international development aid targets. Of course, as underlined in paragraph 154 of the CPC report, primary responsibility for programming external assistance would continue to be discharged by Governments.

20. Medium-term planning, if accompanied by an appropriate budgetary tool, could contribute to progress and peace by helping Member States to attain their individual and collective goals.

21. Finally, he expressed his delegation's general agreement with the conclusions and recommendations contained in chapter X of the CPC report.

/...

22. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said that if the medium-term plan was to be of maximum usefulness, it should allow for joint planning and co-ordination among United Nations bodies so that duplication and waste could be avoided. It should provide clear programme objectives, some of which could also be used in national planning, and a clear framework for the establishment of programme and subprogramme priorities, including procedures for phasing out programmes that were obsolete, completed, ineffective, or of marginal usefulness. The medium-term plan should also provide a framework for the programme budget. That was of particular importance and concern inasmuch as the Organization had to assume new activities at a time when Member States were becoming increasingly reluctant to contribute ever-larger amounts of money. It was therefore essential to establish programme priorities, much as national Governments did.

23. His delegation concurred with the timely, perceptive observations made by the representative of India (A/C.5/35/SR.8) to the effect that it was difficult, if not impossible, to fix meaningful relative growth rates without full budgetary information. CPC should instead set priorities for programmes and subprogrammes. Criteria would have to be worked out for such priority-setting which involved key political decisions. On that basis, the Assistant Secretary-General for Financial Services should be able to make limited financial packages available to the respective programme managers, who would then have to submit budgetary proposals to fit them. The Assistant Secretary-General could work towards a zero growth rate for the budget as a whole, but every programme manager would not necessarily be able to work on that basis. Some would be given smaller financial packages, some larger, depending on the priorities established by CPC. It would thus be essential to formulate and use achievement indicators, particularly time-limited objectives, and programme managers would have to identify programmes that were completed, obsolete, ineffective, or of marginal usefulness, in order to release resources for redeployment. When CPC considered the budget proposals it could then determine whether its priorities had been respected. In that way, CPC, through the medium-term plan, could help to ensure the vitality of programme planning, the best use of resources, and the Organization's ability to undertake new and important programmes.

24. Mr. MAROTO (Spain) said that, thanks to the praiseworthy efforts of various bodies, including the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC), the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), much had been accomplished in the study of medium-term planning and in devising procedures and methods. Sight should not be lost of the goal, which was to provide an effective mechanism for medium-term planning of United Nations activities throughout the system. As far as the United Nations itself was concerned, that mechanism should be harmonized, in terms of timing and functions, with the Organization's biennial budget. Despite the virtual unanimity on that subject, the goal had not yet been fully achieved.

25. The General Assembly had adopted a number of resolutions relating to medium-term planning, including resolutions 31/93, 34/224 and 34/225. The operative paragraphs of resolution 34/224, like those of its predecessor, resolution 31/93, constituted a wide-ranging, concrete and coherent set of guidelines, the

/...

(Mr. Maroto, Spain)

implementation of which would produce an exemplary medium-term planning system. The obvious reply, in his delegation's view, to the question of what was lacking in achieving the desired objectives, was that the guidelines had not been faithfully put into practice. Understandably, their formulation had taken time, but any further delay was unjustified. While keeping an open mind in order to detect, correct and eliminate any defects which might emerge, it was necessary to move forward from theory to practice.

26. Generally speaking, his delegation supported the recommendations made by CPC in its report (A/35/38), especially those which referred to the process of programme planning (paras. 319-340). He stressed that the plans should contain adequate financial indications, along the lines recommended by the Advisory Committee (A/33/345), as required by paragraph 2 (r) of resolution 34/224.

27. With respect to the determination of priorities, he noted that the criteria and method in setting such priorities for the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1989 would be determined by CPC at its twenty-first session. He believed that there was no definite relationship, much less an automatic one, between the priorities and the growth rates assigned to programmes. The former should be established clearly and independently of such rates. The work of CPC on the matter would be extremely important, and it was hoped that the report to be prepared by the Secretariat would indeed suggest appropriate ways to make a decision on the criteria.

28. The resolutions adopted on the identification of activities that had been completed or were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective, did not seem to have succeeded in bringing about a definitive solution to the problem. The pruning of the bureaucratic tree called for a marked sense of self-criticism on the part of the Secretariat, but there was no doubt about the advantages which would accrue to the Organization through the redeployment of human and material resources if correct action was taken. In paragraph 370 of its report, CPC had rightly criticized the inappropriate use by the Secretariat of the report contained in document A/C.5/35/1 to respond to the mandate laid down in General Assembly resolution 34/225. He therefore hoped that the report on the identification of such activities, promised for the current session, would show positive, genuine progress.

29. His delegation endorsed the comments contained in paragraphs 23 to 26 of the first report of the Advisory Committee (A/35/7) and the recommendation made in paragraph 27 of that report with respect to the Secretary-General's report on programme performance for the biennium 1978-1979 (A/C.5/35/1 and addenda).

30. With respect to the choice between a fixed or rolling plan, his delegation agreed with the views set out in paragraph 30 of the CPC report (A/35/38); it therefore had no objection to the proposals contained in paragraph 32 with respect to the flexibility of the next plan and its adjustment at the end of the second and fourth years. It agreed that there was no need to take a decision on whether the plan would have a fixed or rolling basis until after the experience of the first revision. Consequently, it supported the recommendations contained in paragraph 326 of the CPC report.

/...

31. Mr. AMORIN (Uruguay) expressed his country's formal reservation regarding the inclusion of paragraph 4.47 of the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983 contained in document A/35/6. That paragraph, which came under subprogramme 3: International marine political and security problems, dealt with issues which were still being discussed at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea. The Committee should wait in order to consider the results of that conference before formulating any norms in that regard. Furthermore, the inclusion of a paragraph of that nature could affect the legitimate exercise of the sovereign rights of States in their territorial waters.

32. Mr. FERNANDEZ (Philippines) said that his delegation supported the concept of a medium-term plan subject to review within the framework of the programme budget. It hoped that the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination would concentrate on the question of determining priorities among the major programmes at its twenty-first session. With regard to the provision of resources for programme priorities, the Secretary-General, in the absence of other criteria, should be guided by the conclusions reached at the sixteenth and eighteenth sessions of CPC and the determination of relative growth rates.

33. He supported the CPC recommendation that the General Assembly should consider the need to strengthen the activities of the United Nations system in the area of energy. Energy programmes should receive the highest priority in the regional commissions, which were aware of the problems faced by non-energy-producing countries in the area. His delegation would like to know whether the decentralization of energy programmes from Headquarters to the regional commissions was advisable and whether ESCAP had a committee on energy among its nine working committees. The United Nations system should do more to assist countries facing difficulties caused by rising energy costs and shortages. In that regard it should be borne in mind that energy was the basis for all other development activities. It was to be hoped that the second session of the Conference on New and Renewable Sources of Energy would make meaningful recommendations which would intensify studies in that field.

34. His delegation would appreciate further information on intended action by the Secretariat in the subsectors of rural development. It would also like to know the date and venue of the next evaluation of activities by the ACC Task Force on Rural Development.

35. His delegation, which supported the full involvement of regional, sectoral and other organs in the formulation in the medium-term plan, felt that it was essential to meet the deadline for the submission of the plan to the General Assembly. Failure to do so would result in unnecessary postponement and changes in the calendar of meetings. He expressed concern that some subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council and certain intergovernmental bodies might be unable to comply with the time-table.

36. With regard to the second of the international trade programmes (UNCTAD: Commodities), his delegation would like to know whether resources would be provided

/...

(Mr. Fernandez, Philippines)

under the programme budget if the headquarters of the Common Fund were established away from UNCTAD headquarters. It also wondered why, under section 17, the percentage of output implemented as programmed was not calculated under the programme on disaster relief co-ordination. His delegation was not satisfied with the explanation by the Secretariat regarding the delay in the completion of studies on disaster prevention and mitigation and expressed the hope that those studies would be completed by December 1980 as contemplated.

37. Lastly, he stressed the importance of the programme performance report, which should be submitted annually and should identify activities that had been completed or were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective. Improvements in the narratives describing programmes and subprogrammes should be encouraged in order to present Member States with a clearer picture of budget output. Since the medium-term plan would be the principal policy directive after its adoption by the General Assembly, great care should be taken in its preparation and formulation.

AGENDA ITEM 91: PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)

Services provided by the United Nations to activities financed from extrabudgetary resources (continued) (A/35/7/Add.2; A/C.5/34/21)

38. Mr. SADDLER (United States of America) said that his delegation was in general agreement with the views expressed by the Advisory Committee in document A/35/7/Add.2. With respect to the three categories of services described in the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/34/21), he accepted the Advisory Committee's recommendation with regard to the first category, namely services in support of the administrative structure of extrabudgetary activities, subject to the proviso that the present system, even refined and strengthened, as proposed by the Advisory Committee, presented certain conceptual difficulties. Those difficulties arose mainly from the dual treatment afforded the two major subdivisions of expenditures dealt with, namely staff and related costs as opposed to general operating expenses. It was essential to maintain consistency and equity in calculating reimbursements, along with strict uniformity in the treatment of reimbursements, so as to minimize the total impact on the regular budget. In the present system, frequent inconsistencies were technically possible and experience had revealed that the greater the possibility of inconsistencies, the more frequently inconsistencies occurred. He therefore appealed to the officials responsible for making the judgements required in the operation of the present system to be extremely meticulous in their endeavours. He hoped that the Advisory Committee would continue to monitor the actual operation of the system and periodically inform Member States as to whether the impact of support services on the regular budget was being kept to a minimum.

39. With regard to the third category of services, namely services in support of substantive activities financed by extrabudgetary funds, his delegation supported the view of the Advisory Committee that services in support of substantive activities financed by extrabudgetary funds should not be defrayed from the regular budget. It agreed with the recommendation in paragraph 18 of the Advisory Committee's report, provided that support services and reimbursements remained insignificant, as was apparently the case at present.

/...

(Mr. Saddler, United States)

40. With regard to the creation of extrabudgetary posts, his delegation was pleased to see that procedures were working satisfactorily at Headquarters but was concerned about deficiencies at the overseas offices. The creation of extrabudgetary posts at Headquarters and overseas fell within the scope of improved financial management and such problems must be addressed promptly and correctly. His delegation supported the recommendation contained in paragraph 24 of the Advisory Committee's report and would like to see that recommendation reflected in a decision on the item at the current session of the General Assembly.

41. Finally, his delegation requested the Advisory Committee to monitor the subject and report to Member States as part of its normal budget examination.

42. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said that his delegation generally agreed with the Advisory Committee's views on services provided by the United Nations to activities financed from extrabudgetary resources, as set forth in its report (A/35/7/Add.2). On the creation of extrabudgetary posts his delegation agreed with the view of the Advisory Committee, as set forth in paragraph 25 of its report, that care should be taken to ensure that firm resources were available before the creation of any extrabudgetary posts was contemplated and that the approval of the Advisory Committee should be sought in connexion with the establishment of extrabudgetary posts at the D-1 level and above. In his view, posts originally created as extrabudgetary posts should not be transferred to the regular budget. Referring to paragraph 23 of the Advisory Committee's report, he said that it was not clear how extrabudgetary posts could be occupied by staff members with permanent contracts, since there was no assurance that extrabudgetary funds would be continuously available to finance those posts. It was important that there should be order in administration, and he agreed with the Advisory Committee that, if the creation of a post required the development of administrative activities, the appropriate Department in the Secretariat should present its proposal and the Budget Division would have to take a decision on the matter.

AGENDA ITEM 96: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/35/32 and Add.1; A/C.5/35/12)

43. Mr. KUYAMA (Japan) welcomed the report of the Committee on Conferences. It was gratifying to note that various resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly had on the subject of meetings programming and the control of documentation finally become generally known and had started to influence in a positive way the work of United Nations bodies. His delegation wished to endorse the recommendation made by the Committee on Conferences to the effect that the Secretary should be encouraged to apply maximum overprogramming whenever feasible.

/...

(Mr. Kuyama, Japan)

44. With regard to the planned and actual duration of sessions of subsidiary organs, he requested that the outcome of the consultations between the Committee on Conferences and the chairmen of subsidiary bodies, referred to in paragraphs 26 and 27 of the Committee's report, be made known to the Fifth Committee. It was also gratifying to note that the Ad Hoc Committee on Subsidiary Organs, established by General Assembly decision 34/401, had adopted a draft resolution in July 1980 declaring a one-year moratorium on the establishment of new subsidiary organs of the General Assembly. The data provided by the Secretariat concerning wastage of time owing to late starts of meetings or other reasons was not entirely meaningful for judging the performance of the bodies in question, since in some cases time utilized for informal consultations, which were often more effective than formal meetings, had been recorded as time lost. Furthermore, similar data should be provided concerning the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies.

45. With regard to the control and limitation of documentation, the delays caused by late documentation were one of the most crucial causes of time wastage. The problem merited separate treatment, for example in the context of the Joint Inspection Unit report on evaluation of the translation process in the United Nations (A/35/294). One principal step towards controlling and limiting documentation would be to observe strictly the basic rule that every intergovernmental body, at the outset of each session, should review all recurrent documents to determine their redundancy and usefulness. Furthermore, as the Committee had stated in paragraph 40 of its report, it would be necessary to ensure that the Secretariat, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 33/56, informed intergovernmental bodies before decisions were taken as to whether specific requests for documentation exceeded the capability of the Secretariat to produce such documentation within a given time-frame and within its approved resources. In accordance with the same resolution, the Secretariat should draw the attention of intergovernmental bodies to areas where duplication of documentation was likely to occur or where an opportunity for integrating or consolidating documents that dealt with related or similar themes might exist.

46. On the subject of organizational and servicing arrangements for special conferences and their preparatory meetings, he said that once a decision to hold a conference had been taken, every attempt should be made to organize it effectively. Delegations appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat to that end, which had now resulted, after consideration by the Committee on Conferences, in a systematic framework or set of guidelines as set forth in chapter VIII of the Committee's report. His delegation felt that the following considerations were important in that connexion: firstly, whenever a preparatory organ for a conference was envisaged, primary consideration should be given to whether an existing intergovernmental organ could assume direct responsibility for carrying out such preparatory work. Secondly, the number of preparatory sessions should be reduced to a minimum by making good use of limited time and facilities and also by taking into account such factors as the availability of basic documents as well as other elements in the preparatory process. Thirdly, with regard to the organizational arrangements at the Secretariat level, existing Secretariat

/...

machinery should normally serve for the conference, without the establishment of new Secretariat machinery. Fourthly, in principle, United Nations bodies should schedule their sessions at their respective established headquarters, although they might hold sessions away from their established headquarters when a Government issuing such invitations had agreed to defray the additional costs.

47. He noted that the points he had just referred to were more or less covered by the guidelines contained in chapter VIII of the Committee's report and the draft resolution in chapter VI, which his delegation therefore fully supported.

48. Mr. LAMLOU (Morocco) welcomed the clear and concise report of the Committee on Conferences, which merited serious study by the Fifth Committee so that measures could be taken to improve conference services and so that the Department of Conference Services, which had done much to improve its services, could better meet its obligations to Member States. It should be remembered that the increased number of meetings and conferences convened in response to the wishes of the international community caused problems not only for the Secretariat, but also for Member States, in particular the smaller and developing countries, which were anxious not to fall behind in a rapidly changing world. The conference servicing task was rendered more difficult not only by the increasing number of meetings, but also by the increased number of Member States and the growing agenda, which now dealt with many issues that had long been neglected. Under the circumstances it was clear that the provision of conference services must be rationalized as much as possible.

49. It was appropriate to ask what the Committee on Conferences had done to implement General Assembly resolution 34/50, in particular paragraph 3 of that resolution. It would seem, judging from paragraph 68 of the Committee's report, that it had shown some degree of ineffectiveness in two areas: the Committee, as a body of government representatives not continuously in session, had shown itself, firstly, unable to consider adequately technical innovations in the field of conference servicing and, secondly, unsuitable to take over the administrative and other aspects of the conference programming process, an operation properly entrusted by the General Assembly to the Department of Conference Services.

50. Many delegations seemed to agree, however, that the Committee on Conferences with its broad-based representation could be a suitable instrument for dealing with programming with the necessary flexibility and with the comprehensive view required in order to ensure the rational use of conference resources. They urged that the role of the Committee be strengthened, inter alia, by strengthening its mandate beyond the terms of reference of General Assembly resolution 32/72, the possibilities of which the Committee had now exhausted.

(Mr. Lahlou, Morocco)

51. The increased number of meetings and conferences heightened the need for a serious study in the capability of the Secretariat to assume the growing conference servicing responsibilities. Overprogramming, though not without its own dangers, could be useful and some additional resources would be available as a result of the elimination of some meetings and the exercise of greater care in keeping meetings within their allotted times. The new task before the Committee on Conferences went beyond the reallocation of resources, however, to the establishment of guidelines for meetings and conferences under the direction of the General Assembly.

52. On the subject of organizational and servicing arrangements for special conferences of the United Nations and their preparatory meetings, he drew attention to the value of such conferences, which were called for by developments on the international scene that could not be considered adequately by the regular sessional bodies of the General Assembly. It was the important responsibility of the Secretariat and the specialized agencies that those conferences should be carefully and properly prepared. Such efforts called for the support and co-operation of all intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations.

53. His delegation supported the draft resolution in paragraph 61 of the Committee's report, although it would wish to see some minor amendments in the wording. The elimination of summary records was of some concern to his delegation; the impact of that decision had been unfavourable for certain bodies and delegations, in particular small delegations. The impact of the measure could perhaps be attenuated by changing the presentation of committee reports to reflect more fully the trends in the debate. With regard to the intention to limit reports to 32 pages, he pointed out that the intention of such measures was not to reduce the work of the Secretariat but to make United Nations bodies more effective; the length of reports bore no direct relation to the effort required to produce them. His delegation supported recommendation 2 and paragraphs 4 and 14 of recommendation 3 in chapter VIII of the Committee's report. His delegation's position on recommendation 5 had already been made clear.

54. Mr. STUART (United Kingdom) said that, although his delegation had at one time had some doubts as to the value of the work of the Committee on Conferences, those doubts had been dispelled in recent years. He felt that the Fifth Committee should endorse the recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences as a worth-while contribution to economy and the elimination of waste.

55. With regard to recommendation 1, dealing with overprogramming, his delegation agreed that the Secretary-General should be encouraged to continue applying maximum overprogramming, whenever possible. The Committee had not, however, defined the term "whenever possible", nor had the Secretary-General provided any indication as to how he interpreted the term. He requested, therefore, specific details as to when and how maximum overprogramming would be applied and some indication of the total value of the savings expected and achieved, especially in the area of free-lance recruitment. He also agreed with recommendation 2, dealing with delay in the issuance of documentation in all required languages, and requested

/...

(Mr. Stuart, United Kingdom)

that the Secretary-General should provide details and adequate explanations for any delays.

56. His delegation supported the recommendation in paragraph 9 (b) of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/35/12) to the effect that specific requests from subsidiary organs for exceptions to the decision to eliminate summary records should be referred to the Committee on Conferences for consideration in early 1981.

57. With regard to organizational and servicing arrangements for special conferences of the United Nations and their preparatory meetings, his delegation supported the draft resolution contained in recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences, in chapter VIII of its report. Although his delegation was opposed to meetings organized by the United Nations and serviced by its Secretariat but not open to all Member States, the arrangements envisaged in paragraph 17 (b) of chapter VIII of the Committee's report were not of that nature and were quite useful, in that they enabled regional groups to prepare their positions before the opening of a conference and led to economies in time and effort.

58. On the subject of ways to enable the Committee on Conferences to play a more effective role, his delegation did not believe that the Committee needed to be strengthened or that its present mandate should be expanded. The Committee should accept the constraints of its present mandate.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.