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COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 390th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 16 June 1993, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. HOHENFELLNER

(Austria)

- Other matters (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OTHER MATTERS (continued)

The CHAIRMAN: I very much regret that, although I was punctual, we could not start this meeting punctually. But that is not my responsibility.

Mr. REY (Colombia) (interpretation from Spanish): I wish to apologize to the Chairman and other members of the Committee for delaying the start of the meeting. The truth is that I did not expect to be the first speaker, though I shall be pleased to make the first statement.

On behalf of the Group of 77, over which my country is honoured to preside, I should like to make a few points concerning the three items the Committee is currently considering with a view to defining and taking a decision on them. In my previous statement, I had occasion to describe the position of the Group of 77 on the holding of the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 3). I explained, that the Group of 77 was aware that the convening of such a Conference required a clear and detailed definition of the Conference's purposes and objectives, and I expressed the Group's willingness to participate actively in efforts to that end. As to the Conference's venue and calendar, I believe that proposals were made in the informal Working Group. For its part, the Group of 77 is flexible on the matter. The delegation of Colombia welcomes the transfer of the headquarters of the Office for Outer Space Affairs to Vienna: a great deal of research in the field of space science technology has been carried out in Austria, which hosted such conferences as UNISPACE 82 and meetings of the outer space Committee in 1991. It was my personal honour to attend those conferences and to avail myself of the many facilities that the Austrian Government has to offer in that regard.

(Mr. Rey, Colombia)

I believe that the members of the Group of 77 share this view. However, despite its favourable view of the activities of the Office for Outer Space Affairs in Vienna, and although the Group of 77 sees no difficulty in holding meetings of the Committee and the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee in Vienna, there would be problems if we were to hold meetings of the Legal Subcommittee there - not because its meetings are inherently different from the others but because, as the Group of 77 has observed, in general, the convening of conferences away from New York can create certain difficulties.

For one thing, they arise from some Committee members' lack of diplomatic representation in Vienna. For example, seven of the 11 African countries have no diplomatic representation in Vienna; neither does one of the Asian countries.

(Mr. Rey, Colombia)

In other words, eight countries out of a total of 31 - 25 per cent - have no representation in Vienna.

The Group of 77 wished to put this concern to the Subcommittee so that the possibility of other approaches to helping these countries could be explored. Such approaches would consist basically in continuing to support the current arrangement, which is to alternate the venue of meetings of the Committee between Europe-Geneva - and New York, it being understood that the European venue would henceforth be Vienna.

I speak now on behalf of Latin American members of the Committee, in connection with the request of a certain Asian country to become a member. Our countries, and my country in particular, favour increasing the membership of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. We have absolutely no objection to the participation of any country; quite the contrary, we feel that broader participation is always welcome.

However, the countries of Latin America, including Colombia, respect the right of each regional group to select its own representatives. We therefore have no objection to an increase in the membership of a particular regional group, provided that the representation of the other regional groups is increased proportionally. Any other arrangement would be totally unacceptable to us.

Mr. ORDZHONIKIDZE (Russian Federation) (interpretation from Russian): If I have understood correctly, we are now discussing the agenda item "Other matters". I shall be speaking on behalf of the Russian Federation alone, so this statement will be somewhat shorter than the preceding one.

During this session of the Committee, there has emerged broad agreement on the merits of enlarging its membership. Indeed, throughout the informal consultations on this issue, my delegation took the position that if the

(Mr. Ordzhonikidze, Russian Federation)

Committee is to deal effectively with outer space matters it must include those States that can make a genuine contribution to outer space activities and that can share with the United Nations their experience, developments and programmes. We took it as our premise that this question could be agreed on and resolved; the Committee's prestige could not but benefit as a result.

Unfortunately, at the last moment, for reasons we fail to understand, a numerical consideration has been raised - even though, in outer space matters, quantity does not always correspond to quality. It seems to us that we should be thinking in terms of filling the Committee not with representatives of particular regions but with representatives of States with experience in space activities - States that are capable of making a genuine contribution to the Committee's activities. That is the peculiarity of this particular United Nations body; we would not, of course, want to see more empty seats in the chamber, because the Committee's prestige would then plummet.

We earnestly appeal to the representatives of the Group of 77 not to upset at the last minute the consensus that had emerged, the more so as their numerically-based approach is incomprehensible to us.

Under the item "Other matters" we are also considering the question of a future United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE 3). In this connection, we have serious doubts concerning the wording in the informal paper that we received to the effect that the Committee has considered the various aspects of the conference in detail.

(Mr. Ordzhonikidze,
Russian Federation)

I do not recall such a detailed discussion of various aspects of the conference, and I doubt that we have seriously considered this problem. Of course, certain delegations spoke, one after the other; but no serious discussion took place, and that was for one reason: those who initiated this proposal unfortunately could not explain to us clearly and understandably what it is that they would like the conference to do. What are its objectives? What are its tasks? What would be the specific questions to be considered at the conference? And why is such a conference needed in the first place? Until such time as this has been explained to us clearly, until such time as we are ready to take a decision, my delegation cannot support any wording relating to the conference which implies that the Committee is ready to deal with this question.

The CHAIRMAN: As we are clearly touching on matters that I wanted to deal with in informal consultations, and in order to allow sufficient time for us to discuss these matters very bluntly with a view to reaching a consensus, I would suggest, if Colombia agrees, that we continue discussing these items in the informal consultations which I intend to hold immediately after this meeting. At that time, we shall deal with all these matters as well as those raised by the representatives of Colombia and the Russian Federation.

Mr. REY (Colombia) (interpretation from Spanish): I have no objection to your suggestion. However, before we begin informal consultations, I must say the following in reply to the statement made by the representative of the Russian Federation.

I do not know what consensus or what agreements he is talking about. The Latin American Group is unaware of anything of the sort. We do not know what

(Mr. Rey, Colombia)

he is referring to, or even what the focus of the problem is. What my delegation said on behalf of the Latin American Group is that we have no objection to the admission of any country, provided that it results in a proportionate increase in the membership of the other regional groups. Why? Because that is what the Charter of the United Nations stipulates. Here, fortunately, if only in principle, there are no first- and second-class countries. We cannot therefore treat countries selectively; that would be to prejudge representatives of other regions incapable of participating effectively in the work of the Committee. That is something that I cannot accept, either on behalf of my delegation or on behalf of the Latin American countries.

I do not know if there is any conflict. I do not know what agreements and consensuses might have been reached earlier. I am simply saying that we are prepared to accept the admission of the country that has requested it, provided that the membership of the other regional groups is also increased. I do not see why this should create any problems. If I am told that an additional Asian country, an additional European country, an additional Latin American country, an additional African country and so on are accepted, fine; there is no problem, no conflict. But perhaps someone who has participated in the discussion of other questions that we are not familiar with knows something that we do not.

The CHAIRMAN: Let me remind delegations that following the adjournment of this meeting, informal consultations restricted to full members will take place.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.