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Chairman: Mr. Chowdhury .... (Bangladesh)

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

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97-83457 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 119: Pattern of conferences (continued) (A/C.5/52/L.13)

1. Mr. Ho Tong Yen (Singapore), introducing draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.13 on the pattern of conferences, said that section A of the draft resolution dealt with the calendar of conferences, the observance of the Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha holidays, and the provision and utilization of conference services. Section B dealt with United Nations documents and the technical and audio quality of some conference rooms. Section C addressed the Secretary-General's continuing efforts to utilize computer technologies in the United Nations system and section D dealt with the further development of the cost accounting system. Finally, section E dealt with the issue of smoking, particularly in conference rooms.

2. The Committee's attention was drawn to operative paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A. It had been the understanding of the Committee in adopting the decision by consensus that the decision would not affect the total number of official holidays. The Secretary-General would be responsible for implementing the decision in the Secretariat on the understanding that all official holidays should be observed on an equal basis.

3. The Chairman said he took it that the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.13 without a vote.

4. It was so decided.

5. Mr. Schlesinger (Austria), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation had joined the consensus on paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A on the understanding that the total number of official holidays would not exceed nine and no official holiday should be observed at the expense of another.

6. Mr. Farid (Saudi Arabia), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that he trusted that the resolution would be consistently implemented every year. The Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha holidays should be considered official holidays of the Organization on the same footing as any other official holiday. His delegation intended to monitor the implementation of the resolution to ensure its effectiveness.

7. Mr. Lozinski (Russian Federation), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation understood that the allocation of nine official holidays a year should be decided by the administration in consultation with staff at each duty station, taking account of the list of official holidays and local custom and practice. The total annual number of holidays should not exceed nine and the provisions contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A should not result in additional budget appropriations. His delegation had also noted an inaccurate translation in the Russian version of paragraph 5 which should be duly corrected by the Secretariat.

8. Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that the issue of smoking dealt with in section E had proved less straightforward than his delegation had originally envisaged. The wording of that section fell somewhat short of what his delegation had hoped for, but nevertheless it represented a small step in the right direction. He trusted that the Secretary-General would devise appropriate measures to discourage smoking in conference rooms.

9. Mr. Atiyanto (Indonesia), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation had joined the consensus on paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A on the understanding that the Secretary-General would fully implement all aspects of their provisions. The United Nations should preserve and conserve its international character at Headquarters and other duty stations alike, and not simply reflect prevailing local custom.

10. Mr. Sulaiman (Syrian Arab Republic), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation had joined the consensus on paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A on the understanding that the two additional official holidays would not represent an increase in the annual total of nine, and moreover they should not replace other religious holidays that were currently observed. The United Nations needed to reflect its religious and cultural diversity. His delegation planned to monitor the implementation of the resolution.

11. Mr. Medina (Morocco), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that the implementation of paragraph 5 of section A had been entrusted to the Secretary-General, who should make every effort to accommodate the decision contained therein. The two additional holidays should be treated in the same way as other religious holidays which were currently observed at Headquarters and other duty stations.

12. Mr. Herrera (Mexico) said that the Spanish version of operative paragraph 2 of section E sounded far more peremptory than the English equivalent and should therefore be toned down.

13. Mr. Maddens (Belgium), explaining the position of the European Union on the resolution just adopted, said that

the issue of the additional holidays was a managerial matter to be resolved by the Secretary-General and the staff. The total annual number of holidays should not exceed nine, and no holiday should be observed at the expense of another.

14. Mr. Elmontasser (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation wished to associate itself with the comments that had already been made by the representatives of Indonesia, Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. Mr. Sial (Pakistan), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation had joined the consensus on the understanding that the two additional holidays would be observed at Headquarters and other duty stations where applicable. In that connection, the Secretary-General should ensure compliance with the spirit and the letter of the resolution. His delegation also attached importance to paragraphs 24 and 25 of section B, which would radically alter the way in which the Organization conducted its legislative business.

16. Ms. Incera (Costa Rica), explaining her delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that, in accordance with paragraph 2 of section E, the Secretariat should immediately remove no-smoking signs from areas used by delegations since there was no legislative mandate for displaying them.

17. Mr. Moktefi (Algeria), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation trusted that the provisions contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A would be fully implemented. The addition of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha to the list of official holidays meant that they should be observed at all duty stations of the Organization.

18. Mr. Ahounou (Côte d'Ivoire), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that his delegation had joined the consensus on section E, but trusted that the Secretariat would eventually move in the direction of an outright ban on smoking in conference facilities. Given the United Nations affiliation to the World Health Organization, his delegation was puzzled by the reluctance to take a stronger position on smoking.

19. Ms. Fahmy (Egypt), explaining her delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that her delegation had joined the consensus on paragraphs 5 and 6 of section A on the understanding that the addition of Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha to the official list of holidays would not be to the detriment of holidays which the Organization already observed. Her delegation also noted with satisfaction the emphasis which the resolution placed on multilingualism. In paragraph 24 of section B, the words "as appropriate" in the English text had not been rendered satisfactorily into Arabic; she therefore requested the Secretariat to make the necessary correction.

20. Ms. Silot Bravo (Cuba), explaining her delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that the word "notes" in operative paragraph 4 of section B of the resolution had not been translated correctly into Spanish. The necessary correction should accordingly be made. Her delegation also looked forward to receiving the proposals of the Secretariat on resources to renovate the conference facilities at Headquarters, in particular the interpretation booths.

21. Mr. Monayair (Kuwait), explaining his delegation's position on the resolution just adopted, said that the Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha holidays were observed in some 50 Islamic States and it was therefore right that the United Nations should observe them. His delegation trusted that the Secretary-General would implement the resolution in accordance with the agreed text.

Agenda item 121: United Nations common system (continued) (A/C.5/52/L.11)

22. Ms. Daes (Greece), speaking in her capacity as Vice-Chairman of the Committee, introduced draft resolution A/C.5/52/L.11, entitled "United Nations common system: report of the International Civil Service Commission". The draft resolution on that vitally important item was the outcome of intensive and constructive informal consultations in which a consensus had been reached. After highlighting the main issues dealt with in each section of the draft resolution, she proposed that the Committee should adopt it by consensus.

23. The draft resolution was adopted.

24. The Chairman said that the Committee had concluded its consideration of agenda item 121.

Agenda item 115: Programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 (continued) (A/C.5/52/32)

25. Mr. Mselle (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) orally presented the Advisory Committee's comments on the Secretary-General's second report on the programme budget performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996-1997 (A/C.5/52/32). In accordance with past practice, the report was purely financial in scope and would be supplemented by a report on programme implementation. However, since the goal of performance reporting should be to relate financial data to programme performance, the Secretariat should make further efforts to consider, in the long term, the possibility of

combining the two aspects of budget performance into a single performance report.

26. Paragraph 3 of the report indicated that the anticipated final level of expenditure and income for the biennium represented a net decrease of $25.1 million compared to the revised appropriations and estimates of income approved in General Assembly resolution 51/222. The projected expenditure of $2,549.4 million reflected a decrease of $53.8 million, while the projected income of $419 million reflected a decrease of $28.7 million. Paragraph 4 indicated that the net reduction of $25.1 million reflected the combined effect of projected additional requirements of $31.6 million due to changes in inflation assumptions, commitments entered into under resolution 50/217 on unforeseen and extraordinary expenses and commitments authorized by the General Assembly; a $28.7-million decrease in income; and an anticipated reduction of $85.4 million due to changes in exchange rate assumptions, variations in post and common staff costs and adjustments to objects of expenditure other than posts.

27. The estimated additional requirements of $10.4 million for the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), which were detailed in the Secretary-General's ninth progress report on IMIS (A/52/711), were reflected in schedule 3, section 30, of the performance report, under the heading "Other changes". At its session in February and March 1998, the Advisory Committee would examine the requirements for the project outlined in document A/52/711. In the meantime, however, it recommended that the additional provision of $10.4 million should be deleted from the programme budget for 1996-1997.

28. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee had been informed, with respect to the reference to "implementation flexibility" in paragraph 8, that programme managers had been given more possibilities of redeploying resources allotted to their programmes, with the exception of staff costs, honoraria and hospitality. The Advisory Committee welcomed that development.

29. In paragraph 7, the Secretary-General indicated that budget implementation in 1996-1997 had been particularly challenging owing to the need to achieve the necessary savings other than through significant reductions in staff costs. However, paragraph 26 indicated that the average actual vacancy rates for the Professional category and above and the General Service and related categories of staff had been estimated at 12.8 and 7.6 per cent, respectively, whereas the target rates had been 10.4 and 7.5 per cent. Moreover, schedule 9 of the report showed that vacancy rates in some budget sections had reached dramatically high levels. For example, under section 21 (Human rights), the rates for the Professional and General Service categories had risen from 4 and 8.5 per cent, respectively, to 49 and 18.6 per cent; under section 11 (United Nations Environment Programme), they had risen from 17.4 and 0 per cent to 39.1 and 5 per cent. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee had been informed that the Secretariat had made no deliberate attempt to increase actual vacancy rates over the target rates.

30. Paragraphs 12 to 17 of the report explained the additional requirements relating to changes in inflation assumptions and the decrease resulting from exchange-rate fluctuations (which was due primarily to the depreciation of the Swiss franc and the Austrian schilling against the United States dollar); details on the assumed and actual rates of exchange were contained in schedules 4 and 5. Paragraphs 18 to 23 discussed the additional requirements of $30 million resulting from the commitments entered into under resolution 50/217, the commitments authorized for the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) and the Joint United Nations/OAS International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH) and staff assessment. Those additional requirements had been met within the current level of appropriations, in view of the continuing favourable exchange rate performance of the United States dollar. In that connection, he recalled the Advisory Committee's observation, in paragraph 36 of document A/51/7/Add.1, that even though it might be possible to absorb at least part of the cost of new mandates because of movements in exchange rates and inflation, it was important to remember that General Assembly resolution 41/213 had been reaffirmed and continued to apply until the Assembly specifically changed it.

31. Paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's report indicated that the anticipated final level of expenditure and income for 1996-1997 had been based, inter alia, on actual expenditures for the first 18 months. However, considering the Organization's investments in technology, the Secretariat should try to base performance reporting on actual expenditures for the first 21 months. Moreover, the estimated expenditures for the current biennium included unliquidated obligations. Future performance reports should indicate the amount of unliquidated obligations included in estimated expenditures for the biennium.

32. The projected $28.7-million decrease in income was discussed in paragraphs 32 to 35. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee had been informed that the decrease in income from rental of premises mentioned in paragraph 34 was due to the fact that the relocation of the United Nations Children's Fund in Geneva and of the United Nations Volunteers could

not have been foreseen at the time the budget for 1996-1997 had been prepared.

33. In the light of its observations and recommendations, the Advisory Committee recommended a reduction of $10.4 million in respect of IMIS under the expenditure sections of the programme budget for 1996-1997.

34. Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda) said that in view of their importance, he would have preferred to receive the Advisory Committee's comments in writing. In part II, paragraph 6, of its resolution 50/214, by which it had adopted the programme budget for 1996-1997, the General Assembly had decided that the savings required under that budget would not affect the full implementation of mandated programmes and activities. He asked whether particular attention had been paid to that stipulation in the implementation of the programme budget for 1996-1997, since it appeared that a number of programmes and activities had been curtailed, deferred, postponed or even cancelled.

35. He endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the $10.4 million relating to IMIS should be deleted from the proposed programme budget for 1998-1999. Since it appeared that that amount was to come from the savings achieved in other departments, he asked the Secretariat to identify those departments and to explain why the savings achieved in them were to be transferred to IMIS instead of being either left in those same departments or returned to Member States. Lastly, although currency fluctuations had been favourable in 1996-1997, it would be unwise to use projected currency fluctuations and inflation rates, which were very unpredictable, to reduce the overall level of budget appropriations. Instead, the current procedures should be maintained.

36. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) said she agreed that the Advisory Committee's comments, which concerned an issue of great significance for the Organization's activities, should have been submitted in writing. She regretted that the Committee had so little time in which to consider the second budget performance report (A/C.5/52/32), especially in view of the exceptional circumstances of the current biennium.

37. She was concerned to note that some of the savings achieved had been attributable to very high vacancy rates. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee had indicated that that situation had not reflected a deliberate policy on the part of the Secretariat, but it must be stressed that that approach was unacceptable, particularly in view of the postponement or cancellation of some important activities, as reported in document A/C.5/51/53. She asked the Secretariat to comment on that situation in a formal meeting. Her delegation had previously expressed concern about the impact of postponing the lifting of the freeze on vacancy rates, but the Secretariat had provided no satisfactory response to those concerns and had obviously used vacancy rates to generate additional savings, in contravention of the General Assembly's decision on the matter. In that connection, she recalled the Advisory Committee's concern, expressed in document A/51/7/Add.1, about how vacancies were being used to accommodate the costs of additional mandates relating to the maintenance of peace and security, even though the General Assembly had authorized additional appropriations for such activities. In the draft resolution to be adopted on the item, the Committee should indicate that it noted with concern that the Secretariat had used vacancy rates to generate additional savings.

38. She agreed with the Advisory Committee that the estimates contained in future budget performance reports would be more realistic if they took into account actual expenditures for the first 21 months of the biennium instead of only the first 18 months. She also agreed that the Secretariat's request for an additional $10.4 million for IMIS was unjustified. IMIS was a multi-year project which had been very expensive and had not yet yielded full results. The Secretariat should submit updated resource requirements after the Advisory Committee had analysed the project and after the results of the special audit became available. Lastly, she asked why managers had not used their increased flexibility in the use of resources to find ways (such as the use of temporary assistance) to carry out some of the activities which had been postponed, including the preparation of certain reports.

39. Mr. Repasch (United States of America) asked when delegations could expect to receive the text of the Advisory Committee's important comments. With respect to IMIS, the Committee would not be in a position to decide whether the recommendation to delete the additional $10.4 million was justified until the Advisory Committee had conducted a full analysis of the project. He asked which of the income sections referred to in the Secretary-General's report included the proceeds from insurance payments received by the Organization in connection with the renovation of the roof of the General Assembly building. Lastly, he asked for details on what additional expenses were included under the heading "Other changes" in schedule 1, particularly with regard to those budget sections in which substantial increases were projected under that heading, such as section 23 (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), section 26C (Office of Human Resources Management) and 26E (Conference services) and section 28 (Special expenses).

40. Mr. Farid (Saudi Arabia) said that the proposed final appropriations for consultants and experts, general operating

expenses and furniture, as indicated in schedule 2, were relatively high in comparison to the total budget figure and should be reduced. He was concerned about the indication, in paragraph 28 of the report, that increases for travel, furniture and equipment amounted to $16.5 million. On the other hand, he welcomed the reduction of expenditure on staff costs, supplies and materials (para. 31) and hoped that it would represent a growing trend in the Organization. Lastly, he was concerned about the decreased net revenues from the United Nations Gift Centre at Headquarters (para. 35), especially in view of the irregularities reported previously by the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The cost-effectiveness of that operation should be analysed with a view to determining whether or not it should be continued.

41. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) requested further clarification regarding improvement to premises mentioned in paragraph 28 of the second performance report, since, in the view of her delegation, there was still much room for improvement in the condition of the Headquarters complex. Concerning the United Nations Gift Centre, although a cost-benefit analysis of its operation would be helpful, it did serve a purpose in disseminating information about the Organization. In that connection, if tax was currently being collected on its sales, that should be reported as income and Member States should have an opportunity to give their views on the practice.

42. Mr. Halbwachs (Controller), in reply to the representative of Uganda, said that the Secretary-General had indicated that it would not be possible to realize the necessary savings without some effect on programmes and the level of vacancies. The actual impact had been detailed in document A/C.5/50/57 and Add.1. The Secretariat was not using fluctuations in currency and inflation rates to reduce the budget; the significant increase in the strength of the United States dollar had worked to the Organization's advantage in the current re-costing exercise and had allowed it to absorb some changes, but such changes were cyclical. Nor had vacancies been used to create additional savings: when the recruitment freeze had been lifted in April 1997 it had been expected that the vacancy rate would fall, but the level had remained about the same.

43. With regard to the repair of the General Assembly Hall roof, the insurance payment received had been applied to those repairs. Although some delegations had pointed out high expenditures in certain areas, the amounts had not exceeded the levels which the General Assembly had authorized. In fact, the amount spent on consultants was below the level for the biennium 1982-1983. The net reduction in expenditure on premises did not relate to Headquarters, but had been brought about by a delay in plans to move the library at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and by structural repairs to the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) premises that had been deemed not to be necessary. He agreed with ACABQ that future performance reports should be based on expenditures for 21 months rather than 18 months.

44. Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon) said that if there was one lesson to be learned from the performance report for the biennium 1996-1997, it was that those very difficult years should not be used as a model for the future. The credits allocated had not been used for their intended purpose, out of excessive prudence, and thus the goals of the biennium would not be achieved. Directors had been given more freedom and flexibility in order to achieve the necessary savings, but they had used that discretion to cut back on programmes, hiring of staff and maintenance of facilities, which in the end were false economies. Those measures had put immense pressure on programme execution, which had led to delays in implementation of mandates and morale problems among staff.

45. In the coming biennium, programmes must be executed in full and vacancy rates must fall to acceptable levels. In addition, the United Nations must keep up with changing technology in order to have the means to execute its budget more effectively. Finally, all Member States must pay their arrears promptly.

46. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) asked the Controller to provide a report on repair projects at Headquarters, many of which had been only partially completed or had been delayed. She also wondered whether the relocation of the library at ESCAP would take place during the biennium 1998-1999. With regard to vacancy rates, the General Assembly had lifted the general recruitment freeze by its decision 51/456 in December 1996; she would like to know why the Secretariat had waited until April 1997 to implement that decision.

47. Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda) wondered why the Secretariat had implemented programmes which were not mandated, but had not implemented others that were. The savings from currency fluctuations, inflation and efficiencies should have been used to implement those programmes, or the Secretariat should have requested further appropriations from the General Assembly.

48. His delegation also agreed that the performance report should be based on a 21-month rather than an 18-month cycle.

49. Mr. Hanson (Canada) said that his delegation also regretted that programme objectives had not been achieved in accordance with appropriations. However, an

appropriation was nothing more than a legal authority to spend money, and money which had not been received could not be spent. If delegations were concerned that mandated activities had not been fulfilled, they should look to the gap between payment of contributions and agreed appropriation levels. Delegations were only too ready to negotiate budgets, but their Governments then failed to make the contributions that flowed from those commitments. The answer to many of the questions posed lay in the status of contributions and the $2 billion in arrears.

50. Mr. Repasch (United States of America) said that his delegation would like to see a full analysis of the issues which had led to the decision by ACABQ to recommend deletion of the funds for IMIS. Furthermore, it was his understanding that a performance report provided updates on income and expenditure; hence, it would include some indication of the amount received from insurance on the roof and its subsequent disbursement.

51. Mr. Farid (Saudi Arabia) said that the comparison of expenditure levels for consultants with those in a previous biennium was irrelevant. Since the number of staff had decreased, consultancy and all other related expenses should also decrease accordingly. Operating expenses of $212 million were too high for an Organization with a total budget of $2.5 billion, and must be brought down.

52. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) said that her delegation fully agreed with the representative of Canada on the impact of the failure to pay assessed contributions. However, a distinction should be drawn between Governments which failed to make payments because of political conditionalities and others, like her own, which had difficulty in making full payments for financial reasons.

53. Mr. Armitage (Australia) said that, in the view of his delegation, in the context of budget discussions the reasons for non-payment of assessed contributions were irrelevant. In principle, if income levels were declining or uncertain, it made sense to limit expenditure, which was one of the main reasons for the recent tight budgets. His delegation would also like to hear more about the reasoning behind the deletion of the IMIS funding from the current biennium.

54. Ms. Ng (Panama) asked whether there was any legal basis for the United Nations Gift Centre at Headquarters charging tax on sales and whether tax had ever been charged in the past.

55. Mr. Mselle (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that, by mid-December, the Advisory Committee had always found it advisable to issue as many as possible of its reports orally so as to speed up the Committee's work. Moreover, the second performance report (A/C.5/52/32) had become available on 13 December 1997; the Advisory Committee had had an advance copy, which it had considered on 12 December and 15 December, and there had not been time to submit a written report.

56. Responding to the question why the Advisory Committee had recommended deletion of the amount of $10.4 million for IMIS, he said that the only information about IMIS in the second performance report (A/C.5/52/32) was in paragraph 5, which referred to the ninth progress report of the Secretary-General on IMIS (A/52/711), a long and complicated document that required a thorough review by the Advisory Committee. It was not clear from either report why the amount in question should be allocated to the 1996-1997 budget, and whether the amount related to activities carried out by IMIS in 1996-1997 for which those funds had been either committed or obligated. If the activities in question had not commenced, the Secretariat would need to explain why the amount had been included in the 1996-1997 budget. The issue needed to be settled in the context of a detailed review of the ninth progress report on IMIS, and for that reason the Advisory Committee had recommended that the amount of $10.4 million should be deleted from the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. The Advisory Committee would review the ninth progress report on IMIS in February 1998, and if all or part of the amount of $10.4 million was required would make an appropriate recommendation to the General Assembly.

57. Mr. Halbwachs (Controller) said that with respect to construction in New York, he had said not that all the projects had been carried out, but that all the funds that had been appropriated had been spent. He did not have information as to whether the work on the ESCAP library would be rescheduled for 1998-1999.

58. The Secretariat had not implemented programmes which had not been mandated, but had implemented programmes which had been mandated but for which funds had not been appropriated. It had not taken funds from mandated programmes to finance MICIVIH and MINUGUA. It was not asking for IMIS to be financed with savings from any section or programme; IMIS would be financed within the totality of the budget. As to why the Secretariat had not requested the General Assembly to approve additional funds to implement programmes, he said that a list of programmes and activities which had had to be modified or deferred in order to stay within the level of funds available had been provided in document A/C.5/50/57 and Add.1. The General Assembly had approved that list and had not seen fit to

request additional funds; therefore, the Secretariat had no basis for requesting additional funds.

59. The insurance settlement for the repair of the roof of the Headquarters building had been regarded as a direct refund of expenditure, consistent with regulation 7.1 of the Financial Regulations and Rules.

60. He would seek information about the operation of the United Nations Gift Centre at Headquarters and report back to the Committee.

61. Mr. Repasch (United States of America) said that his delegation agreed that the ninth progress report was a complicated and obscure document, and for precisely that reason had asked about the basis for the Advisory Committee's recommendation. The ninth progress report had not been introduced to the Committee and there had been no opportunity to discuss it, yet the Committee was being asked to take action on the basis of that report. No final decision should be taken until both the Advisory Committee and the Committee had carried out a full analysis of the issues surrounding IMIS.

62. Mr. Sial (Pakistan) said his delegation shared the concern expressed by several delegations about the non-implementation of programmes and activities. In paragraph 7 of resolution 50/214, the General Assembly had reiterated the need for the Secretary-General to ensure that resources were strictly utilized for the purposes it had approved. His delegation was concerned that after resources had been approved, they had been used for other purposes, with the result that activities and programmes had been adversely affected. In November 1996, the Secretariat had assured the Committee that great care would be taken by programme managers to ensure that mandated programmes and activities were not affected; the actual situation seemed to be different.

63. While it was the responsibility of all Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time, non-payment of contributions should not imply the curtailment of programmes and activities. The General Assembly had repeatedly stressed that any change in programmes and activities was its prerogative.

64. Mr. Mselle (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Secretariat should provide information to the Committee on the resources available for IMIS in 1998. If there were resources available at least for the first six months, there would be no problem; if no resources were available as of 1 January 1998, an appropriation would be needed.

65. The Chairman said that the Committee needed to take a decision recommending that the General Assembly should approve the final appropriations for the biennium 1996-1997 in the amounts shown under various sections in the last column of schedule I of the second performance report (A/C.5/52/32), excluding an amount of $10,362.1 million, taking into account the recommendation of the Advisory Committee.

66. Mr. Repasch (United States of America) said that his delegation was prepared to support such a decision, provided that it included language indicating that the Committee's decision regarding the Advisory Committee's recommendation on IMIS would be conditional on further analysis of the report by the Advisory Committee and the Board of Auditors.

67. Mr. Mselle (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Committee was considering the final appropriations for the biennium 1996-1997; the accounts would be closed in March 1998 to allow the Board of Auditors to start its work. The Advisory Committee would receive from the Secretariat a report on the final transfer between sections of the budget before the accounts were closed. If anything was going to be done about IMIS, it would have to be in the context of the 1998-1999 budget. The Advisory Committee had not supported the Secretary-General's recommendation that a credit of $10.4 million should be left in the 1996-1997 budget; any additional resources for IMIS would therefore have to be appropriated in the context of the 1998-1999 biennium.

68. Mr. Repasch (United States of America) said that the Committee did not have enough information to be able to take a decision. He would prefer the decision to be conditional on a final report by the Advisory Committee and a decision on it by the Committee. Perhaps the Committee could take a final decision at the resumed session, before the accounts were closed.

69. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) said that if IMIS needed additional resources, they could be approved at the time when the report of the Advisory Committee was taken up. The Committee could not take a decision now, and it would be incorrect to take a decision and then reopen the question later.

70. Mr. Odaga-Jalomayo (Uganda) said that the Committee should take a decision, and if a further appropriation was needed, it could be included in the budget for the 1998-1999 biennium.

71. Ms. Fahmy (Egypt) said that her delegation supported the suggestion made by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee.

72. Mr. Lowen (United Kingdom) said that his delegation felt that the Committee did not have sufficient information to take a decision; the matter should be pursued in informal meetings.

73. Mr. Namburete (Mozambique) said that his delegation supported the idea of taking a decision straight away, taking into account the explanations given.

74. Mr. Armitage (Australia) said that his delegation agreed that the Committee did not have sufficient information to take a decision.

75. The Chairman said that it seemed that the Committee was not in a position to take a decision; the item should be taken up in informal meetings.

Other matters

76. Ms. Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba) said that her delegation had been informed that an administrative instruction had been issued recently by the Secretariat regarding staff members on fixed term contracts. At the next meeting, representatives from the Office of Human Resources Management should provide further information on the subject.

77. Mr. Saha (India) said his delegation felt that the Committee needed to accord serious consideration to that matter, which was of interest to all Member States.

78. The Chairman said that he would convey the request for information to the Secretariat.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.