



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia)

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

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

AGENDA ITEM 100: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1982-1983 (continued)
(A/36/6, A/36/7, A/36/38, chaps. V and VII D)

General Debate (continued)

First reading

Section 1. Over-all policy-making, direction and co-ordination

1. Mr. SHERMAN (Liberia) said that two reasons had been put forward for the zero-growth budget proposed by the Secretary-General: the need to maintain and strengthen the financial credibility of the Organization at a time when Member States wished to contain their spending, and the need to concentrate resources on more urgent priorities. Nevertheless, his delegation opposed the concept of zero growth, since it would have a debilitating effect on developing countries.
2. While it was generally agreed that excessive spending by the United Nations could be curbed, care should be taken not to render the United Nations system ineffective in its efforts to promote world peace through understanding and to bring relief to suffering peoples. Programmes of benefit to developing countries should be financed through a redeployment of funds from less useful projects.
3. In his foreword to the proposed programme budget, the Secretary-General had noted that the Secretariat could not successfully accomplish an ever-widening range of tasks without being granted adequate means to do so. The scarcity of financial resources made it imperative to redeploy existing resources from less important activities to those with higher priority. General Assembly resolutions 32/206 and 35/209 clearly required the Secretary-General and the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) to engineer such a reallocation of resources. It was important to allow CPC to examine programme aspects of the budget and to formulate recommendations on them before the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions commenced its review of the administrative and financial aspects of the budget.
4. Despite their economic difficulties, Member States had continued to pay their assessed contributions. That was an indication of their faith in the United Nations. The Organization should not have to face difficulties in financing its programmes and activities, which should be funded in accordance with the ability to pay.
5. The Secretary-General had stated that, although there was no increase in real terms, the programme budget for the biennium 1982-1983 represented a 14.7 per cent increase in nominal terms, largely because of adjustments for inflation. While that increase was acceptable, the decrease in some objects of expenditure, which resulted in a negative resource growth of \$3.5 million, was extremely disturbing.
6. Given that nearly two thirds of the budget was for personnel services, his delegation opposed the conversion of temporary posts to established posts. Promotion on the ground of greater efficiency should, however, be encouraged.

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(Mr. Sherman, Liberia)

7. The budget could not ignore the world financial situation. The inflationary pressures which had affected the budget were inherent in the free-market system. Maximum economy and prudence should be employed in formulating and implementing the budget for the biennium 1982-1983.

8. Mr. VOSS RUBIO (Uruguay) said that his delegation would support any proposal to increase operational expenditure and reduce administrative costs. A reduction in costs should be accompanied by a redistribution of resources to correspond more closely to reality and to maximize operational effectiveness. Activities initiated and programmes benefiting developing countries should be completed. His delegation looked forward to a reallocation of resources, which would make it possible to determine priorities more precisely and to rationalize activities financed from extrabudgetary resources.

9. The Organization's activities had not always been cost-effective, nor had they contributed as greatly as they might have done to the fulfilment of the aims of the Charter. His delegation fully supported the identification and elimination of obsolete, marginal or ineffective activities. In that regard, account should be taken of the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination in determining the size of the budget for the next biennium.

10. Uruguay supported the allocation of funds for the fourth training programme for translator/precis writers at the Economic Commission for Africa, on the understanding that any allocation should be in proportion to the amount authorized at the last session of the General Assembly. The increasing use of first-class air travel by United Nations officials was disturbing. The cheapest class available should be used.

11. Almost 80 per cent of budget requirements were for staff emoluments and related expenditure, while common staff costs would not alter significantly in the next biennium. Efforts should be made to devote resources to substantive programmes in the economic, social and humanitarian spheres.

12. His delegation supported the adoption of a standardized nomenclature throughout the Secretariat to achieve a more systematic structure. It also supported the Secretary-General's request for funds for premises for the Economic Commission for Latin America in Santiago, and the proposals relating to the organization of services at the Kenyatta Conference Centre in Nairobi, as well as the completion in good time of offices for the United Nations Environment Programme. His delegation welcomed the measures aimed at placing Arabic on the same footing as the other working and official languages of the main organs of the United Nations.

13. Although the serious international economic crisis might prove a constraint, the international community's best hope lay in strengthening the United Nations. There were millions who placed their hopes for a better life in the Organization, which made it imperative for the international community, while seeking greater efficiency, to continue to support it.

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14. Mr. MEZE (Gabon) said that his delegation regretted the delay in the circulation of documents, since it hampered the consideration of questions before the Committee.

15. The current economic crisis particularly affected developing countries; hence the need to ensure equitable contributions. The contributions made by certain Member States of the Organization had decreased while that of Gabon had continued to increase. His delegation's primary concern was to ensure that United Nations resources were used properly. In that regard, his delegation had confidence in the Administration. It was gratifying that the regional economic commissions had been given sufficient resources to discharge the tasks entrusted to them.

16. Mr. HOUNGAVOU (Benin) said that, given the importance his Government attached to multilateral assistance, it was concerned over the policy of zero growth, which had not been discussed by the Organization, and which seemed to have been imposed on the Secretariat by certain Member States. Those same States devoted enormous resources to arms expenditure, and to activities which in no way promoted international peace and security.

17. The figures contained in the proposed programme budget revealed a catastrophic situation. It was a regrettable fact that some four fifths of the resources were required for maintaining the United Nations bureaucracy, while only one fifth was devoted to programme implementation. The concern of the third world was heightened by the realization that zero growth did not apply to staff costs, since United Nations officials, in common with national civil servants, moved along a career path; zero growth applied only to that part of the budget devoted to programmes.

18. The policy of zero growth, which had not originated in a mandate from the Organization, represented the view of a minority of States which chose to ignore their obligations and to overlook the fact that the economic crisis affected developing countries most of all, since they were the least able to combat it. A zero-growth policy would reduce multilateral programmes and jeopardize implementation of the International Development Strategy. Perhaps the time had come for the United Nations to change the way in which its budget was prepared.

19. Mr. KABA (Guinea), referring to the matter of easing the financial burden of the Organization, observed that during 1980 in New York alone some 3,500 meetings had been held and had generated 600 million pages of documentation.

20. Greater importance should be attached to the role of the regional economic commissions and, in that connexion, he welcomed the interest which the international community had shown in the implementation of the Lagos Plan of Action, adopted in 1980 by the Organization of African Unity.

21. He expressed concern at the unjustified and deliberate withholding of contributions by the great Powers, which had no hesitations, however, about spending enormous sums in their unbridled arms race. The aid and co-operation policies of some rich countries, and even some specialized agencies, focused only on those countries in the direst of straits.

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(Mr. Kaba, Guinea)

22. Any increase in expenditure must be used to expand United Nations programmes and activities benefiting developing countries and promoting international peace and security. Substantial resources were required for certain programmes, and there seemed to be no room for cutting expenditure without sacrificing effectiveness. Ways and means must therefore be sought to increase resources for essential programmes. What was most regrettable was that instead of taking a responsible approach to the difficult problem of striking a balance between the growing requirements of United Nations bodies and the level of funding to be provided, the major contributors were more concerned with slashing the budget at any cost. Like all developing countries, Guinea was especially concerned to enhance the efficiency of the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and was prepared to co-operate in efforts towards that end. He appealed to the major industrialized countries to join in those efforts by promoting United Nations action in support of the development programmes of Member States.

23. As the major contributors, the industrialized countries had the greatest influence on the administrative and executive structure of all the organizations of the United Nations system and must resist the temptation of manipulating organizations to suit their own purposes; otherwise, the fragile framework for co-operation among nations would not survive. It was therefore essential for those countries to rise above selfishness and paternalism and, in a spirit of solidarity, to promote co-operation among peoples, if the international community wished its efforts for peace and development to be successful.

24. Mr. MUGUME (Uganda) expressed his delegation's satisfaction that the Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management had found time to make an early statement in the Fifth Committee on some of the fundamental issues relating to the Secretary-General's programme budget proposals. The budget proposals for 1982-1983 were historic because they marked the first time that the principle of zero growth had been applied to the regular budget. It had been observed that zero growth was not a goal in itself and that an organization could have a zero-growth budget and yet effectively maintain the efficiency and productivity of its programme. The Secretary-General's budget proposals stood out as a brilliant academic attempt at identifying a mathematical relationship between the revalued base, inflation, currency rate fluctuations and resource growth. His delegation wondered, however, whether a zero growth rate in real terms could be applied to a dynamic programme budget whose parameters were far outweighed by the variables, and whether it was realistic or desirable slavishly to adhere to the concept of zero growth while assuming that supplementary estimates would bail the Organization out if obstacles were encountered in programme delivery. There should be a causal relationship between projects and programme budgeting. For those reasons, his delegation found the zero-growth idea, while attractive, unacceptable, and the premises underlying the budget proposals unconvincing.

25. The programme budget proposals implied a negative growth rate of 0.2 per cent. The projected rate of 0.8 per cent for the biennium 1980-1981 had resulted in a 3.7 per cent real growth rate. In the light of experience, a real growth rate 3 to 4 per cent higher than the rate assumed at the time of submission of the budget

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(Mr. Mugume, Uganda)

estimates was the rule rather than the exception, and there was no reason to expect things to turn out differently when the underlying causes remained. It must be borne in mind that the Secretariat could not successfully accomplish the ever-widening range of tasks assigned to it without adequate means to do so.

26. While the aim of the zero-growth budget had been described as being to maintain and strengthen the Organization's credibility at a time when Member States were facing serious economic and financial difficulties, it was ironic that the Secretary-General should undertake an experiment in zero-growth budgeting at a time when the developing countries, representing the majority of Member States, were facing serious difficulties in their development efforts. On the contrary, the situation seemed to militate in favour of a higher growth rate.

27. Although assurances had been given that programme productivity and effectiveness would be maintained, no attempt had been made to demonstrate the fundamental causal relationship that should exist between the programme and the budget proposals and how redeployment would be effected.

28. Since a special review of priorities was still being carried out, he failed to understand how the Secretary-General could have proposed a zero-growth budget based on the redeployment of resources. Unless it could be convincingly demonstrated that the redeployment of resources would not adversely affect programme delivery, it would be difficult to regard the budget proposals as the result of the Secretary-General's efforts to safeguard the interests of all Member States. The Secretary-General should have consulted all Member States and groups before embarking on the path of zero growth. While some Member States had adopted a policy of curtailing public spending, as the Secretary-General had pointed out in the foreword to the programme budget, attempts to compare the national budgets of individual Member States and the United Nations programme budgets should be resisted. Apart from the obvious differences in the objectives of the two types of budget, national budgets were limited more by resource constraints, while the United Nations budget was limited more by the lack of political will on the part of the Member States to support its activities financially. It was amazing that a world which spent over \$500 billion on arms contributed only a meagre sum to what was perhaps the only organization offering mankind the hope of peace, security and better living conditions in the developing countries.

29. Turning to the first report of the Advisory Committee (A/36/7), he said that, while agreeing that savings should be made wherever possible, his delegation found it difficult to understand why the Advisory Committee should confine itself solely to budget-cutting. For example, the Advisory Committee had unrealistically recommended a reduction in the estimates for the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to account for unfilled vacancies at a time when ECA was taking on an increasing role in the implementation of the International Development Strategy, a substantial new programme of action for the more than 20 least developed countries in Africa and the Lagos Programme of Action.

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(Mr. Mugume, Uganda)

30. He shared the Secretary-General's concern over the Organization's cash situation, which was the result of the withholding of contributions and delayed payments by Member States. He expressed the hope that Member States would display the necessary political will to meet the cost of their commitment to the ideals of the Organization.

31. Mr. BELYAEV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the steps taken to reduce somewhat the tempo of growth of the Organization's spending were commendable in view of the serious financial and economic difficulties which many Member States were facing. To that extent the budget proposals were more in keeping with the times than they had been in previous years. They did not include the transfer of any posts previously financed from extrabudgetary funds to the regular budget, and marked progress had been made in restricting the future growth of the staffing table.

32. All the same, the increase projected in the Organization's net expenditure, according to the budget proposals, would be 13.7 per cent greater in the forthcoming biennium than in the biennium 1980-1981, and those proposals were still subject to review and expansion. While the budget was claimed to show no real growth, the actual increase in the financial burden on Member States, based on initial estimates alone, would be more than \$300 million. One reason for that was that not all departmental heads had paid due attention to the Secretary-General's efforts to restrain growth in planned expenditure. In fact, apart from a number of small refinements, the proposed programme budget was very similar in both form and content to the budget for the biennium 1981-1982, and suffered all the same defects.

33. The proposals had been drawn up without regard to the effectiveness and value of current programmes and to the possibility of redeploying resources. It was clear that an inadequate attempt had been made during the preparation of the budget to arrive at a closer interrelationship between planning, programming and resource availability, as was pointed out in the report of CPC (A/36/38). It was unfortunate that neither CPC nor the Economic and Social Council had been able to complete their task of reviewing the proposed budget. The Secretariat must gather and submit exhaustive information on obsolete, ineffective and marginal activities before the Committee completed its consideration of the item.

34. The budget submission had also been used as an excuse for an unwarranted expansion of the staffing table, the upward reclassification of some posts and the conversion of temporary posts into permanent ones. Such moves were known to incur enormous additional expenditure, and were thus entirely at odds with the Secretariat's assurances that it was trying to make economic and rational use of its resources. His delegation supported the suggestion that the productivity of the existing staff should be thoroughly studied by the International Civil Service Commission and the Joint Inspection Unit.

35. The budget again allowed for outlays in connexion with the bond issue, the sad consequence of illicit operations in the Congo and the Near East undertaken in defiance of the Charter. Full responsibility for those operations must be borne by

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(Mr. Belyaev, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic)

the countries who had foisted them on the Organization at the time. His own country would accept no responsibility for them, and would not pay the corresponding amounts.

36. The practice of financing technical assistance under the regular budget was not strictly in accordance with Article 17 of the Charter. His delegation favoured the transfer of such expenditure from the regular budget to the budget of UNDP. As in the past, his Government would pay its contribution for technical assistance in its national currency.

37. Perhaps the major reason for the rapid growth in the resources requested was the Secretariat's inclusion, on its own initiative, of significant sums to cover the cost of inflation and currency fluctuations, thereby apportioning some of the cost to Member States which bore no responsibility for such phenomena. As yet, the Secretariat had taken no specific steps to counter the effects of inflation on the budget. His delegation believed that budgetary outlays occasioned by inflation should be met through savings, adjustments within the budget or contributions (voluntary and otherwise) from the developed States where Secretariat departments were situated.

38. Finally, there could be no justification for the requested record increases in what were clearly secondary areas of activity, such as communications, the rental of furniture and equipment, and over-time payments. One could only welcome the Secretariat's assurances that it intended to adhere strictly to the principles of economy and efficiency, but those principles had not yet found concrete expression in the budgetary proposals.

39. United Nations expenditure was now so large that energetic efforts were needed on the part of all countries, the Secretariat and the Fifth Committee to stabilize the Organization's expenditure. The chief task at the current session should be to prune the budget of unwarranted items of expenditure, and his delegation was quite willing to co-operate in that task.

40. Mr. HAKIM (Afghanistan) said that his delegation respected the United Nations Charter and the generally accepted principles of international law and supported the activities of the United Nations aimed at strengthening peace and developing international co-operation. It appreciated the personal efforts of the Secretary-General to improve financial discipline and enhance the efficiency of the Organization. He agreed with the Secretary-General that the time had come for the United Nations to join in the efforts of Member States to achieve economies in the utilization of resources. Of course, the budget could not have been drawn up without taking into account the evolution of past commitments or the economic and financial conditions of the world in which the Organization had to carry out its mandate.

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(Mr. Hakim, Afghanistan)

41. A questionable method had again been used in calculating the rate of growth of the budget, which by excluding the so-called non-recurrent expenditures, resulted in an understatement of real growth. The Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management had stated that the budget contained numerous references to activities which had been completed and that the resources thus released were being redeployed to new or higher-priority activities; however, in order to comply with the directives of the General Assembly, the Secretariat should clearly identify the priority assigned to each activity.

42. His delegation did not agree with the Secretariat's policy of systematically expanding its staff and found the proposed additional expenditure for 153 new posts unjustified. In a period of budgetary restraint, there should be no growth in non-essential activities.

43. His delegation supported the notion of the special responsibility of Western countries for offsetting the effects of inflation and monetary instability on the United Nations budget. Those States in which 82 per cent of the budget was spent should bear a proportionately larger share of the burden.

44. Budget resources should be allocated for the main objectives of the United Nations as set forth in the Charter. His delegation therefore reserved the right not to take part in or contribute to those programmes and activities which were at variance with the Charter or which should not be financed from the regular budget.

45. Finally, the proposed level of budgetary expenditures for 1982-1983 should not be exceeded, and consideration should be given to the establishment of a ceiling on the Organization's expenditure.

46. Mr. DE BURGOS CABAL (Brazil) said that the main objective of programme budgeting was to ensure that adequate resources were provided for the implementation of programmes approved by the Organization's legislative organs. That did not necessarily call for increased appropriations, since an adequate level of programme delivery and a sound budgetary policy could be ensured by, inter alia, reallocation of resources, permanent re-evaluation of programmes, and greater managerial efficiency. On the other hand, the budget should not necessarily be maintained at a zero growth rate in order to reflect the financial constraints faced by Member States. Indeed, if the Organization was to pursue one of its main purposes of promoting economic and social development, a higher level of programme delivery in assistance to developing countries was more than ever required. It was hard to imagine how the objectives of the new International Development Strategy could be met if assistance to developing countries was curtailed as a result of a restrictive budgetary policy.

47. His delegation was reassured to a certain extent by the Secretary-General's statement that the zero growth rate policy would in no way weaken, curtail or preempt programmes in support of economic and social development in developing countries, but it had misgivings about the adoption of the zero growth concept a priori. Instead of following the basic principle that it was the level of programmes

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(Mr. de Burgos Cabal, Brazil)

approved by the competent legislative organs that should determine the rate of any real growth, the Secretary-General had taken the opposite approach of tailoring programme delivery to ensure a negative rate of real growth. However, given past experience, there was not perhaps too much cause for concern, because the revised estimates approved for a given biennium always raised the rate of real growth far beyond the figure set in the initial estimates. That would undoubtedly be the case in the next biennium too.

48. In sympathizing with the Secretary-General's efforts to impose financial restraint and to tailor the budget to the availability of financial resources, his delegation nevertheless held the view that those efforts should have been directed towards an improved allocation of resources in accordance with a clearly defined set of priorities. Both the Secretary-General and the intergovernmental bodies should press on with efforts to comply fully with General Assembly resolution 35/209 by ensuring redeployment of resources from activities that had been completed or were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective in order to improve the efficiency of the Organization's activities, particularly in the field of social and economic assistance to the developing countries.

49. A large number of delegations had expressed concern that only 20 per cent of planned expenditure for 1982-1983 would be devoted to programme activities. That raised serious doubts about the Organization's ability to ensure an adequate level of substantive activities and programme delivery. Delegations were right to caution against a budgetary policy which only led to increased staff and administrative costs. In that connexion, he believed that any increase in the number of posts or reclassifications should be carried out on the basis of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 35/210 which called for increased representation of developing countries in senior posts. Reclassification could not be a substitute for the development of a promotion system based on precise, strict rules. His delegation would be very cautious in considering requests for reclassification of posts under the individual sections of the proposed programme budget, and believed that greater discipline should also be exercised in the creation of new extrabudgetary posts, which, as experience had shown, were eventually transferred to the regular budget.

50. Mr. KEMAL (Pakistan) said that there was only one important area in which his delegation continued to have difficulties, namely, requests for additional posts. While the Secretary-General attempted to justify those requests on the basis of an increased work-load resulting from legislative decisions on new activities, his budget submissions did not always provide sufficient proof that existing staff could not cope. To assist the programme and budgetary review bodies to ascertain whether a particular request for an additional post was warranted, the Secretary-General might commission the compilation of a comprehensive register of Professional staff working in the Secretariat, together with detailed job descriptions.

51. As far as the zero-growth budget was concerned, he shared the general view that it was open to question on both theoretical and practical grounds. As a concept, zero growth had connotations of a passive approach, something certainly not intended by the Secretary-General. In practical terms, it meant that activities

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(Mr. Kemal, Pakistan)

would have to mark time for two years. The majority of Member States were concerned that such a freeze should be applied at a time when global problems in the fields of international peace and security and humanitarian affairs and the worsening economic situation of developing countries called for more, not less, action. A zero-growth budget was also paradoxical at a time when the military budgets of the major Powers were increasing in real terms at a rate already in excess of three per cent per annum. However, it should not be assumed that the work of the Organization would automatically suffer on account of zero growth. There would undoubtedly be administrative and financial implications arising from decisions taken at the current session. Real growth might therefore actually prove to be three or four per cent--an acceptable, if modest, rate. Moreover, the burden on Member States might be less than expected if savings accrued from an increase in the value of the United States dollar.

52. Though acceptance of the Advisory Committee's recommended reductions would lower the growth rate further, it did not necessarily follow that the slight reductions it had proposed in the number of reclassifications or in the estimates for long-distance telephone calls, for instance, would have an adverse effect on programme delivery. In short, the question would have to be considered on a case-by-case basis before arriving at any general conclusion regarding the impact of the recommended cuts on top of the zero growth rate.

53. It might be argued that, in the light of the fact that almost 80 per cent of the regular budget was spent on salaries and related costs, very little was left for development activities and little purpose would therefore be served by increasing the budget. However, the same argument could be advanced to prove the opposite, and to justify budgetary increases. The best approach would be to examine the over-all distribution of funds among the various programmes. He cautioned against drawing any hasty conclusions from the fact that, compared with the biennium 1978-1979, there was a slight decline in the percentage allocated for economic, social and humanitarian activities while there was a growth of 2.5 per cent in common services. That did not necessarily mean that the interests of Member States would suffer, since the increase might be attributed largely to the implementation of decisions of the General Assembly on matters such as the Vienna International Centre and the provision of better language services and public information activities. It should not be forgotten that Member States attached considerable importance to the implementation of personnel policies such as the recruitment of nationals from unrepresented and under-represented countries, and to conference services. Decisions of that kind were basically political questions, yet their implementation fell under the heading of administrative costs. It was not always easy therefore to make meaningful distinctions between substantive activities and administrative costs. Such distinctions were perhaps more valid for the specialized agencies, and it was heartening to note the real growth budgetary policies that they had adopted. Nevertheless, he stressed that with even a moderate growth rate in the budget an effort could have been made to redress the balance in favour of economic programmes.

54. As far as improvements in the programme budgeting process were concerned, the recommendations contained in paragraphs 453 to 472 of the CPC report (A/36/38) merited the fullest consideration by the General Assembly. The proposals relating

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(Mr. Kemal, Pakistan)

to the structural changes in the Secretariat were of special interest, and his delegation would like to hear the views of the Secretary-General and of the Advisory Committee on that subject. Moreover, all concerned should consider to what extent the narratives in the medium-term plan and the programme budget were legally binding on the Secretary-General. He wondered whether it would be possible for the Committee of Governmental Experts to Evaluate the Present Structure of the Secretariat in the Administrative, Finance and Personnel Areas to examine some of the interesting questions raised by CPC in its report. He would also welcome measures to enable CPC to play its proper role in the formulation of recommendations in respect of the proposed programme budget, without prejudice to the well-established, time-tested functions of the Advisory Committee. Under the current system, ACABQ would not have time to consider the budget proposals and to have its first report ready for the General Assembly in compliance with the six-week rule if it had to wait until CPC had considered them. There might also be some legal problems with respect to the interpretation of CPC recommendations on important programmes before such recommendations were adopted by the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council. Unfortunately, his delegation had no ready answer to that problem.

55. Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland) said that his delegation had wished to speak last in the general debate on the proposed programme budget so as to approach the Secretary-General's proposals without preconceived opinions and to listen to the views of the developing countries, the major contributors and all other members of the Committee. The general debate, which had proved to be very stimulating, had focused on the so-called zero real growth approach. Such an approach had not been the practice of the Secretariat in recent years, and he noted the assurances given by the Secretary-General that it would not adversely affect the substantive activities of the Organization and that its main objective was to ensure optimum utilization of available resources. The Secretary-General had decided to submit a zero-growth budget after a careful examination of the situation, which confirmed the view held by his delegation over a number of years that the Secretariat possessed a substantial absorptive capacity and could implement its specific tasks and programmes within the limits of current resources.

56. The highlight of the Secretary-General's proposals was not the concept of zero real growth but rather the emphasis on improvement in the effectiveness and productivity of the Secretariat. His delegation welcomed that emphasis and would like to receive more details on how the Secretariat intended to achieve that goal. While understanding the concerns of delegations which had questioned the right of the Secretariat to calculate initial programme budget proposals on the basis of zero real growth, his delegation believed that the overriding consideration was that Member States entrusted the Secretariat with specific tasks and that it was the duty of the Secretariat to calculate the relevant resources needed for that purpose. If the Secretariat discovered that it could carry out all its essential activities with relatively fewer resources, that could only be to the benefit of Member States. The Secretariat might in fact be criticized for having misled Member States so long by maintaining a substantial surplus capacity which had not been properly utilized.

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(Mr. Abraszewski, Poland)

57. The identification of activities which were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective was an issue of great interest, especially to his delegation, which had been associated in the drafting of resolutions on that subject since 1975. He was, therefore, happy to learn that the Secretariat intended to pay increasing attention to the exercise of identifying such activities. The identification of obsolete activities and their eventual elimination by decisions of intergovernmental organs could become an important means for improving the effectiveness of the Secretariat, and his delegation looked forward to the results of the review that was under way. At the same time, he cautioned against the simplistic view that the aim was mainly or solely to achieve economies through the arbitrary elimination of activities. The purpose of the exercise was and should be to help improve the effectiveness of United Nations activities and to identify priorities, thereby helping the Organization to adapt to the changing needs of the international community. The implementation of General Assembly resolution 3534 (XXX) and all its subsequent reaffirmations was in the interest of all Member States.

58. The programme budget proposals before the Committee were only initial estimates, and past experience had shown that, as a result of additions of various kinds, the final growth rate of the budget would be substantially higher than initially calculated. Accordingly, he requested the Secretariat to calculate towards the end of the session the final rate of real growth, taking into account the financial implications of new activities approved and any supplementary or revised estimates submitted.

59. For countries whose national currency was not freely convertible, what really counted was the over-all growth rate of the programme budget. That rate was 13.7 per cent over the level of the programme budget for 1980-1981. His delegation was concerned at the excessive requests for some objects of expenditure, particularly for travel and consultants. During the examination of individual sections of the budget, it intended to ask the Secretariat to provide specific information in support of some of its requests, and he urged the Secretariat to be prepared to do so, both orally and in writing, including furnishing the Committee with lists of experts and consultants employed during the current biennium. After such a detailed and careful examination, his delegation would be able to arrive at informed conclusions on the level of resources requested.

60. Mr. DEBATIN (Under-Secretary-General for Administration, Finance and Management), replying to a question from the Finnish delegation, said that the report of the special programme review was currently being finalized and should be presented to the Committee in mid-November. The report would be submitted to the Advisory Committee, which could then decide for itself as to its involvement in the substance of the issue. It would indicate the magnitude, at least, of the possible financial implications, but a precise indication of the implications of each and every recommendation would be premature, pending the Fifth Committee's decisions on a number of programmes.

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61. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Secretary-General was requesting a sum of \$33,787,700 under section 1 for the biennium 1982-1983; the Advisory Committee was recommending an over-all reduction in those estimates of \$253,300, and gave its reasons in paragraphs 1.6, 1.8, 1.23, 1.25 and 1.27 of its report (A/36/7).

62. The representative of Nigeria had criticized the Advisory Committee for recommending reductions amounting to over \$200,000 on the ground that a special session of the General Assembly might not be necessary for a subject as important as disarmament. He wished to make it clear that the Advisory Committee had nowhere recommended that the special session should not be held: it did not have the authority to do so. All it had recommended was that consideration of the amounts requested by the Secretary-General in connexion with the specific session should be deferred until the Preparatory Committee for the Second Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament issued its report, so that all the related financial implications could be discussed in the context of a single document.

63. In paragraph 1.16 of its report, the Advisory Committee recommended against approval of the requested sum for contractual services in relation to the World Food Council because it was convinced that DPI should be able to handle the work involved; it intended, in its review of budget performance for the biennium 1982-1983, to inquire into the implementation of its recommendation.

64. The Committee had had considerable difficulty in analysing the information on the two proposed reclassifications which it discussed in paragraphs 1.25 and 1.27 of its report. It was aware that reclassifications were a touchy subject, but the Committee had examined the requests, as it had done in the past, on the basis of written and oral information provided by the Secretariat, and had concluded that neither reclassification was warranted.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.