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PATTERN OF CONFERENCES

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK: SUBSIDIARY ORGANS
OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Report of the Fifth CommitteeRapporteur: Mr. Mario MARTORELL (Peru)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 4th plenary meeting, on 18 September 1981, the General Assembly, on the recommendation of the General Committee, included in its agenda item 105, entitled:

"Pattern of conferences:

"(a) Report of the Committee on Conferences;

"(b) Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution 35/10 C";

and item 8 (b), entitled:

"Subsidiary organs of the General Assembly"

and allocated them to the Fifth Committee, together with chapters XXXV and XXXVII of the report of the Economic and Social Council.

2. The Fifth Committee considered these items jointly at its 44th, 45th, 51st, 55th, 60th, 63rd and 65th meetings, held on 16, 17, 23, 25 November and 2, 4 and 7 December 1981.

3. For its consideration of the items the Fifth Committee had before it the following documents:

- (a) Report of the Committee on Conferences, 1/ containing recommendations and two draft resolutions; 2/
- (b) Report of the Secretary-General on draft standard rules of procedure for United Nations conferences (A/36/199 and Corr.1);
- (c) Note by the Secretariat on the three items (A/C.5/36/22);
- (d) Note by the Secretary-General transmitting to the General Assembly the report of the "Joint Inspection Unit on control and limitation of documentation in the United Nations system" (A/36/167) and the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (A/36/167/Add.1) and of the Secretary-General (A/36/167/Add.2) thereon;
- (e) Report of the Economic and Social Council, chapters XXXV and XXXVII (A/36/3/Add.35 and 37). 3/
4. The comments and observations made by delegations in the course of the discussion of these items are reflected in the relevant summary records of the Fifth Committee (A/C.5/SR.44, 45, 51, 55, 60, 63 and 65).

II. CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS

A. Recommendations of the Committee on Conferences

5. At the 63rd meeting on 4 December, Mr. Michael Godfrey (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman of the Fifth Committee, submitted two amendments (A/C.5/36/L.25) to recommendation 7 of the Committee on Conferences, 2/ which had been prepared during informal consultations among interested delegations:

(a) Under the first amendment it was proposed that guideline 3 (a) in the annex to recommendation 7 should be changed to read as follows:

"The organ which decides to convene the conference or preparatory organ, whenever it has been designated, should adopt specific rules to limit the length of national papers or summaries thereof to the extent possible and on the language versions required, taking into account experience gained on the occasion of past special conferences in the same area of activity."

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/36/32 and Corr.1).

2/ Ibid., para. 84.

3/ To be incorporated in Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/36/3/Rev.1).

(b) Under the second amendment item the second sentence in paragraph 1 of annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences should be deleted.

6. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted these amendments by consensus.

B. Draft resolution A/C.5/36/L.26

7. At the 63rd meeting on 4 December, Mr. Michael Godfrey (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman of the Fifth Committee, submitted a draft resolution entitled "Future work of the Committee on Conferences" (A/C.5/36/L.26), which was prepared during informal consultations among interested delegations.

8. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted the draft resolution by consensus (see para. 13, draft resolution A). In so doing it adopted, by implication, the two draft resolutions proposed by the Committee on Conferences in its recommendations 6 and 7 (see para. 13, draft resolutions C and D).

C. Draft resolution A/C.5/36/L.22

9. At the 60th meeting on 2 December, the representative of France, on behalf of China, France, Peru, Saudi Arabia, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, introduced a draft resolution entitled "Simultaneous distribution of documents in the different languages of the United Nations" (A/C.5/36/L.22).

10. At the 63rd meeting on 4 December, the Committee adopted the draft resolution by consensus (see para. 13, draft resolution B).

D. Action on document A/36/199 and Corr.1

11. At the 55th meeting, the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on behalf of the States members of the European Community, proposed that consideration of document A/36/199 and Corr.1 be deferred to the thirty-seventh session and that a recommendation be made to the General Assembly that it should then allocate it to the Sixth Committee.

12. At the 65th meeting, the Fifth Committee adopted the proposal by consensus (see para. 14, draft decision).

III. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE

13. The Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolutions:

/...

Pattern of conferences

A

FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

The General Assembly,

I

1. Takes note with appreciation of the report of the Committee on Conferences 4/ and approves the recommendations contained therein, 5/ as amended;
2. Approves the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1982-1983 as submitted by the Committee on Conferences 6/ and amended by subsequent decisions taken by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session;
3. Authorizes the Committee on Conferences to make any adjustments within approved resources in the calendar of conferences for 1982-1983 that may become necessary as a result of action and decisions by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session and at its second special session devoted to disarmament;
4. Decides that in drawing up future calendars of conferences and meetings the implications on the capacity of the documentation services of the Secretariat to process and issue in time the documentation required for the sessions of all scheduled organs should be taken into account;
5. Invites the Committee on Conferences to pursue, as specified in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 35/10 A of 3 November 1980, its efforts towards accomplishing a shortening of sessions or a biennial cycle of sessions of United Nations organs with a view to submitting further concrete proposals to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session;
6. Recommends that the Economic and Social Council should consider calling upon the Committee on Conferences to review all proposals made at sessions of the Council that affect the schedule of conferences and meetings prior to their adoption by the Council;
7. Decides to extend until the end of 1982 the moratorium on the establishment of new subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly, as declared in paragraph 1 of its resolution 35/5 of 20 October 1980;

4/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/36/32 and Corr.1).

5/ Ibid., para. 84.

6/ Ibid., annex III.

8. Requests the Secretary-General to prepare a manual for secretaries of United Nations organs to guide them in the efficient preparation and organization of their work, in the scheduling of meetings and the submission of documentation in good time;

9. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences, a programme of systematic and progressive replacement and upgrading of the electronic equipment in the conference rooms at United Nations Headquarters.

II

1. Requests the Committee on Conferences to undertake, on a priority basis, a comprehensive study of the rationale that currently determines the provision of meeting records to the United Nations organs with a view to identifying criteria for the selection of organs that should receive records in the future and, in this connexion, to take into full account the potential offered by new technologies;

2. Further requests the Committee on Conferences to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session appropriate recommendations in connexion with paragraph 10 above and with General Assembly resolution 35/10 B of 3 November 1980;

3. Requests the Committee on Conferences to examine the practices and policies followed by the reproduction and documents distribution services of the Secretariat with a view to identifying areas for achieving economies and improving efficiency;

4. Requests the Committee on Conferences, pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 1981/83 of 24 July 1981 on control and limitation of documentation, to review the calendar of conferences and meetings for the biennium 1982-1983, with particular reference to the economic and social fields, with a view to adjusting the calendar to the servicing capacities within the Secretariat, taking into account the problems that are occurring with regard to the submission and dissemination of documentation in good time and to consult with the Bureau of the Council concerning the implementation of this request;

5. Confirms the rule that 32 pages should be the maximum length of all action-oriented documents prepared by the Secretariat for intergovernmental meetings, in accordance with the internal instructions of the Secretariat, and requests its subsidiary organs to ensure that their reports shall be as brief as possible and shall not exceed the desired limit of 32 pages;

6. Urges all its subsidiary organs to reduce the number of requests for additional documents and to attempt to limit the number of reports required to cover any one subject of specific concern to a given organ;

7. Requests its subsidiary organs to consider requesting the Secretariat to make brief oral statements in lieu of written reports, in particular progress reports, at the outset of each session;

8. Decides that consolidated statements of all documents requested by each United Nations organ and by the Main Committees of the General Assembly shall be submitted by the Secretary-General at the end of each session, together with an indication of the date upon which it will be possible to issue each document in all required languages, reflecting the time required for its preparation by both the substantive and conference-servicing units of the Secretariat;

9. Insists that the Secretary-General take the necessary administrative measures within available resources to prevent in future the undue delays in the submission of documents for translation, reproduction and distribution which continue to be experienced;

10. Encourages the Secretary-General to make wider use of contractual translation services in view of their demonstrated financial advantages;

11. Decides to refer the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on control and limitation of documentation, 7/ together with the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination 8/ and the Secretary-General 9/, to the Committee on Conferences for further examination;

12. Requests the Committee on Conferences to consider this and future reports of the Joint Inspection Unit containing recommendations which deal with matters falling within the mandate of the Committee and to submit its observations thereon to the General Assembly for its attention when examining the relevant reports of the Joint Inspection Unit;

13. Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its thirty-seventh session the item entitled "Control and limitation of documentation".

III

1. Requests the Secretary-General to submit to the Committee on Conferences and to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions a comprehensive analysis of the existing budgetary techniques used in the calculation and presentation of conference-servicing costs in statements of administrative and financial implications pursuant to rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the consolidated statement of conference-servicing costs and the programme budget and invites both organs to submit appropriate recommendations relevant to their respective areas of competence to the Assembly at its thirty-seventh session.

7/ A/36/167.

8/ A/36/167/Add.1.

9/ A/36/167/Add.2.

B

SIMULTANEOUS DISTRIBUTION OF DOCUMENTS IN THE DIFFERENT
LANGUAGES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The General Assembly,

Aware that the diversity of languages of the Organization is a source of general enrichment and of better understanding among Member States,

Recalling its resolution 2 (I) of 1 February 1946 on rules of procedure concerning languages,

Recalling further its resolutions 2247 (XXI) of 20 December 1966 and 2292 (XXI) of 8 December 1967 as well as its resolutions 3189 (XXVIII) of December 1973, 3190 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973, and 3191 (XXVIII) of 18 December 1973,

Noting the necessity of giving full effect to paragraph 3 of resolution 2247 (XXI) and paragraph 4 of resolution 2292 (XXI) concerning the simultaneous distribution of documents,

Reiterating its deep concern at the steady lengthening of delays in the distribution of documents in the different official languages,

1. Decides that documents shall be given effective simultaneous distribution in sufficient time in the official and working languages of the organs of the United Nations;
2. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session on the implementation of the present resolution.

C

CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION FOR TREATY BODIES

The General Assembly,

Concerned at the critical situation prevailing with regard to the issuance of documentation in all official languages in good time,

Noting the considerable volume of documentation and summary records for treaty bodies whose conference-servicing costs are borne by the regular budget of the United Nations and their adverse effect on the processing capacity of the central conference services for other documentation required for intergovernmental meetings,

1. Invites the offices of treaty bodies to consult with the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences on possible measures to control and limit documentation;

/...

2. Urges all treaty bodies, as a matter of priority, to review their requirements for documentation in all languages and for meeting records, with a view to adopting immediate measures to restrict substantially the present volume of documentation;

3. Requests all bodies to inform the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session, through the Committee on Conferences, about the practical measures they have taken.

D

CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION FOR SPECIAL CONFERENCES

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolution 35/10 C of 3 November 1980,

1. Decides that, if and when special conferences of the United Nations are convened, particular attention shall be given to harmonizing the proposed design of a conference with the documentation needs, so as to foster attainment of the stated objectives of a conference during both the preparatory phase and the conference phase itself;

2. Declares that the submission of national papers on the occasion of special conferences should be proposed only if such papers are intended to play an integral part in the preparatory activities and at the conference itself, taking into account the time required for a meaningful integration of such papers both in the preparatory activities and in the negotiating process of a conference;

3. Approves the guidelines for the control and limitation of documentation of special conferences set forth in the annex to the present resolution.

ANNEX

Guidelines for the control and limitation of documentation for
special conferences of the United Nations

1. All measures to control and limit documentation in force at the time when a special conference is being prepared or held shall apply to documentation prepared for that conference as well as to any preparatory organ that may be designated.
2. Summary records shall not be provided to special conferences and their preparatory organs, with the exception of legal codification conferences, for which the needs will be determined in each case.
3. Whenever Governments are requested to submit national papers or reports, the following rules might apply:
 - (a) The organ which decides to convene the conference or preparatory organ, whenever it has been designated, should adopt specific rules to limit the length of national papers or summaries thereof to the extent possible and the language versions required, taking into account experience gained on the occasion of past special conferences in the same area of activity;
 - (b) Each paper or report and each summary or abstract should be prepared in the format described in the layout appended to annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences; 10/
 - (c) A firm deadline for the submission of such papers or reports and their summaries and abstracts should be established, taking into account the purpose for which they are required in the preparatory process but in any event not later than eight weeks before the opening of the conference;
 - (d) All papers or reports as well as summaries or abstracts received should be listed by the Secretariat in an information document and grouped in various ways, such as alphabetically by country, region or by subject;
 - (e) National papers or reports should not be redistributed at the conference site, if the conference is held away from established headquarters; instead, a library should be established at such a conference site which shall contain in single copies all relevant material pertaining to the conference;
 - (f) The Secretary-General should keep the total number of copies printed for this type of documentation under constant review and adjust it to a realistic level of demand.

10/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/36/32 and Corr.1).

4. Submissions by non-governmental organizations shall bear a uniform cover page with a document symbol and number provided by the Secretariat. It shall be the responsibility of each submitting non-governmental organization to make sure that this cover page appears on each copy of the report. The Secretariat shall then distribute such a report if it is submitted in a sufficient number of copies. Reports by non-governmental organizations will not be translated or reproduced by the Secretariat, nor will they be transported to the conference site by the Secretariat if the conference is held away from established headquarters. Furthermore, a deadline shall be set for the presentation of such reports to the Secretariat. A list of all documents presented by non-governmental organizations will then be issued by the Secretariat.

* * *

14. The Fifth Committee also recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft decision:

"The General Assembly decides to defer to its thirty-seventh session consideration of the report of the Secretary-General on draft standard rules of procedures for United Nations conferences 11/ and recommends that at that session the report be referred to the Sixth Committee."
