



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 9th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 110: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 8: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

(b) SUBSIDIARY ORGANS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)

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

AGENDA ITEM 110: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (A/37/11, A/37/461 and Add.1) (continued)

1. Mr. RAKAU (German Democratic Republic) said that, whereas the debate on the report of the Committee on Contributions (A/37/11) required realism and a sense of proportion, an opposite strategy, one of provocation and calumnies against other States, particularly the socialist States, was being pursued by one country, the representative of which had already spoken in the debate.
2. His delegation did not intend to take up in detail all the substantive points in the report because the Committee on Contributions had completed its main task, namely, that of preparing a scale of assessments for the period 1983-1985, and because it still had complex tasks on its agenda.
3. With regard to individual substantive points, he said, firstly, that, like the majority of delegations, his delegation believed that preparation of a scale of assessments had to be treated as a matter of priority. It recognized that the Committee on Contributions had to follow the instructions given by the Assembly and it was in favour of the Committee's continuing the discussion on guidelines for the collection and presentation of data, although it felt that the existing methods had stood the test of time. Secondly, since the statistical base period had been fixed at 10 years, further debate on that period was unnecessary in the Fifth Committee. Thirdly, the statements made by the Committee on Contributions concerning the low per capita income allowance formula needed no further comment. Fourthly, mitigation of changes in the scale should remain limited so as not to undermine the principle of relative capacity to pay.
4. Fifthly, he recalled that General Assembly resolution 36/231 A had been the product of protracted negotiations which had been marked throughout by goodwill and readiness to compromise. His delegation had been among those which, despite their reservations, had supported the resolution on the ground that the scale of assessments must be based on a broad consensus. It was therefore astounded to find that some delegations which had taken such a firm stand at the thirty-sixth session in favour of new principles for the scale of assessments were now calling into question the consequences thereof. As the Committee on Contributions had pointed out, it was impossible to establish a scale satisfactory to all concerned, and the task was certainly not advanced by displays of national egoism. His delegation had serious doubts as to the usefulness of setting up a working group at the present time. Accordingly, it proposed that the scale of assessments recommended by the Committee on Contributions should be adopted by consensus; that the debate on paragraphs 2 and 3 of General Assembly resolution 36/231 A should be held following the presentation of comprehensive information by the Committee on Contributions and, if appropriate, in a working group; and that no decision should be taken for the time being on the question of enlarging the Committee.

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(Mr. Rakau, German Democratic Republic)

5. Sixthly, concerning alternative methods for assessing relative capacity to pay, he said that any criterion that was complementary to national income must, inter alia, be quantifiable and capable of comparison.

6. Finally, his delegation reaffirmed its position that peace-keeping operations were not relevant to arrears in the context of Article 19 of the United Nations Charter.

7. Mr. CHU Kuei-yu (China) said that everyone knew how delicate and difficult a task was the formulation of the scale of assessments. In working out the new scale, the Committee on Contributions had adhered to the principle of capacity to pay, taking into account the economic disparities between developed and developing countries. The Committee had readjusted the low per capita income allowance formula in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/231 A and had accepted the supplementary data provided by some countries and taken into account the difficulties of others. Accordingly, his delegation supported the new scale.

8. It believed none the less that the formulation of a fair and reasonable scale of assessments was a continuous process that needed constant improvement. All agreed that it was reasonable to assess contributions according to Member States' capacity to pay, but there were still divergent views concerning the criteria to be used in correctly assessing that capacity. Accordingly, ways of arriving at a common understanding should be explored. While his delegation understood the points made by some dissenting delegations it felt that under the present circumstances the per capita national income method might as well be accepted.

9. According to uniform criteria, China's rate of assessment for the period 1982-1985 should be 0.6784 per cent. However, his Government had accepted the proposed rate of 0.81 in the common interest, and hoped, as the Chinese economy grew, it would be able to accept corresponding increases in its assessed contribution.

10. Mrs. LOPEZ-ORTEGA (Mexico) said the fact that the Committee on Contributions had been compelled to defer its study on alternative methods to assess the real capacity of Member States to pay, despite the undoubted importance of that study, and had also decided, as noted in paragraph 16, to postpone to the following session discussion of the problem of inflation uncompensated for by exchange-rate adjustments and of the guidelines for the collection and presentation of data by Member States on a uniform and comparable basis, clearly demonstrated the need for the Committee to schedule longer sessions.

11. All delegations recognized the need for immediate measures to alleviate the effects of the worsening international economic situation. The developing countries were experiencing difficulties as a result of low prices of raw materials, high interest rates and short debt repayment periods. Those points had been made in the plenary Assembly by the President of Mexico, who had drawn attention to the fact that the data used in calculating the rate of assessment for Mexico had been affected by the changes in exchange rate between the peso and the dollar.

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(Mrs. Lopez-Ortega, Mexico)

12. Her delegation supported the proposal to enlarge the Committee on Contributions so as to increase the number of experts from developing countries.

13. It was clear from the proposed new scale of assessments that the Committee on Contributions had not fully implemented paragraph 4 (c) of resolution 36/231 A, which stated that efforts should be made to limit the increase of individual rates of assessments to a reasonable level, and, in that context, that special measures should be taken in favour of countries whose rates of assessments had already been increased at the previous review of the scale of assessments. Accordingly, her delegation endorsed the proposal made by the representative of Brazil that the existing scale of assessments should be retained until the Committee on Contributions had completed its work and that use should be made of the consultative services of international institutions of statistics and econometrics.

14. The fact that Mexico was opposing the new scale of assessments did not in any way imply that it was unaware of the current crisis in international co-operation. Indeed, her Government had demonstrated by its actions its respect for the principle of the United Nations.

15. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) said that his delegation would comment at the appropriate time on a number of issues to which his delegation attached great importance, including the suggestions that the membership of the Committee on Contributions should be enlarged and that the contributions of the permanent members of the Security Council should reflect the privileges enjoyed by those States.

16. His delegation was fully aware of the difficulties encountered by the Committee on Contributions in collecting comprehensive data on national income, fixing uniform exchange rates for converting data in local currency to United States dollars and obtaining relevant data on time. However, it could not condone the tendency of some members, as reported in paragraph 4 of the report (A/37/11), to challenge the authority of the General Assembly to issue directives to the Committee. The Legal Counsel was to be commended for reaffirming the collective decision taken by the Assembly at its previous session.

17. In voting for General Assembly resolution 36/231 A, his delegation had expected the Committee on Contributions to give equal weight to all the provisions of the resolution. It had therefore been disappointed to see that the Committee had been unable to complete the tasks assigned to it. Moreover, while understanding the reasons for that failure, his delegation did not accept them, on the one hand, because it was not the first time that the Committee had failed to complete the task assigned to it - at the thirty-sixth session his delegation had had to deplore the failure of the Committee to respond to General Assembly resolution 34/6 B - and, on the other, because by not giving equal weight to all the provisions of the resolution the Committee had established a dangerous precedent. Despite those general reservations he welcomed the report as a whole. He noted with interest from paragraph 37 that 93 Member States, or 59 per cent of the membership of the Organization, were assessed at or below 0.03 per cent, as compared with 89 in 1979. However, he noted with some concern that over 20 developing countries would see the

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(Mr. Ziniel, Ghana)

assessments increase under the proposed new scale, as compared with 10 whose assessments would decrease. By contrast, some developed countries whose contributions had been declining progressively would contribute still less. In general, therefore, the recommended scale did not satisfactorily reflect the spirit of General Assembly resolution 36/231 A, which sought to alleviate the burden of the developing countries.

18. While his delegation would support the new scale, it urged the Committee on Contributions to take greater account of the prevailing perception that, within the context of the new international economic order, the developed countries should increase their financial assistance to the developing countries.

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/37/32, A/37/112 and Add.1; A/C.5/37/2, A/C.5/37/7 and Corr.1, A/C.5/37/11)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued) (A/36/167 and Add.1 and 2; A/37/32, chap. V, A/C.5/37/11)

AGENDA ITEM 8: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

(b) SUBSIDIARY ORGANS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/37/3, chap. III, sect. A; chap. IX, sects. C and H)

19. Mr. HERIJANTO (Indonesia) said that meetings cancelled, starting late, ending early or ending late continued to waste conference services and cause unnecessary expense. Organs in the United Nations system increasingly tended to seek changes in the calendar of meetings for the sake of convenience rather than necessity. Such changes disrupted conference-service planning, and efforts should be made to minimize them. An appropriate interval should be allowed between consecutive meetings of any given body and between the meetings of different bodies, so as to allow both Member States and the Secretariat time for preparation.

20. Although the Organization's workload needed to be rationalized, some flexibility was required so that special or emergency meetings could be convened whenever the need arose. The recommendation by the Committee on Conferences concerning guidelines on the organization of special conferences (A/37/32, chap. XI, recommendation 4) should be taken fully into account.

21. Despite the Secretary-General's new directive concerning documentation, referred to in annex I to the report of the Committee on Conferences, member countries were still receiving documents late. That made preparation of positions difficult, and in many cases the unavailability of documents had resulted in the postponement of

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(Mr. Herijanto, Indonesia)

meetings. His delegation attached great importance to recommendation 6 (A/37/32, chap. XI), which was designed to limit the number of bodies entitled to receive verbatim or summary records: the limitation could both generate savings and improve the delivery of other documentation. The recommended period of three years seemed appropriate, since it would allow a full assessment of the impact of the decision.

22. Mr. KELLER (United States of America) said that every delegation was aware of the remarkable work performed by the Department of Conference Services, given the enormous volume of documentation processed and the huge number of meetings to be supported. His delegation fully recognized the extremely high quality of the work that the Department routinely performed without specific praise or commendation.

23. The number and length of meetings in the United Nations had grown in recent years to the point where Governments, large and small, were hard put to it to attend them all and make useful contributions towards their success. The time had come to address the issue of proliferating meetings throughout the United Nations system. His delegation would be willing to join efforts to reduce the number of days devoted to conferences and meetings of all types in the United Nations. Past initiatives to limit the number of conferences by establishing a "quota" system had been unsuccessful, but an alternative might be to make a percentage cut in the total number of meetings scheduled. An overall cutback of, say, 10 per cent for the biennium 1984-1985 would effectively implement the first recommendation made by the Joint Inspection Unit in document A/36/167. To that end, the Secretariat should supply an accurate figure for the total number of conference days serviced over a period of, for example, two years.

24. Alternatively, the Committee on Conferences might be asked to provide comments and suggestions on the best methods of implementing and quantifying such an initiative. To be effective, any suggestion would have to include enforcement powers for the Committee on Conferences, not merely the authority to issue polite requests which were all too often disregarded.

25. For some years the General Assembly had been adopting resolutions calling on United Nations bodies to hold shorter sessions at longer intervals. There had been some slight progress, but meetings were still held too often for substantial developments to occur between them. His delegation would support any initiative to make the principle of biennial sessions, as set out in paragraph 27 (b) of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/37/32), the rule of thumb rather than the exception. In cases where bodies had to meet more frequently, their meetings should be limited to one fixed session every year. He would appreciate information on the bodies which would be affected by such limitations.

26. His delegation would vote for the draft resolution, as strengthened and the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences.

27. Concerning documentation, the large number of bodies receiving verbatim or summary records, most of which, in his delegation's view, were unnecessary, had to be

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(Mr. Keller, United States)

limited. Directing the labour currently expended on producing summary records into more productive channels was a real challenge, which the Fifth Committee should take up.

28. His delegation heartily endorsed the Secretary-General's decision to limit documents emanating from the Secretariat to a maximum of 24 pages. His delegation also favoured stronger language in paragraph 14 of the draft resolution contained in recommendation 6 by the Committee on Conferences. Subsidiary bodies of the United Nations must adhere to the established 32-page limit for their reports; some did not. The only exceptions to such a limit should be bodies like the International Law Commission and UNCITRAL when they were actively engaged in drafting legal instruments. The limitation could also be an opportunity: more concise reports had greater impact.

29. Mr. CAPPAGLI (Argentina) said that his delegation generally agreed with the report of the Committee on Conferences. Referring specifically to chapter IV, on Secretariat Organization for United Nations Special Conferences, he commended the Joint Inspection Unit's report on the subject (A/37/112) and said that, in view of the growing number of special conferences and their increasing importance, the clearest possible standards should be laid down to govern their organization. General Assembly resolution 35/10 C, which established guidelines in that regard, had been a promising start.

30. One feature of special conferences which needed to be borne particularly in mind was their role in making the general public aware of subjects of which it would otherwise remain ignorant. In order not to detract from that role, the number of conferences held every year should be kept to a minimum. The ultimate decision to convene a special conference lay exclusively with States, which had to decide on the merits of each individual proposal. Every proposal for a conference should therefore spell out its intended objectives, so as to prevent the duplication of work already being done by a United Nations body.

31. As for special conferences held away from established headquarters, his delegation supported recommendation 2 (c) of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/37/112, chap. V) and the Secretary-General's suggestion in paragraph 39 of document A/37/112/Add.1. It did not, however, wholly support the views expressed by the Secretary-General in paragraph 40 of the latter document which had led to recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences, since an advance payment could hardly be regarded as a deciding factor in the conclusion of an agreement. The signing of an agreement to host a special conference could be delayed for a variety of reasons; it would therefore be sensible to set a firm deadline for the signing of such an agreement. But a State's agreement to host a conference seemed a sufficient reflection of its sovereign will without the need for an advance payment. A precise estimation of the additional costs, made by the United Nations in close collaboration with the host country at the preliminary stage, would enable the State concerned to take an informed decision. In any event, an advance payment would not eliminate the risk of a transfer of the conference to another venue.

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32. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that the most important task facing the Committee on Conferences was not to limit documentation, but to redistribute conference servicing resources in a manner more beneficial to the international community.

33. The reports before the Fifth Committee on the subject of special conferences concerned only the financial and administrative aspects of their organization. Regarding the former, he said that it was not always possible to limit the resources and facilities to be provided for such conferences. As to the latter, he saw no need for a secretariat committee to be set up to deal with a special conference, as recommended in document A/37/112. The existing structure should be able to provide the necessary services.

34. In the reasoning leading up to its recommendation 5 (A/37/32, chap. V), the Committee on Conferences questioned the rationale for providing meeting records for United Nations bodies. His delegation found meeting records very useful, since they provided a means for delegations with limited resources and staff to discover what took place at meetings they could not otherwise cover. It was important, however, to remedy delays in the issue of summary records. It should be possible to issue them promptly if all the other documents relating to a given meeting had been dealt with in advance; that was a matter of distributing the Secretariat's workload over the course of the year. Blame for the late appearance of summary records did not always lie with the translation services.

35. He did not support the proposed technological innovations in the Department of Conference Services. They were unlikely to produce the desired effects and might increase the existing linguistic imbalance in the Secretariat, since they would apply only to the longer-established languages. It was the more recently introduced languages that needed reinforcement.

36. The Organization should not place too great a reliance on translation by satellite, which destroyed the close link required between the translator and the technical expert who produced the original text. Translators often needed to consult the author of a document for information and advice.

37. The Departments of Conference Services and Public Information needed to co-ordinate their activities. Often the documents they produced were very similar; some co-ordination could save a great deal of effort.

38. Delegations should bolster the Secretary-General's efforts to reduce the alarming burden of documentation. The move to reduce the maximum size of documents emanating from the Secretariat from 32 to 24 pages, however, although practical, was naive. It was more important to determine what documents delegations really needed and what they did not. He daily received a large number of documents that were of no use to him at all.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.