



## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session  
OFFICIAL RECORDS

Monday, 26 April 1971,  
at 3.20 p.m.

NEW YORK

*President:* Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

## AGENDA ITEM 16

**Measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council (continued) (E/4986 and Add.1-3)**

1. Mr. SCOTT (New Zealand) said that although the response to the Secretary-General's communication sent to Governments of Member States pursuant to the decision taken at the 1737th meeting on 13 January 1971 had so far been limited, he hoped that the action initiated in January would enable the Council to make substantive progress at its current session.

2. In its reply to the Secretary-General's communication (see E/4986), his delegation had echoed the widely held view that there were two basic categories of reform: short-term reforms of a procedural or technical nature, which should not create any political difficulties, and far-reaching long-term reforms, which could be expected to give rise to controversy and conflicts of interests. In its opinion, the Council at its current session should concern itself with smaller reforms which would set the tone for dispassionate consideration of the more important problems, such as the future composition of the Council on the solution of which success in making the Council more meaningful and effective in the discharge of its functions would depend.

3. Immediate improvements could be made with regard to documentation, the programme of meetings and the Council's agenda, including the establishment of the necessary priorities. He therefore suggested that the Council should request the Secretariat to compile a list of possible measures to be taken in those areas for consideration during the third week of the session. The list should be compiled in co-operation with interested delegations and should take into account the relevant comments made by Governments in their official replies to the Secretary-General's communication. The list, which would be prepared along the lines of the analysis of Government views prepared for the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly, might also include suggestions by the Secretary-General himself. When available, the document might be studied by an informal open-ended working group in which non-Council members having a contribution to make could participate. The group would then prepare an appropriate draft for consideration and adoption by the Council during the current session. His delegation would be fully prepared to play its part in the work of such a group. In any case, the Council should agree as soon as possible on whatever procedure it was going to adopt and should avoid unneces-

sary procedural debate if the momentum that had been generated was to result in real improvement in its work.

4. Mr. MOJSOV (Yugoslavia) said that his Government had submitted to the Secretary-General views<sup>1</sup> on the topic under consideration, together with certain specific proposals which it hoped would contribute to improving the organization of the Council's work.

5. His delegation felt that the policy-making role of the Council should be strengthened. The Council should, in particular, identify the major problems of development, indicate new policy directions and recommend appropriate ways and means of meeting the challenges of the development process. It should also serve as a medium for influencing Governments to exercise their political will to solve pressing problems and to give new impetus to development. Revitalized, the Council could take more initiative in dealing with economic and social problems and thus improve the prospects for success in attaining the goals of the Second United Nations Development Decade. To that end, it should be so composed and organized as to be capable of laying down policy guidelines for its subsidiary organs and other bodies engaged in making recommendations for action.

6. His delegation noted a tendency among certain developed countries to underestimate the Council's role as a policy-making body and to overemphasize its co-ordinating function. That tendency was very clearly exemplified in paragraph 2 of the United Kingdom's reply (see E/4986). It would appear that most of the developed countries wanted the Council to contribute to the further stagnation of the United Nations system by freezing the resources of the regular budget and using its influence to limit voluntary contributions at the very time when assistance was urgently needed if the Second Development Decade was to be a success. Indeed, some of the developed countries even seemed to consider that the only role the Council should play in the review and the appraisal of the progress of the Decade was that of supervision.

7. In his delegation's view, one of the main reasons for the unsatisfactory performance of the Council was the inadequate representation of the membership of the United Nations, especially the smaller developed and the developing countries, in the Council itself and in its subsidiary bodies. In order to remedy that defect, the number of members of some of the subsidiary bodies should be increased.

8. The two issues which he had mentioned, both of them of a political nature, could be solved, many difficulties which contributed to the Council's inefficiency would be

<sup>1</sup> Subsequently circulated as document E/4986/Add.4.

eliminated and the Council would find it easier to cope with the technical aspects of its work.

9. His Government would like to make a number of suggestions. The Council should continue its present practice of holding two regular sessions a year, together with a brief organizational session at the beginning of the year. It should place greater emphasis on social items during the spring session and on economic items during the summer session, and should continue its present practice of concentrating on major policy matters at the summer session. It should maintain its three sessional committees, but most of the items on its agenda should be allocated to the Economic and Social Committees, which, in order to be able to cope with their increased workload, should hold intersessional meetings to deal with specific issues when necessary. No substantive items should be referred at the outset to the Co-ordination Committee; only specific subjects raising questions of co-ordination should be submitted to it at appropriate times, and its terms of reference in dealing with such subjects should be clearly and precisely defined. Such a procedure would reduce the burden of work of the Co-ordination Committee and enable it to take over much of the work now performed by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination. The Co-ordination Committee should also meet intersessionally as often as necessary in order to assist the Council in programming and co-ordination. The Council's documentation should be relevant to the subject-matter under consideration and should contain recommendations for action. Reports should consist of two parts: a resumé of the discussion and specific recommendations.

10. In his delegation's view, the problems of the Council could not be solved in a purely technical and mechanical way. The Council could never function as a policy-making body unless Governments were ready to undertake the political commitments necessary for the implementation of the objectives of the Charter, and thus create conditions in which the Council could discharge its functions. His delegation was prepared at the present session to agree to certain specific measures, both political and technical, which would ensure a continued improvement of the way in which the Council handled its work.

11. Mr. BUSH (United States of America) said that his Government wanted the Economic and Social Council to be a hard-driving, forward-looking body in which the industrialized countries and the less developed countries could work with each other, instead of against each other, to improve the lot of people everywhere. The President of the United States took great interest in the problem of establishing effective international machinery for improving economic and social conditions throughout the world, particularly in the less developed countries.

12. However, it was generally recognized that the Council fell short of those expectations at the present time and, in fact, was in deep trouble. It issued too many documents, held too many meetings, postponed too many decisions. It failed to lead, and all countries, particularly the developing ones, suffered as a result. In short, the Council was undergoing a crisis of confidence. The question was how confidence in the Council could be restored. In his opinion, that could not be done by tinkering with procedures; on

the contrary, its members must take stock of the Council's place within the United Nations system and make sure that the opportunities that it afforded were exploited to the maximum.

13. The Council was subordinate to the General Assembly, which set policies and expressed the "political will" of the United Nations. It was the Assembly which had the final word on all important issues, including economic and social ones. It was the Assembly which had the power of the purse in approving the operating programmes of the United Nations. The founders of the United Nations had assigned to the Council certain specific functions not in order to derogate from the rights and responsibilities of the Assembly, but to relieve the latter of the detailed consideration of such highly complex matters as specific work programmes in the economic, social and related fields and the co-ordination of the activities of the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies. Those were the central functions of the Council and they were essentially non-political. They required attention to technical detail in the programming and execution of agreed policies, involved complicated interrelationships between the various parts of the United Nations system, and were concerned with the day-to-day operation of the system. No intergovernmental forum of 127 or more members could do that kind of job; even smaller bodies found the task extremely difficult. The Council could not and should not compete with the Assembly; what it could do was to examine difficult technical issues and thus help the Assembly to act on them intelligently. That was an important policy-formulating role. It could also make sure that the will of the Assembly was carried out by co-ordinating and supervising the social and economic activities of the United Nations and the specialized agencies.

14. There were two main complaints about the work of the Council: first, that not enough member countries participated in its work and, secondly, that it failed to come to grips with the main issues of the day. Something could be done about both.

15. It was sometimes charged that the Council was not representative of the United Nations as a whole; his delegation could not agree. Its twenty-seven members were drawn from all geographical regions and represented a realistic ratio between less developed and industrialized countries. The seventeen less developed countries had a clear majority; the facts belied the assertion that the Council was a rich man's club. However, while the Council was representative of the membership of the United Nations, it could be argued that it did not allow enough countries to participate in its work. His delegation therefore felt that it would be desirable to increase the participation of delegations in the economic and social organs of the United Nations. There were two ways of doing so. One would be to increase the membership of the Council by twelve or fifteen, but that would require a change in the Charter, a process which might take several years. The other would be to assign some of the more important new issues to subsidiary committees of the Council which would be expanded to include delegations that were not members of the Council. That could be done immediately.

16. The two most immediate issues which the Council must tackle were the establishment of machinery for the

review and appraisal of the Second Development Decade and the establishment of future institutional arrangements for science and technology. Those two subjects could be dealt with in the manner he had indicated; if the Council followed that course it would immediately begin to move forward in its work. Other subjects which also urgently required the Council's attention, such as uncontrolled population growth and the degradation of the environment, could in the future be dealt with in the same way. Looking further into the future, changes in the structure of the United Nations system could be anticipated, which would make it more effective in coping with the enormous demands of an increasingly internationalized development effort. If such a course were adopted, the Council would be enabled to play a more important role, the general Membership of the United Nations would develop a greater sense of participation in its work and the General Assembly would be better served. Moreover, all that could be done immediately.

17. His delegation, which was submitting its proposals in more detail in an official document,<sup>2</sup> had often been asked whether the United States was interested in the United Nations only as a mechanism for promoting economic and social development. The answer was that the United States wanted the United Nations to be a viable political body; however, if the Organization could succeed in promoting economic and social development it could eliminate many of the causes of political friction. Accordingly, his Government supported the political role of the United Nations but placed particular emphasis on its economic and social role.

18. Mr. ZAKHAROV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) recalled that his delegation had given a detailed explanation of its position of principle on the item under consideration at the 1734th meeting on 12 January and had outlined its general approach to it at the previous meeting.

19. His country's efforts to promote peace and international co-operation included taking full advantage of the possibilities offered by the United Nations, as Mr. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, had stated at the Twenty-fourth Congress. His delegation felt that at present, inadequate use was being made of the possibilities of the Economic and Social Council in promoting fruitful international co-operation in the economic and social fields. The role of the Council in the United Nations system was defined in Chapters IX and X of the Charter, particularly in Article 60, which stated that responsibility for the discharge of the functions of the Organization was vested in the General Assembly and, under the authority of the General Assembly, in the Economic and Social Council. The Soviet Union believed that the Council could be more effective in promoting the economic and social progress of the peoples. It was therefore gratified to see that the replies of Governments (E/4986 and Add.1-3) to the Secretary-General's letter envisaged a leading role for the Council in the economic and social activities of the United Nations. The Soviet Union had consistently advocated strengthening the Council, enhancing its role and authority, and making its activities more effective.

20. It was generally accepted that the role of the Council, as one of the main organs of the United Nations, required strengthening. A number of measures had been proposed to that effect, measures which, he felt, could be divided into two categories: those aimed at the rationalization and improvement of existing procedures and those aimed at structural changes necessitating a revision of the Charter. His delegation could support the first category but not the second. The question of the better organization of the work of the Council required very careful study and his delegation, for its part, was prepared to continue the consultations begun among the members of the Council at the forty-ninth session.

21. His delegation had often drawn attention to the existing deficiencies in the work of the Council and had proposed measures to remedy them. One of the most serious of those deficiencies was that the Council was not fully discharging its functions under the Charter as the main United Nations organ responsible for co-ordinating activities in the economic, social, scientific and technical fields. Its agenda was overburdened with minor matters which could be successfully dealt with by subsidiary organs. In fact, its effectiveness could be greatly enhanced by the establishment of a sessional committee on science and technology. At the same time, the Council should be kept better informed of the practical steps which the Secretariat was taking to give effect to its decisions.

22. At its forty-ninth session the Council had adopted, on the proposal of the USSR delegation, resolution 1547 (XLIX), strict compliance with which would enable the Council to discharge its functions and at the same time would remove from the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) the extraordinary and unauthorized functions which it had assumed and which were the exclusive prerogative of intergovernmental organs, thus enhancing the Council's authority. He hoped that the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, which was to study the question of ACC, would submit appropriate recommendations to the Council at its fifty-first session.

23. Despite its deficiencies, the Council could, because of its great experience, solve many complex social and economic problems and thus lighten the burden of the General Assembly. It was important as both a co-ordinating and a legislative body and for that reason his delegation was surprised that no high-ranking officials of the Secretariat were attending its meetings on so important a subject.

24. His delegation was submitting for the Council's consideration a draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly.<sup>3</sup> It was designed to enhance the prestige and co-ordinating role of the Council and increase its effectiveness in the practical fields with which it was concerned.

25. Mr. QUARONI (Italy) said that his delegation, as had been clear in the informal meetings during the resumed forty-ninth session in December and the organizational meetings of the fiftieth session in January, attached considerable importance to reforming the working methods of the Council. With regard to the organization of work at

<sup>2</sup> Subsequently circulated as document E/4986/Add.5.

<sup>3</sup> Subsequently circulated as document E/L.1382.

the present stage, he suggested that a summary of all replies, both official and informal, should be prepared, preferably by the Secretariat, so as to facilitate the Council's work.

26. Mr. HEDEMANN (Norway) supported the New Zealand delegation's suggestion that the Secretariat should compile a list of proposals for improving the work of the Council to be submitted to an open-ended working group in preparation for consideration by the Council later in the session. His delegation would be prepared to take part in such a working group. Furthermore, the New Zealand proposals seemed to be fully compatible with others made during the meeting.

27. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that, while he was not against the establishment of a working group, he considered that more than one day was needed for the preliminary debate. Although it was superfluous for members to comment on the replies of their own Governments, they should be given an opportunity to give their views on the position of other delegations. Furthermore, it would be premature to decide on any definite course of action at that juncture. The Soviet Union had already submitted a draft resolution and certain delegations had made thought-provoking statements. Members therefore needed time to reflect and work out their positions.

28. The PRESIDENT pointed out that members would have ample opportunity to formulate their views before the Council reverted to the item during the third and fourth weeks of the session.

29. It was essential for the Council to take a decision on the item during the current session. He therefore urged delegations to submit in writing as early as possible any formal or informal proposals which they might wish to make.

30. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) said that he thought the suggestions before the Council were extremely interesting. There was already considerable divergence of views. For example, the delegation of Yugoslavia, in contrast to the United States delegation, considered that the Economic and Social Council was not merely a technical organ but had political functions and should therefore examine the questions submitted to it in greater depth. The Yugoslav representative had advocated certain structural reforms, whereas the representatives of the USSR and New Zealand would prefer to begin by tackling short-term problems. His own delegation felt that the Council should proceed as soon as possible to consider specific problems, beginning with short-term ones. An *ad hoc* group might be established to do the preparatory work and hear the views of States not members of the Council, which had positive contributions to make.

31. He shared the USSR representative's regret that, when the Council was considering an item which was of the greatest importance for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Secretariat was not well represented; in particular, he would have liked the Under-Secretary-General to be present.

32. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) considered that a summary of proposals and suggestions should be prepared as soon as possible since it might help to avoid unduly protracted debates. With a schematic picture of long-term and short-term proposals relating to such matters as procedure, programming, and possible institutional machinery for science and technology before it, the Council could easily identify areas of possible consensus. Furthermore, for the sake of efficiency members should be urged to submit their proposals, point by point, in writing to the Secretariat and to dispense with lengthy explanatory statements.

*The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.*