



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Thursday, 6 May 1971,
at 10.50 a.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

AGENDA ITEM 9

Transport development (*continued*):(a) Establishment of a United Nations transport centre (*continued*) (E/4964 and Add.1-3, E/4989, chap. VII; E/L.1381)

1. Mr. ODERO-JOWI (Kenya) said that the question of the establishment of a United Nations transport economics centre was extremely important. Economic and social development depended on an adequate transport system. In particular, the system must provide fast and economical services that were responsive to the needs of a developing economy.

2. In Kenya, as in other African countries, the transport system had been established by a colonial régime with the object of exploiting the country's mineral and agricultural resources to support the industries in the metropolitan country. Railways and roads had been built without the slightest consideration for the economic and social interests of the African people. Furthermore, the African colonies had been exploited separately, no links being established between the different colonial empires, while the colonial régimes had not developed any transport system at all in Africa's many land-locked countries. As a result, the independent African States must currently try to rationalize transport systems within each country and to link the various countries.

3. In an evaluation of the need for a United Nations transport economics centre, account must be taken of those problems which were peculiar to Africa and which seriously handicapped development. Other difficulties arose from the lack of financial resources. The high costs incurred by the African countries in the establishment of their transport systems were due not so much to increases in mileage of railway tracks or roads as to the high cost of equipment and machinery imported at great expense from developed countries, as well as to such factors as inefficient construction techniques and the high cost of repairs. Because of the lack of skilled personnel, the developing countries had to recruit expatriate advisers and accept inequitable contracts with foreign construction companies.

4. It was clear that the developing countries needed the assistance of the United Nations in eliminating the handicaps which were impeding the development of their transport systems and in making a rational choice between the various modes of transport in the light of national development objectives.

5. His delegation fully supported the idea of a centre with the role and functions outlined in the Secretary-General's report (E/4964). They could, however, be extended to include studies of some of the problems facing developing countries, to which he had just referred. For example, the centre should study interregional transport requirements of the African States, prepare model contracts for road construction and its financing and make a technical examination of the railway network of the African countries in order to determine their long-term and short-term requirements.

6. Mr. FINGER (United States of America) stressed that too hasty a decision should not be taken. The Council should first be very sure that the proposed centre should definitely represent the best possible use of the Organization's limited resources. Experience showed that the decision to establish a new body was almost irrevocable. It was true, as the representative of Kenya had emphasized, that transport was a key factor in development and that the developing countries had a particular need for assistance. But it should be stressed that considerable efforts were already being made in that field and that the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, for example, had already made very substantial loans to finance transport projects. In view of the Organization's very limited resources, it should be ascertained whether the proposed centre should be established or whether there might not be a better alternative, such as development of the transport activities of the regional economic commissions. At all events, the Council should study the question in greater detail before taking a decision; he suggested that consideration of the question should be deferred to the next session.

7. Mr. PRAGUE (France) said that his delegation did not favour the establishment of the proposed centre and hoped that the majority of the Council would reject the proposal, or at least that the decision would be deferred.

8. Contrary to what was stated in paragraph 3 of document E/4964, the Secretary-General's report seemed to have taken insufficient account of the comments and suggestions of the regional economic commissions and of various United Nations bodies. The Secretary-General had recently revised his proposals (see E/4964/Add.3) and submitted new draft terms of reference for the centre that were less ambitious than the original proposal. That change had not, however, been matched by a proportionate reduction in the estimated costs, which remained extremely high. It would certainly appear that the usefulness of the centre, whose terms of reference were quite vague, would not warrant the expenditure.

9. He hoped that the Council would defer its decision on a question which was in fact not of top priority.

10. Mr. TARDOS (Hungary) recalled that, at its February 1971 session, the Inland Transport Committee of ECE had considered the question of the establishment of a United Nations transport economics and technology documentation centre. That Committee had decided that the Economic and Social Council should ascertain the views of the regional economic commissions before taking a decision and that it had insufficient information on the proposed centre to give an authoritative opinion. In general, the replies received from the various United Nations bodies were not very encouraging.

11. Although it had been stated (see E/4964/Add.3, annex I, para. 6) that the centre would pay particular attention to transport problems which were not covered by any other United Nations body, there was a great risk that it might duplicate many of the activities of certain international non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, the proposed reduction in staff seemed small compared with the reduction in the amount of work to be assigned to the centre. For all those reasons his delegation could not support the establishment of the transport documentation centre.

12. Mr. RABETAFIKA (Madagascar) felt that the question should first be considered by the regional economic commissions. The replies received from the United Nations bodies were generally rather unenthusiastic and it would be inadvisable to go against the views of those bodies. Consequently, although his delegation had very much hoped that an arrangement would be evolved for assisting the developing countries, it considered that no decision should be taken until more favourable reactions had been expressed. It therefore suggested that the decision should be deferred so that the question might be considered in greater detail.

13. Mr. HEDEMANN (Norway) said that he was well aware of the special interest of developing countries in that matter but that the arguments advanced thus far had not convinced his delegation that the establishment of a centre would be the best solution. It would be preferable to defer the question until a subsequent session.

14. Mr. FRANCO-HOLGUIN (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) recalled that the representative of the Bank had indicated at the forty-eighth session of the Council (1682nd meeting) that better transport planning and use of the resources available to transport agencies could be achieved. In particular, project preparation could be improved with better data and methods and a wider consideration of new technologies.

15. There should be greater communication of knowledge and experience, because projects costs were increasing as traffic growth necessitated the use of higher levels of technology. Research into various aspects of the transport sector was being undertaken at various levels, in universities, research institutes and elsewhere, but there was no clear over-all view. The result was not only duplication of effort, but also that a project might be needlessly delayed while research was being undertaken which had already been carried out.

16. Good transport planning and efficient transport operations required a large supply of highly qualified people;

they would benefit if they had access to information which they currently lacked because of ignorance of its existence, language differences or limited distribution arrangements.

17. The proposed centre, acting in co-operation with agencies concerned, would therefore fill a gap in transport technology by providing easily accessible knowledge on transportation research.

18. Mr. BARNEA (Director, Resources and Transport Division) said that the Secretary-General's proposals were in fact rather modest, considering the amount of investment in transport and the fact that mistakes in that area were becoming increasingly expensive. Transport was developing much more rapidly in developed than in developing countries. The Council therefore had a part to play in helping the developing countries in that field. It was of course the Council which should decide whether the establishment of a centre was the best solution to the question.

19. Mr. LOUYA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) thanked the Secretary-General for his report, which was both clear and concise. The Congolese delegation was generally opposed to the proliferation of United Nations bodies, but was in favour of the establishment of a United Nations transport economics and technology documentation centre. The aim should be to help developing countries to establish national transportation services and to strengthen those which already existed. Success would depend on the analysis and evaluation methods used, which should be selected in consultation with national and international transport bodies. It was stated in the report (see E/4964/Add.3, annex I, para. 8) that the centre would review and analyse studies on the economic aspects of transportation. He wondered what form those analyses would take and how the centre would intervene to assist interested governments.

20. It was also proposed in paragraph 14 that the centre should have eight senior posts. The Congolese delegation was convinced of the need to limit expenditure and did not feel that the immediate or future activities of the centre would warrant so many high-level posts.

21. Mr. FINGER (United States of America) expressed surprise that the World Bank, if it believed that significant savings would result from a better dissemination of information on new transport technology, had not itself taken the necessary action. The Bank could use the services of experts and was in an unrivalled position to collect and disseminate such information. Moreover, it had a surplus available from earnings, while the United Nations had a serious deficit. The Bank might have good reasons for not providing that kind of service itself, but had not mentioned any. If the Bank had been in the habit of making wide use, for instance, of the studies and research results published by UNDP, its attitude might appear more convincing.

22. The representative of IBRD had emphasized the establishment of a central information library, while the Director of the Resources and Transport Division had stressed the idea of new research. Those two points of view would have to be reconciled, particularly as the representative of the Congo had underlined the need to help

developing countries to establish their own transport services.

23. His delegation felt that the Council was not yet ready to take a decision on the establishment of the new body.

24. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) noted that the arguments advanced so far showed a certain scepticism about the proposed transport centre. Ghana had undertaken a vast transport development programme as part of its general development plan. If appropriate plans were to be drawn up, the research results and indispensable technical data should be made available. Yet centres already existed for the dissemination of such information and the proposed centre might be just another library. Transport experts always managed to acquire the necessary information and the establishment of the centre might lead to duplication and needless expenditure. In addition, the centre might be a purely administrative body and give no practical assistance in the field. It was envisaged that when established the centre would prepare, within its functions and terms of reference, its long-term programme of work (see E/4964/Add.3, annex I, para. 15). The Ghanaian delegation would not wish to be instrumental in setting up a body which did not already have a clear idea of its long-term work programme. It was not opposed to the establishment of such a centre in the future, if more thorough study dispelled the doubts, but thought it would be premature to take a decision at the current session.

25. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) agreed with the representative of Ghana and said that the United States representative's remarks about IBRD were very cogent. The Bank would derive no special advantage from the establishment of a United Nations transport economics and technology documentation centre. It had all the resources needed to study transport projects and had already made an important contribution to the financing of those projects in many developing countries, whose transport needs were well known. The solution to their problem lay not in the establishment of a documentation centre, but in a more rational preparation of national programmes and in assistance from the specialized agencies and regional economic commissions which were familiar with the special needs of each region. The Greek delegation would prefer the question to be postponed *sine die*, but would accept the majority view.

26. Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil) felt that the transport activities of the regional economic commissions should be expanded. At the moment, ECLA had only very limited resources for such activities. Research and data collection and dissemination should be undertaken on a world-wide basis. Even if developing countries had free access to research results, it was not always easy for them to adapt the information obtained to their own needs. For that reason, a documentation centre seemed to be needed. At the eleventh session of the UNDP Governing Council, it had been seen that most transport projects had been given to IBRD for execution, which proved there was a gap in that respect in the United Nations system. United Nations world-wide and regional services should be strengthened so as to support the projects in the field. Yet it was the developing countries which should say whether the proposed documentation centre fulfilled their needs.

27. Mr. SHAHI (Pakistan) stated that various delegations had held informal consultations to prepare proposals with lesser financial implications than those described in annex II of document E/4964/Add.3. They had not had time to finalize those proposals. It would therefore be desirable to suspend the discussion until the following week, so that consultations could be held among all delegations—those of developed as well as developing countries.

28. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) thought it might be advisable to close the debate on the item. The Council could consider the draft resolutions and take a decision on them during the following week.

29. Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil) supported the proposal made by the representative of Pakistan.

30. Mr. SHAHI (Pakistan) said he agreed with the views expressed by the representative of Greece.

31. The PRESIDENT said that, if there were no objections, the general debate on the item would be considered to be closed, and the Council would take up the draft resolutions the following week.

It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 11

Science and technology:

(a) Future institutional arrangements for science and technology (E/4959, E/4989, chap. VII)

32. The PRESIDENT drew attention to the note by the Secretary-General (E/4959), which referred, *inter alia*, to resolution 74 (X) of the Trade and Development Board. The Council also had before it the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination on its eighth session (E/4989, chapter VII).

33. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) pointed out that the establishment of intergovernmental machinery for the application of science and technology to development was much more complex than the establishment of a United Nations centre for transport economics and technology documentation. His Government based its position on the need to reinforce and co-ordinate the current activities of the United Nations in that sphere, as science and technology played an exceptionally important part in the solution of existing and social problems.

34. The Twenty-fourth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR had decided that the application of science and technology to development should be an essential element in the external economic policy of the Soviet Union. It had also been decided that the USSR should increase its participation in the economic and technical development of developing countries by such means as bilateral arrangements. His Government considered that if activities in that sector were to be strengthened and co-ordinated, the United Nations must now take stock of its activities and introduce some order into them; con-

siderable efforts were being made, but they often entailed duplication. As a specific proposal the Soviet delegation would suggest that the first essential task should be to define the problems in that field and establish very strict priorities, that is, decide on the basic objectives to be attained. For example, extremely favourable conditions should be created to enable the countries concerned to obtain as much assistance as possible and thus accelerate their development. Another important element in the process of reorganization would be to determine which organs and agencies in the United Nations system were primarily responsible for solving those problems. The next stage would be to establish a system of co-ordination for the United Nations and its specialized agencies so as to introduce some order and achieve greater efficiency. But which organ or agency should be responsible for introducing the necessary order? The Soviet delegation thought it would be logical to entrust the task to the specialized agencies concerned and to the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development since they had eminent specialists who could prepare specific proposals for consideration by the Council.

35. The establishment of intergovernmental machinery would meet a real need, and various solutions had been suggested; the Soviet delegation was ready to co-operate whole-heartedly towards achieving that end.

36. The establishment of a standing intergovernmental committee of the Council or the General Assembly would have two drawbacks. Such a committee would be a subsidiary organ. Science and technology were an integral part of economic and social development, and it would be illogical for the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council to set activities connected with science and technology apart from other activities, thus relegating them to a secondary position. Furthermore it would not be desirable to decide at that stage to set up a standing intergovernmental committee, since suggestions concerning the form such machinery should take had not yet been crystallized.

37. The Soviet delegation would accordingly support the establishment of a sessional committee of the Council, which would have the same status as CPC, and the Social Committee and the Economic Committee of the Council. The establishment of such a committee would not rule out the possibility of setting up a standing committee at some future date.

38. The Soviet delegation was also in favour of maintaining the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, since the Council would need advice from a committee of experts in any case, and such advice would be even more necessary if it was decided that a sessional committee should be instituted.

39. Mr. SHAHI (Pakistan) said the complexity of the question explained the fact that no majority view had emerged during the last few sessions of the Council concerning the nature of the proposed intergovernmental machinery.

40. The Economic and Social Council was a principal organ of the United Nations, but its authority had diminished over the years for various reasons. It would be difficult to adopt the suggestion made by the representative of the Soviet Union unless the greatest possible number of members could be represented in the proposed sessional committee.

41. A number of reasons militated in favour of the establishment of a standing committee of the General Assembly, since science and technology concerned all Member States without exception, as did the question of the environment which had first been raised in the General Assembly. Moreover, it would not be encroaching on the authority of the Council to entrust consideration of the question to an organ of the General Assembly. He did not consider that to establish a standing committee of the Economic and Social Council would be a satisfactory solution, although it would perhaps be preferable to setting up a sessional committee. It would of course be normal for the Council to play the main role in that sphere, as laid down in the Charter, but it should be borne in mind that because of its limited membership the Council was not the most appropriate body to consider a matter that concerned all Member States.

42. He hoped that a consensus would emerge on the question, taking account of the legitimate aspirations of developing countries. It was too early to assess the question of the terms of reference of the new committee, but it was already clear that its field of activities should not be too broad. The difficulties that had arisen over questions of jurisdiction in the case of peaceful uses of the sea-bed and the ocean floor should serve as a warning in that connexion.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.