



## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Tuesday, 12 January 1971,  
at 10.55 a.m.

NEW YORK

*President: Mr. R. DRISS (Tunisia).**Organization of work*

1. The PRESIDENT, referring to rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, said that as a result of the informal consultations he had mentioned at the previous meeting, it had been decided that Mr. K. Szarka (Hungary) would serve as Chairman of the Social Committee, Mr. J. A. de Araújo Castro (Brazil) as Chairman of the Co-ordination Committee and Mr. C. Caranicas (Greece) as Chairman of the Economic Committee.

2. Referring to a question raised by the French representative at the previous meeting, he suggested that the agenda items should be considered in the following order: 5, 6, 7, 4 and 3.

*It was so decided.***AGENDA ITEM 5****Measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council (E/L.1369)**

3. Mr. MARAMIS (Indonesia), President of the Council in 1970, introducing his note of 31 December 1970 on measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council (E/L.1369), thanked all delegations, particularly those which were not members of the Council, which had participated in the informal discussions. There had seemed to be agreement among the participants in those discussions that the role of the Council should be reaffirmed and its methods of work improved to enable it to discharge more effectively the functions conferred upon it by the Charter. It had also been noted that those functions would assume added importance in the discharge of the responsibilities the General Assembly might wish to entrust to the Council for the review and appraisal of the objectives and policies of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade (General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV)). A great many suggestions had been made for improving the organization of the Council's work and there had seemed to be agreement that a distinction should be made between suggestions relating to organizational matters, which could be put into effect immediately, and suggestions concerning the Council's structure, which might require far-reaching changes in its practice and procedures. Since the proposals had been made informally and did not have official status, he would not attempt to summarize them. He suggested, rather, that the Council should invite delegations to submit their proposals in a more formal manner and should devise procedures for translating those proposals into practical recommendations that could be considered by the Council at its fiftieth session. One possibility would be to invite the officers of

the Council and the Secretariat, in consultation with delegations, to undertake the task. Alternatively, a working group of the whole might be established for that purpose.

4. Mr. DE ARAÚJO CASTRO (Brazil) said that the fact that little progress had been made in endeavours to improve the organization of the Council's work was not a cause for pessimism. On the contrary, as a result of the impasse reached on the question of structural changes, members would be forced to re-examine their policies towards the Economic and Social Council and search for an understanding on which the necessary political will for action could be based. That political will would be achieved only when both developed and developing countries realized that they must face and solve the problems of development regardless of any commitments their decisions might imply. So long as issues were evaded and measures for promoting development watered down it would be difficult to reach agreement on basic reforms. Reforms were significant only when they were designed to attain a specific goal and they became possible only when that goal had the political backing of all interested parties. The Council's first task should be to bring its policies and actions more closely into line with the interests of the 127 States Members of the United Nations. If it was to deal only with such questions as the environment and population control, the Council could be allowed to become impotent and useless. His delegation was convinced, however, that, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter, all United Nations bodies had an important role to play in the promotion of development. National interests could not be accepted or tolerated. The nature of the problems to be dealt with, particularly in connexion with the political will for action, was a clear indication that work to improve the Council should be carried on by means of consultations in which all members of the Council could and should participate.

5. In conclusion, he congratulated the former President of the Council, on having prepared a cautious and wise paper on measures to improve the organization of the Council's work. His delegation did, however, take exception to the wording of the third and fourth sentences of the third paragraph of the note, which did not seem to reflect accurately the discussions in the informal meetings.

6. Mr. HEDEMANN (Norway) recalled that at its forty-ninth session the Council had decided<sup>1</sup> that suggestions for improving the organization of its work should be submitted to it at its fiftieth session, when it would start to devise procedures for translating the suggestions into practical recommendations. His delegation was not sure that the Council as a whole was the organ best suited to sift the suggestions made and formulate specific recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-ninth Session, 1722nd meeting.*

Rather, it was inclined to support the idea, put forward during the informal meetings, that a small working group should be established to perform that task. The group could consist of the officers of the Council and five or six members drawn from the different geographical areas. Since Asia was not represented among the Council's officers, arrangements might be made for two Asian countries to serve on the working group. Any Council member not represented in the group would have the right to submit written proposals by a specific date. The working group should consider those written suggestions, together with suggestions made during the informal meetings, and, in strict observance of the six-week rule, submit recommendations to the Council for consideration at its fiftieth session, to be held in April-May 1971. It was important that during the current organizational meetings the Council should take some decision which would enable it to make progress in its endeavours to improve the organization of its work.

7. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) endorsed the Norwegian proposal. The Council should appoint an official working group, which would be serviced in the normal way, to examine thoroughly all the suggestions made on the subject. In that connexion, his delegation agreed with the former President of the Council that the suggestions made in the informal meetings should be submitted in a more formal manner. His delegation could accept the Norwegian representative's suggestion concerning the composition of the working group and would have no objection to special arrangements being made for Asia. It wished to emphasize, however, that the working group should be open-ended and that any member of the Council wishing to participate in its work should be able to do so. The working group should take steps to ensure that its report was available in sufficient time to allow the Council to discuss the question early in its fiftieth session.

8. Mr. SCOTT (New Zealand) said that an attempt must be made to improve the Council's methods of work so as to enable it to discharge more effectively the functions conferred on it by the Charter. His delegation was prepared to consider with an open mind any changes that such improvement might involve. The note (E/L.1369) prepared by Mr. Maramis, the former President of the Council, provided a useful basis for discussion, although his delegation would have preferred a more detailed indication of the suggestions put forward during the informal meetings. As was suggested in the last paragraph of that paper, member delegations should be invited to present their proposals in a more formal manner and procedures for translating those proposals into practical recommendations to be considered by the Council at its fiftieth session should be devised. If the momentum of the informal discussions was not to be lost, that time-table should be adhered to. It was important that all States Members of the United Nations should have an opportunity to consider the role of one of the Organization's most important bodies, for only in that way would the Council be able to discharge the responsibilities entrusted to it by the Charter. It was important, too, that those delegations which had been active during the informal discussions and which were no longer members of the Council should be allowed to make suggestions for improving the Council's work, if they wished to do so. His delegation was of the opinion, therefore, that a working group of the whole should be established to perform the

task outlined in the last paragraph of the note. Nevertheless, if the majority of the Council so wished, it could accept the first possibility mentioned in that paragraph, namely, that the officers of the Council and the Secretariat, in consultation with delegations, undertake the task. It could also accept the Norwegian proposal, provided that the working group established was open-ended and that any delegation wishing to do so could participate in its work. In conclusion, he endorsed the Ghanaian representative's suggestion that any group established should have official status.

9. Mr. VIAUD (France) suggested that the problem was one of adapting the Council to its new responsibilities rather than of transforming it. There were two main reasons why the Council should be adapted to meet its new responsibilities. In the first place, the Council must be in a position to exercise direct and special responsibility in the review and appraisal of the objectives and policies of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. Secondly, the Council must be enabled to fulfil its function of co-ordinating programmes within the United Nations and of co-ordinating the activities of the United Nations and those of the specialized agencies. The latter function would assume particular importance during the Second Development Decade.

10. His delegation doubted the usefulness of establishing a working group to consider the suggestions already made for improving the organization of work of the Council. Before that was done, Governments should be requested to submit their written comments on the question. That was particularly necessary since not all Member States would be represented in any working group that might be established, and on such an important matter the views of all Governments should be known. The comments of Governments could be incorporated into a Secretariat report for submission to the Council at its fiftieth session. If it considered such a step necessary, the Council would then be able, later in that session, to appoint a working group of the whole which could meet some time between the fiftieth and fifty-first sessions of the Council.

11. Mr. OSMAN (Sudan) recalled that although the problems raised by the item under consideration had been identified more clearly during the informal discussions, no consensus had been reached on how they might be solved and how the Council's procedures might be improved. It had been suggested that a working group should be established to consider the various proposals submitted by the members of the Council. His delegation had supported that suggestion, but it had understood that the proposals would be circulated to Member States for their comments. That had not been done, however, and his delegation considered that it would be difficult to establish a working group at the present stage, without knowing how Member States would react to the various proposals.

12. With regard to the proposal of the French delegation that Member States should submit their comments in writing within two months, he felt that such a procedure might not be feasible. His delegation wished to propose that members of the Council should submit their proposals to the Secretariat, which would incorporate them in a docu-

ment to be submitted to the fiftieth session. Governments and Member States would have an opportunity of explaining their views at that time, and it would then be possible to establish a working group to formulate specific recommendations and report to the Council at its fifty-first session in July 1971.

13. Mr. OLDS (United States of America) said his delegation believed that the evolution of the United Nations system had dramatically affected the quality and quantity of the Council's work. The Council's failure to come to terms with the nature of that evolution had made the possibility of further fragmentation of the system a very real one. His delegation had hoped that the informal discussions called for at the Council's forty-ninth session would have clarified the nature of the problem before the Council was confronted with further fragmentation. For example, there had been reports that new machinery might be needed to assume monitoring functions related to the Second United Nations Development Decade, and to deal with environmental problems and those relating to the sea. If Governments were more confident of the Council's capacity to deal with such problems, they would be less inclined to remove them from the Council's sphere of competence.

14. It was important for Governments to reflect on the problem of improving the organization of the Council's work, but it was the Council's responsibility to recommend a policy which would bring about substantive improvements. His Government was prepared to participate in that effort, in order to provide the Council with a clear description of procedures, policies and practices designed to improve its work. It believed that a body smaller than the Council should be given immediate responsibility for assembling and clarifying the wealth of suggestions already at hand and for formulating specific proposals. His delegation considered the Norwegian proposal, as modified by Ghana, acceptable. It endorsed the idea that former members of the Council who had participated in previous deliberations on the question should be invited to participate in the working group, and felt that Governments should also have the opportunity of expressing their views.

15. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) recalled that his delegation had always been concerned with developing measures to strengthen the role of the Council. It had expressed its views in the General Assembly and had submitted detailed proposals.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it had actively participated in the exceptionally fruitful informal discussions which had been held in 1970.

16. Mr. Maramis, President of the Council in 1970, had observed that there were different views concerning various important matters on which, because of the complexity of the problems involved, it had not been possible to reach unanimous agreement, and had stressed the need for a very cautious and prudent approach to principles which were fundamental to any body established by the Charter, such as the Council. His delegation fully supported the view that any United Nations body was based on certain permanent principles without which no effective action was possible. It

adhered to the central idea that principles which were of lasting and fundamental value must be retained, but that did not mean that it would not be possible to introduce certain changes in the operational methods of the Council, for example, those affecting its relations with other United Nations bodies.

17. His delegation agreed with Mr. Maramis' views regarding practical measures for a better utilization of the Council's time and resources. It also believed in the need for better co-ordination of the activities of the Council and those of the Second Committee, and agreed that the vast quantity of documentation produced tended to prevent the Council from selecting for consideration the most vital and urgent questions.

18. In addition, it was extremely important for the Council to avoid hasty decisions in the complex fields of human rights and economic and social development. During the past twenty-five years a very special system had evolved in the United Nations; difficulties had arisen, but they were concerning details affecting the relationships between the Council and the specialized agencies. Those details were currently under examination, but the development was only a recent one, and extreme caution should therefore be observed, in order to ensure that no hasty and premature decisions were taken in connexion with the future organization of the Council's work.

19. Mr. Maramis had proposed that detailed discussion of measures to improve the organization of the Council's work should be taken up at the fiftieth session, and not before. His delegation fully supported that view and wished to propose that the Council should not risk prejudging matters by fixing a schedule for taking decisions, since haste would be highly detrimental.

20. His delegation agreed with the French delegation that the establishment of a working party at the present time would impede future discussion of the question and would deprive Governments of the opportunity of expressing their views. The Secretariat should first request Member States to submit their views in time for the fiftieth session. After the replies had been received, the Secretariat could work out certain proposals. Such a procedure would be more rational and democratic; discussion would not be limited to a restricted group, and the views of Governments could be taken into consideration.

21. Mr. ANTOINE (Haiti) said that the question under consideration involved important issues. In his view, a working group should be established forthwith for translating into practical recommendations the proposals and suggestions made regarding the improvement of the Council's work. The results of the group's work should be transmitted to Member States for consideration and comment, and the group, in co-operation with the Secretariat, should then prepare a report for submission to the Council at its fifty-first session.

22. Mr. ARIFF (Malaysia) said that his delegation had no strong views regarding the approach the Council should take to the question of measures to improve the organization of its work. Such measures could be divided into two categories: those relating to working methods, which could

<sup>2</sup> See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fifth Session, Second Committee*, 1319th meeting.

be settled immediately, and those relating to structural questions, which had far-reaching implications and might require amendment of the Charter. His delegation believed that any body which studied the question should proceed with caution. He agreed that a working group should be set up and that it should be open-ended, so that it would be truly effective. The suggestion that the members of the working group should be chosen on a geographical basis was an excellent one, and Mr. Maramis should certainly be a member of the group. The role of the Council as defined in the Charter should be strengthened, but not at the expense of the General Assembly, since that would erode the latter's prerogatives. The Council agenda should be examined carefully to exclude certain miscellaneous items; effective pruning of the agenda would be difficult, but not impossible. Certain functions now performed by the Council might perhaps be transferred to the General Assembly, since the existing situation gave rise to substantial duplication of discussions. The Council had already adopted the procedure of transmitting the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the General Assembly without debate, and that procedure could perhaps be applied to the reports of other commissions.

23. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece), referring to the fifth paragraph of document E/L.1369, said that a distinction should be drawn between questions relating to such areas as co-ordination of General Assembly and Council discussions, the preparation and presentation of documentation and the structure of the Council's agenda, and questions concerning committee organization. If the President submitted to the Council a paper containing specific suggestions on the first-mentioned areas, the Council would readily accept them; the difficulty lay, rather, in the area of committee organization. With regard to the suggestions made concerning future action, he doubted, as did the French representative, the advisability and feasibility of establishing a working group to consider the suggestions already made for improving the organization of work of the Council. The most important task facing the Council and the United Nations in 1971 was clearly the review and appraisal of the objectives and policies of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. That was the only task likely to enhance the role of the Council in 1971 and beyond. He agreed with the French representative that a questionnaire concerning the review and reappraisal of the Council's work should be submitted to all Member States and that Governments should reply within two months so that their comments could be discussed at the fiftieth session and the fifty-first session.

24. Mr. GHORRA (Lebanon) expressed his appreciation to Mr. Maramis, President of the Council in 1970, for leading the informal discussions on means of improving the Council's work. His delegation had at first been inclined to support the Norwegian proposal, but the doubts expressed by the representatives of France, Greece and the USSR concerning some procedural aspects had led his delegation to review its position.

25. In his view, the time had come to pass from the exploratory stage to the preparatory stage. A working

group could be set up which would, with the Secretariat's assistance, collect all the suggestions which had been advanced so far by inviting delegations to formalize their ideas; at the same time, a questionnaire could be submitted to Governments. The working group would collect information for submission to the Council at its fiftieth session, but it would not engage in any substantive discussion of ways and means of improving the Council's procedures.

26. Mr. FAJARDO (Uruguay) said that in fact the proposal to set up a formal working group supplemented the proposal to submit a questionnaire to Governments. Member States hoped that the Council would be the first to express an opinion regarding measures to improve the organization of its work. The Council should therefore set up a formal working group whose conclusions would be submitted to Member States for comments. The Council could then consider the replies of Governments at its fiftieth session or possibly at its fifty-first session. In any case, his delegation's position was flexible and he hoped that a consensus could be reached.

27. Mr. AYOUB (Tunisia) observed that the Council had before it two alternative proposals; the proposal to set up forthwith a working group to consider the proposals submitted during the informal discussions and the French proposal to postpone the establishment of the working group until the Council had been apprised of Governments' views on measures to improve the organization of its work. The French proposal would have the advantage of enabling Governments which were not members of the Council to submit proposals. He therefore considered that the working group should begin its work after the fiftieth session; it should be formal and have summary records, so that States which were not members of the Council could be informed of its debates.

28. Mr. ORČIĆ (Yugoslavia) recalled that a year earlier his delegation, together with the Indian delegation, had informally circulated a working paper stating that the Economic and Social Council should play a more effective role in its review of the over-all economic and social situation, in identifying the major lags and constraints in the field of development and in recommending ways and means for their removal, as well as indicating new policy directions in a dynamic context. The forum of the Council should be used for inducing Governments to exercise their political will for resolving major issues in the field of economic and social development and thus providing new impetus to the development process. The prestige, status and effectiveness of the Council would depend on the way in which it discharged that function. Any proposal for the improvement of the Council's method of work should be considered. The main aim of the discussions should be the adaptation of the Council to present needs. No comprehensive study on the matter was available at present, and document E/L.1369 did not provide an adequate basis for further discussion. The present series of organizational meetings should be used for further serious preliminary discussions. All Member States should be able to offer suggestions on measures to improve the organization of the Council's work.

*The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.*