



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Wednesday, 28 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.1-4, E/L.1382)

1. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that the difficulties which the Council had been facing for many years were due mainly to the considerable growth of the economic activities of the United Nations system caused by the accession to independence of many territories and by increasing awareness of the problem of under-development as it affected a large part of mankind. The changes which those developments necessitated had been opposed by the industrialized countries, as could be seen from their initial unwillingness to agree to the convening of a conference on trade and development. At the same time the developing countries, in their impatience, had tended to by-pass the conservative stronghold which the Council constituted in their eyes. The result had been a progressive weakening of the Council and a proliferation of new organs detrimental to the efficiency of the Organization as a whole.

2. The problem of the need to improve the methods and organization of the Council was still unsolved because of the mutual distrust of the industrialized and developing countries. He could not agree with the representative of Brazil (see 1738th meeting) that the efforts to revive the Council were largely designed to counter the natural preference of developing countries for larger and more politically oriented organs in which their demands were more likely to be met. His own delegations's desire to give new life to the Council arose from a deep conviction that the General Assembly might be weakened if its work was not carefully prepared by an organ which had the Assembly's confidence and enjoyed the necessary prestige among the agencies of the United Nations system.

3. If the Council was to regain its rightful place, it was essential to overcome the mistrust with which the proposals of the different groups were still being received. Only then could the Council agree on practical measures which would enable it to be the focal point for the formulation and harmonization of policies designed to accelerate the economic and social progress of the third world.

4. It was unfair to say that the Council had done nothing for the developing countries. After establishing the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance and the Special Fund it had merged them in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It had established the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic and Social

Office at Beirut. It had encouraged the activities of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and had contributed to the launching of the Second United Nations Development Decade. Lastly, it had authorized the Secretary-General to convene high-level expert groups such as the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development. The difficulty lay in the fact that the Council tended to lose control of the machinery which it set up to deal with problems as they arose and found itself reduced to holding academic debates on the reports of its subsidiary organs, as in the case, most notably, of UNDP and UNICEF. The autonomy of UNCTAD and UNIDO had accelerated that process. In his view, the remedy did not lie in expanding the membership of the Council, which would involve the delicate task of amending the Charter. The role of the Council, which was fundamentally of a political nature, consisted in identifying the main economic and social problems facing the international community at meetings attended, preferably, by ministers or other high-ranking officials, and recommending to the Governments concerned and the organs of the United Nations the policies to be pursued. Hence the revival of the Council depended on the political will of its members to co-operate in all the tasks entrusted to it. He did not agree with the representative of Brazil that the desired political will would be created by increasing the number of participants, but he fully concurred in the view that the main obstacle which the Council faced was the conflict between the interests of the industrialized world and those of the less developed countries. That obstacle would be overcome more easily if the economic and social policy-makers met regularly in the Council in order to give the necessary impetus to the competent organs of the United Nations. Such meetings would be particularly useful in connexion with the appraisal of the Second Development Decade.

5. The Council had not been as successful as had been hoped in co-ordinating the activities of the specialized agencies and the principal organs of the United Nations. In the case of the Second Development Decade, for example, it did not have the authority to force the organizations of the United Nations system to adopt the complementary measures required for the success of the programmes undertaken. The developed countries attributed the Council's impotence to increases in the budget and bad organization, while the developing countries put the blame on budgetary restrictions, but no attempt had been made to agree on priorities. With the assistance of the subsidiary bodies, and of CPC in particular, the Council should be able to identify areas warranting priority and recommend increases in resources for the most useful activities while calling for reductions in the resources devoted to secondary activities. If the Council could establish priorities and impose on the specialized agencies the discipline required for the execution of joint programmes it would recover the

* Resumed from the 1739th meeting.

prestige without which its co-ordinating function would degenerate into a mere administrative exercise. His delegation was not categorically opposed to a reasonable increase in the budget, but considered that when proposals for the adoption or expansion of programmes were being studied thought should be given to the possibility of reducing less important activities. With regard to the Second Development Decade, France would approve the establishment of more substantial administrative support provided the developing countries acknowledged that the success of the Decade would largely depend on a reduction in the secondary programmes of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade (General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV)).

6. Thus, the two basic elements of reform were the holding of frequent high-level meetings in order to enhance the authority of the recommendations submitted to the General Assembly and the fixing of priorities as a means of providing more dynamic guidance for the activities of the United Nations and its specialized agencies. As his Government had stated in its memorandum (see E/4986/Add.3), a distinction could then be made between the organization of work and reorganization of the Council's structures. His delegation agreed with the President of the forty-ninth session of the Council that members should not underestimate the value of practical steps relating to the organization of meetings, the preparation of documents, the periodicity of sessions and the staggering of certain items. The Council might take useful decisions on those matters.

7. With regard to structural reform, it would be pointless at the present time to enlarge the Council itself. At the technical level, however, more States might profitably be involved in the preparation of certain items if the committees reporting to the Council were enlarged. Similarly, the membership of CPC might be increased to twenty-seven. With regard to the application of science and technology to development, an intergovernmental organ should be established which could do the preparatory work that the Council was not able to undertake. Such committees or commissions should have the benefit of the preliminary views of groups of experts such as the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development.

8. His delegation was prepared to co-operate fully in the work of the Council or in any working group. The success of any reforms adopted would depend largely on the spirit in which they were applied. If the Council was to play a vital role within the United Nations and serve the interests of the third world, it was essential that members should at all times show the political will to promote the economic and social development of the developing countries.

9. Mr. LOUYA (Democratic Republic of the Congo) said that despite the reforms introduced since 1965, the Council was not yet in a position to discharge effectively the tasks assigned to it by the Charter. Serious problems, for which the Council was not entirely responsible, continued to exist in the fields of co-ordination and development. The Council's defects were mainly due to the establishment of a great number of organs over the past twenty years, the multiplicity of their tasks and the absence of any effective

machinery for the integration and collective appraisal of their activities.

10. The results achieved by the United Nations in the economic and social fields were followed closely throughout the world. It was clear that the effectiveness of the United Nations system in promoting development was largely dependent on the efficiency of the Economic and Social Council which formulated the relevant policy guidelines. His delegation therefore supported the proposal of the New Zealand representative (1739th meeting) to establish a working group which would consider in depth the item under discussion, analyse the views submitted by Governments and thus help to identify the reforms which were needed, particularly with regard to improvements in co-ordination.

11. His delegation had no objection in principle to the draft resolution submitted by the Soviet Union (E/L.1382), but it did not think that the Council should take a decision on it at the current session since, before taking such a step, it should await the recommendations and proposals of the working group.

12. Mr. ODERO-JOWI (Kenya) said that, like other developing countries, Kenya had a vital stake in the work of the Council. It felt that, in consonance with the spirit of the Charter, the work of the Council should be viewed in the light of the demands made upon it by the millions of human beings who still lacked the basic requisites of economic and social development. It should be related to the challenge laid down in the International Development Strategy adopted by the General Assembly, and measures to improve the organization of the Council's work should be undertaken from that standpoint alone.

13. If the goals of the Development Decade were to be achieved, the Council could not confine itself to forwarding documents produced by the Secretariat to the General Assembly without specific policy directives and recommendations for implementation. It could not disregard its primary role as a policy-making body in the field of economic and social development and it should demonstrate its dynamism by taking initiatives in that field. In order to play its role as the main intergovernmental co-ordinating body on policy matters as defined in Chapter X of the Charter it should establish priorities and evolve the appropriate policy measures for their implementation. It should not waste time on detailed discussion of the numerous reports from the specialized agencies, and it should make sure that overlapping was avoided.

14. If the Council was to be able to wield full authority and gain the necessary support of Governments, its working documents should be issued at least six weeks before the opening of its sessions. His delegation would be in favour of a system which would ensure that documents were forwarded to members sufficiently early so that the discussion of items would not have to be postponed because delegations had not had time to read them. In addition, documents should spell out clearly the action required and its financial implications so that the Council could consider it realistically.

15. The Council could fulfil its basic mission only if it served all countries, developed and developing. His delega-

tion supported the suggestions for increasing the Council's membership, in the belief that to do so would strengthen it and give greater authority to its decisions.

16. The PRESIDENT urged members intending to submit draft resolutions to do so as soon as possible so that a working group composed of the sponsors of such drafts could be set up with a view to reaching a consensus during the session. In addition, the Secretariat should prepare a reference paper containing an analysis of the main ideas and suggestions put forward for consideration by the Council during the third week of the session.

17. Mr. OSMAN (Sudan) supported the President's suggestions but wished to point out that the Secretariat had a vital role to play in improving the work of the Council. He would welcome a position statement by the Secretariat.

18. Mr. DE SEYNES (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that he had been unable to listen to earlier statements in the Council's debate because he had been required to attend ACC.

19. The question of the composition of the Council was closely linked with a more vital problem: the political balance within United Nations organs. Some delegations were of the opinion that a membership of twenty-seven was not the optimum number for the Council because it did not provide the most dynamic balance. In that connexion, it should be remembered that the Council was functioning in a state of osmosis with the General Assembly and the equilibrium which was being sustained was highly satisfactory and dynamic. He could recall no instance of the Council taking a position substantially different from that subsequently taken by the Assembly, either before or after the membership had been raised to twenty-seven; the Council had always recognized that it could function effectively only if it reflected the position of the General Assembly.

20. He had been surprised that the representative of France, in speaking of the past role of the Council, had not referred to the Council's decision leading to the establishment of UNCTAD. The resolution, if he remembered correctly, had been elaborated by the Council at its thirty-fourth session in 1962 and had been adopted by the General Assembly at its sixteenth session. The Council had at that time been composed of only eighteen members.

21. One inherent source of weakness for the Economic and Social Council was to be found in the nature of the functions which were now ascribed to it or advocated for it. The functions which were within the classical traditions of multilateral diplomacy, those relating to trade, international payments and capital transfers, as well as the supervision of programmes of practical action, were now exercised elsewhere either *de jure* or *de facto*. UNCTAD had within its jurisdiction the negotiation of concrete agreement on trade and finance, and the Economic and Social Council had, for all practical purposes, abdicated its responsibility to control the United Nations Development Programme. It was quite revealing that the thorough reform of the programme, on the basis of the Jackson Report,¹

had not been undertaken by the Economic and Social Council in spite of the impact which UNDP activities had on the whole of the United Nations system. That was both a symptom and a cause of the weakness of the Council. The situation had therefore been reached where the operationally significant functions were vested *de jure* or *de facto* in other organs.

22. It remained for the Council to discharge functions which were vital but rather vague and ill-defined and which under any set of circumstances would be extremely difficult to perform: (a) the formulation of general policies; (b) the co-ordination of programmes of the United Nations system; and (c) the control of the programme of work of the United Nations proper. In performing (a) the Council always ran the risk of confining itself to generalities without much impact; (b) was extremely difficult as the Council had neither juridical authority over the programmes of the agencies nor the power of the purse to influence them; (c) was handicapped by a method of programme and budget which did not permit the effective relation of one to the other.

23. Nevertheless, the Economic and Social Council had a unique chance to overcome those handicaps if it was given the principal responsibility, under the General Assembly, for the delicate functions relating to the Second Development Decade. It seemed that the Council was the proper place for that as the General Assembly was too large for an exercise which had many technical aspects and as the Strategy represented a synthesis of numerous elements which were dealt with in different agencies directly related to the Council. The Economic and Social Council was the natural focal point for ensuring the coherence of the Strategy, in view of its institutional relationship with all the various agencies or organizations of the system. If the chance was missed, then it was probable that the Council would persist in its dynamic insufficiency for years to come, even if its membership was increased.

24. More difficult tasks even than the Development Strategy would confront the United Nations system during the 1970s, which also because of their multi-disciplinary nature should be vested in the Economic and Social Council, under the General Assembly. Those were the subject matters arising from the development of technology which would require the co-ordination of numerous elements and a measure of planning and forecasting, for which the Council would also appear to be the natural focal point under the authority of the General Assembly. When dealing with such matters, including environment, the same degree of convergence of interests between groups of countries as postulated for the Development Strategy might not be found. Priorities might have to be defined and arbitrations exercised in cases of conflicts of interests. There was in certain quarters a resistance to dealing with those problems within the United Nations system, but it should be realized that if they were not dealt with within the United Nations system, they would be dealt with elsewhere without the concurrence, support and influence of a large part of humanity which could be affected by the decisions made. In respect of those new subjects, involving action with a real operational significance, a strong Economic and Social Council would appear to be a great asset.

¹ A Study of the Capacity of the United Nations Development System (United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.70.I.10).

25. The role of the Secretariat in respect of the present functions of the Economic and Social Council was essentially that of providing the Council with the information and analysis which it needed to discharge its responsibilities. It was quite possible that the role was not adequately exercised, and that the Council required a different type of document in order to pass judgement in fields increasingly complex. The matter should be the subject of careful scrutiny and of a dialogue between the Governments and the Secretariat. The objective here was to provide the Economic and Social Council with the material which it needed to formulate a global judgement on problems, some of which had a planetary character. Studies and reports, of course, should retain their professional rigour, but they might be presented in a way which would be more useful to decision-makers in the Governments.

26. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) said that he agreed with the French representative and the Under-Secretary-General that the Council's problem lay in its inability to control the activities of the organs established under its auspices. Nevertheless, it must face up to its important task of co-ordinating the work of those bodies with that of the specialized agencies. The Council was at a disadvantage in that the range of its concerns was very broad, and it was clearly difficult for the Secretariat to produce good documentation defining the essence of each problem. In addition, there were the questions of political balance and the need to satisfy as many Governments as possible. It was true that the developing countries had never responded to the Council as they had to UNCTAD, despite the fact that, as the French representative had pointed out, the Council had done much for them in the past and that it had launched the initiative by which UNCTAD had been established. His delegation did not oppose the idea of enlarging the membership of the Council, even though that might require an amendment to the Charter, but it would prefer to see an expansion of the Economic Committee. If that were agreed to, it would be necessary to appoint experts to enable the Secretariat to facilitate the Committee's work.

27. The Council appeared to be agreed that a working group, in which non-members of the Council could participate, should do some preparatory work on the item under discussion. It would, however, in his opinion, need to have before it an analytical summary of the views expressed in the Council, prepared by the Secretariat. He wondered whether the working group would be authorized to discuss the USSR delegation's resolution and any others that might be submitted.

28. The PRESIDENT suggested that it would be advisable for the group to be a formal working group and thus to have the full range of conference services. It might consist of or include the sponsors of draft resolutions.

29. Mr. VIAUD (France) said that, when he had spoken of the past history of the Council, he had hesitated to credit the latter with setting up UNCTAD because it had dragged its feet for two or three years before taking any decision on that matter and, by so doing, had failed to measure up to the expectations of the developing countries.

30. He agreed with the President that the working group should be formal. The Soviet Union should be commended

for submitting a draft resolution (E/L.1382), even though it perhaps did not cover all the views expressed in the debate, and other delegations should be encouraged to submit draft resolutions as a basis for discussion. It would be advisable to wait until such draft resolutions were handed to the Secretariat before the working group was established. If the procedure he was suggesting found favour, a decision would have to be taken on the items to be covered by the draft resolutions. In any event, the sponsors should take into account the views expressed in the debate and endeavour to produce texts acceptable to the Council as a whole if anything was to be achieved at the current session.

31. Mr. SCOTT (New Zealand) said that the Secretary-General's views on measures to improve the organization of the Council's work would be most welcome. A wealth of material on the subject already existed and he agreed with the suggestion that material of an unofficial nature should also be considered. He was confident that the Secretariat would be able to identify some areas on which the Council could reach a consensus and he hoped that it could produce material in time for consideration by a working group. He agreed with the representatives of France and Greece that a working group should do the spade-work, leaving the Council to make the final pronouncements. It was essential for the Council to achieve progress on certain procedural and technical matters in which reform was long overdue. The working group need not await the submission of additional draft resolutions provided it had a summary of suggestions on the short-term measures contemplated. With regard to the Soviet Union's draft resolution, he was of the opinion that it should be deferred until the following session on the grounds that it did not reflect the widespread feeling among members that the Council should take early action. He wondered whether the President would designate the members of the working group and whether it would be open to non-members of the Council. He hoped that the working group could meet as soon as the Secretariat had compiled a basic working document. A time-limit should be set so that the Council could take a decision on its recommendations during the latter part of the session.

32. Mr. OSMAN (Sudan) supported the proposal for the establishment of a working group, which he felt should begin its deliberations the following week on the basis of a working paper prepared by the Secretariat. He was doubtful whether the working group would be able to submit to the Council at its present session a draft resolution containing specific recommendations, but it might be able to reach a consensus on some particular points. He suggested that the President or the working group should contact the Chairman of the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly to ascertain what views had been expressed in that Committee and whether they might be helpful to the Council in its own work.

33. The PRESIDENT said that he would act on the Sudanese representative's suggestion, for the two bodies in question would inevitably have an interest in each other's work.

34. He invited the members of the Council to express their views on the advisability of requesting the Secretariat to prepare an analytical summary of the views and proposals

made and on the desirability of establishing a working group.

35. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he could see no reason for haste in the establishment of a working group, which would, he felt, only tie the Council's hands and to some extent circumvent it. The working group would be too small and technical a body to deal with the great bulk of material already available on the subject: the conclusions to which the President of the forty-ninth session of the Council had come after his unofficial consultations in December 1970, the Council's discussion of the subject in January 1971, the replies of Governments (E/4986 and Add.1-4), and the exchange of views at the present session. In addition, there was his delegation's draft resolution (E/L.1382), which was concerned only with some first steps which could be taken on specific aspects of the Council's work. Other draft resolutions might also be submitted. Thus the Council had both the time and the material it needed to take a decision on the matter itself.

36. He supported the proposal to request the Secretariat to prepare an analysis of the proposals made but hoped that the Secretary-General, as head of one of the principal organs of the United Nations, would also express his views on the subject and make any recommendations he felt appropriate. If the Secretary-General was unable to submit such a document during the current session, his delegation would agree to postpone consideration of the matter to the next session.

37. Mr. ANTOINE (Haiti) also felt that the Council should be in no hurry to establish a working group at its current session, since only a few Governments had replied to the Secretary-General's request for their views. He would endorse a request to the Secretariat to prepare an analytical summary, but felt that the Secretariat might be in a better position to express its view on the subject at the next session. Accordingly, he felt that consideration of the matter should be postponed to that session and, in the meantime, the Secretariat could co-ordinate all the views expressed by Governments in a single document on the basis of which the Council could adopt a draft resolution containing its final decision.

38. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) agreed with the representatives of the USSR and Haiti that the Council might indeed dispense with the establishment of a working group, which would be an exceptional procedure, and leave time to ascertain for itself the views of more non-members, particularly in the form of statements by their observers in the Council.

39. He would suggest that delegations contemplating the submission of draft resolutions should confine them to immediate problems.

40. Mr. JAIN (Observer for India), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that his delegation favoured the establishment of a working group because the group could consider all the proposals made and crystallize the points on which consensus might conceivably be reached during the current session, and because it would obviate the necessity for lengthy discussions. His delegation, which took a keen interest in the subject and had already

submitted some suggestions on it, would like to become a member of the working group. He also supported the proposed request to the Secretariat.

41. Mr. TARDOS (Hungary) doubted whether any consensus could be reached until the views of all other members and non-members had been heard; only then could the points of possible agreement emerge. Instead of establishing a working group, the members of the Council might simply hold informal consultations.

42. Mr. FINGER (United States of America) saw no reason for delaying the establishment of a working group. In such a body statements were briefer, work progressed more quickly and non-members could take part. If the Council had to wait for the written views of all other members—or even a majority of them—before it could set up the working group, it might find itself waiting indefinitely. It was rare for more than a fraction of Governments to reply in such instances. Any action it took at the current session would in no sense be definitive and would be subject to continuing review. He could see no reason why the working group should not discuss, *inter alia*, the USSR draft resolution, which tied in well with the work of the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly and proposed a logical distribution of work between the Council and the Assembly, in accordance with Chapters IX and X of the Charter. He doubted, however, whether there was a necessary pre-condition for the submission of other draft resolutions. He therefore suggested that the President should consult the members to ascertain whether there was agreement on the objectives and composition of the working group. The preparation of a working document by the Secretariat would be very helpful.

43. Mr. HEDEMANN (Norway) supported both the early establishment of a working group and the preparation of an analytical summary by the Secretariat.

44. Mr. AKWEI (Ghana) supported the proposal to request the Secretariat to prepare an analytical summary of the proposals made and the proposal to establish a working group, which could even be a committee of the whole and should be open to all Members of the United Nations. He could see no need to lay down any specific terms of reference for it. Clearly, the working group would never receive all the views of all Member States; it should merely be asked to take account of any views submitted at any time. Proposals need not be submitted in the form of a draft resolution, nor need the working group submit a draft resolution as the final result of its work, particularly one in the form of a draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly, as many matters could be decided by the Council on its own authority. The working group should study but not necessarily decide on the USSR draft resolution at the present session.

45. Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil) said that the Council had now reverted to the point it had reached at its forty-ninth session in July 1970. Enough informal consultations had been held; it was time for the Council itself to deal with the question. There was no reason why it could not do so: it had the time, the text of the replies by

Governments and the summary records of its meetings. Instead of establishing a working group it should now go beyond the stage of expression of views and, at the end of its current session, decide at least certain minor matters, such as the calendar of meetings and documentation. He was in favour of asking the Secretariat for an analytical summary, which Governments should study, together with the replies of other Governments; they should then come to the next session prepared to take decisions on major points.

46. Mr. SPENCER (Observer for Canada), speaking at the invitation of the President, indicated that the views of his

delegation coincided with those expressed by the Observer for India.

47. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should postpone a decision on the question of the working group for the time being and should decide to request the Secretariat to prepare an analytical summary of the comments made on the item under discussion.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.5 p.m.