



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Friday, 7 May 1971,
at 10.50 a.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. Rachid DRISS (Tunisia).

AGENDA ITEM 11

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

1. Mr. ODERO-JOWI (Kenya) observed that it was universally recognized that science and technology exercised a profound influence both on the tempo of economic development and on the content and quality of social change.

2. In agriculture, for instance, science and technology could be utilized to increase productivity and to effect savings through the use of simpler and less costly techniques. Industrial development was even more dependent on scientific techniques because increased productivity and cost reduction were closely related to their use. A faster pace of industrialization, due in particular to cost reduction, fostered the expansion of public enterprise and helped to raise the standard of living.

3. The application of science and technology to transport, which was a major factor in economic and social development, made it possible, as in the case of manufacturing industries, to save on labour and capital and thus to stimulate economic development and overcome poverty and underdevelopment.

4. Moreover, it was now possible to make greater use of natural resources, and the developing countries, in particular, must develop their capacity to do so. The mining of some mineral resources could now be contemplated because of the spectacular progress achieved. Similarly, the development of hydrology was already benefiting and would continue to benefit agriculture, a process which would help to improve the living conditions of millions of men and women in many developing countries. Furthermore, advances in medical science, which had led to the eradication of a number of diseases previously regarded as incurable, had an important bearing on economic development.

5. The recent advent of the computer and the revolutionary progress made in communications had profoundly affected virtually all areas of endeavour. The United Nations had already recognized not only the need for improving and co-ordinating its activities in science and technology, but also the desirability of establishing inter-governmental machinery for that purpose. His delegation believed that the time had come for the Council to decide what type of institutional arrangement could best help the

countries concerned to derive greater benefits from scientific and technological progress. It favoured the establishment of a standing committee of the General Assembly, whose terms of reference should be clearly defined and whose reports should be channelled to the General Assembly through the Economic and Social Council. The Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development should be retained in order to give the new committee technical backing. The terms of reference of the committee should include assistance to the developing countries in formulating policies in the field of science and technology in the light of their level of industrial, social, scientific and technological development and of the relationships which existed or were envisaged with their neighbours and with other countries. In view of the particular interest which the developing countries took in the application of science and technology to development, the new committee should, if it was to be successful, take due account of local social and cultural conditions. The problems of adapting equipment, in particular, must be given very careful consideration. Changes should not only be made in size or scale but should be adapted to local conditions, the needs of the probable users and even the market. That did not mean supplying second-rate tools, but the creation of new and better equipment and the improvement of what already existed.

6. The proper co-ordination of the planning and implementation of a national policy for science and technology was a very difficult task which the States concerned might perhaps consider entrusting to a national body specifically created for that purpose; that body would have to determine what national activities could be undertaken with local resources and what activities were contingent on imported technology. The body might also have to establish an information centre on the most recent scientific and technological developments. The question of its relationship to other bodies, particularly the specialized agencies, universities, research organizations, etc., should also be decided. The important thing was that the nature of such relationships should be made very explicit and practical.

7. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the suggestions he made would be taken into account when the Council discussed the terms of reference of the proposed intergovernmental machinery. Some operational relationship would have to exist between research and training institutes, universities, private research and development organizations, government research agencies and the organizations of the United Nations system. Other considerations, such as the type of education best suited to the policy adopted in the field of science and technology, should also be taken into account. In that respect, the United Nations system could provide effective help to the developing countries. The work currently being done by UNESCO and the Office for Science and Technology was to

be commended. The task of formulating and implementing a policy for science and technology and of co-ordinating and integrating it in national development plans was of course a very difficult one, but the challenge had to be faced and overcome if the countries concerned were to survive in the technological era.

8. Mr. VIAUD (France) noted that the item on institutional arrangements for science and technology had been on the Council's agenda for almost three years. It was based on Council resolution 1454 (XLVII) of 8 August 1969 and was still very relevant to the debate because it contained two main points that should be kept in mind. First of all, the Council, in that resolution, recognized the need for the establishment of an intergovernmental machinery in the field of the application of science and technology to development, and considered that the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was competent to take any action, including appropriate institutional arrangements within its framework, in connexion with those aspects of the transfer of operative technology that fell within its jurisdiction. Furthermore, in that resolution the Council had also decided to extend the term of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development until the end of 1971 and to enlarge the membership of the Committee from 18 to 24. Later, in its resolution 1544 (XLIV) of 30 July 1970, the Council had reiterated that there was a need for the reinforcement and co-ordination of activities in the field in question, but recognized that so far no consensus or majority opinion had emerged on how best to meet the need for such reinforcement and co-ordination. Those facts explained why the Council found itself in the present situation. Nevertheless, some progress had been made: UNCTAD had decided to set up an intergovernmental group on the transfer of technology, which would hold its first session in June 1971. Moreover, the increase in the membership of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development from 18 to 24 was a step forward; the Committee could therefore base its work on a broader range of ideas and scientific and technical knowledge and would undoubtedly become more dynamic. The work of the Committee on Peaceful Uses of the Sea-bed and the Ocean Floor beyond the Limits of National Jurisdiction and the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was beyond the Council's purview as they did not report to the Council. The time had come for the Council to shake itself free of the inertia which had blocked action on that question for almost two years.

9. With reference to the comments of the representative of Pakistan (1752nd meeting), who considered that a sessional committee of the Council would only be acceptable if its membership was enlarged, he felt that, although the premise of the argument was logical, namely that it would make sense to establish an enlarged body, there was a surprising element of sophistry in the conclusion that the body in question should not report to the Council on the ground that the Council was not sufficiently representative. He expressed surprise that under one agenda item some members were advocating that the role of the Council should be strengthened while under another, they were recommending that it should be stripped of some of its functions. The need to find a logical formula within the

framework of the Council's functions under the Charter was obvious.

10. His delegation believed that in the first instance it was important to avoid taking a decision that, even indirectly, would cast doubt upon the Council's competence with regard to the application of science and technology to development, in which it had co-ordinating functions that no one could reasonably challenge. Secondly, scientific and technological questions should be thoroughly examined in the Council, and that was not possible at present because there was no body competent to do so. None of the existing solutions were satisfactory. If, as a result of a lack of the appropriate institutional machinery, problems that the Council should deal with were referred to the Economic Committee, the latter would be unable to carry out its responsibilities and would be even less effective than it was at present.

11. The establishment of a sessional committee of the Council would compensate for those drawbacks. It was true that the interest shown by a number of countries in the application of science and technology to development might justify the establishment of a body with a larger membership than that of the Council. Moreover, a strengthened membership in numerical and qualitative terms would also be advantageous considering the diversity and scope of the problems to be dealt with. His Government would be quite willing to examine the possibility of making institutional arrangements for adding other members to the 27 members of the Council as a concession to those who argued that broader representation was the best guarantee of a body's efficiency. The main thing would be that the new body should report to the Council so that the Council could compare its report with those of other bodies (UNIDO, UNCTAD, the specialized agencies) and submit to the General Assembly proposals that could be discussed by the Assembly with full knowledge of the facts.

12. His delegation was of the opinion that the establishment of a General Assembly committee under Article 22 of the Charter would be a poor solution because it would have the effect of weakening the Council's role. Nor would it be a good solution for the General Assembly itself, because the latter would not have a body capable of passing judgement on specialized activities. It was clear that the decisions and recommendations addressed to Member States in the field of scientific and technical co-operation should come from the General Assembly itself, but it was still necessary for its decisions to be guided and prepared by a specialized body. The purpose in such a delegation of authority was precisely to enable the General Assembly to go straight to the most important problems.

13. Notwithstanding the various difficulties, his delegation was confident that the Council could reach a decision and establish a body with terms of reference sufficiently precise to enable it to fulfil the desired objective.

14. Mr. SELMECI (Hungary) said that the importance of the question before the Council had been repeatedly emphasized by a number of United Nations bodies and affirmed in a number of resolutions. The fact that the question of the institutional arrangements for science and technology had been on the Council's agenda since its

forty-sixth session was an indication of its controversial nature. Perhaps the time was not ripe for a decision on the question. Perhaps, too, it should be considered at the same time as the item dealing with measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council.

15. Thus far, members appeared to agree on only one aspect of the problem: that the proposed institutional machinery should be an intergovernmental body. Although none of the proposals before the Council was fully satisfactory to his delegation, the proposal made by the USSR representative at the 1752nd meeting to establish a sessional committee of the Economic and Social Council had the fewest drawbacks. The fact was that under the Charter, the Council had responsibility for co-ordination in the economic and social fields, and matters relating to science and technology were closely related to those fields. It was, of course, the General Assembly that decided the over-all objectives and policies to be followed by all members of the United Nations system, and the body to be set up would naturally comply with the Assembly's guidelines. However, it would report to the Economic and Social Council.

16. Mr. SPENCER (Observer for Canada), speaking under rule 75 of the rules of procedure, said that although he had no specific recommendations with regard to the nature of any body, he wished to make a few comments.

17. Unlike agriculture or industry, for example, science and technology was not a separate sector of development and all United Nations organizations were inevitably concerned with some aspects of the question. Secondly, the technological revolution that was now taking place was basic to global development, particularly in the developing countries. Thirdly, accelerating developments in science and technology were changing the very structure of society with accelerating effects, including in the field of human rights. For those reasons, therefore, the Economic and Social Council, whose principal responsibilities were co-ordination, economic and social development, forward planning and human rights questions, was the organ best qualified to deal with problems of science and technology, as they arose in the context of the United Nations.

18. Any decision that might be taken on the establishment of a body to deal with science and technology should take into account current discussion not only of the measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council but also of the preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. It should be borne in mind, however, that although questions of the environment were related to, they should not be equated with, questions of science and technology.

19. Any institutional arrangements to be devised should be linked to the Economic and Social Council and not the General Assembly. In the first place, the issues to be faced by the Committee fell completely within the terms of reference of the Council. Then, the advocates of a standing committee of the General Assembly had stressed that the new body should have broad terms of reference; if so, they would encroach upon those of the committees dealing with the sea-bed and outer space. Moreover, the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology

to Development had recommended that the Council should create an intergovernmental committee on science and technology; the Advisory Committee was a subsidiary body of the Council and it would therefore be much simpler if the proposed committee were also a Council committee, which would make working relations between the two bodies easier. In any event, the future role of the Advisory Committee should be considered carefully.

20. Another argument advanced in favour of a General Assembly committee was that it could have more members than the Economic and Social Council. However, there was no reason why a sessional or intersessional committee of the Council with more than 27 members could not be set up. There were precedents in both cases. Finally, the question of the non-representational nature of the Council was exercising many Governments, but that question was being considered in connexion with measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council, and the Council should not be by-passed through assuming in advance that the exercise would fail.

21. Mr. YOGASUNDRAM (Ceylon) said that, since the members of the Council seemed to be in general agreement on the need for new machinery to deal with questions relating to science and technology, there was no reason to defer a decision on that subject. Although his delegation had no firm preference between a General Assembly committee or a Council committee, it would tend to favour the latter solution. In that regard, it should be pointed out that the question could not be divorced from the question of measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council. Whatever happened, the establishment of a new body should not be used as a pretext for dissolving the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development or excessively weakening its terms of reference.

22. Mr. KITCHEN (United States of America) said that the Council was duty-bound to organize itself so that it could help all mankind to benefit from the advantages of science and technology. There was still a great divergence in the views of members of the Council. Some felt that UNCTAD's role should be enhanced, others thought that a standing committee of the General Assembly should be set up, and still others, including his delegation, favoured the establishment of a sessional committee of the Economic and Social Council. There was no denying the competence of UNCTAD or the important role played by the specialized agencies. The point, however, was to equip the Council itself to assume the tasks entrusted to it under the Charter. He agreed with the Brazilian representative that some questions relating to science and technology were inextricably linked with political considerations falling within the competence of the General Assembly. His delegation was therefore proposing a solution in which it had tried to take account of all those considerations.

23. His delegation proposed the establishment of a standing committee on science and technology, subordinate to the Council and composed of prominent Government representatives experienced in the subject of science and technology, who could number more than 27. The committee would meet once a year and consider a broad range of questions. It would be assisted by panels of experts who

would advise it on questions within their specialties. The committee members would be selected in their personal capacity on the basis of their qualifications and in such a way as to take account of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. That arrangement would make available the specialized talent, and the intergovernmental nature of the standing committee would ensure the support of Governments.

24. In a background paper it had distributed to members of the Council, his delegation had described alternatives to that proposal, in the hope of initiating an interesting and dynamic exchange of views.

25. Mr. SKATARETIKO (Yugoslavia) recalled that the Council had already given detailed consideration, during its forty-seventh and forty-ninth sessions, to the question of future institutional arrangements for science and technology. The discussion had been based on reports such as the one in document E/4845 and on proposals of intergovernmental organizations and expert bodies, such as the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development. The members of the Council had also had the opportunity to examine the issue in the light of a possible reorganization of the General Assembly or strengthening of the role of the Council in the economic and social fields. Various speakers had proposed the establishment of a committee which would be a sessional, intersessional or standing committee of the Council or the General Assembly. Their arguments were based on the opinions of experts or political viewpoints which varied according to the country or group of countries concerned. However, everyone recognized the importance of the role of science and technology in development. The problem was not whether to establish machinery or what type of machinery to establish, but what would be its purpose—in other words, what services it would render to the world community, especially the developing countries. Although considerable attention had been given to that problem, no answers had yet been found to the basic questions concerning the terms of reference, membership and level of the organ, its relationship with the advisory bodies in the field of science and technology, the specialized agencies and other intergovernmental bodies in that field, its method of work and reporting procedure or its staffing.

26. If the Council wished to take a definite decision quickly, it should establish an *ad hoc* working group consisting of 15 to 25 representatives of States Members of the United Nations. Such an intergovernmental working group would immediately begin to prepare detailed recommendations on the establishment of an intergovernmental body and its terms of reference, so that it would be able to report to the Council at its fifty-first session on the progress made. The Council would then be able to take action-oriented decisions at its fifty-first session. His delegation appealed to representatives to make an effort to work in a constructive manner and set aside particular national interests.

27. Mr. MOBARAK (Lebanon) stressed the importance that most delegations had always attached to the question under consideration. Apparently, many of them favoured the creation of an intergovernmental body. That body could be given the task of over-all co-ordination. Although

sectoral tasks fell within the competence of the specialized agencies, over-all co-ordination was necessary so that account would be taken of the role of science and technology in all sectors of economic development and of their influence on the growth of national income. Each country should carefully study the range of options available to it in the application of science and technology to development. It would seem important to establish an intergovernmental body which could deal with the problems not being studied by the specialized agencies or the other specialized bodies of the United Nations. In resolution 1454 (XLVII), the Council had already recognized the need for the reinforcement and co-ordination of present and contemplated activities, including the desirability of the establishment of an intergovernmental machinery in the field of the application of science and technology to development. It should therefore take a decision as soon as possible on that question and define in detail the terms of reference, membership and reporting procedure of the body to be established.

28. Mr. SUMANTERA (Indonesia) said that his delegation attached great importance to science and technology and to the human aspects of the problem. It reaffirmed that it was in favour of the establishment of an intergovernmental committee which would be a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly.

29. Mr. DE AZEVEDO BRITO (Brazil) said he was glad that the French delegation had recognized the General Assembly's competence to take decisions of principle in matters of economic and social development. Similarly, in connexion with measures to improve the organization of the work of the Council, the United Kingdom representative had recognized that it was for the General Assembly to take policy decisions. The representative of France, however, had said that questions relating to science and technology should not be assigned to the Economic Committee or the Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council. In that case, it would be necessary to create sessional committees not only to deal with questions relating to science and technology, but also in the field of human rights or in other fields, such as transport and population; that would lead to a proliferation of sessional committees.

30. His delegation would like to know when the question would be considered in substance so that experts could be made available in good time. It was in favour of the creation of an intergovernmental committee which would be a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and which would submit its reports to the Assembly through the Council; the latter could then take decisions on questions within its competence. The Council should without delay recommend to the General Assembly the creation of such a standing committee of the Assembly. After the Assembly had taken a decision, the Council, at its resumed fifty-first session, could consider the question of revising the terms of reference of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development. His delegation had no fixed position regarding the terms of reference of the organ to be created. But it was essential that the Council should take a decision without delay.

31. Mr. GROS (France) noted the impatience shown by some delegations. It was important at the current stage to

point out that initially the intention had been to include the item on the agenda of the fifty-first session. Some Governments could accordingly consider that they needed a little more time to reflect on it. The representative of Brazil had just said that if the French delegation's reasoning was followed, sessional committees of the Council would also have to be created with competence in matters relating to human rights, transport, population, etc. The difference, however, lay in the fact that there were already intergovernmental functional commissions which dealt with those matters whereas there was none in the field of science and technology.

32. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) pointed out that now that it was at the beginning of the Second Development Decade the United Nations should face up to the challenge represented by the current technological revolution. The developing countries should without delay derive the maximum profit from technological advances with a view to accelerating their economic development. It might be that in the near future one of the main advantages offered by the United Nations would prove to be its capacity to create intergovernmental agencies or organs to promote international co-operation in that area. In view of the fact that science and technology altered even the data relating to time and space, Governments should face up to the problems which were outside their national jurisdiction, such as the environment or the exploitation of the sea-bed and ocean floor. It was not surprising that the United Nations was concerned to introduce order in those sectors, by ensuring that the advantages of technology were shared and distributed equitably. Although the Organization had developed a great deal since its creation, the purposes of the Charter still met the hopes of Member States in the economic, social and cultural fields. The scope of the Organization's activities had expanded because new technologies made improved international co-operation essential, but it had also been narrowed because of the limitations which impeded collective action by the United Nations for peace. Nowhere in the Charter could the words "science and technology" be found, yet the tasks which faced the Organization in that field, and which had not even been dreamed of at San Francisco, would perhaps in the future prove to be the most important.

33. It had been said that in order to settle the question under consideration, a new General Assembly committee on science, natural resources and the environment should be created to replace the Special Political Committee. The Secretary-General had even spoken of a "committee of the future".

34. The representative of France had quite appropriately pointed out that the question had been under consideration for a long time and his explanation concerning the statement by the representative of Pakistan could not fail to meet with approval. In fact, it was a contradiction to wish to improve the organization of the work of the Council and strengthen its authority while stating that the Council was not sufficiently representative. His own delegation did not believe that the Council was undergoing a crisis of confidence. Increasing the number of its members would not result in a strengthening of its authority. The Security Council was the political organ of the United Nations: it was not, however, because it had a limited membership that it was unable to solve the problems submitted to it. The same applied to the Economic and Social Council. The creation of a standing committee of the General Assembly would have a number of disadvantages. If all aspects of the various solutions were taken into account, it would perhaps be recognized that it was better to create a sessional committee of the Council, a committee with an expanded membership. Observers should play a greater role in such a committee than that currently provided for in rule 75 of the Council's rules of procedure. His delegation reserved the right to modify its position if a large majority came out in favour of solutions (a), (b) or (c) suggested in the report of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (see E/4989, para. 79). It was, in fact, important that a decision should be taken by a large majority.

35. The PRESIDENT, noting with interest that several members of the Council wished a decision to be taken by consensus or by a fairly large majority, invited delegations to formulate specific proposals.

36. He declared closed the list of speakers wishing to participate in the general debate on the item.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.