



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Fiftieth Session

OFFICIAL RECORDS

Thursday, 13 May 1971,
at 10.50 a.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.1-7, E/L.1382, E/(L)/CRP.1)

1. Mr. VINCI (Italy), noting that the question of reorganizing the procedures and working methods of the Economic and Social Council had been under consideration for a number of years, said that if no practical results had so far been achieved that was not because of lack of interest but rather because of the complex nature of the problem. However, the Council should not be discouraged, especially since it had taken certain procedural decisions which would enable it to consider more effectively the various suggestions that had been made. It was against that background that his delegation wished to make some observations on the question.

2. The Council should never lose sight of its ultimate objective, namely, the expansion of its prestige, powers and functions. That objective was in keeping not only with the responsibilities which the Charter specifically entrusted to the Council under the authority of the General Assembly but also with the evolution of contemporary society, which made it increasingly clear that peace and stability were to a large extent dependent on the achievement of greater social justice, progress and a general rise in living standards. The statements made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Italy at the two most recent sessions of the General Assembly,¹ at which he had stressed the need for a global peace strategy, had been based on that principle. The drive and co-ordination provided by the Council should be seen in the context of that strategy, as a means of enabling the United Nations to achieve the purposes set forth in Article 55 of the Charter, and in the light of the changes which had occurred since the establishment of the United Nations.

3. The first requirement was to restore to the Council the full functions entrusted to it by the Charter, but it was also essential to re-establish confidence in the Council itself and in its ability to discharge its responsibilities. For both purposes, a common political will was needed. Some delegations, in particular that of Brazil, had stated that the growing conflict within the Council between the interests of the developing and the industrialized countries was the primary reason for its decline. His delegation could only express regret at that development in so far as it reflected a

growing tendency for the developing countries to place their problems directly before other organizations in the United Nations family or the General Assembly, which they considered to be more favourably disposed towards their interests. In following that course, there was a danger that an artificial dichotomy might be established between the Council and the Assembly. Their mutual relations were clearly set forth in the Charter and the fact that delegations were trying to restore a more effective and important role to the Council did not mean that they wanted to upset the institutional balance of the United Nations. Nor did it mean that they were trying to promote the interests of certain countries at the expense of others. On the contrary, the purpose of the effort to restore confidence in the Council and strengthen its capacity to perform its rightful functions was precisely to enable all Member States to participate in the most important aspect of its work, namely, assisting the less fortunate countries in their development and promoting a greater equilibrium and increased economic and social justice in the world.

4. The best opportunity for reaffirming the responsibilities and functions of the Council would be provided by the process of implementation and appraisal of the International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade (General Assembly resolution 2626 (XXV)). He noted in that connexion that the agendas of the current and forthcoming sessions of the Council respectively included the item on future institutional arrangements for science and technology and the item on review and appraisal of the objectives and policies of the International Development Strategy, which were two of the most important development policy questions.

5. The question of restoring the prestige of the Council and strengthening it in the exercise of its functions was closely linked to that of its expansion. His Government considered that it should be expanded and that action on that question should be taken shortly. It was necessary, on the one hand, to make the Council more representative of the total membership of the United Nations, and, on the other, to ensure the continuous participation in the Council's work of countries which had the means and the desire to contribute to the implementation of the economic and social policy of the Organization. In that connexion, his delegation had been impressed by the statement on the subject made by the representative of Pakistan at the 1735th meeting. It fully realized that the expansion of the Council raised difficult problems and could be achieved only through a further amendment to the Charter. However, such difficulties did not mean that that objective should be considered less urgent, since it might play a vital role in restoring to the Council its appropriate place and functions. His delegation would find it difficult at the present stage to express an opinion on the size of an increase in the Council's membership. Useful experience

* Resumed from 1745th meeting.

¹ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-fourth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 1783rd meeting and *ibid.*, *Twenty-fifth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 1857th meeting.

might be gained from any decision taken by the Council on expansion of the body which would be made responsible for the appraisal of the International Development Strategy or on the establishment of a standing committee to consider problems of science and technology. Further useful indications could be provided through the implementation of suggestions such as those which had been made concerning the election of members of the sessional committees of the Council, in particular the suggestion that such committees might have a different composition from that of the Council itself. Such a procedure would enable a greater number of countries to participate in the work of the Council without an amendment to the Charter. However, the advantages of such a solution might prove more apparent than real in view of the complexity which it would introduce into the election of members of the Council and the danger that it would tend to encourage repetition of debate at the various stages of consideration of an item.

6. His delegation wished to draw attention to a suggestion which it had originally made in the course of informal consultations. It had proposed that the experiment successfully conducted by a number of members of the Group of Western European and other States, which had included in their delegations to the Council representatives of other countries having very similar interests and positions, might profitably be followed by other regional groups. That procedure might make for rapid and easy progress in enabling a greater number of States not members of the Council to participate in its work. It might be of special benefit to certain countries represented by small delegations which could thus secure the co-operation of other countries and make use of their expertise and experience in certain fields.

7. He wished to make it clear that he was not putting forward that suggestion as an alternative to expansion of the Council, which his delegation considered imperative. However, the implementation or further study of the suggestions might enable the Council to obtain a clearer idea as to what would be the optimum increase in membership.

8. An essential function of the Council was that of co-ordination, which should be undertaken in such a way as to ensure that the greatest possible benefit was derived from the new programme approach. In no circumstances should that function be interpreted in a static or essentially negative context; on the contrary, it should be based on the concept of a moderate and reasonable expansion of United Nations activities, with more rigorous selection of priorities and ruthless elimination of duplication and of the irrational use of financial and human resources. In that connexion, the suggestion made by the French delegation (1743rd meeting) concerning the expansion of CPC and a study of the respective functions of CPC and the sessional Co-ordination Committee of the Council merited further consideration.

9. Another important function of the Council was that of providing a forum for annual general debates on the world economic and social situation. That could, as the Secretary-General had suggested at the 1696th meeting of the forty-ninth session, be transformed into an opportunity to

look into the problems of the future and diagnose as far in advance as possible, the probable development of those situations and the dangers and challenges that were likely to arise. The Council should not simply react to events but should serve as a kind of early warning system to prevent or minimize the effect of surprises in a world changing with dizzying rapidity. So conducted, the general debates on the world economic and social situation would not be a mere academic exercise but would enable the Council to identify what subjects required discussion and to establish an order of priority for taking action. That would also mean that the press in general, which tended to ignore the Council's deliberations, would begin to take a livelier interest in them.

10. His delegation considered many of the suggestions made in the note by the Secretary-General (E/(L)/CRP.1) to be very valuable. In his opinion, those suggestions had a sufficient measure of support so that the Council could take decisions on them before the end of its current session. Such decisions, although of a procedural and organizational nature, would go far towards improving the quality and effectiveness of the Council's work; the Council could then begin to tackle far more difficult subjects.

11. Mr. KITTANI (Assistant Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs) said that, since no reference to the Office for Inter-Agency Affairs was made in document E/(L)/CRP.1, he wished to draw attention to the role which it could play in assisting the Council in co-ordinating the activities of the United Nations system. In that connexion, the Secretary-General's bulletin,² in particular the first sentence, the second function outlined in part I, and subparagraph (a) of part II, might be of special interest to the Council.

12. Although both procedural and structural changes should be made in an effort to increase the Council's effectiveness, such changes were of marginal importance. Far more could be required if the Council was effectively to discharge the central role assigned to it by the Charter. While a large measure of the responsibility for increasing the effectiveness of the Council lay with Member States, the Secretariat too had an important role to play in providing maximum assistance to States and helping the Council to discharge its role as set forth in the Charter.

13. Mr. OGISO (Observer for Japan), speaking at the invitation of the President, said that his country felt strongly that the Economic and Social Council, as the main organ of the United Nations concerned with economic and social matters, should be strengthened. That was particularly important in the case of its co-ordination function because of the recent establishment of a number of United Nations organs dealing with specific fields, such as UNDP and UNCTAD. The Council must also play the primary role in reviewing and appraising the progress made in implementing the International Development Strategy.

14. To enable the Council to discharge its various functions, it should be increased in size so that more Members of the United Nations could take part in its work and it could act with greater dynamism in the field of inter-

² Document ST/SGB/131/Amend.21.

national co-operation. Although that would require an amendment to the Charter, which would undoubtedly be a very lengthy process, the Council could, as a first step, recognize at its present session the desirability of such an enlargement. The actual size of the enlargement should be decided in informal consultations.

15. With a view to making the institutional arrangements necessary to enable the Council to discharge its important responsibilities in connexion with the review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Development Strategy, the Council might set up a special committee for substantive consideration of the question or might open its Economic Committee to participation by non-members of the Council. As only a year and a half had passed since the last reconstitution of CPC, his delegation felt that the Council should not be in a hurry to change the composition of that body. However, delegations which were not members of CPC, particularly those which were members of the Council, should be encouraged to take part in CPC's work as observers.

16. With regard to the Council's programme and methods of work, he felt that it was now over-burdened by having to consider highly technical matters in detail. Subsidiary bodies should deal with such matters and formulate recommendations or proposals in the form of draft resolutions for adoption by the Council. He concurred in the view that they should adopt a rule under which they would meet every two years.

17. His delegation supported the suggestion made at the 1743rd meeting by the Observer for India that, if the

Council decided to establish a working group to consider proposals on measures to improve its work, such a group should be open to interested delegations which were not members of the Council.

18. Mr. CARANICAS (Greece) drew the attention of the Assistant Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs to paragraph 17 of the report of CPC on its eighth session (E/4989) and asked whether he intended to consider procedures whereby the Council could be kept better informed of the somewhat mysterious work being done by ACC. In particular, he wondered whether the Council could be informed of the conclusions reached or decisions taken by ACC's Preparatory Committee and the recommendations adopted by ACC itself at its most recent session.

19. Mr. AHMED (Secretary of the Council) recalled that, in paragraph 3 of its resolution 1547 (XLIX), the Council had instructed CPC to review the sphere of activities and competence of ACC in the light of the relevant discussion in the Council and to submit recommendations to the Council at its fifty-first session. At its most recent session, CPC had held only a preliminary exchange of views on the matter and had asked the Chairman of ACC for his views on the two proposals that had been made. In the light of ACC's views, CPC would continue its discussion at its ninth session, to be held later this month, and would submit its final recommendations to the Council at its fifty-first session in July 1971. He therefore suggested that the Council should defer consideration of the problem of ACC until it had received CPC's final recommendations.

The meeting rose at 11.50 a.m.