



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 15th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/37/32 and Corr.1), A/37/112, and Add.1; A/C.5/37/2, A/C.5/37/7 and Corr.1, A/C.5/37/11; A/C.5/37/L.6-9)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued) (A/36/167 and Add.1 and 2; A/37/32, chap. V; A/C.5/37/11; A/C.5/37/CRP.1)

AGENDA ITEM 8: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ORGANIZATION OF WORK (continued)

(b) SUBSIDIARY ORGANS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued) (A/37/3, chap. III, sect. A, and chap. IX, sects. C and H)

1. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) said that, at the time of the adoption of General Assembly resolution 36/117 B, relating to the simultaneous distribution of documents in the different languages of the United Nations, his delegation had observed that that decision was aimed at increasing equity among the already privileged. Since a majority of representatives never had an opportunity to use their mother tongue in the proceedings of the United Nations, his delegation had expressed the hope that that resolution would not make matters still more difficult by reducing the time available to study documents for those to whom all the official and working languages of the United Nations were foreign languages.

2. The Secretary-General had stated in his report (A/C.5/37/11, para. 8) that more space was being made available for documents held for simultaneous release. In view of the general scarcity of space in the Secretariat buildings and the rising cost of documentation, it would be a matter of concern to his delegation if strict implementation of the resolution led to a sizeable increase in the expenditure devoted to documentation in the regular budget.

3. Mr. van HELLENBERG HUBAR (Netherlands) said that his delegation shared the concern of the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to organize an effective programme of conferences and his preoccupation over the control of documentation. The comments of the Secretary-General on Secretariat organization and procedures for the preparation of special conferences (A/37/112/Add.1) were both practical and pertinent, particularly those contained in paragraphs 16 and 17, and those relating to recommendation 1 (d). The suggestion, in paragraph 49, that it would be preferable to gain several years of experience with the guidelines already adopted over the past two years, rather than to develop and adopt new guidelines for the formulation and evaluation of special conferences, was commendable.

4. It had been suggested that congestion in the preparation of documents could be relieved by evenly distributing meetings between New York, Geneva and Vienna, a

(Mr. van Hellenberg Hubar, Netherlands)

proposal which failed to sway his delegation. With regard to the establishment of a Conference Management Committee, he wished to know what the financial implications would be.

5. His delegation agreed with the Soviet Union that the costs of convening special conferences in countries in which the United Nations did not already have appropriate conference-servicing facilities should be carefully calculated before invitations were accepted. With reference to sound recordings of meetings, it would be of interest to know the cost ratio of such recordings to summary records, how long the tapes were retained and to whom they were made available. Finally, it was to be hoped that the draft resolution contained in recommendation 6 in the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/37/32 and Corr.1), could be modified in order to render it more acceptable.

6. Mr. YAKOVENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) enquired what United Nations bodies were referred to in the recommendation contained in paragraph 27 (f) of the report of the Committee on Conferences. With regard to the note by the Secretariat on the pattern of conferences (A/C.5/37/7 and Corr.1), his delegation would welcome clarification of item 176, which gave New York as the venue for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, whereas the Committee had not yet taken a decision on where it was to meet. Since the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs in Vienna provided secretariat services for that Committee, it would be preferable for it to hold its meetings in Vienna. With reference to item 21, his delegation wished to know whether the dates given for the twenty-second session of the Population Commission were correct. The dates given in item 93 for the Joint Meetings of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination also appeared to be incorrect.

7. His delegation welcomed the information on contractual translation contained in document A/C.5/37/CRP.1. It was not, however, clear how much staff time was involved, nor was there any breakdown by language. Information on the printing of documents contracted out for translation would also be welcome.

8. Mr. WYZNER (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) said that, in order to succeed, the Department of Conference Services required the help not only of all the offices and departments which used conference services but also of Member States, whose decisions had a decisive impact on the Department's workload. The Department could impose its own rules, such as the 24-page limit, on documentation prepared by the Secretariat, but its position was much weaker in respect of such documentation as the reports of organs, which it was not authorized to amend and could not return once the body in question had adjourned.

9. With regard to the calendar of meetings, the Department had the final defence that in certain circumstances and at certain times it simply did not have the necessary physical accommodation.

10. The support received from the Committee on Conferences was welcome, particularly its proposals on meetings records and the reports of subsidiary

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(Mr. Wyzner)

organs, and its collaboration in preparing manageable calendars of meetings and conferences. The Department also deeply appreciated the interest of the Fifth Committee in those matters.

11. The Secretary-General had estimated that some \$7.5 million could be saved by the elimination of written records for all subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, the elimination of summary records for the sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council and the Main Committees of the General Assembly, the establishment of a maximum limit of 32 pages for reports of subsidiary bodies of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, and the reduction of the maximum number of pages for any document emanating from the Secretariat from 32 pages to 24 pages.

12. Further, the Committee on Conferences had recommended a reduction in the number of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly entitled to summary records. If that recommendation was implemented, approximately \$500,000 in staff costs would be avoided, representing approximately 6 1/2 man-years of translation and 7 1/4 man-years of typing, and also freed capacity in the reproduction shop for the production of other documents.

13. The Committee on Conferences had also recommended that subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly should strive to keep their reports within the 32-page limit. The Department recognized that there were those for whom adherence to such a limit would be virtually impossible. Nevertheless, had such a limit been observed at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly, approximately 14 2/3 man-years of translation and 9 man-years of typing, representing some \$900,000 in staff costs, would have been saved, by reducing the need for temporary assistance and overtime. Such savings would, of course, remain theoretical until limits on documentation were observed, particularly in the case of documents under the control of Member States. Although some subsidiary organs would have difficulties in respecting limits on the length of documents, it should be noted that major problems had been caused in the past by reports which had exceeded 320 pages, or 10 times the 32-page limit.

14. Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 36/117 B, on the simultaneous distribution of documents, four exceptions had been made. Pre-session documents for the May 1982 meetings of the Executive Board of UNICEF and the twenty-ninth session of the Governing Council of UNDP had not been distributed simultaneously, at the specific request of the secretariats of those bodies. Following an objection by one delegation, all documents had subsequently been distributed at the same time.

15. In April 1982, the Bureau and the secretariat of the Economic and Social Council had agreed to suspend the simultaneous distribution requirement in the case of documents for the Council's first regular session of 1982 which had not been issued six weeks before the opening meeting. A delegation had objected, and the Council had subsequently decided that pre-session documentation should be subject to simultaneous distribution in the Council's working languages, while in-session documentation would be issued simultaneously in all its official languages.

(Mr. Wyzner)

16. Since then, at the request of the Administrator of UNDP, with the concurrence of the members of the Governing Council, documentation for the Intersessional Committee of the Whole of the Governing Council, meeting in September 1982, had not been held for simultaneous distribution. In addition, the Secretary-General of the Second United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had requested, since the item concerned was about to be taken up by the Special Political Committee, that the report of the Conference should be distributed even though one of the language versions had been unavailable; the delegations using that language had agreed.

17. The Secretariat would continue to comply with resolution 36/117 B, and any requests for waivers from whatever quarter, would be treated with the utmost caution. Moreover, as a rule, no summary records would henceforth be distributed until all the required language versions were available. Exceptions would be made only upon the request of the organ concerned, its Bureau or Chairman and with the agreement of delegations using the language concerned.

18. Summary records had presented a special problem in recent years. The main difficulty arose because the staff who produced them were also working on other documents which the bodies concerned required and which received priority. Summary records could be made available sooner in certain languages than in others simply because the former were the languages in which they were drafted. However, efforts would be made to issue records simultaneously, with a minimum of delay.

19. As far as contractual translation was concerned, in a resolution adopted the previous year the General Assembly had encouraged the Secretary-General to make wider use of contractual translation services in view of their demonstrated financial advantages. At his request, statistics had been made available to the Committee, in conference room paper A/C.5/37/CRP.1, which showed an upward trend in the volume of material placed externally in recent years. However, while the procedure had its advantages, there were bounds to its unlimited use. It was, for instance, not suited to documentation which had to be ready simultaneously in all the required languages by a stated time, such as the documentation needed for most meetings; for that purpose a basic complement of established staff had to be maintained. On the other hand, it generally lent itself to publications, final official records and backlogs of various kinds which had arisen despite the Secretariat's best efforts to avoid them.

20. The Department would provide information in due course on those bodies which had held or would hold more than one session in 1982.

21. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that his delegation would welcome specific details of advance payments by host Governments for meetings held away from Headquarters, and wished to know whether alternative ways of estimating costs had been devised. Information on the financial implications of recommendation 8 of the Committee Conferences would be welcome.

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22. Mr. ENODIEN (Nigeria) said that the Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid had requested that the Special Committee should be included in the list of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly entitled to summary records of its meetings. In view of the historical significance of the fight against racism and apartheid, that request should be considered sympathetically. It would be a tragedy if such records were lost. His delegation therefore proposed that recommendation 6 of the Committee on Conferences should be amended by the addition of a paragraph 3 (e) to the proposed draft resolution, reading "Special Committee against Apartheid;".

23. Mr. OKEYO (Chairman of the Committee on Conferences) said that one of the Committee's prime objectives in the years to come would be to achieve faithful implementation of all the regulations and decisions governing the conduct of meetings. It would be necessary to concentrate on adherence to the regulations by both the Secretariat and the intergovernmental bodies; in the latter case, it was up to delegations to abide by the rules in order to improve the efficiency of the Organization.

24. He was pleased that the Committee had been able to meet delegations' expectations in the area of guidelines for the conduct of special conferences. The draft resolution it was recommending would make an important contribution to the improved organization of United Nations special conferences.

25. The Committee would continue to strive for the correct balance between the need to rationalize the use of scarce conference resources and the need to provide the most favourable possible conditions for delegations to negotiate in.

26. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Dominican Republic had become a sponsor of the amendments contained in document A/C.5/37/L.6.

27. Mr. KELLER (United States of America), introducing the amendments in documents A/C.5/37/L.6 and 7 on behalf of the sponsors, said that the intention of the amendment to paragraph 14 of the draft resolution recommended for adoption by the Committee on Conferences in chapter XI of its report was to reflect delegations' clear desire to control the length of reports more rigorously. Delegations always had access to meeting records, so there was no reason why bodies that were entitled to such records should include in their reports material that could be identified by a reference to the meetings concerned. In that connection, he mentioned that 32 pages was, for technical reasons related to the printing process, a very convenient limit to impose.

28. The intention of the proposed new paragraph 16 was to provide guidance to the Secretary-General in drawing up the proposed programme budget for 1984-1985. Over the past two years, full conference services had been provided for over 16,000 meetings in New York and Geneva alone, and over 8,000 more meetings had been provided with less comprehensive services. That situation had to be brought under control; additional demands for services would have to be justified by the bodies concerned. The sponsors did not intend to restrict the activity of any United Nations body, simply to encourage greater dispatch and efficiency in the work of the United Nations.

29. Mr. YAKOVENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), introducing the amendments contained in document A/C.5/37/L.9, said that the proposed quota system was not meant to imply the rigid apportionment of conference services and facilities; rather it should prompt a reassessment of the relative priorities of United Nations activities. The control and limitation of documentation was a pressing issue, as the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/36/167) showed. JIU made a number of suggestions for reducing the volume of United Nations documentation; his delegation believed that a numerical target would be helpful.

30. In paragraph 22 of its report, the Committee on Conferences suggested a comprehensive review of the conference and documentation problems of all United Nations bodies. His delegation felt that little would come of such an exercise unless the bodies themselves were involved in it. The purpose of the final amendment, therefore, was to encourage bodies to discuss the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences, with a view to improving the organization of their work.

31. Mr. EL-SAFETY (Egypt), referring to the statistics on contractual translation provided in document A/C.5/37/CRP.1, asked whether any actual savings to the Organization had resulted from the increase in the use of contractual translation between 1979 and 1982, and what proportion of the Organization's total translation workload it was desirable, in the Secretariat's view, to send out for contractual translation. He also wondered what would happen if the Organization increased its reliance on contractual translators and then found that they were too busy to deal with some urgent documents.

32. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) commented that several United Nations bodies were likely to have a great deal of difficulty in complying with the 32-page limit for their reports called for under the amendment contained in document A/C.5/37/L.6. That would put the Secretariat in the position of having either to refuse to produce the documents which bodies needed for their work, or to disobey the General Assembly's instruction to keep all reports within a 32-page limit. He felt that a list of exceptions to such a rule would have to be drawn up, after consideration of the circumstances of each individual body.

33. He did not think it was practical to ask the Secretariat to reduce the number of scheduled conference days, as called for in document A/C.5/37/L.7: the Secretary-General was not in a position to change the calendar of conferences once it had been approved by the General Assembly. He asked, therefore, how the Secretariat would set about complying with such a request.

34. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) asked what legal bodies other than the International Law Commission would be covered by the exception made in the amendment proposed to paragraph 14 of the draft resolution. He also requested an estimate of the actual volume of documents that would be saved by the 5 per cent reduction called for in document A/C.5/37/L.9.

AGENDA ITEM 110: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (continued) (A/37/11, A/37/461 and Add.1)

35. Ms. ZONICLE (Bahamas) said that in the discussion of the scale of assessments, her country, although assessed at the "floor" of the scale, had some important interests at stake, concerning in the main its status as a developing country with a relatively high per capita income generated primarily by expatriates and the seriousness with which it, as a small State, took its obligations under Article 1, Article 17, paragraph 2, and Article 18, paragraph 1, of the Charter.

36. The controversy over General Assembly resolution 36/231 A stemmed from the divergent views of Member States with regard to the various criteria for assessing the capacity to pay of Member States. Until those criteria were dealt with on a comprehensive rather than piecemeal basis, and with sensitivity for their historical origins and evolution, they would always lead to inequitable and hence contentious results.

37. The question of excessive variations between two successive scales might not be so problematic after all if Articles 1 and 2 and Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Charter were translated into enforceable standards. Moreover, excessive variations between successive scales need not be a stumbling-block if Member States took into account the ratio between their individual assessments and their gross national products and national budgets. Instead of regarding their contributions as grants, Member States should see them as investments, albeit modest, in the solution of the very issues which devoured the greater part of their national budgets. In addition, the scale was an excellent tool for improving the desirable ranges of Member States and thereby enabling them to participate more directly in decision-making and programme implementation.

38. As to the controversy over the proper length of the statistical base period, she recalled that that device had originally been intended as a means of reducing the effects of short-run fluctuations in economic conditions and of movements in exchange rates. With the passing of time, however, it had come to be viewed as a compensatory mechanism needed to mitigate inequities resulting from the sole use of national income. Obviously, if a composite indicator for measuring "true" or "comprehensive" capacity to pay were to be found, there would be no need for such a compensatory mechanism.

39. The Committee on Contributions had repeatedly pointed to the conceptual and methodological constraints hampering its efforts to improve the calculation of national income and accumulated national wealth. Those concepts clearly fell within the realm of political economy and, consequently, ultimate responsibility rested with Member States, not the Committee on Contributions, for devising agreed methods for the quantification of development and quality-of-life indicators and for the submission of comprehensive and comparable statistical data. Until that had been achieved, it was most unfair for the Committee on Contributions to be constantly blamed for lack of results.

(Ms. Zonicle, Bahamas)

40. Member States should be able to rely on the expertise and creativity of the Committee on Contributions to initiate the search for new and improved methodologies to achieve objectivity and fairness. In that context, the conclusions in paragraph 43 of the Committee's report were unworthy of it. The Committee should not continue to fuel the dissatisfaction of Member States by consistently resorting to an imperfect discretionary mitigation and adjustment process.

41. Another contribution which the Committee on Contributions could make would be to develop a questionnaire synthesizing the current state of conceptual agreement on development indicators and giving guidance as to how to minimize areas of disagreement.

42. With regard to the question of national income in constant rather than current prices, her delegation agreed with the view expressed by the Committee on Contributions in its report to the thirty-fifth session (A/35/11) that the use of either current or constant prices was not significant when variations in a country's exchange rate were in line with variations in price levels. Accordingly, it considered that the issues of inflation and exchange rates were for Member States to settle either individually or collectively.

43. The low per capita income allowance formula was perhaps the only true objective compensatory mechanism to mitigate anomalous assessments resulting from the sole use of estimates of national income. There appeared to be no difficulty with regard to the harmonization of national accounting systems and the comparability of data bases, as the Committee had consistently reported progress in those areas.

44. The key to the paradox between increased growth rates in the developing countries and the widening gap between them and the developed countries lay in the fundamental differences between economic growth and economic development. The introduction of a "development" dimension into the scale of assessments was possible only to the extent that development indicators could be quantified. The Committee on Contributions, the Statistical Commission and the appropriate Secretariat units should therefore redouble their efforts towards that end.

45. Turning to ways to enhance the equity and fairness of the scale, her delegation considered that establishing a minimum assessment for the permanent members of the Security Council was a double-edged sword which might intensify the negative aspects of their special rights and privileges and impede the full implementation of Article 2, paragraph 1, of the Charter. It also gave rise to the question whether financial levies should not also be imposed on other States or groups in accordance with the particular influence they had within the Organization.

46. Another issue emerging from the Committee's report was that of its own status. From its very inception, the Committee had defined its role as technical rather than policy-making. But anomalies in the assessments of certain Member

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(Ms. Zonicle, Bahamas)

States had led over the years to dissatisfaction with the Committee's performance. The Committee had itself contributed to the erosion of its status as an independent expert body by, inter alia, granting relief to those countries which complained the loudest and by failing to verify the uniformity of statistical data for all Member States.

47. With regard to the proposal to increase the membership of the Committee, she recalled that its membership had already been expanded in 1968, 1972 and 1976, and left it to members to judge what effect that had had on the equity of the scale. Nevertheless, there was some merit in the proposal if it brought about a more equitable balance in the Committee's membership, not only in terms of geographical distribution but also in terms of the income levels of the countries represented. At the current time, the low-income countries were grossly under-represented in the Committee.

48. As to whether the Fifth Committee should approve the scale of assessments recommended by the Committee on Contributions, she noted that, within the confines of the growth-oriented approach of its majority, the Committee had made every effort to comply with paragraph 4 of resolution 36/231 A. Although it had not carried out the comprehensive study on alternative methods to assess the real capacity to pay of Member States, the Committee had made an honest effort within its conceptual limitations and working under time constraints. The genuine seriousness with which it had approached paragraph 3 of resolution 36/231 A could be seen from its decision to extend the normal duration of its session to continue the study. In the circumstances, therefore, the Fifth Committee should accept the proposed new scale and call upon the Committee on Contributions to issue as soon as possible the guidelines requested in paragraph 2 of resolution 36/231 A and to complete the study on alternative methods for assessing capacity to pay before the expiry of the proposed new scale. The Fifth Committee should also call upon Member States to assist the Committee on Contributions in compiling adjusted, reliable, comprehensive, uniform, comparable and timely data and in reaching agreement on the weighting of economic and developmental indicators, and request the Statistical Commission and the Secretary-General to intensify their assistance to Member States and the Committee on Contributions in those endeavours. Specialized agencies with relevant expertise should be asked to share their experience and encouraged to give priority to solving problems relating to the scale of assessments within their areas of responsibility. The membership of the Committee should reflect equitably the differing income levels of Member States either by internal redistribution of existing regional posts or by the smallest viable increase in the number of members. Lastly, the Committee should be asked to submit at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly a progress report outlining the major obstacles it faced and suggesting practical solutions on how to eliminate them so that the study could be completed at the latest before the review of the next scale.

49. In surveying the alternatives open to the Fifth Committee, her delegation had opted for co-operation rather than confrontation with the Committee on Contributions. The scale of assessments reflected in microcosm some of the deepest contradictions and imperfections in the Organization. For that very reason, the

(Ms. Zonicle, Bahamas)

Fifth Committee had a unique opportunity to resolve a number of issues and thus to further the Organization's efforts to promote the goals of the Charter.

50. Mr. GODFREY (New Zealand) said that his delegation's initial inclination had been to advocate adoption of the proposed new scale of assessments since it felt that the Committee on Contributions had done a difficult job well. However, as the debate had progressed, his delegation had begun to wonder whether it remained useful to advocate such a course or whether it should favour some form of compromise. Many delegations were unhappy with the proposed scale for quite different reasons. Some which had supported, even promoted, the adoption of resolution 36/231 A, were unhappy despite the substantial measure of relief obtained from the extension of the base period and the modification of the low per capita income formula.

51. His country's rate of assessment had been reduced by one point. However, his delegation had consistently opposed the lengthening the base period since it believed in the concept of current capacity to pay. Had it not been for the interim changes provided for in resolution 36/231 A, his country's assessment would have been reduced by not one point but three. Under the earlier procedure of a three-year base period, its assessment would have been further reduced, reflecting that, in recent years, his country's economy had been faring somewhat worse than the average for the world. Other countries could, no doubt, pick out from the statistics in the report the assessment which they felt to be fair in their case. Perhaps the fairest scale would be one with which no delegation was really happy.

52. The current divisive situation in the Fifth Committee, with all its unfortunate implications for the financial stability of the Organization, was likely to continue unless the Committee on Contributions was given the opportunity to carry out a comprehensive study on methods of calculating the scale of assessments, including the possibility of utilizing supplementary criteria in addition to capacity to pay based on national income. It would be unrealistic to expect the Committee at the same session both to carry out the study and to grapple with the complexities of devising a new scale. In fact, the study was likely to take two sessions, perhaps with a subgroup continuing the task between sessions, and to require the assistance of statistical experts, as suggested by another delegation. For those reasons, it was highly desirable for the Assembly to adopt a new scale, whether that recommended by the Committee on Contributions or some variation thereof, for three years. His delegation favoured the scale recommended by the Committee, despite its imperfections. As a last resort, however, it would be prepared to have the new scale adopted for a two-year period only. In that case, of course, the study which had been called for would have to be completed at the next session of the Committee on Contributions.

53. Mr. HADID (Algeria) said that his delegation, like the delegations of many other developing countries, had in recent years been emphasizing the inadequacy of national income statistics as the sole measure of the capacity to pay of Member States, especially the developing countries. It was essential, therefore, to develop social and economic indicators which reflected the special situation of the

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(Mr. Hadid, Algeria)

developing countries. Resolution 36/231 A provided coherent guidance for the work of the Committee on Contributions. In view of the widening gap between the developed and the developing countries, the Committee should give priority to the study requested in paragraph 3 of that resolution so that it could be completed before the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly. The transitional criteria outlined in paragraph 4 of the resolution were inadequate in themselves to ensure a truly fair scale of assessments but represented the bare minimum if the developing countries were not to be unjustly penalized by the continued application of the old formula. Paragraph 4 (c) had clearly not been taken into account by the Committee, in view of the excessive increases in the rates of assessment of several developing countries, ranging from 20 to 90 per cent. The share of the budget to be borne by the Group of 77 as a whole had been increased by approximately 20 per cent, while the economic situation of the developing countries had been steadily declining. There was an urgent need, therefore, for the Committee on Contributions to redouble its efforts to give effect to all the provisions of resolution 36/231 A.

54. Mr. BELOV (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that strict compliance with General Assembly decisions, objectivity, and the ability to take everything into account were characteristic of the work of the Committee on Contributions, as the Committee's report (A/37/11) showed. During its most recent session the Committee had once again shown its honesty and high degree of competence in following the General Assembly's directions to apportion the expenses of the United Nations as fairly as possible amongst the Member States. Thanks to a thorough analysis of the copious but inconsistent data on States' economic development over the period in question, the Committee had managed, in strict conformity with the principles and criteria set forth in General Assembly decisions, to develop scientifically sound proposals for setting Members' contributions for the coming three years. The new scale of assessments recommended in paragraph 65 of the report gave an entirely realistic picture of the changes that had taken place in Member States' economic circumstances, and it was to be hoped that, despite all the reservations and proposals for the future that had been made, that scale would be approved by the Fifth Committee. While he did not want to ignore or belittle the difficulties of arriving at a definition of States' real and strictly comparable capacity to pay, or in allowing for the specific factors affecting the economies of individual countries, he was deeply convinced that the new scale was sounder and fairer than the existing one, since it had been developed in the light of greater experience and using more refined methods.

55. In recent years the General Assembly had changed or reviewed over a dozen principles, criteria and factors in an effort to buttress the principle of relative capacity to pay, which had been calculated for nearly 40 years on the basis of States' national income. An untold number of additional economic, social and simply invented indicators had been studied over that period, but at the current level of statistical development worldwide, national income at current prices was the only comparable measure of countries' capacity to pay based on their levels of economic development. Attempts to refine or replace that indicator had generally proved fruitless, impossible to apply in practice, and inconsistent with the long-term interests of most Member States.

(Mr. Belov, Byelorussian SSR)

56. Not only had the Committee been guided by existing directives and instructions, but it had drawn as far as possible on the recommendations made by the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session to give due attention to the developing countries in general, and to those with a low per capita income in particular. It had applied a new relief gradient for countries with a low per capita income, and had reduced the assessments of several countries faced with natural disasters and other exceptional circumstances. The number of States paying the minimum assessment had risen from 70, under the old scale, to 75 under the new one, and 60 per cent of the membership of the Organization accounted for little more than 1 per cent of the total budget. It had paid due attention to the problem of excessive variations between two successive scales, and used the machine scale data flexibly in determining States' assessments.

57. A few delegations, in their statements, had challenged the justification for the new scale and the competence of the Committee on Contributions. His delegation felt that such emotional and tendentious statements were in most cases unsupported by convincing arguments. He could not support the idea of convening a working group to prepare a different scale for the simple reason that a fair scale had already been worked out by the Committee on Contributions. Nor was there any justification for reviewing the period over which the new scale should apply. It had to be remembered that owing to reductions in the minimum assessment which had come about on the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions, 130 Member States had seen their assessments reduced since joining the Organization. ^{One} thing in the proposed scale that was perhaps not consistent with the principle of capacity to pay was the reduction in one State's assessment by 59.2 per cent, and that was largely responsible for the increase in the assessments that a number of other States would have to pay. The assessments of the socialist founder Members of the United Nations had risen by 38.1 per cent, and that of the Byelorussian SSR, in particular, by 56.5 per cent, since 1946. In that connection, he repudiated the untoward and overtly provocative attacks on sovereign States by some speakers. That kind of interference evidently had its source outside the Fifth Committee and was intended to prevent the constructive discussion of a highly important topic.

58. The increasing difficulty in dealing with the scale of assessments was due not to imperfections in the methods of its calculation but rather to the growing financial burden on Member States caused by the excessive growth of the United Nations budget. As well as making a thorough study of ways of improving the fairness and objectivity with which the expenses of the United Nations were apportioned, it was time to examine thoroughly the reasons for the Organization's excessive budgetary growth and take steps to ensure that the Organization spent its resources on its most important tasks and that the growth in its spending matched the growth in Member States' gross national income.

59. In conclusion, he stated that the financing of United Nations peace-keeping operations was governed by Chapter VII of the Charter; it did not fall within the ambit of Article 19, which applied exclusively to contributions to the regular budget.

60. Mr. HICKEY (Australia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said he was sorry that the Brazilian delegation had found his language in an earlier statement to be excessive. He had intended merely to be frank.

61. The total reduction of 30 points in Australia's rate of assessment should not be regarded as a correction for over-assessment in the past. Twenty-one of those points related to objective criteria and only 9 to an over-assessment in the previous scale. Nevertheless, the principle involved was regarded as important by the Australian authorities.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.