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Eighteenth session  
SECOND COMMITTEE

ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK  
AT FUTURE SESSIONS

Note by the Chairman

The Chairman has the honour to transmit to members of the Second Committee the attached statement which he has prepared with regard to the possible reorganization of the practices and methods of work of the Committee at future sessions of the Assembly.

If it would be agreeable to the Committee, the Chairman would propose to take up this matter at the penultimate meeting of the Second Committee during the current session, at which time he hopes that delegations will be ready to give their reactions to the suggestions he has made at the end of this statement.

## METHODS OF WORK

Before concluding our work this year, it seemed to me desirable that we should spend a little time reviewing and evaluating our practices and methods of work. In doing so, we would, in fact, be implementing the policy which the General Assembly adopted in its resolution 1845 (XVII), when it recommended that priority should be given to the consideration of ways and means of improving methods of work. In its resolution 1898 (XVIII) the Assembly approved a series of arrangements aimed at expediting the work, which had been prepared by an ad hoc Committee after long study and extended consultation.

It is, of course, true that this review and the recommendations emerging from it were made primarily from the point of view of the General Assembly as a whole. On the other hand, each principal committee has developed over the years methods of work and even procedural practices which have seemed best suited to the areas in which it operates and to the problems which it has encountered. Thus it seems to me in line with the policy of the General Assembly if we in this Committee have an exchange of views aimed at improving our methods of work and our practices in the light of experience gained during past sessions and particularly during the session which we are about to conclude. In undertaking this exercise, I believe that we must go beyond procedural devices and seek an appropriate relationship between the substance of what we are doing and the alternative ways of doing it. We must go into the record of earlier years and then try to take a "forward look" at the possible course of the Committee's work in the next few years.

In what follows I have naturally drawn on my personal experience in the Second Committee during four sessions of the General Assembly, but I have also had discussions with a number of old-timers and newcomers in this Committee. I need hardly add that I have also sought the advice of the Secretariat, who observe both the continuing and the changing elements in our work from their vantage point. Indeed, I was encouraged to take the lead by Mr. de Seynes, when he said on 21 October 1963 at the end of the general debate:

"As I have listened to this debate, I have been struck by the extent to which there is a common outlook with respect to the problem of economic development, which is the central theme of all our deliberations. I think that we now have enough points in common on the general aspect to enable

us to consider giving our debates a more specific turn, so that we may see how we can use the Second Committee to advance the solution of the specific problems which will arise. One aspect, and a far from negligible one, of the wider problem of institutional mechanisms to which I have referred, is the organization of our debates. I think that when our present deliberations, which in many respects have been encouraging, are concluded, we would do well to give some thought to this question so that, in the future as in the past, your Committee may continue to play the important part which it is expected to play." (A/C.2/L.732)

Let me turn first to the record. Looking back over past sessions of the Second Committee, we can discern two main phases in the way the Committee has gone about its work. In the earlier phase, it used to take up first and in some detail the operational programmes and then turn to general economic questions, including a general debate and the consideration of the draft resolutions which emerged from it. This period can be characterized more or less as follows: (i) there was a considerable diversity of views regarding economic development and the role of the United Nations in dealing with it; (ii) the operational programmes, in particular the regular and expanded programmes of technical assistance, were still in their formative stages and the system of close scrutiny and continuing evaluation was being developed. In particular, it was a time when the developing countries placed considerable emphasis on giving sound direction to these programmes; however, they began increasingly also to stress general development problems, such as planning and industrialization, capital flow and trade.

Soon after the establishment of the Special Fund, the Committee moved into a new phase, which became particularly evident during the fifteenth session in 1960 when, as we remember, Dr. Janez Stanovnik, the distinguished representative of Yugoslavia, was in the Chair. This second phase was reflected in a shift in our methods of work. Consideration of general economic questions became the main feature of each session, and the operational programmes were taken up afterwards in the time that remained, which resulted in a brief, perhaps too brief, review of these programmes. Although this year we had only one general debate, the two groups of items which we set up in 1960 are still reflected in our arrangement of business.

The new arrangement introduced in 1960 was perhaps overdue. On the whole, the operational programmes were working well, and the main task of the Assembly was to appeal to Governments to increase their contributions, a task which, incidentally, we still face. It was natural, therefore, for the Committee to focus its attention on policy-making for economic development, both at the national and international levels, and to take up the specific problems encountered there, such as planning, the diversification of national economies, industrialization, regional and sub-regional integration, capital flows, the multilateral financing of economic development through the United Nations, and last but not least, international trade as a principal instrument of economic development.

I need hardly add that each of these questions provoked long and difficult discussions, and sometimes we heard sharply conflicting views on specific issues. I believe, however, that we all gained from these frank exchanges a better understanding of the basic problems of development and a mutual comprehension of the differing points of view. Particularly during the last two sessions, we have witnessed a narrowing of sharp differences, and we are making progress towards a consensus on certain basic aspects of major issues. For example, the Secretary-General himself recently indicated that development is one of the three highest-priority objectives (Disarmament, Decolonization and Development) of the United Nations (United Nations Press Release SG/1580). I presume we agree on the imperative need to diversify the economies of developing countries and in particular to promote industrialization. We agree that spontaneous market forces cannot, by themselves, ensure development which requires a conscious effort, both at the national and international levels, that is, by planning. We are agreed on the high priority which must be given to training and other important means of progress in order to enable the developing countries to move forward from their traditional stationary way of life. More recently we have unanimously agreed to call the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, of the importance of which we are all aware.

I would not like to exaggerate the gains we have made. Many important differences remain. In some areas, instead of general agreement, we find working compromises. But both on the theoretical and on the day-to-day practical levels, we have moved closer together, and we may, I think, take satisfaction from the

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fact that these gains have been registered in the United Nations and in this Committee. Of course, they are also to be associated with many phenomena occurring outside the Organization; since 1945, by means of university and other research and from day-to-day experience - sometimes harsh experience - in the developing countries and elsewhere, we know much more than we did about development both in theory and in practice. In this general context, I regard it as a great, and perhaps even an historic, achievement that the United Nations and this Committee has been able to proceed as far as they have towards building a common platform.

If what I have just said truly reflects our present position, it follows that a readjustment of our methods of work may be in order and that in considering what kind of readjustment should be made, we should keep very much in mind the substantive framework within which we work. Thus, although I shall now proceed to take up the pedestrian questions of arrangement of business and agenda formulation, I feel that they could not be tackled except in the context of our work as a whole.

It may be opportune to remind you that we can have no more than an exchange of views, that we can take no decision regarding methods of work which would be binding on the Second Committee when it meets in future years. On the other hand, I hope that our exchange of views may be useful to future sessions of the Committee. It is difficult to effect a major change or indeed to make any significant departure from traditional and well-established practices without prior discussions, since delegations in making their preparations for a session do so on the basis of the previous years' pattern. Thus, while we cannot commit our successors in next year's Second Committee, we can give them the benefit of our collective experience after nearly three months of work in an atmosphere which this year has been relatively free of sharp controversy. It is because of this that I felt encouraged to raise certain questions and even to make certain suggestions.

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First of all, a number of members have spoken to me about the possibility of modifying our present procedures with regard to the general debate, although others also saw some advantages in the present system. I must admit that I myself feel that, notwithstanding the fact that the various statements were useful and

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thought-provoking, the general debate in its present form is overlong and contains much repetition, both as regards individual speakers and from year to year. Indeed, I must say that, in my opinion, in future years the time might be better spent in the consideration of specific questions.

I should hasten to add that, in suggesting this change, I have no wish to imply that the general debate has not fulfilled an important function in the past, and that in general delegations have not found it a useful vehicle for setting forth their views. It has given everybody a broad and highly useful review of the thinking on economic questions throughout the world. It cannot be denied that the round of general statements has also played a certain role in the fashioning of draft resolutions which goes on simultaneously behind the scene. It may be wondered, however, whether it is the general debate that is of key importance to the draft resolutions or rather that the time of the general debate is used by delegations for informal consultations.

As we have all gained greater experience in the Second Committee's field of endeavour, the value of this phase of our work has become somewhat less apparent. At the same time, the increase in the number of United Nations Members has lengthened the list of speakers until this year we listened to eighty-seven addresses. In the last few years an average of four to five weeks has been given over to the general debate.

Thus the question is not so much whether the general debate is useful or not; we all agree that it serves a certain purpose. We must, however, think whether this is the most useful way we can spend the limited time at our disposal; in short, whether this is the best way of fashioning policies which will be helpful to developing countries in their struggle for development. There is also an additional aspect. The general debate at the plenary meetings of the General Assembly increasingly includes the principal views of delegations on economic and social problems, including development, capital flows and trade. In fact the two general debates already overlap one another to a significant extent. Since a further expansion of plenary statements in this area may be expected in view of the increasing importance attached to development, this overlapping will tend to become more and more pronounced. Accordingly, the plenary meetings of the General Assembly might in future years also be considered the proper place for general statements on economic policy.\*

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\* Moreover, the plenary general debate is reported verbatim and it could, of course, be taken fully into account by the members of the Second Committee.

In any change in our methods of work, the formulation of the agenda as well as the scope of the items allocated to the Committee is of basic importance. This, of course, lies outside our field of competence, and yet I think that the Secretary-General, Governments and the General Committee of the General Assembly might wish to take into account our views expressed on the subject. I think that most members who have taken part in our discussions during the last few years would agree that economic development has occupied almost all our time, indeed that we have not had enough time for a comprehensive consideration of the many problems falling under this general heading. These economic development problems are so difficult and far-reaching and their bearing on key world problems so obvious, that we simply have not had time to address ourselves to many other questions - important as they may be.

If we recognize this fact, we must also recognize that our agenda - which year after year has featured the economic development of under-developed countries as only one of several items - does not provide a sufficiently concrete basis for our work. It is as if the First Committee had on its agenda some such general item as "political problems". It is too general, and, in fact, almost any draft resolution can be submitted under it. The question arises whether it would not be better to replace the omnibus item - if I may call it that - by specific items which would tend to focus attention on those aspects of the economic development of developing countries which in the opinion of Member Governments most urgently need it, as has been done hitherto in the form of sub-items of the general development item.

I may be mistaken, but it seems to me that the criticisms which were directed at some of the procedural suggestions I made at the beginning of the session were, in fact, intended to make our work more specific and to enable it to proceed in an orderly fashion from one topic to another. If we gain more time, by elimination of the general debate, and have a limited number of specific topics on our agenda, it might be possible to proceed in a less hasty fashion and to take each topic up in succession rather than to consider them when the time is so limited that, in many cases, the general observations which delegations wish to make either have to give way to the detailed discussion of the proposals themselves or do not receive the attention they deserve.

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The question may also be raised whether, in view of the urgent economic and financial questions confronting the Committee, it is desirable for us to attempt to tackle closely-related questions of social development. While these questions have usually been allocated to the Third Committee, there have recently been occasional departures from this practice and consideration of these matters has proved rather lengthy and has cut into the time available for important economic questions. It can hardly be doubted that one Committee could not do justice to the many questions of economic and social development, and that the present procedure of allocating economic questions to the Second Committee and social questions to the Third Committee, while presenting certain obvious difficulties, seems on balance the best solution available.

I would envisage, if I may repeat myself, a number of items on our agenda, each of which would be limited to specific topics, and at the beginning of each session the Committee would approve a time-table indicating the approximate number of meetings it planned to devote to each item both for general observations and for the consideration of concrete proposals relating to it. This is indeed the procedure being followed by other committees of the Assembly.

Of course, the report of the Economic and Social Council has to be retained as an item on the agenda, and this would ensure that we had sufficient flexibility to take up matters dealt with in this report but for which no specific agenda item had been provided. For example, this year the draft resolutions on the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and on the enlargement of the sessional committees of the Economic and Social Council were tabled under this item.

An approach of this kind would require that an effort be made to list items in the order in which delegations would wish to take them up. A preliminary attempt to establish this order might be undertaken by the Secretary-General when he draws up the provisional agenda. The Committee would naturally retain the right to adjust the order in which it takes up the various items, taking into account their urgency and the time required by delegations to ready themselves for beginning discussions on the floor and to table draft resolutions.

However, one of the aims of the new approach would be to reduce the delays attributable to lack of adequate advance preparation. Since delegations would have an accurate picture of most of the topics to be discussed well in advance,

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it should be possible for them to come to the opening of each session prepared to begin consideration of most of the specific topics without undue delay and having, if possible, advance texts of draft resolutions. The importance of this advance preparation, which to some extent already takes place, can hardly be overemphasized.

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May I now recapitulate and make my suggestions more specific:

Firstly, I would suggest that the general debate in the Second Committee may be discontinued. Statements of economic policy would be made in the general debate of the General Assembly in plenary meeting, where they are already being made by many delegations and where they will be promptly published in the verbatim records.

Second, I would suggest that the agenda should be so formulated as to avoid items on general subjects in order to focus attention on specific topics. There would continue to be one mandatory general item, namely, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", which would ensure whatever flexibility may be required. The agenda would, of course, regularly include an item covering the United Nations operational programmes.

Third, I would suggest that an effort should be made to list items in the agenda in the order in which they are most likely to be taken up by the Committee and that the Committee, at the beginning of each session, should determine the final order.

Fourth, I would suggest that the Committee should, when it organizes its work for the session, allocate provisionally a certain number of meetings to each item before it, and determine deadlines for submission of proposals.

Fifth, I would suggest that any draft resolutions unrelated to any specific item and tabled under the item, "Report of the Economic and Social Council", should normally be considered towards the end of the session so as to give delegations sufficient time to familiarize themselves with the topic concerned.

Sixth, I would suggest that the General Committee of the General Assembly should give particular consideration to the distribution of items between the Second and Third Committees bearing in mind that economic sections of the Economic and Social Council report are allocated to the Second Committee and social and

human rights sections to the Third Committee, and taking into account the length of time required for the adequate consideration of the primarily "economic" items.

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In conclusion, I should like to explain that, in presenting these ideas and suggestions to the Committee, my intention has been to stimulate your thinking and to provoke your comments, even if they are critical comments. Indeed, I hope you will feel as free as I have felt to present your frank views on how we may further improve our working methods in the years to come. I say this because it is my firm belief that frank and constructive criticism is not only the privilege but even the duty of those who hold that international co-operation through the United Nations is the best way of solving the world's pressing problems. The purpose of my suggestions has been to stimulate an effort, by reviewing our methods of work, to bring it about that at future sessions the Second Committee would be better able to focus its discussion on the main substantive issues. I believe that this would be achieved if the foregoing suggestions were applied.

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