



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 16th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. ABRASZEWSKI (Poland)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 108: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued)

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
- (b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AGENDA ITEM 109: CONTROL AND LIMITATION OF DOCUMENTATION (continued)

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)

AGENDA ITEM 110: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS (continued)

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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, 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.6-11)

(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 and 2)

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. THERON (Deputy to the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Chief Editor), replying to a question asked by the representative of the Netherlands at a previous meeting concerning the proposed guidelines on Secretariat organization for special conferences, said that the establishment of conference management committees would not have any financial implications. It was clear from guideline 2 that such committees would be composed of existing staff and that no special services would be required for their meetings.

2. Replying to the Soviet representative, he indicated that the reference to the Population Commission in document A/C.5/37/7 was a mistake and should be deleted. As to the joint meetings of CPC and ACC, he said that the exact dates would not be confirmed until the first regular session of ACC in early 1983. A correction would be made in the calendar, indicating that those meetings would take place in June/July.

3. Conference Room Paper No. 2 had been distributed in response to the Soviet representative's request for a breakdown by language of contractual translation given out by Headquarters during the period 1979-1982. To put the matter in perspective, it should not be expected that contractual translation should be equally distributed among the various languages. As the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services had indicated at the preceding meeting, documents for meetings were almost never sent for outside translation because of the need to meet strict deadlines. The kinds of documentation suitable for external translation included publications, final official records and other non-urgent material, as well as documentation for other organizations such as UNDP, UNICEF and UNITAR and some of those publications were not prepared in all the official languages of the United Nations.

(Mr. Theron)

4. The representative of Egypt had asked whether any savings had resulted from the steady increase in the volume of contractual translation between 1979 and 1982 and what the desirable percentage for contractual translation was. In that connexion, it was essential to bear in mind that, when the Secretariat spoke of savings, it meant savings on established staff and temporary assistance. The established staff of the Secretariat did not normally work on the kinds of material suitable for contractual translation, and temporary assistance was exclusively to assist the permanent staff during certain peak periods. Unless the basic volume of official documentation which had to be processed in all the languages was reduced, the number of established staff and the volume of temporary assistance would have to remain at their current levels. In fact, it was wrong to link the two categories of translation, internal and external: two entirely different types of documentation were involved.

5. The Soviet representative had also asked a question concerning contractual printing. The guiding principle of the Secretariat had been that what could not be handled internally was sent for outside printing. The implementation of the publications programme as a whole was under the control of the Publications Board, which took all relevant factors into account. The technological innovations which were being introduced into the Department of Conference Services might eventually eliminate external typesetting in the traditional sense, although not immediately for all languages. The Department would, of course, carefully study the cost-effectiveness of such new technology and would not build up its internal capacity if the work could be done more cheaply externally for some or all languages.

6. The representative of the Philippines had asked what legal bodies other than the International Law Commission would be permitted to exceed the limit of 32 pages for reports if the draft amendment in document A/C.5/37/L.6 was adopted. He indicated that it would be logical to assume that the bodies in question would be those which the Committee on Conferences had recommended should be entitled to summary records because of the legal nature of their work. In addition to the International Law Commission, those were the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law, the Legal Sub-Committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and because of its legislative and executive responsibilities, the Council for Namibia.

7. The representative of the Philippines had also asked what effects the 5 per cent reduction in total documentation proposed by the Soviet Union in document A/C.5/37/L.9 would have. In 1981 at Headquarters, 654 million printed pages had been produced and 5 per cent of that would amount to 32,700,000 pages. Everyone agreed with the aim of reducing total documentation but it was necessary to bear in mind the realities of the situation. Not all documentation was within the control of the Secretary-General. Verbatim records, which could not by definition be shortened, accounted for 28.3 per cent of the total documentation; communications from Governments, which the Secretariat was obliged to circulate in full, represented 6.2 per cent and reports of various organs and bodies, 23.7 per cent. Reports originating in the Secretariat, over which it did have control, represented only 24.2 per cent of total documentation.

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(Mr. Theron)

8. In connection with questions asked regarding recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences, he had been informed by the Office of Financial Services that the Secretary-General considered that about 10 per cent of the total estimated additional costs to be borne by a host Government of a special conference or meeting would be an appropriate amount to be deposited immediately following acceptance of its invitation. That would cover early preparatory expenses, in particular the planning mission, for which there was no provision in the regular budget. With regard to the balance, the current practice was to include in agreements between the United Nations and host Governments a provision requiring payment in full one to five months prior to the scheduled date of the conference.

9. The question of alternative methods of costing conference servicing was familiar to all and had been discussed by the Committee on Conferences and the Advisory Committee at the request of the Fifth Committee. At its spring session, ACABQ had reviewed a document of the Committee on Conferences (A/AC.172/75) which explained the current method of presenting conference-servicing requirements in statements of administrative and financial implications. The Advisory Committee had concluded, as it had indicated in its first report (A/37/7), that the full-costing system, despite its drawbacks, was preferable to the former "incremental" method. The Secretary-General intended to continue to use the full-costing method, taking into account the recommendations of the Advisory Committee.

10. Questions had been asked regarding the comparative costs of issuing summary records and tapes of proceedings. Sound recordings were already made of meetings of the Security Council and General Assembly for archival purposes and constituted part of the permanent records of the Organization. Recordings were also made of other meetings and, while not intended for archival purposes, they were generally kept indefinitely. Members of delegations and authorized staff had access to such recordings and could have copies made at minimal cost. The current facilities for sound recording were limited but less than \$200,000 would be needed to expand them to provide for recording of seven channels for all meetings of the Main Committees of the General Assembly. After that initial investment, the cost of providing each delegation with tapes of both the "floor" and one official language would be less than \$1,000 per meeting. The cost of issuing a summary record for one meeting in four languages, taking into account staff salaries and other expenses, was \$3,800 and in six languages, \$5,200. There was an obvious advantage to the tapes but it was for Member States to decide which arrangement would suit them.

11. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) asked whether the requirement of a 10 per cent advance payment in connection with meetings held away from Headquarters applied to costs both in United States dollars and local currency.

12. Mrs. DORSET (Trinidad and Tobago) asked whether contractual translation was cheaper than temporary assistance.

13. Mr. ZINIEL (Ghana) said that his delegation fully sympathized with the aims of reducing the volume of documentation and halting the proliferation of meetings in

(Mr. Ziniel, Ghana)

the United Nations. However, efforts to solve those problems must take into account the dynamic nature of the Organization and its role as a centre for harmonizing the activities of Member States. The draft amendment proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.7 ignored the fact that the number of conference days was not constant and that the Secretary-General was not responsible for determining the number of conference days in any given year. The Secretary-General could be expected to ensure the proper utilization of conference-servicing resources, but that problem was not even dealt with in document A/C.5/37/L.7. Accordingly, the request to reduce the number of scheduled conference days contained in document A/C.5/37/L.7 should be addressed to Member States, whose decisions would no doubt be influenced by world events and conditions.

14. The quota system proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.9 had been considered thoroughly by the Fifth Committee at a previous session and rejected. His delegation regarded the introduction of such a system as a subtle device to prevent the United Nations from taking action on certain key issues.

15. The second paragraph of the draft amendment ignored the cause-and-effect relationship between the number of meetings and the overall volume of United Nations documentation. The target of reducing documentation by 5 per cent was arbitrary. The goal should be to curtail expenditure on conferences without ignoring Article 1 of the Charter.

16. Lastly, his delegation supported the amendment proposed by Nigeria in document A/C.5/37/L.11.

17. Mr. EL-SAFETY (Egypt) noted that the Chief Editor's replies amounted to a diplomatic way of telling him that he had no answers to the questions he (Mr. El-Safty) had asked at the preceding meeting.

18. Recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences could be interpreted as implying a lack of confidence in Member States on the part of the Organization. Member States were, however, sovereign and were fully aware of the obligations and responsibilities they undertook when they offered to host United Nations meetings or conferences, and it was inappropriate to require them to make advance payments. The current arrangement of requiring payment in full one to five months before the date of a conference was more than adequate. He therefore proposed replacing the words "should made" in recommendation 5 by the words "may, at its option, decide to make".

19. The draft amendment in document A/C.5/37/L.7 would confer on the Secretary-General powers which rightly belonged to Member States. He could, however, understand addressing the request contained in that document to legislative bodies.

20. He recognized the good intentions of the sponsor of the amendments in document A/C.5/37/L.9 but recalled that the concept of a quota system had already been rejected by the General Assembly. He therefore supported deleting the first

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(Mr. El-Safty, Egypt)

paragraph of that document. The figure of 5 per cent in the second paragraph was arbitrary and should also be deleted. With regard to the third paragraph, his delegation was not convinced that contractual translation was the most economical method of processing United Nations documents and, accordingly, proposed the deletion of the paragraph.

21. His delegation fully endorsed the draft amendments in documents A/C.5/37/L.10 and L.11.

22. Mr. DITZ (Austria), referring to the guidelines on Secretariat organization for United Nations special conferences, contained in recommendation 4 of the Committee on Conferences, said that his delegation strongly supported the establishment of the Conference Management Committee, provided that purely technical matters could continue to be dealt with as at present, in order to facilitate rapid decision-making. The conducting of an evaluation exercise by the host Government and the Secretariat would be of value, enabling both to learn from experience. It was important for the views of host countries to be fully reflected in such exercises. His delegation thus proposed that guideline 8 be amended by the addition of the sentence "Such evaluation should also take into account, in the case of conferences held on the invitation of a host country, views offered or reports prepared by host country authorities."

23. Recommendation 5, that host countries make advance payments to the United Nations, would be difficult to implement. For example in the case of Austria, parliamentary approval would be required for any such funds, which would obviously take some time. The proposal made by the delegation of Egypt was valid.

24. He agreed with the Soviet delegation that the meetings of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should be held in Vienna rather than New York, since the unit providing secretariat services was located in Vienna.

25. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said that the amendments proposed by the Soviet Union (A/C.5/37/L.9) to recommendation 6 of the Committee on Conferences reflected a desire to control documentation, which his delegation shared. The fourth paragraph was acceptable, but he shared the concern of the delegations of Ghana and Egypt over the first, second and third paragraphs. As stated in paragraph 54 of the report of the Committee on Conferences, that Committee had already considered the question of quotas. There was no cause to review the matter further. It was, in any event, the responsibility of Member States.

26. Part of the problem referred to in recommendation 5 seemed to be the Organization's cash flow. Perhaps wording might be found to suggest that host countries might wish to make an advance payment. The views of the Secretariat on the cash flow aspect of the matter would be welcome.

27. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said that Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations made the Organization a forum for the exchange of views on international problems. Such exchanges were clearly impossible without

(Mr. Monthe, United Republic of Cameroon)

conferences, so that the convening of conferences and the publication of the accompanying documentation were, in fact, authorized under Article 1. If delegations lost sight of that fact, they would not merely limit the volume of documentation but would inhibit the convening of conferences and stifle international debate. Caution was necessary.

28. The Committee should adopt a more balanced attitude. The volume of documentation in the United Nations reflected the state of the world. Conferences were necessary to avoid conflict between States, and conference documentation was obviously required. Moreover, only some 25 per cent of documentation was under the control of the Secretary-General, so that it was for Member States to take action to limit any excess.

29. The amendment proposed by the Philippines (A/C.5/37/L.10) to recommendation 4 was acceptable. Recommendation 5 was also acceptable, although it would be of interest to know whether there had been instances in the past in which host Governments had been dilatory in paying conference costs. If there had not, it seemed unwise to establish a procedure which might cause tension between the Secretariat and Member States.

30. With reference to recommendation 6, the proposed new paragraph 14 contained in document A/C.5/37/L.6 was not very promising. There was a need to be flexible in imposing the 32-page limit; it was important to ensure that reports remained intelligible. With regard to the proposed new paragraph 15, it should be considered whether reducing the number of bodies entitled to written records would facilitate the attainment of better results.

31. In respect of the proposed new paragraph 16, contained in document A/C.5/37/L.7, any reduction in the number of conference days was for Member States, not the Secretary-General, to decide. If it were decided to reduce the number of conference days, it might well happen that additional conferences would be necessitated by international developments. The amendment, in ignoring such considerations, was unrealistic.

32. His delegation had difficulties with the Soviet amendments to recommendation 6. The question of quotas had been debated some two years earlier, and most delegations had spoken against imposing such a strait-jacket on the work of the United Nations. Nor would it be easy to reduce documentation by the proposed amount of 5 per cent, given that the convening of conferences was determined by unforeseeable international developments. The fourth paragraph of the Soviet amendment was acceptable to his delegation, although it might be preferable for the Committee on Conferences alone to consider the matter, since if other organs submitted their views there would be increased documentation.

33. He supported the amendment proposed by Nigeria (A/C.5/37/L.11) to recommendation 6. The Special Committee against Apartheid had been listed as an exception in previous years, and it should continue to receive summary records.

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34. Mr. GRODSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the criticism of the Soviet amendments to recommendation 6 reflected a misunderstanding of the aims of the Soviet initiative. The interpretation of the proposal as imposing a strait-jacket on the work of the United Nations was quite erroneous. On the contrary, his delegation had always supported a broad exchange of views at all levels as necessitated by political developments.

35. The aim of the Soviet proposal had merely been to eliminate waste, without impeding the work of the United Nations. For example, it was well known that there were bodies which scheduled meetings, only to cancel them, thus leaving interpreters and other staff idle. That hardly represented an efficient use of resources. Indeed, his delegation would welcome information on the numbers of meetings which were cancelled.

36. With regard to the proposal to reduce the overall volume of documentation by 5 per cent in 1983, many other delegations had expressed the view that the volume of documentation was unmanageable. The figure of 5 per cent had been proposed on a trial basis, so that the Secretariat would know what Member States expected. Certainly many reports could be condensed without any detriment to their substance.

37. Only the Egyptian representative had objected to the proposal to make wider use of contractual translation, apparently because of his lack of understanding of the advantages which would accrue. In 1980 the Joint Inspection Unit had concluded that contractual translation cost far less than translation performed by permanent staff, and that conclusion had been accepted by the General Assembly. Equally, there were advantages in contracting out the printing of United Nations documents, advantages which would benefit all Member States, including Egypt.

38. The proposals contained in paragraph 27 of the report of the Committee on Conferences were important, and the views of subsidiary organs on them had been sought. Unfortunately the response had been disappointing. The proposal contained in the fourth paragraph of the Soviet amendments to recommendation 6 represented an endeavour to elicit a response, in order to determine how expenditure on conferences could be reduced without detriment to the activities of those subsidiary organs.

39. Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka) said that the case for rejecting recommendation 6 of the Committee on Conferences had already been well put by the representative from the United Republic of Cameroon. His own delegation could not agree to any proposal that would impede the work of United Nations bodies. The Committee had clearly recognized that some United Nations activities would be adversely affected by the withdrawal of summary records, and had made an exception of the United Nations Council for Namibia; but other bodies, such as the Special Committee against Apartheid, also needed to be exempted from the scope of the recommendation. Another such body was the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, which was now entering a crucial stage of its work. He did not see how it could continue to function if records of its proceedings were not issued in the form of

(Mr. De Silva, Sri Lanka)

United Nations documents. He accordingly proposed the addition of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean to the list of subsidiary organs of the General Assembly that would remain entitled to summary records under paragraph 3 of recommendation 6.

40. Mr. MANSOURI (Syrian Arab Republic) pointed out that the General Assembly had set up a special subsidiary organ to deal with the situation and rights of the Palestinian people. Delegations were aware of the importance of that body and of the reports which it submitted to the General Assembly and Security Council. On behalf, therefore, of the delegations of Cuba, Jordan, Pakistan, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates as well as his own delegation, he proposed that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People should be included in the list of exceptions contained in paragraph 3.

41. In concluding, he also expressed his delegation's support for the proposals contained in documents A/C.5/37/L.10 and L.11.

42. Mrs. LOPEZ ORTEGA (Mexico) endorsed the remarks made by the representative of Ghana on document A/C.5/37/L.7. The recent explanations by the Soviet representative notwithstanding, she still had reservations concerning the first paragraph of the proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.9, feeling that it would restrict opportunities to hold conferences on matters of importance to the United Nations as they arose. The proposal, together with the third paragraph of the same document, should be deleted. On the other hand, her delegation supported the proposal by Nigeria contained in document A/C.5/37/L.11.

43. Miss CASTILLO (Dominican Republic) said that her country had sponsored the proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.6, in view of the pressing need for the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies to reduce the enormous sums that the Organization spent on documentation and, thereby, lighten the budgetary burden to be borne by Member States. Her delegation would support all proposals which sought to reduce the Organization's expenditure.

44. Mr. HICKEY (Australia) expressed his delegation's support for the proposal made by the Austrian representative.

45. Mr. HADID (Algeria) said that his delegation would have no difficulty in supporting the proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.10, and would also support A/C.5/37/L.11, together with the oral proposal just made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. The case of bodies like the Special Committee against Apartheid and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People illustrated the need to avoid excessive rigidity where documentation was concerned, as had been well explained by the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon.

46. It was his understanding that the internal translation facilities of the Secretariat were generally used to handle United Nations documentation, and that only when those facilities would not suffice was translation sent out for contractual processing. He accordingly saw no need for the third paragraph of the Soviet proposals contained in document A/C.5/37/L.9.

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47. Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba) said that his delegation supported all economy measures in the United Nations designed to reduce the budget. He also felt, however, that such economies should not adversely affect the work of United Nations bodies and programmes. The first proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.6 was unduly restrictive: subsidiary bodies should be given the opportunity to study their use of conference facilities and documentation for themselves, and to submit their observations to the General Assembly. Like other speakers before him, he felt that it was not for the Secretary-General to decide to reduce the number of scheduled conference days, as was proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.7; that was for Member States to decide.

48. Studies had shown that contractual translation cut the Organization's translation costs by a factor of three. As it was obviously an effective means of making economies, he could see no reason why a provision such as the third paragraph of the Soviet proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.9 should not be included in any omnibus resolution to be adopted by the Committee.

49. His delegation had no objection to the proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.10, and strongly supported that in A/C.5/37/L.11, together with the proposal just made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

50. Mr. BANGURA (Sierra Leone) said that his delegation supported the Nigerian and Syrian proposals, but agreed with the representative of the United Republic of Cameroon that it was for Member States to initiate action to reduce the number of scheduled meeting days, not the Secretary-General as proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.7.

51. Mr. GRODSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) expressed his delegation's support for the proposals made by the representatives of Nigeria, the Syrian Arab Republic and Sri Lanka for the inclusion of additional bodies in the list of those which would retain their entitlement to summary record coverage.

52. In order to meet the concerns so far expressed about the Soviet proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.9, he wished to revise the first paragraph by adding, at the end, the words "without prejudice to the implementation of programmes approved by the General Assembly;" and to expand the second paragraph to read: "Invites all subsidiary organs of the United Nations and the Secretary-General to take measures to reduce the overall volume of United Nations documentation by 5 per cent in 1983, without prejudice to the implementation of programmes approved by the General Assembly;". He hoped that those modifications would make the proposals more acceptable.

53. Mrs. KNEZEVIC (Yugoslavia) said that her delegation shared the concern already expressed about the proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.9. There was no need for quotas to limit the proliferation of unnecessary meetings in the United Nations. Her delegation favoured a rationalization of the use of conference resources, but that rationalization should result from the determination of relative programme priorities and the elimination of obsolete and marginal activities, together with an extended use of the evaluation process as applied to United Nations activities.

(Mrs. Knezević, Yugoslavia)

A percentage limit on documentation would not only lead to arbitrary restrictions, but would be very difficult to enforce.

54. Mr. ENODIEN (Nigeria) said that the Committee on Conferences had made good initial progress towards limiting the proliferation of conferences and documents within the United Nations. Its recommendations should not now be subject to so many additions and amendments as to mar its original accomplishment.

55. He endorsed the Ghanaian representative's views on the amendment proposed in document A/C.5/37/L.6: the original wording of paragraph 14 of the draft resolution recommended by the Committee on Conferences would already limit conferences and documents, and had the advantage of being flexible. He had reservations as to the proposals in document A/C.5/37/L.9, some of which were so rigid as to be likely to prove impractical.

56. As for his proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.11, he felt he should point out that the Special Committee against Apartheid was one of the bodies for which an exception to the discontinuance of summary record coverage had been made in the past. Its omission from the exceptions allowed under the recommendation on the Committee on Conferences was apparently an oversight; that fact, however, had not been adequately explained by the Secretariat, and the Secretariat had also omitted to show that the call to retain summary records for the Special Committee was supported by 12 delegations in addition to his own.

57. Mr. M'TESA (Zambia) expressed support for the proposal in document A/C.5/37/L.11, as well as the proposals to restore summary record coverage for the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean. His delegation well understood the need for economies, but felt that economy should not take precedence over one of the chief tasks of the United Nations, which was to secure the freedom of all peoples.

58. Mr. CAPPAGLI (Argentina), referring to recommendation 5 by the Committee on Conferences, said that the extension of an invitation to host a special conference was indication enough of a State's intent to meet its obligations; no advance payment should be required before the signing of a formal agreement between the inviting Government and the United Nations. His delegation supported the Austrian proposal in that connection.

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)

59. Mr. AMJAD ALI (Chairman of the Committee on Contributions), responding to the statements made and the questions asked about the report of the Committee on Contributions, reminded the Fifth Committee, first, that the data used in establishing the scale of assessments were those provided by Member States. Details of the nature and type of data sought as well as their conversion and utilization were given in paragraphs 8 through 14 of the report. Only in the

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(Mr. Anjad Ali)

absence of data provided directly by Member States did the United Nations Statistical Office, under the guidance of the Committee on Contributions, resort to other sources as described in paragraph 15. Secondly, as indicated in paragraph 7 and as he had recalled in his introductory statement, the computations of relative capacity to pay were based on average "taxable income", defined as the difference between the national income and the amount of relief received or absorbed as the result of the application of the low per capita income allowance formula. Thus, the basis for assessment was not per capita income, the latter being used only to calculate relief or deductions to national income. Thirdly, he stressed that Member States were assessed on the basis of their individual economic situation not as members of any economic grouping. Within a given group, the economic situation of individual countries varied greatly. Revised parameters, such as a 10-year base period or the low per capita income allowance formula, had varying effects on Member States regardless of the group to which they belonged.

60. A number of representatives had referred to the failure of the Committee on Contributions to address itself to the mandate given by the General Assembly in paragraph 3 of resolution 36/231 A. He acknowledged that the Committee had failed to complete the thorough study called for on alternative methods to assess real capacity to pay. The complex nature of that study was briefly described in chapter V of the report. The Committee could either have carried out the study or proposed a scale within the period of 4 weeks allotted to it; it could not have done both. The majority of members had decided to give precedence to determining a scale of assessments, as noted in paragraph 4 of the report.

61. Some representatives had criticized the seeking of a legal opinion by the Committee on Contributions. As he had explained in his introductory statement, doubts had been expressed by some members of that Committee regarding the binding nature of the Assembly's directives. They had held that the Committee was composed of experts who should be allowed to react to those directives. To set the matter at rest and reach a correct solution, the opinion of the United Nations Legal Counsel had been sought. His finding had been clear: the directives of the General Assembly were binding and the Committee on Contributions must follow them.

62. The representative of Portugal had complained about the manner in which the statistical information questionnaire had been sent to Member States. It should be recalled in that connection that data gathering had always been a dual process. To ensure that estimates of national income and related statistics were submitted by Governments sufficiently ahead of time, the United Nations Statistical Office had sent questionnaires to the national statistical offices in January and early February 1982. On 23 February 1982, a note verbale from the Secretary-General had been addressed to the Permanent Representatives of all Member States, informing them officially of the date and place of the next session of the Committee on Contributions and the request made by the United Nations Statistical Office for national income statistics for each of the calendar years 1969 to 1980 inclusive, together with other relevant data. The Secretary-General had further indicated in the same note that, if Governments wished to provide supplementary material, it should be submitted as soon as possible. About the first week of April, after a

(Mr. Amjad Ali)

number of Member States had failed to respond to the questionnaire a second note, in the form of a cable, had been sent to the Permanent Missions of those countries. The Committee on Contributions was quite willing to improve its data gathering process, but in fairness to the Secretariat he thought it necessary to explain the procedure that had been followed in the current year regarding the request for statistical information.

63. The representative of Iran had said that the per capita income figures for Iran for 1979 to 1980 in the Committee's report were not the same as the figures provided by his Government, which had been approximately doubled. The United Nations Statistical Office reported that the national income figures that had been used in calculating Iran's rate of assessment were national income estimates in market prices provided by the Central Bank of Iran through the UNDP Resident Representative in Teheran. As described in paragraph 11 of the Committee's report, those data had first been adjusted to a calendar year basis. Then, as explained in paragraphs 31 and 32, in order to compensate for the previous over-assessment due to the use of fiscal year data, the Committee had decided, as in the case of Australia, to adjust the data for Iran in such a way that the statistical base period covered was from 21 September 1970 to 20 September 1980, instead of from 1 January 1971 to 31 December 1980. The resulting per capita income figures differed only slightly from those submitted by the Government. For instance, the per capita income figures for 1979 and 1980 used by the Committee, as shown in annex II of the report, were \$US 2,023 and \$US 2,255 respectively, while the figures submitted by the Central Bank of Iran had been \$US 2,291 and \$US 2,213.

64. The representative of Yugoslavia had referred to the per capita gross national product figures for Yugoslavia appearing in the World Bank Atlas, 1979, as if they had been used in the establishment of his country's rate of assessment. It should be emphasized that that source of information was resorted to only in exceptional instances, when no data were available from official national sources or other United Nations sources. Since no new data had been provided by the Yugoslav Government in its latest reply to the questionnaire, official data for the period up to 1977 had been taken from its reply to the earlier questionnaire; data for 1978 and 1979 had been obtained from OECD data files, submitted to that organization by the Yugoslav statistical office. The latter had provided the United Nations with 1980 data on net material product which the United Nations Statistical Office had converted into national income. Data obtained from such official national sources were, as a rule, expressed in national currencies and subsequently converted into United States dollars according to the annual average exchange rates published by the International Monetary Fund.

65. The representative of Singapore had stated that, since national income was conceived on a residential basis, the concept did not truly reflect the income of Singaporeans. As non-Singaporean residents worked, spent, invested and were liable to taxation in Singapore in the same way as Singaporeans, whatever transfers they made abroad - whether in the form of interest, dividends or remittances - had already been deducted from aggregate incomes in order to arrive at national income.

(Mr. Amjad Ali)

66. Regarding the suggestion of the representative of Afghanistan that the United Nations should extend further assistance to countries which lacked the resources to compile the statistical data needed by the Committee, he said that such assistance was provided by the United Nations at the request of the country concerned. Statistical development programmes were currently being carried out in various countries in close collaboration with the United Nations Statistical Office.

67. A number of delegations, including those of Brazil, Egypt and Japan, had felt that the inherent difficulty of comparing national income data of countries with market economies with those of centrally planned economies tended to give rise to inequity in establishing a scale of assessments. The representative of Japan in particular had hoped that the Secretary-General's study on the comparability of the two systems of national accounts would be continued. The programme for the current and next biennium of the United Nations Statistical Office on the links between the System of National Accounts (SNA) and the Material Product System (MPS) called for a revision of the conceptual guidelines for linking the two systems as well as actual data conversion for 20 additional countries. Moreover, the current SNA national accounts questionnaire included a table on the links between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Net Material Product (NMP) which countries were requested to complete.

68. The representative of Brazil had referred to the principle of non-retroactivity in the context of the revision of national income data and expressed the view that that principle had been violated when certain Member States had modified the statistics which they had submitted earlier and which had been used in the establishment of previous scales of assessment. Such changes, however, were a regular feature of statistical compilation procedures. Data were periodically revised by the statistical offices of Member States when new information that had not previously been taken into account became available. For instance, the data on national income estimates of three countries, Brazil, Mexico and the Netherlands, had been revised upward by those countries' statistical offices. When the national income data for each of the years 1970 to 1977 submitted to the United Nations for the current review and data for the same period submitted for earlier reviews of the scale were compared, the average upward revision was 3.5 per cent for Brazil, 12.7 per cent for Mexico and 5.7 per cent for the Netherlands.

69. Some representatives still appeared to believe that the scale of assessments was calculated on the basis of per capita income. The representative of Bangladesh, for instance, had stated that, since his country was one of the least developed with a per capita income among the lowest in the world, he could not understand how it could be assessed at a higher rate than 86 other countries. The representative of Iran had stated that per capita income was not a true indicator of a country's capacity to pay. In fact, per capita income had never been used as an indicator of that capacity. Rather, it had been used in the low per capita income allowance formula to determine the percentage reduction to which a country with a per capita income below the upper limit was entitled. Although the per capita income of Bangladesh was among the lowest, the national income of

(Mr. Amjad Ali)

Bangladesh, a country of some 80 million people, was relatively much higher than that of the 86 countries referred to by that country's representative.

70. The representative of Spain, in speaking on the report of the Committee on Contributions some years earlier, had severely criticized the lack of information about the basis used to establish the scale of assessment. His comments had been duly reported to the Committee on Contributions. In the current report, the machine scale had been included to provide Member States with precise information about the scale. The Spanish representative's comment at the current session that inflation had distorted the value of national income expressed at current prices and therefore had had a direct impact on the calculation of Member States' rates of assessments was undoubtedly true. Various methods to correct for inflation had been proposed by members of the Committee on Contributions at its recent session, and on the basis of those suggestions the United Nations Statistical Office had calculated alternative scales of assessment for the Committee to review. Owing to wide divergences of opinion, the Committee had been unable to agree on applying any of those methods as a basis for systematic correction for inflation. Some account had been taken of the impact of inflation, however, during the mitigation process.

71. No solution had been reached either on the question of integrating supplementary social and economic indicators in the current methodology. In that connection, he recalled the difficulties experienced by the Committee in the past with regard to the availability of data. He quoted paragraph 19 of its 1981 report (A/36/11), in which the Committee had observed that certain indicators were not available for certain countries and, even where they were available, were for various reasons not comparable. Similar difficulties had been cited in paragraph 40 of that report concerning the availability of data on wealth estimates for individual countries. Other difficult questions still needing to be resolved related to the selection of appropriate indicators for inclusion and the weights to be assigned to each of them in integrating them into the current methodology. In doing so, account would have to be taken of the extent to which they were already included or reflected in national income figures.

72. Those questions of inflation and social and economic indicators, as well as others, had been dealt with in a study submitted to the 1982 session of the Committee on Contributions. It would be taken up at the Committee's 1983 meeting and the outcome of the discussions would be reported to the Fifth Committee at the next session of the General Assembly. In that context, as a member of the Committee on Contributions, he would have no objection to enlisting the services of a consultant, as proposed by some delegations, in deepening and refining the study on alternative methodologies, the groundwork of which had already been done by the United Nations Statistical Office.

73. Many representatives had wondered why their recommended rates of assessment had gone up as compared with the official scale. The increase in the rate of assessment of Spain, for example, was due partly to a relatively higher income growth over the two periods under review, partly to a rate of inflation much higher than the world rate, and partly to the change in parameters adopted by the General

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(Mr. Amjad Ali)

Assembly in 1981. The increase in the rate of assessment for Mexico was partly due to an upward revision of its national income, averaging some 12.7 per cent for each year from 1970 to 1977.

74. Many of the circumstances that adversely affected a country's capacity to pay, to which several representatives had referred, frequently related to the more recent years, which were not taken into account in calculating the scale of assessments. The only data considered by the Committee had been the national income and per capita income figures for the period 1971 to 1980, the latest year for which national income data were available for most countries.

75. The debate in the Fifth Committee on the report and recommendations of the Committee on Contributions had once again been instructive and enlightening. As Chairman of the Committee on Contributions for a number of years, he had always drawn much guidance from the cogent arguments advanced during the debate on whether or not the Committee had succeeded in fulfilling the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. He hoped, however, that it would be appreciated that although the Committee did its best to conform to the spirit of the Assembly's instructions, the questions it had to tackle were highly complex and intricate and the calculations called for could be made differently from different points of view. The Committee sought to reconcile the different criteria as best it could. It was of course the General Assembly's prerogative to accept or reject the Committee's recommendations. In the exercise of that prerogative, however, allowance should be made for the fact that it was not humanly possible to make recommendations that would appeal equally to all Member States.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.