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**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING**

**Chairman:** Mr. OKEYO (Kenya)

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

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**AGENDA ITEM 119: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES**

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**Distr. GENERAL**  
**A/C.5/43/SR.3**  
**10 October 1988**

**ORIGINAL: ENGLISH**

**88-55983 0276S (E)**

6 P.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

**AGENDA ITEM 119: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (A/43/32, A/43/628)**

1. **Mr. MUDHO** (Kenya), Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, introducing the report of that Committee in document A/43/32, drew attention to chapter I, which contained three draft resolutions recommended for approval by the General Assembly.
2. Draft resolution A contained provisions on the draft calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 1989 and on the utilization of conference-servicing resources by United Nations organs.
3. Draft resolution B dealt with the status of the Committee on Conferences. As members would recall, the Committee on Conferences had discussed that question at length at its 1987 session pursuant to resolutions 41/177 and 41/213, but had not been quite able to reach a consensus on new terms of reference. He was happy to report that agreement had been reached in 1988 on the wording of new terms of reference, on the Committee's future status as a permanent subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and on the method of selecting the Committee's members and their term of office. Although the Committee had not been able to agree on a specific figure for the number of members, there was agreement that the size of the Committee should not be substantially modified. The Committee was making no specific recommendation as to its geographical composition.
4. Draft resolution C dealt with the control and limitation of documentation and included a request to the Secretary-General to establish a standard format for the final reports of special conferences. The latter provision had been included in the draft resolution pursuant to the Committee's discussion of a report on the evaluation of the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking submitted to the Committee on Conferences by the Conference Management Committee in accordance with resolution 37/14 B.
5. The Committee had also discussed a number of matters not requiring explicit action by the General Assembly. An account of the Committee's consideration of those matters could be found in chapters VI and VIII of the report. He commended the report and the three draft resolutions to the Fifth Committee for its approval.
6. **Mr. WYZNER** (Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments) remarked that the Committee on Conferences had succeeded in developing new terms of reference and a recommendation as to its future status, as mandated by the General Assembly. If its recommendations were accepted, the Committee on Conferences would become a permanent subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. The change would not greatly affect its normal operating methods, but would signal that the Assembly felt it had come of age and was ready to undertake the new responsibilities entrusted to it.
7. The Secretariat looked forward to continuing its close and fruitful co-operation with the Committee in order to ensure the continued efficient

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provision of high-quality conference and documentation services. A revitalized Committee on Conferences could play a very valuable role in bringing greater order and cohesiveness to the United Nations conference programme. Past efforts by the Committee and the Secretariat to even out the "peaks and valleys" in the schedule of meetings in New York had greatly assisted in the rational use of resources. Continuing to do so, and spacing out meetings in the same sector of activity at the same conference location, as recommended by the Committee in draft resolution B, would also make it much easier for delegations, smaller ones especially, to cover all the meetings which interested them. Member States and user organisations must co-operate closely with the Department of Conference Services in order to achieve those objectives.

8. In response to an initiative two years earlier in the Fifth Committee, the Economic and Social Council had agreed to invite the Committee on Conferences to review its draft calendar of conferences in 1989. Pursuant to resolution 42/207 B, the Committee on Conferences had considered the possibility of centralising the planning and co-ordination of all organizational aspects of conference servicing. More detailed consideration of the question would have to await the outcome of the deliberations in the Special Commission of the Economic and Social Council on the In-depth Study of the United Nations Intergovernmental Structure and Functions in the Economic and Social Fields. Meanwhile, the Council at its second regular session of 1988 had adopted a resolution requiring meetings of its subsidiary bodies to end at least eight weeks before the Council session at which their reports were to be considered (resolution 1988/77, para. 2 (f) (i)).

9. It was unlikely that the preparation of the draft calendar of conferences would show any striking differences in future. For many years the Secretariat had worked closely, and successfully, with the Committee on Conferences in compiling the draft calendar and maintaining it following its adoption.

10. The Committee on Conferences had continued to discuss the efficiency with which a number of United Nations bodies used the conference resources made available to them. It had found that, overall, those bodies had continued to use their allotted services more efficiently. The Fifth Committee, at the forty-second session of the General Assembly, had achieved the commendable resources utilization rate of 93 per cent.

11. The Committee had considered two items related to documentation: communications from Member States which were issued as United Nations documents, and the adherence by subsidiary organs of the General Assembly to the 32-page limit for reports to the Assembly. Both questions highlighted the fact that the Department of Conference Services controlled neither the volume nor the timing of its work. The Department did take whatever steps it could to provide the best possible services. Very careful planning went into the scheduling of documentation and publications processing, and special emphasis was laid on the monitoring and enforcement of regulations governing the control and limitation of documentation. Notes verbales addressed to representatives of Member States in 1986 had not produced significant reductions in the numbers of copies of documents requested,

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but communications which he had sent to Secretariat and other official recipients of United Nations documents in 1988 had helped to reduce the overall quantity of documents distributed within the Secretariat.

12. Turning to document A/43/628, he said that the Secretariat had always considered it its duty to treat all official languages with equal respect. If, however, the Secretariat was to continue to provide meeting services and documentation in conformity with General Assembly resolutions 36/117 B and 42/207 C, certain minimum conditions would have to be met. As resolution 42/207 C affirmed, "in order to ensure the provision of adequate conference services to the United Nations, the allocation of resources for those services should be sufficient to meet requirements". The Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/43/1) on recommended levels of staff reductions for each programme of activity recognized that a reduction of 15 per cent in conference-servicing staff without a concomitant reduction in demand for service would leave the Secretariat unable to sustain its conference-servicing activities, and described the disruption that would result if conference services in New York and Geneva were reduced by the targeted figure of close to 15 per cent. It did, however, indicate that a 10-per-cent reduction in posts should be possible without disrupting the work of other parts of the Secretariat that depended on conferences and documentation services, and the Secretariat should still be able to service the approved calendar of conferences and produce the related documentation while according equal treatment to all official languages.

13. The staff reductions proposed by the Secretary-General had been thoroughly reviewed by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) and by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). During those reviews the Department had explained that it had calculated the maximum number of posts that could be abolished in each functional area without seriously impairing its ability to deliver services at the level and of the quality on which Member States had come to rely. It had evaluated the cost-effectiveness of reducing staff when the reductions would of necessity have to be offset by costly temporary assistance and/or increased overtime. It was keenly aware that, as a result of the reform of the budgetary process, additional funds could no longer be obtained in the context, for example, of the consolidated statement of conference-servicing costs. Given that conference-servicing and documentation requirements had shown no signs of subsiding, it was clear that a 10-per-cent reduction in permanent staff would take a heavy toll but was a viable proposition. The only means of effecting a 15-per-cent cut without gravely disrupting meetings and documentation services would be to seek a substantial reduction in the number of meetings included in future calendars of conferences; and as the Secretary-General pointed out in his 1988 report on the work of the Organization (A/43/1), a decrease in meetings would require a decision not by the Secretariat but by Member States.

14. He was gratified that, after an exhaustive examination of the Department's arguments, both ACABQ and CPC had understood the Secretary-General's conclusion that a reduction of more than 10 per cent in conference-servicing staff would jeopardize the smooth functioning of the conference-servicing machinery of the

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United Nations. Even with a 10-per-cent reduction in staff, the Department would be facing considerable risks and would have to make many adjustments in order to meet its responsibilities with a substantially reduced work-force.

15. A continued commitment to the introduction of new technologies and managerial innovations was necessary to compensate for the reduction in staff resources. Further improvements had been made in the planning and rationalization of work methods to increase productivity, and technological innovations were being introduced in a variety of conference-servicing activities. An advanced documents control and tracking system had been designed and would be operational in early 1989. Computer technology would be applied to the planning of meetings and assignment of interpreters, and to a stock-control system for documents and publications. In addition, the Department was beginning to install equipment which would eventually provide the translation services with on-line access to terminology and reference data banks, and was upgrading its terminology data base to improve its ability to deal with non-roman scripts.

16. As early as the 1981-1982 biennium, the Department had begun reducing its established post and temporary assistance requirements in anticipation of increased productivity through the acquisition of advanced technology. That process had not started with the current reform efforts and should not be viewed as a panacea for all problems.

17. With the active support of the Joint Inspection Unit and the generous contribution of a Member State, the Department had undertaken a pilot project with optical disc technology for the storage, retrieval and remote transmission of full texts of documents and publications at the United Nations Office at Geneva and at Headquarters. Other potential uses for that "state-of-the-art" technology were being investigated.

18. The ability of the Department of Conference Services to cope with a sustained level of work with a reduced work-force would depend on the support and understanding of Member States and was contingent on a more streamlined and evenly planned calendar of conferences which would better enable the Secretariat to service meetings and produce parliamentary documentation by utilizing more effectively its permanent staff and reducing its reliance on temporary assistance and overtime. Vigilance was of paramount importance if the goals of the reforms were to be attained: the more effective implementation of the Organization's work programmes and the efficient management and deployment of existing resources.

19. Mr. BAZAN (Chile) said that his delegation agreed with the recommendations which the Committee on Conferences had made regarding the improved utilization of conference-servicing resources. Discipline and restraint were of the utmost importance in the work of subsidiary organs of the United Nations, and scarce resources must be used to best advantage. In most cases, savings could be made without significantly affecting the deliberations of the bodies concerned. The same could be said with regard to documentation. Member States should bear in mind

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the Organisation's financial situation before requesting the official circulation of a document, and should endeavour to keep such documents as short as possible.

20. The Committee on Conferences had agreed to recommend that it should become a permanent subsidiary body of the Assembly, whose members would be appointed by the President of the Assembly, after consultations with the chairmen of regional groups, for a three-year term of office. His delegation had been disappointed that the Committee on Conferences had not been in a position to submit any specific recommendation with respect to its size and composition. While its size should not be substantially modified, the Committee on Conferences should not be prevented from making changes in its membership which would result in a more equitable geographical balance. The principle of geographical distribution should be applied whenever a subsidiary organ was created, and, in keeping with the principle of sovereign equality, all Member States should have the same opportunities to serve as members of such organs.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.