



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. OKEYO (Kenya)

later: Mr. VAN DEN HOUT (Netherlands)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 119: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/43/32, A/43/586 and A/43/628)

1. Mr. DIARY (Senegal) recalled that in resolution 37/14 C the General Assembly had requested the subsidiary organs, in preparing their reports, to endeavour not to exceed the limit of 32 pages. The application of that recommendation had led to a reduction in the volume of documentation and it was essential that these subsidiary organs should continue to bear it in mind. For that reason, his delegation supported the Committee's decision to request its Chairman to invite the subsidiary organs to prepare briefer reports, and the decision to recommend to the General Assembly that it again request Member States to reduce the length of communications to be distributed as United Nations documents.
2. It was gratifying to note that, in general, the subsidiary organs had made better use of the conference services placed at their disposal. While it should be recommended that some organs should make better use of the services, the delicate nature of the questions dealt with should be borne in mind.
3. The Group of 18 had recommended that the Committee on Conferences should be strengthened and given broader functions. The Committee, in considering the possibility of being retained as an intergovernmental body in pursuance of a General Assembly proposal, had been able to reach agreement on various aspects, such as the mandate and future status of the Committee, but not on its composition. If the Committee was retained as an intergovernmental body, it should be more representative, but it might continue with the same number of members or slightly enlarge its membership.
4. General Assembly resolution 42/207 C reaffirmed the principle of equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations. It was gratifying to note in the report of the Secretary-General (A/43/628) that in future the relevant provisions would be more effectively implemented. In that connection, emphasis should be placed on the importance of applying recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 with flexibility, particularly with respect to the Department of Conference Services, which ensured language balance in the Organization. Now that it was recovering its vitality, it was essential that sufficient resources be provided to the Department of Conference Services, without which no agreement could be reached.
5. Mr. SCHASTNY (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that document A/43/32 and the statement by the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences showed that the Committee had carried out useful work during the past year with a view to co-ordinating conference activities and redefining the function of the Committee in the framework of the administrative and financial reform of the United Nations.
6. On the whole, his delegation agreed with the new mandate of the Committee set forth in its report in draft resolution B. Apparently, the present membership was

(Mr. Schastny, Byelorussian SSR)

the optimum number though it might be increased slightly, provided there were no negative effects on the equitable participation of the various regional groups. At the same time, his delegation proposed that the Committee, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, avoid any manifestation of imposing its will by force in future.

7. It was right that the Committee should write to the Chairmen of bodies that had not been functioning as they should in order to assist them in making better use of conference services, but it was not right to propose that they should be penalized. The appeal made to Member States to moderate their requests for the distribution of communications as documents of the United Nations had already helped to achieve considerable reduction in the volume of documentation. Other recommendations of that kind would no doubt result in further reductions and would contribute to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 37/14.

8. The Department of Conference Services had limited resources and an increasing volume of work. In addition, it was faced with a dilemma that was very difficult to resolve, since, on the one hand, it had to respect scrupulously the provisions of General Assembly resolution 42/207 C concerning the equal treatment of the official languages of the United Nations and, on the other, it had to take into account the plan of the Secretary-General adopted in pursuance of recommendation 15 of the Group of 18. In that situation, careful study should be given to the recruitment of temporary staff to provide conference services, a question that was dealt with in paragraph 9 of document A/43/628. That option could be justified in the case of short-term staff. In other cases, it had been shown that it was more economical to use permanent staff. It was necessary to adopt a flexible position with due regard for the particular situation of the various bodies. One method which could be economical was contractual translation so as to avoid, for example, staff travel costs. In the Byelorussian SSR, there were specialists who had attended the Translation and Interpretation School who would be prepared to perform that task.

9. It was necessary to ensure that conference services functioned properly in order to guarantee the execution of United Nations programmes which were directly linked to the maintenance of peace and international solidarity. In addition, unforeseen expenses should be eliminated and that would require adherence to the calendar of conferences and the careful selection of the meeting venues. It was to be hoped that the new mandate of the Committee on Conferences would contribute even more to the effectiveness of the work of the organs of the United Nations.

10. Mr. COTTON (New Zealand) said that the report of the Committee on Conferences was in line with the basic principles of resolution 41/213. The report contained three draft resolutions which the Committee had agreed by consensus to recommend to the General Assembly.

11. Draft resolution A noted that there had been a considerable improvement in the utilization of conference resources by a number of United Nations organs. That was an important aspect of the Committee's work which merited the full support of the

(Mr. Cotton, New Zealand)

Fifth Committee. As indicated in the report of the Committee, despite improvements, some organs had not met the modest target of 75 per cent utilization. The practice of listing the names of those organs in the report, and the practice of having the Chairman of the Committee send letters requesting explanations to the Chairmen of the organs that had not fully used their resources were justified. However, the report should properly include the names of the organs that had made excellent use of their resources as well.

12. Paragraph 29 of the report indicated that the Secretariat would make a more comprehensive list of the organs studied to determine the use of resources. It would be a good thing if in future years that list included the principal organs established under the Charter. That presented no legal obstacles and had no budgetary implications. At the same time, the Department of Conference Services should be congratulated for expanding its activities without budgetary implications. The management strategy that permitted that expansion should be applied in many other areas of Secretariat activity.

13. Draft resolution B represented a major triumph for the Committee, which was able to agree on its mandate earlier in the year. The draft resolution provided that the Committee should be retained as a subsidiary organ and clearly defined its terms of reference, that is, its responsibilities in the management of the conference structure of the United Nations. Attention had been paid to the budgetary process and to the pre-eminence of budgetary proposals, and the mandates of United Nations bodies had been respected. The principles of optimum utilization of conference facilities and documentation would clearly be a responsibility of the Committee if the draft resolution was approved. In the course of the discussions held during the drafting of the proposed resolution, a new agreement had been reached among Committee members and, it was to be hoped, in the Fifth Committee, that a tightly structured management would be established so that the United Nations could achieve its objectives.

14. Draft resolution C referred to the perennial problem of the control and limitation of United Nations documentation, to which self-discipline was the only answer.

15. The delegation of New Zealand fully supported the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences and reserved the right to speak on them again.

16. Mr. RALLIS (Greece), speaking on behalf of the Twelve Member States of the European Community, said that he trusted that the new terms of reference of the Committee on Conferences, set forth in draft resolution B (document A/43/32) would prove to be a useful tool for the effective functioning of the Committee and enable it to be effective in discharging the enhanced role envisaged for it under its new mandate. A decision to retain the Committee on Conferences as a permanent subsidiary organ of the General Assembly would signal the importance which Member States attached to it. It would also enable the Committee to bring greater order and cohesion to the United Nations pattern of conferences.

(Mr. Rallis, Greece)

17. The new mandate should enable the Committee to ensure optimum utilization of conference services in accordance with the provisions of resolution 41/213 and the other relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. In that context, setting the calendar of conferences within the framework of available resources for conference services would be beneficial to the United Nations.
18. It was regrettable that the Committee had not been in a position to submit any specific recommendations on its composition. In the view of the Twelve, in order to be effective, the size of the Committee should remain small. There appeared to be no need to change the Committee's composition, especially at a time when it was functioning more effectively.
19. Concerning the problem of control and limitation of documentation, the Greek delegation supported the decision of the Committee on Conferences to request its Chairman to remain in contact with the Chairmen of those bodies whose reports exceeded 32 pages. Member States and the Secretariat, in particular, must do their share in order to reduce the volume of documentation. Moreover, delegations should refrain from requesting that lengthy communications should be circulated as official documents of the United Nations. If the appeals of the General Assembly to that effect went unheeded, the Committee on Conferences should recommend other measures.
20. It was equally important to improve the conference resources utilization factor. While it was encouraging that the utilization factor had risen above the modest 75 per cent mark set by the Committee on Conferences, that target should be revised upwards. In many cases, the number of meetings could be significantly reduced without affecting the substantive work of the bodies.
21. The Secretariat should furnish to the Committee a list with cost indication and venues of conferences and meetings of any bodies funded outside the regular budget of the United Nations, but which were being serviced by the Organization's Department of Conference Services.
22. In the past, many guidelines had been adopted on the number and length of conferences and meetings; the important thing was to implement those decisions. The draft resolutions before the Fifth Committee, once adopted, should be duly taken into account. The Committee on Conferences would have to monitor their full implementation.
23. He referred to the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 42/207 C (document A/43/628) on the use of the official languages of the United Nations, simultaneous distribution of documentation and respect for the equal treatment of official languages of the United Nations. The Secretary-General had already taken some measures on those questions and it was to be hoped that he would continue on that course. Timely distribution of documents and the provision of adequate conference services were questions of substance which had a significant impact on optimum utilization of resources.

(Mr. Rallis, Greece)

24. Lastly, the Twelve would appreciate clarification from the Secretariat on the statement made by the Secretary-General at the end of paragraph 9 in document A/43/628 on temporary assistance, as it might have financial implications. The Twelve would reserve judgement on the statement pending clarification.

25. Mr. BARABANOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the process of reassessing the activities of the Committee on Conferences had begun with the recommendations of the Group of 18. Those recommendations included strengthening the Committee and broadening its terms of reference.

26. In the view of the Soviet delegation, the Committee should function principally as an authorized organ of the General Assembly, concerned both with guaranteeing that conferences - one of the most important activities of the United Nations - took place, and ensuring that conference resources were utilized as rationally and economically as possible.

27. Draft resolution B, contained in the report of the Committee (A/43/32), was the product of two years' debate. While the Soviet delegation did not strongly support such organisational proposals as making the Committee a permanent subsidiary organ of the Assembly, the mode of appointing members, etc., neither did it wish to raise objections, although it saw no rational basis for changing the number of members.

28. There was nothing substantially new in the draft resolution's proposals concerning the Committee's terms of reference, as it merely systematized its present terms of reference. However, it was not his delegation's intention to criticize the Committee, as the draft resolution had obviously been the product of a delicate compromise. In any case, the provisions of the draft resolution, imperfect as they were, might serve as a sound basis for intensifying and substantially broadening the activities of the Committee on Conferences.

29. The Soviet delegation had no objections to the other recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences. Moreover, with reference to the revised calendar of conferences and meetings, he noted that in accordance with the new budgeting process, so-called perennial activities were included in the budget estimates until the Assembly decided otherwise. It was his delegation's understanding that that also applied to meetings of bodies whose mandates were to be presented for renewal, as listed in annex III of the Committee's report.

30. In conclusion, the inexcusable delay with which the report of the Committee on Conferences had been submitted was regrettable and constituted an argument in favour of the proposal by some delegations that all editorial services of the United Nations Secretariat should be consolidated in the Department of Conference Services, as recommended by the Group of 18.

31. Mr. AKHTARUZZAMAN (Bangladesh) said that the services rendered by the Department of Conference Services were crucial to the holding of meetings by the various United Nations bodies, and his delegation took note of the statement by the

(Mr. Akhtaruzzaman, Bangladesh)

Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments to the effect that new technology would be introduced to compensate for the reduction in personnel in accordance with General Assembly resolution 41/213. It was, however, vitally important to ensure the efficiency of conference services in the face of the personnel cut.

32. His delegation noted with satisfaction the overall utilization rate of conference services of 77 per cent, but urged those bodies with low utilization rates to make improvements. Furthermore, when scheduling conferences and meetings, the difficulties of the smaller delegations should be taken into consideration.

33. Documents should be made available on time and in all United Nations working languages, which should be treated equally.

34. His delegation welcomed the draft resolution which spelled out the new mandate, status and composition of the Committee on Conferences. If the Committee became an intergovernmental body, its composition should be based on the principle of equitable geographical representation. In that context, his delegation was prepared to support the view of the delegation of China that the Committee should be expanded.

35. Mr. NASSER (Egypt) said that his delegation welcomed the steps taken by a number of intergovernmental bodies to promote a more efficient use of conference services. Although some bodies had failed to make full use of their conference resources, the complexity of the political issues under discussion should be taken into account. Financial rationalization should not be carried out at the expense of political effectiveness. His delegation strongly opposed any attempt to curtail the holding of meetings for budgetary reasons.

36. He noted with satisfaction that the utilization factor continued to improve and that in the past three years no requests had been made for additions or changes in the calendar of conferences and meetings that involved financial implications. The draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 1989 reflected a more even distribution of meetings, which should help to improve the utilization of conference services.

37. His delegation regretted that the Committee on Conferences had been unable to reach agreement on its future composition. Draft resolution B contained in the Committee's report represented a step forward, but the status, composition and mandate of the Committee on Conferences constituted an indivisible whole. Since that Committee was a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, its composition must be based on the principle of equitable geographical representation. The Committee should have the smallest membership that was compatible with that principle. As the General Assembly itself must deal with that question, it would not be advisable to consider the draft resolution presented by the Committee on Conferences beforehand.

(Mr. Nasser, Egypt)

38. Lastly, his delegation was pleased to note that new technologies and managerial innovations had been introduced in the Department of Conference Services.

39. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that the pattern of conferences had drawn considerable attention over the years, not only because it constituted a highly important part of United Nations activities, but also because it had a major impact on resources. The rationalization of meetings and conferences and the efficient utilization of conference services should be a bilateral undertaking of delegations and the Secretariat. To impose considerations and present situations which would violate the relevant General Assembly resolutions would not only be unproductive but would also give rise to the very problems which the Committee had been striving to solve for many years. The Secretary-General had not been remiss in his efforts to cut costs in conference services without seriously affecting normal activities.

40. One of the recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its report on the representation of organizations of the United Nations system at conferences and meetings (A/43/586) was to reduce travel by United Nations staff attending meetings and conferences. His delegation supported that recommendation. With the exception of technical and development assistance missions, the Secretariat staff should refrain from accepting invitations involving travel outside Headquarters, unless the invitation was at the expense of the inviting Government or organization.

41. As an economy measure, greater use should be made of United Nations field offices in places where meetings were held. At the conclusion of the meeting, the representative of the field office might send all pertinent documents, together with his observations and recommendations. Clearly, greater control of Secretariat representation could still be achieved despite the proposed 10 per cent cut in conference-servicing activities accepted by the Secretary-General.

42. His delegation would like to know why JIU had not included Secretariat support services in its study, which constituted an important aspect of conference services. Nor had any mention been made of support services in meetings and conferences held outside Headquarters.

43. His delegation had noted with satisfaction various conclusions and recommendations contained in the JIU report: the observance of order and discipline in the issuance and acceptance of invitations by Secretariat offices would lead to a reduction in representation; departments and offices had been more selective with regard to invitations, 70 per cent of which had been rejected in 1986; the practice of extending invitations purely for reasons of protocol or institutional courtesy should be abolished; and before deciding to attend a meeting or a conference, departments and offices should conduct a cost-benefit analysis of such participation.

44. With regard to the size and composition of the Committee on Conferences, his delegation agreed with other delegations that the current arrangement should

(Mr. Garrido, Philippines)

continue, because experience had shown that consensus could be obtained faster in a smaller body.

45. Lastly, his delegation supported the draft resolutions contained in document A/43/32. However, in draft resolution A, paragraph 4, his Government would like to add the words "compared to previous years" after the words "Notes with appreciation that there has been a considerable improvement in utilization of conference resources by a number of United Nations organs", but would not insist on its incorporation if that would pose any problem for the Fifth Committee.

46. Mr. Van den Hout (Netherlands) took the Chair.

47. Mr. TALAVERA (Peru) said that his delegation was pleased with the progress made in the search for a more equitable distribution of conference programming throughout the year and urged the Committee on Conferences to pursue its efforts with the same zeal, particularly in the economic sphere, where the relatively large number of bodies made the task more difficult.

48. His delegation supported the recommendation by the Committee on Conferences that the General Assembly should urge the United Nations organs which had failed to make adequate use of conference-servicing resources to consider reducing the number of meetings they requested in their future programmes of work. However, the criterion of efficiency in the utilization of conference services established by the Committee in 1983 should not be changed.

49. His delegation supported the proposal that the Committee on Conferences should become a permanent subsidiary body. Equitable geographical distribution must be the main criterion for determining the Committee's composition, although that would mean changing its current composition, which was an inappropriate one because it did not represent the regional groups equitably.

50. As to the control and limitation of documentation, especially communications from Member States circulated as United Nations documents, the Committee was right to recommend that Member States should refrain as far as possible from making requests for communications to be circulated as official documents. In any event, when that kind of request was made the communication must be kept short.

51. With regard to the reports of subsidiary organs to the General Assembly, the increase in the volume of official supplements was a cause for concern, for, according to paragraph 76 of the Committee's report, it had increased in 1987 to nearly 3,000 pages; that meant that each supplement had an average of 90 pages, i.e. nearly three times the limit of 32 pages set by the General Assembly.

52. Mr. MAUS (Mexico), referring to the question of a possible change in the status of the Committee on Conferences, said that in the committee itself his delegation had supported the proposal that it should be retained as a permanent subsidiary body, for its work was very important. The Committee's membership should be increased by the minimum number necessary to maintain the effectiveness

(Mr. Maus, Mexico)

of its work and to ensure more equitable geographical representation. His delegation was ready to collaborate with other delegations in seeking an effective and fair composition for the Committee.

53. Mr. LADJOUZI (Algeria) said that, although there was consensus that the Committee on Conferences should be retained as an intergovernmental body, there was no consensus about its purpose. For some delegations, the Committee should be able to reduce the number and duration of meetings which it considered pointless. For others, the Committee's main task was to ensure optimum use of conference services and help the Secretariat to obtain the necessary means to hold the meetings approved by the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies.

54. Some delegations had said that the Committee had served Member States effectively with its present composition. In that case, there was no reason to change its status or mandate. Change must not be selective. The desire to strengthen the Committee should be matched by a desire to correct its defects, including its composition. Furthermore, the Committee itself had stressed the interrelationship between its status, composition and mandate (A/43/32, para. 57).

55. His delegation would not oppose the Committee's becoming a permanent subsidiary body, providing that it retained its flexibility and would still be composed of experts. It would have liked the Committee to be an expert body but was aware that its opinion was a minority one.

56. After laborious negotiations at the Committee's substantive session in 1988, agreement had been reached on the terms of reference of a committee which, if agreement was reached on its status and composition, would become a permanent subsidiary body of the General Assembly. Paragraph 4 (c) of draft resolution B had given rise to differing interpretations; at a time when efforts were being made to enhance the efficiency and increase the operational clarity of the United Nations, it would be wrong to adopt an ambiguous mandate.

57. It had emerged during the Committee's unsuccessful attempt in 1987 to reach agreement on its status and composition that the budgetary process annexed to resolution 41/213 concerning improvement of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations did not provide for the Committee's participation in that process or establish a limit on the Organization's expenditure on conferences and meetings. Resolution 42/211 and the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) were irrefutable proof that there was no limit on the resources to be assigned by the General Assembly for conference services.

58. His delegation agreed with the Tunisian delegation that it would be preferable to adhere to the meaning of paragraph 4 (c) of draft resolution B originally intended by the States members of the Committee on Conferences when they drafted it, i.e., that the Committee was not to have any budgetary functions, or right to assume the functions of other United Nations bodies or prevail over them, or any prerogative to apply an expenditure limit which indeed did not exist.

(Mr. Ladjouai, Algeria)

59. The interpretation which the Algerian delegation, as a member of the Committee on Conferences, gave to paragraph 4 (c) was that the process followed up to the present for the establishment of the calendar of conferences and consideration of proposed departures therefrom would be retained. If that interpretation was not unanimous, the Fifth Committee should clarify the paragraph and make the necessary changes to ensure that it could be carried out.

60. The question of the number of members of the Committee was not a problem. The present number was acceptable, or a slightly larger number or even a smaller one, but the aim must be to correct the present imbalance in the geographical distribution of the membership. That meant that the principle of equitable geographical distribution would have to be applied. The fact that the principle had been applied flexibly in exceptional circumstances did not mean that it had been abandoned or replaced by arbitrary criteria such as the level of contributions or the interest shown in conference matters.

61. The principle of the equality of the official and working languages of the United Nations was not an end in itself or the only criterion for the application of recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 to the Department of Conference Services. The spirit of resolution 42/207 C was that the Organization must be provided with the services and mean to hold its conferences and meetings in accordance with the established conditions. The principle of the equality of languages was one of those conditions.

62. His delegation supported the Secretary-General's proposal to reduce by 10 per cent the total number of posts in the Department of Conference Services because it was convinced that any larger reduction would make it impossible to maintain the minimum resources necessary for the holding of conferences and meetings.

63. The Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments had referred to a number of difficulties which the Department would experience even if the cut-back in posts was only 10 per cent. But the Algerian delegation understood that the percentage reduction proposed by the Secretary-General was derived from an internal study on the Department's staffing needs; furthermore, recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 spoke, on the one hand, about a percentage reduction in posts and, on the other, about the need to maintain the level of the Organization's activities and programmes; the Secretary-General's plans should therefore be formulated with sufficient flexibility to reconcile those two aspects of recommendation 15. In accordance with the letter and spirit of resolution 41/213, the percentage reduction finally approved by the General Assembly ought to be the closest figure to the one specified in recommendation 15 which would ensure the maintenance of the Organization's programmes and activities. It was to be hoped that the reduction in posts in the Department of Conference Services by 10 per cent would not have an adverse impact on the provision of services.

64. The Under-Secretary-General had emphasized the possibilities of introducing new technology to reduce costs and increase the production of conference services.

(Mr. Ladjouai, Algeria)

It would appear that that question had been addressed somewhat gingerly, possibly owing to the short-term costs entailed. However, were it genuinely possible to reduce medium- and long-term costs and to improve the efficiency of the services, the Committee should act with more vigour and determination. The Secretariat could, in due course, help those missions which so desired to use the new technology. Computer technology and the new storage technology were of utmost interest.

65. His delegation supported the cancellation or reduction of useless meetings. However, it was difficult to identify such meetings and to determine how best to cancel or reduce them. The Committee on Conferences was not competent to do so. It would perhaps be more sensible to consider the question of the usefulness and the number of meetings in the bodies directly concerned, which had the means of judging the question and the necessary authority to act on it.

66. While punctuality in starting and ending meetings was very important, valid reasons sometimes made it impossible for delegations to be prompt. The officers should take account of such reasons in planning official and unofficial meetings, so that all the delegations concerned could participate fully.

67. Mr. INOMATA (Japan) said that his delegation had participated actively in the work of the Committee on Conferences, and fully agreed with the recommendations contained in paragraph 1 of its report (A/43/32). Japan also endorsed the decisions taken by the Committee regarding the calendar of conferences and meetings, the control and limitation of documentation and the activities of the Committee itself.

68. The Committee had laid a solid foundation for its future work, which would be carried out on a permanent basis. However, the General Assembly must solve a number of problems concerning the establishment of the Committee on Conferences as a permanent body. The first was the question of membership. The strengthening of the Committee depended much more on the improvement of its substantive work than on the enlargement of its membership. The Committee's authority would be enhanced to the extent that it could tackle specific problems and draft specific recommendations.

69. While the Committee had given valuable advice regarding the more efficient use of conference-servicing resources, the control and limitation of documentation and the patterns of conferences, its effects had yet to be assessed. The work of the Committee required a broader approach. Early in 1989 the Committee should prepare a work programme covering not only its activities for that year, but also those for a number of years to come within the framework of the United Nations medium-term plan and the programme budget. The Secretariat would thus have to prepare the relevant documentation for assisting the Committee in formulating a concrete work programme.

70. Japan believed that the question of the monitoring of the Organization's publications policy, provided for in paragraph 4 (h) of the proposed mandate of the

(Mr. Inomata, Japan)

Committee, deserved high priority, as that matter had not been discussed since the General Assembly had adopted resolution 38/32 E in 1983. It should be noted that a single 300-page Secretariat publication, which was often issued yearly in an updated form, was the equivalent of 100 documents submitted by Member States, a subject of frequent criticism.

71. Another significant issue was the need for the Secretariat to carry out an analysis of the results of the in-depth study of the United Nations intergovernmental structure and functions in the economic and social fields. Although the Special Commission set up for that purpose had not reached any concrete conclusions, the study had enabled several United Nations organs, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the Economic Commission for Europe, to adopt concrete measures of rationalisation. It was essential for the Secretariat to undertake an analysis of those measures in terms of financial implications, using an objective workload standard. While his delegation had proposed in the Committee on Conferences that such a study should be carried out, action had not been taken owing to the inconclusive nature of the work of the Special Commission.

72. Finally, the exact size of the Committee on Conferences should be agreed. Japan felt no need for any enlargement. But it was ready to listen to the suggestions of other delegations as long as they were compatible with the efficiency of the Committee's work.

73. Mr. ZONGWE (Zaire) said that the United Nations had entered a decisive stage in its reform, and that the Committee on Conferences was a significant component in the implementation of that reform. The improved use of conference-servicing resources remained important. He welcomed the Secretariat's remarks in paragraphs 8, 9, and 10 of the report of the Committee on Conferences regarding the efficient and effective use of conference services made by a number of bodies. Close co-operation should be established between the substantive secretariats of various bodies and the Department of Conference Services in order to avoid overlapping and to ensure that activities were programmed more smoothly.

74. His delegation regretted the increase in conference servicing in 1988 and the fact that the measures to achieve optimum utilisation of conference resources had not been sufficiently implemented. He supported the recommendation that the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should request the intergovernmental bodies concerned to reorganize their calendars of meetings as efficiently as possible.

75. Zaire would welcome the transformation of the Committee on Conferences into a permanent subsidiary organ comprising Member States appointed on the basis of equitable geographical balance. On that question, as in that of the control and limitation of documentation, it largely supported the three draft resolutions proposed in the Committee's report.

76. As to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 42/207 C, his delegation took particular note of the steps taken by the Secretariat regarding the

(Mr. Zongva, Zaire)

use of the official languages of the United Nations and the simultaneous distribution of documentation in all those languages. He shared the concern expressed by the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments about the dichotomy between the strict application of that resolution and recommendation 15 of the Group of 18, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 41/213 and 42/211, concerning the reduction of Secretariat personnel. Zaire supported the ongoing programme of reforms, and believed that the 10 per cent reduction proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (A/C.5/43/1) and the recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination (CPC) in paragraph 36 of its report (A/43/16) were reassuring, as they duly took into account the need to allocate sufficient resources to the translation and interpretation services and to other conference services.

77. While his delegation supported the technological innovations programme in the Department of Conference Services, he would like to have complete documentation on the progress of that programme in order to assess its relevant benefits more effectively.

ITEM 118: JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (continued) (A/42/540, A/43/16 and Corr.1 (Part I), A/43/34, A/43/124, A/43/161, A/43/397 and A/43/556)

78. Mr. HOH (United States of America) said that one of the most useful analyses provided by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in recent years was that contained in document A/43/124 on the performance and results of United Nations programmes. That report contained concrete, action-oriented recommendations, which Member States found most useful.

79. Evaluation had long been the weak link in the planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation cycle of programmes. The JIU report documented Member States' repeated calls to strengthen the evaluation function in the Secretariat. Unfortunately, it indicated that those calls had not resulted in real improvements. The report recommended that results be measured against established objectives. A qualitative, rather than a strictly quantitative measurement, was needed. His delegation also supported the following recommendations in the report: performance reports should be timed to be a useful input into deliberations on programme budgets; administration and conference servicing, which accounted for almost half of the regular budget, should be subject to periodic intergovernmental review; adequate staff should be provided for carrying out evaluations; and an integrated management information system should be a priority. His country would address those matters in detail when the Committee took up agenda item 115 on programme planning.

80. With regard to the reports on storage which were summarized in the 1988 JIU annual report, his delegation noted that, according to the detailed replies of the Secretary-General (A/43/556), the Secretariat seemed to have tried to reduce storage costs while avoiding less cost-effective approaches and major capital commitments for new equipment pending further study. The Secretariat should be encouraged to seek additional ways of providing efficient archiving and storage.

(Mr. Hoh, United States)

81. In respect of the JIU methods and programme of work described in its annual report (A/43/34), it should be noted that in 1987 the Inspectors reviewed their own activities and proposed ways of increasing the effectiveness of the Unit. The General Assembly had adopted resolution 42/218 in the hope of giving the Unit the guidance and support from Member States that were essential to the successful operation of JIU. Although some aspects of resolution 42/218 had yet to be put into place, his delegation commended the Inspectors and staff of JIU for their efforts, and urged them not to "rest on their laurels".

82. As to the JIU work programme for 1988-1989, his delegation believed that the Unit would do better to attempt fewer studies and to ensure that those which it did undertake were carefully designed and executed. It would also be useful if, as had been recommended by the Group of 18, more JIU studies were evaluations instead of simple reports on how certain operations were being carried out.

83. Section VII of the report addressed the subject of follow-up of the reports, which was a critical ingredient in the effectiveness of the Unit. The section reflected the fact that 1988 was a transitional year for the Unit. His delegation expected that the section would be expanded in future reports. Paragraph 21 of the JIU guidelines called for reporting on the major recommendations of the individual reports which had been summarized in the Unit's annual reports of the three prior years. At a minimum, his delegation would expect that JIU would indicate, report by report, whether it was generally satisfied with the implementation of its recommendations. If JIU had reconsidered a major recommendation in light of information provided by a secretariat, or if there had been any significant lack of follow-up on the part of a secretariat, the report should say so. For easy reference, recommendations cited in that section could be reprinted in the report, which could have the same format as the Secretary-General's report on implementation of JIU recommendations, which was a model of clarity.

84. With regard to the level of staffing for the Unit, the Secretary-General had presented CPC with a post reduction plan several months previously. The first round of cuts had not applied to JIU and other inter-agency secretariats. Those cuts would have to be submitted for the consideration of Member States. Although no area of the Secretariat should be exempt from the pruning of posts, caution should be exercised in the case of JIU, since the General Assembly, in its resolution 41/213, had endorsed recommendations for strengthening the Unit.

85. Lastly, JIU had stated its intention to maintain a dialogue with the secretariats of participating organizations in carrying out its mandate for follow-up of its recommendations. The Unit's self-improvement efforts had clearly helped to give JIU the credibility which it needed to maintain a constructive dialogue with secretariats. Ultimately, effective inspection and evaluation required a tripartite consultation that included intergovernmental bodies as well. The best encouragement that Member States could give to the Unit's self-improvement efforts was to pay attention to its reports and take them into account in the consideration of other agenda items.

86. Mr. KOULIK (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the Joint Inspection Unit, in its 20 years of existence, had prepared more than 200 reports and other material; they had not all been at the same level, however, nor had they all elicited the same reaction from Member States and United Nations officials.

87. It should be recalled that, in considering the part of the report of the Group of 18 devoted to the subject, the proposal had been made that the Unit should be dissolved, and that the Unit itself had provided some justification for the proposal.

88. In recent years the Unit had been asked to mobilize unutilized reserves and make better use of its potential. In that regard, some positive measures had been taken by the Unit to improve the quality of its documents, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly recommendations, especially resolution 42/218.

89. The report contained in document A/43/34 could be said to be a reaction on the part of JIU to General Assembly decisions. Moreover, the report indicated the steps that had been taken by the Inspectors to bring its activities in line with current requirements.

90. In his delegation's view, the guidelines adopted by JIU and contained in the annex to the report were very useful, but it would also be helpful to include the guidelines that should be followed by each Inspector. He noted the Unit's desire to adopt a more collegial approach to its future work, without prejudice to the independence of opinion of the Inspectors.

91. The usefulness of the reports lay in their conclusions and recommendations. Of course, the definitive outcome of the implementation of the recommendations depended to a large extent on the volition of those to whom they were directed. In that regard, he welcomed the Unit's decision to monitor the implementation of its recommendations closely, a task which would be carried out by the Inspectors. It was important for future studies undertaken by the Inspectors to be guided by the spirit of the current JIU report, i.e., they should be easy to read, practical and not exceed 32 pages.

92. In respect of the Unit's work programme at a time when the United Nations was undergoing financial difficulties, it was important for JIU to make recommendations that might result in real savings. In studying document A/43/161 from that standpoint, his delegation supported the Philippine delegation's view that only some of the reports met those requirements. The studies on the extrabudgetary resources of the United Nations, the use of productivity norms and the final report on management methods promised to be useful.

93. In general, the Unit could play an important role in contributing to the effective operation of the United Nations. His delegation shared the view of other delegations that it was not appropriate to reduce the number of JIU staff engaged in research.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.