

United Nations
**GENERAL
ASSEMBLY**

THIRTY-FOURTH SESSION

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FIFTH COMMITTEE

17th meeting

held on

Monday, 15 October 1979

at 3 p.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 17th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

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

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK.

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/34/SR.17
24 October 1979
ENGLISH

ORIGINAL: SPANISH

79-57531 5171E (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 98: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1980-1981 (continued)
(A/34/6 and Add.1, A/34/7; A/C.5/34/12 and 13)

General debate (continued)

1. Mr. LEINO (Finland) expressed his appreciation to the Secretary-General for his efforts to keep the real growth of the budget for the next biennium to as low a level as feasible. Finland supported the policy of financial restraint and economy, and hoped that the Secretariat would pursue it in spite of the pressures which would inevitably occur for increases in the budget. That policy also implied sacrifices in the implementation of programmes already accepted. Many organs and bodies of the United Nations system paid too little attention to the financial implications of their decisions of substance, while the managers and staff responsible for the implementation of such decisions preferred the greatest possible financial flexibility.
2. The financial needs of the United Nations as a whole could be approached from different standpoints. Finland had always stressed the pivotal role of the United Nations in the life of the world community. The Fifth Committee should not, therefore, act solely in the capacity of an auditor, but should also see the administration and financing of the United Nations in a wider perspective, keeping in mind the goals of the Organization, which were the maintenance of peace and security and the economic and social advancement of the peoples of the world.
3. The more the political and economic situation in the world gave cause for concern, the more necessary it was to have an effective United Nations. In that perspective, the contributions of Governments to the United Nations budget were minute in comparison with the valuable political results which had been achieved. At the same time, it was understandable that Governments which were forced to apply a restrained domestic financial policy and to curtail their public spending, like the Government of Finland, demanded financial restraint in the United Nations.
4. It was the difficult task of the Secretariat to make optimum use of the available financial resources. To that end, it was hoped that it would do its utmost to avoid any waste of resources or duplication of activities.
5. Another area which should be studied was internal and external administrative and financial control. In that respect, his delegation welcomed the ideas of the delegation of Canada for examining the present auditing system of the United Nations, as the goals in view were generally acceptable.
6. However, the States Members of the United Nations should not limit themselves to examining its machinery; they should also make sure that they were making a proper contribution to its work. All Governments should be prepared to fulfil their financial obligations reliably.

(Mr. Leino, Finland)

7. The financial stability of the United Nations was a precondition for the strengthening of its capacity to act in all its spheres of competence. The fundamental responsibility of the Fifth Committee was to guarantee that that capacity was not impaired, an objective which must not be lost from view.

8. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) said that he wished to refer first to the observations made about the proposed programme budget. During the debate, repeated reference had been made to waste and austerity. There was no disagreement about waste, but austerity carried negative as well as positive connotations. A call for austerity was justified only when there was a consensus among Member States that there was obvious waste in the use of United Nations resources which appeared not to be the case. There was a general awareness, however, that the United Nations needed to increase its efficiency, the better to discharge its role under the Charter.

9. In reading the relevant documentation and listening to statements, his delegation had discerned a most unfortunate fact: a correlation between the size of contribution and the degree of influence that could be exercised on the management of the United Nations. But it must be borne in mind that the Charter was based on the fundamental principle of the sovereign equality of every Member State, irrespective of the size of its contribution, its geographical area, its population or its military arsenal.

10. The only source of legislation for the conduct of the budgetary and administrative affairs of the United Nations was to be found in the resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly, and it was the duty of all the Member States to ensure that administration was carried out in a healthy atmosphere, free from interference or pressure. In that respect, he wished to refer to the statement made at the 15th meeting by the delegation of Israel, which had said that the United Nations spent resources on projects of a one-sided political nature, and that international funds should not be utilized to set up partisan propaganda units, or to subsidize the functioning of organs which ignored the sovereign rights of a Member State. He wished to remind the delegation of Israel that the activities referred to were carried out in fulfilment of General Assembly resolutions which had been adopted by the vast majority of Member States. Those activities were also totally compatible with the role of the United Nations as spelt out in the Charter, since they were aimed at exposing the injustices and flagrant violations of human rights inflicted on a people by a Member State. Thus, by no stretch of the imagination could they be regarded as incompatible with the goals of the United Nations.

11. In spite of its misgivings about the 0.8 per cent real rate of growth of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981, his delegation could, in principle, accept the budgetary proposals presented by the Secretary-General. Its views on the cuts recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions would be given when the budget was discussed section by section.

12. With regard to the positive trends which he had detected in the proposed programme budget, he said that the form of presentation was a clear improvement

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(Mr. Ramzy, Egypt)

over previous ones, and demonstrated the endeavours of the Secretary-General to implement the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/211. His delegation also welcomed the increased trend towards decentralizing United Nations expenses from New York and Geneva to other locations, especially the regional commissions. Although a further effort must be made to redeploy available resources towards more meaningful activities, the initiatives taken by the Secretary-General in that direction were praiseworthy.

13. With respect to the features of the proposed budget which gave cause for concern, his delegation had noted a trend towards proportionately less expenditure on substantive activities, and more expenditure on common services, which was clearly reflected in the fact that common support services had increased their share by 1 per cent to 34 per cent, or \$408 million, whereas substantive activities had retained their existing share of the budget.

14. His delegation was gratified that the Secretary-General had prepared the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 in the context of the medium-term plan for the period 1980-1983, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 33/118, but was surprised that, for major programmes, the Secretary-General had taken into account the relative growth rates recommended by the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination in paragraph 53 (a) of its report (A/33/38). Although it might be true that those recommendations were the only intergovernmental guidelines for resource allocation, they had not been endorsed by the General Assembly. It should also be pointed out that the majority of Member States had not accepted them, and indeed had expressed their reservations on the matter both in CPC and in the Fifth Committee.

15. Mr. BLACKMAN (Barbados) said that the Committee, in considering documents A/34/6 and A/34/7, would not simply be recommending the approval of funds for the activities of the United Nations system but would concomitantly be deciding on the role which it expected the United Nations to play. The programme budget was therefore the most crucial item on the agenda of the current session.

16. At the present point in the debate, his delegation wished to present its views on the budget as a whole and would reserve its right to speak again when the Committee examined the budget in detail.

17. There had been much discussion of growth rates and percentages of growth rates, and various interpretations had been offered of the statistical information contained in the relevant documents. His delegation felt that real growth could not be quantified by examining provisional figures; it would be unwise to attempt to measure real growth in a budget which lacked, inter alia, figures relating to the fifth session of UNCTAD and the Vienna International Centre. Moreover, additional appropriations would be requested when the performance reports were submitted. His delegation therefore concurred with the Advisory Committee's view that it was the revised and not the provisional budget which deserved serious consideration.

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(Mr. Blackman, Barbados)

18. His delegation felt that the Secretary-General, in his opening address to the Committee (A/C.5/34/12), had aptly drawn attention to the contradictory imperatives which the United Nations system was facing by stating that there was a limit to which the Organization could increase programme delivery at the high standard expected of it without the provision of commensurate financial resources.

19. The insistence on negative growth by those that contributed the bulk of the regular budget and extrabudgetary funds should be juxtaposed with the growing needs of the developing world, which sought relief through the resolutions adopted by the specialized agencies and the General Assembly.

20. Zero-base budgeting or negative growth did not necessarily run counter to the interests of the developing world. The concept of negative growth, when scientifically applied, meant the examination of existing activities and the elimination of those which were obsolete, ineffective or of marginal usefulness. The optimal use of existing resources, including redeployment, would flow from the elimination of such activities.

21. There was another application of the concept of negative growth which was unscientific, namely, when existing activities were continued without regard to their effectiveness or utility and there was no increase in the level of funding after adjustments for inflation were made. In his delegation's view, that methodology did not eliminate waste and would tend to hurt the developing world, especially in a time of scarce resources.

22. As a member of the developing world, Barbados felt that the problem of budget growth could neither be understood nor solved in isolation from the preparation of the medium-term plan, on which the budgets for two biennia were technically based. The medium-term plan for 1980-1983 had been made available to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination so late as to impair its ability to make recommendations to the General Assembly, as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 31/93. Such problems would recur every budget year, unless there was constant evaluation of existing programmes and timely submission of reports by the Secretariat to the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination and the Joint Inspection Unit, so as to permit those bodies to make critical recommendations regarding opportunities for absorption, the redeployment of human and budgetary resources and the weeding out of ineffective programmes.

23. His delegation strongly opposed any recommendation aimed at undermining the delivery capacity of programmes designed to aid the developing world. The budget for the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should reflect the needs of countries or regions recently devastated by natural disasters. Furthermore, the important role played by UNIDO in development should be given proper emphasis, as should the heavy dependence of developing countries on agencies and organizations which delivered agricultural, technological and economic assistance to them. His delegation rejected the principle that the needs of the world's communities should be sacrificed on the altar of financial austerity. Austerity budgets which tended to paralyse the United Nations and render it incapable of responding to pressing global problems, especially the problems of the poor, did not serve the interests of Member States, whether developed or developing.

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24. Mr. DE FACQ (Belgium) said that the United Nations had become a highly complex organization, whose structure could not be compared to that of any other public or private body. Based on the voluntary membership of 152 States, including great Powers and small States, economic giants and countries with subsistence economies, the United Nations was characterized, on the one hand, by a definite centralization with regard to the planning of its programmes of work and, on the other hand, by decentralization in their execution. The United Nations engaged in extremely varied activities, ranging from the promotion of disarmament and the establishment of a new international economic order to the issue of postage stamps and the drilling of wells in the Sahel.

25. In his current report on the work of the Organization and the foreword to the proposed programme budget the Secretary-General provided delegations with a clear picture of the budgetary and organizational problems facing him. His delegation was fully aware of the difficult situation in which the Administration was placed: the workload of the Secretariat was steadily growing under the pressure of Governments, while, at the same time, the Administration was constantly being warned not to increase the real and over-all cost of its activities.

26. Any administration which had been in existence for several decades ran the risk of floundering in bureaucracy. There was the danger that some of its units would lose the necessary initiative to streamline their activities and make creative and productive use of the means available to them.

27. The Secretary-General complained, and rightly so, of the present proliferation of United Nations activities, of a lack of co-ordination, which led sometimes to the perpetuation of obsolete activities and of the disparity sometimes seen between the decisions adopted by Governments and the statements made by their representatives in intergovernmental bodies when administrative and budgetary questions were discussed.

28. In order to rationalize and improve as much as possible the activities of the United Nations, simpler and less expensive procedures were required. Their adoption was the responsibility not only of intergovernmental bodies but also of the Administration. Delays and lack of co-operation on the part of the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system should be eliminated, so that proposals for streamlining activities in various sectors of the Organization could be implemented.

29. In accordance with the recommendations of CPC, the Secretary-General had proposed a selective increase in the programme budget, but the question arose as to what the final situation would be once the financial implications of new programmes had been incorporated into the budget.

30. His delegation did not consider it proper that the expected growth in the human settlements programme should be 2.3 per cent, whereas for the administrative organs a growth of more than 70 per cent was foreseen as a result of the transfer to the regular budget of posts previously financed from extrabudgetary resources. Nor could it accept an increase of 30 per cent under section 22 of the budget, even

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(Mr. De Facq, Belgium)

though a transfer of resources was involved. His delegation considered that, in a period of austerity, the transfer of posts to the regular budget should be frozen in the case of programmes or programme components of secondary interest.

31. Moreover, it was essential that the Secretariat should inform the Committee of activities which had been terminated, or had become obsolete or of marginal usefulness so that economies could be made. His delegation considered that the report of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/34/4) might be misleading in that connexion.

32. It was difficult to believe that, in an organization like the United Nations, further components could not be eliminated from a number of programmes. It was essential that the United Nations should devote a larger proportion of its resources to the implementation of projects of direct benefit to developing countries.

33. The office of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation should play a commanding role in all matters concerning initiative and co-ordination within the Organization. An important area of restructuring was regional decentralization. In that connexion, the above-average increase in resources proposed for the regional economic commissions represented a very positive factor. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that decentralization basically meant the transfer of resources and not their increase in the regions unaccompanied by reductions at Headquarters.

34. The Fifth Committee had before it a budget for a total amount in excess of \$1.2 billion. The proposed budget was not final, however, in that the financial implications of recommendations and resolutions approved by a number of organs would be communicated to delegations in the course of the current session.

35. His delegation supported the statement made by the representative of Ireland on behalf of the countries of the European Economic Community and stressed the need to finance the bulk of the financial implications of resolutions approved during the current session through a redistribution of resources in such a way that supplementary estimates would not be submitted during the thirty-fifth session.

36. He welcomed the fact that the growth rate foreseen was barely 0.8 per cent in the case of known budgetary expenditure but had reservations regarding the manner in which that figure had been reached.

37. In examining the budget, his delegation would take into account the difficulties faced by an organization of the size of the United Nations, but it would also take into consideration the will shown by the United Nations in recognizing those difficulties and endeavouring to overcome them.

38. Mr. MONTHE (United Republic of Cameroon) said that, in the view of his delegation, the United Nations budget represented the basic instrument of the Organization for the implementation of its different programmes. A substantial proportion of those programmes were dedicated to the countries of the third world, whose development continued to be limited by the technical and financial

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(Mr. Monthe, Cameroon)

difficulties confronting them. Accordingly, the United Nations budget should reflect not only the concern of Member States at the serious problems of the day but also their joint decisions for the promotion of solutions within the framework of the Charter. Otherwise, such problems would be exacerbated, with unfortunate consequences for all and, in particular, for the young countries with developing economies.

39. His delegation appreciated the efforts which had been made to improve the presentation of the budget but considered that further efforts were required to improve methodology, in particular at the level of programme structure. It should be recognized that there would be deficiencies in that area until a framework had been worked out for the medium-term plan and a thorough examination made of the relationship between that plan and the budget.

40. As the Secretary-General had pointed out in his statement to the Fifth Committee, the proposed programme budget had been drawn up in accordance with a policy of austerity based on the adverse economic conditions prevailing throughout the world. Nevertheless, as the Secretary-General had wisely indicated, in drawing up United Nations programmes, account had to be taken of the growing and changing needs of a large number of Member States and, in particular, of the developing countries. His delegation therefore considered that discretion should be shown on the question of financial and budgetary restraint so as not to prejudice such programmes as a whole.

41. While it was generally agreed that a relationship existed between decisions adopted by the legislative organs of the United Nations and budgetary increases, it had also to be pointed out that the countries of the third world, and Africa in particular, were the principal victims of the tensions, conflicts, troubles, uncertainties and misunderstandings which dominated international economic relations.

42. That being so, the United Nations must be given greater scope for action so as to be able to create conditions leading to equality of opportunity in terms of welfare. The reduction of world conflicts and tensions would make it possible to free resources. Every year a total of at least \$480 billion was spent on the arms race and the United Nations was accordingly deprived of resources which might have been dedicated to the improvement of the living conditions of millions of human beings.

43. Moreover, the necessary political will to end the stalemate impeding various international negotiations was lacking, so that a situation had developed in which further negotiations were necessary, thus requiring additional resources.

44. In the current climate of tension, disequilibrium and uncertainty, affecting not only world peace and security but also international economic relations, it was essential to support the efforts of the United Nations, which represented, in particular for the young countries, a source of hope in a world in search of peace, security and interdependent development, within the framework of the new international economic order.

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45. Mr. HEPBURN (Bahamas) said that his delegation was fully aware that its country was small in size and had few resources and that legal equality was a myth; nevertheless, it ventured to take part in the debate on the highly complex subject of the budget.

46. His delegation, in common with others, realized that something was disturbingly wrong as far as the administrative and financial management of the budget was concerned. First, the major contributors to the budget had voted against the revised estimates at the close of the thirty-third session. Second, the developing countries, as had been clear during the general debate in the plenary Assembly, were increasingly dissatisfied with the ever-increasing gap between themselves and the industrialized countries despite the development programmes implemented by the Organization. Third, the statistics of the proposed programme budget documented the fact that fewer budgetary resources were being channelled into substantive or development-related activities. Fourth, the financial crisis of the United Nations became evident when the reliability and level of resources forthcoming from the major sources of financing for the programmes and activities of the Organization were examined.

47. On the question of extrabudgetary resources, ACABQ had made a number of comments in its first report (A/34/7, paras. 47-59); there was a need for better-defined and objective guidelines, in particular respecting the transfer of posts financed from extrabudgetary resources to the regular budget. Furthermore, as had already been made clear, more objective guidelines in relation to the reclassification of posts under the regular budget were required.

48. His delegation wished to highlight the question of posts financed under the regular budget and from extrabudgetary resources because, as had frequently been pointed out, the preponderant share of the proposed resource growth related to staff costs. In that context, his delegation endorsed the remarks of the delegations of Romania and Australia regarding the need for a re-emphasis on discipline and productivity in the Secretariat. He had also noted, in that same context, the comments of the Advisory Committee in paragraphs 45 and 46 of its first report (A/34/7), concerning expenditure for general temporary assistance and for consultants and expert groups. He trusted the inefficiencies alluded to in the report would be remedied.

49. His delegation had a growing sense of discouragement as it contemplated the issues he had just mentioned, as well as the hundreds of unimplemented or only superficially implemented resolutions. He hoped the warnings of the Advisory Committee in paragraph 74 of its first report, echoed by the Secretary-General in his statement to the Committee, would be heeded.

50. Perhaps the only way to avoid a repetition of the submission of requests for resources greatly in excess of the initial estimates was to "take the bull by the horns", as it were, and exercise the "political will" which was constantly on the lips but rarely characteristic of the acts of delegations.

51. His delegation would therefore like to propose that the Fifth Committee, bearing in mind the letter and spirit of rules 41 and 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and paragraphs 14, 98, 109 and 110 of annex V to those rules, recommend, through its Chairman, to the General Committee that the President of the General Assembly should advise all the Main Committees of the financial

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(Mr. Hepburn, Bahamas)

status of the United Nations, informing them that because of that situation, the Fifth Committee recommended that, in principle, no resolutions containing additional financial implications should be submitted to the Fifth Committee. Additional resources which might be required should be met by redefining priorities respecting new programmes and activities and those already in existence and by redeployment of resources. In that connexion, the Secretariat - for example, the Evaluation Unit and the Steering Committee, under the chairmanship of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation - and the Joint Inspection Unit could be called upon to give "administrative opinions".

52. Once the Main Committees were acquainted, formally, with the financial status of the United Nations, each Committee - and the Security Council - should decide what the exceptions to the "freeze" on the submission of resolutions with financial implications would be.

53. His delegation submitted that suggestion to the Committee for consideration because it felt that such a direct measure was warranted in order to counteract the continuously diminishing credibility of the Organization and the paralysis of two of its major instruments for planning and programming, namely, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, which had not been able to carry out its mandate during its last session, and the medium-term-plan, which, despite all the work that had gone into it, had not been endorsed either by the General Assembly or by the Economic and Social Council.

54. Finally, he wished to add that he had presented the alternative of direct and joint action by all the Main Committees, as opposed to suggesting that the Fifth Committee should take such action solely on its own, because: first, each Main Committee was most familiar with its programmes and therefore better able to identify priority and redeployment possibilities; secondly, the best way to learn was by doing, and responsibility for the effectiveness of the Organization was ultimately collective; and thirdly, the Fifth Committee in the past had not shown itself capable of withstanding the collective onslaught of additional financial implications.

AGENDA ITEM 102: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES: REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
(continued) (A/34/32 and Corr.1)

AGENDA ITEM 12: REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (continued)
(A/34/13/Add.37 and 38)

55. Mr. PALAMARCHUK (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that in establishing the Committee on Conferences and assigning its functions, the General Assembly had been trying to limit the convening of an excessive number of conferences and meetings in the United Nations system. In his view, action to that end must be twofold. In the first place, resources for conference services must be so organized as to avoid waste; scientific workload standards for conference servicing staff must be established and documentation must be radically reduced. In the second place, conference activities in the United Nations must be restricted, with a limit being set on the number of conferences and meetings and the resources for such activities.

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(Mr. Palamarchuk, Ukrainian SSR)

56. It was evident from the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32) that in its two years of operation the Committee had achieved results in the first area. His delegation supported the Committee's recommendations regarding the limitation of documentation and the more rational use of other conference resources; nevertheless, it felt that the measures recommended by the Committee on Conferences aimed at an orderly utilization of conference resources should have been implemented by the Secretariat itself long before the creation of the Committee and that it should not be necessary to assign the task to intergovernmental bodies. The Committee had not made any progress, despite the clear and specific mandate of the General Assembly, on the matter that did require the participation of an intergovernmental body, namely, the establishment of a quota system.

57. Bearing in mind the report of the Committee on Conferences and the day-to-day experience of delegations, it was clear that the ability of the Secretariat to service meetings and the ability of the Member States to participate in meetings had reached a practical limit; going beyond that limit would mean an increase in the budget and a decrease in the participation of Member States.

58. At present, the distribution of conference resources in the United Nations had stabilized and any significant increase in conference activity in a given area would be detrimental to other areas, upsetting the present balance. Any upset in the balance would have serious consequences for the United Nations and would be in contravention of the Charter. In view of that risk, the General Assembly had taken a first positive step by adopting decision 33/417. The establishment of limits on conference resources did not mean the adoption of a rigid system that would not allow for flexibility in the light of changes; on the contrary, such a measure would encourage Member States and the Secretariat to redefine activities that were obsolete and of marginal usefulness, thus making it possible to free resources for other areas of activity.

59. The establishment of a quota system might be complicated if there was no desire to examine the matter thoroughly, but it would be very simple if approached from the standpoint of seeking a rational way to utilize the assessed contributions of Member States. In the view of his delegation, there was no reason for delaying a decision on the matter and, if the Committee on Conferences did not make any progress towards the establishment of a quota system during the coming year, the advisability of renewing its mandate would be open to question.

60. Mr. SERBANESCU (Romania) noted that, in chapter III, section 7, of the report of the Committee on Conferences, there was a continued discrimination against the Economic Commission for Europe because, unlike the other regional economic commissions, it appeared that ECE would not be able to hold meetings away from its headquarters at Geneva. That discrimination should be eliminated, since there was no reason to consider ECE a "second-rate" commission. Furthermore paragraph 32 (j) was ambiguous, as it was not clear which were the "subsidiary organs of the General Assembly" and which were the "other principal organs of the United Nations".

61. His delegation agreed in essence with the contents of paragraph 33 of the report, concerning invitations extended by specialized agencies to bodies of the United Nations system, although it felt that it should be implemented with some flexibility.

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(Mr. Serbanescu, Romania)

62. With regard to the management of conference resources, efforts should be continued to improve the management of resources and to establish guidelines aimed at eliminating improvisation and subjectivity. As for workload standards for conference servicing personnel, on which there was not sufficient information in the report, his delegation supported the recommendation that the problem should continue to be studied and hoped that a decision would be taken soon.

63. Mr. LÖSCHNER (Federal Republic of Germany) said that he found the work of the Committee on Conferences generally satisfactory, but had a few remarks to make on its report. With regard to the establishment of a quota system, a balance must be sought between firmness against proliferation of meetings and the desire to cope with the political and economic needs of a rapidly changing world. However, any growth in conference activities should principally be met by funds obtained through redeployment of resources, and intersessional departures from the conference calendar should be financed from already approved appropriations.

64. His delegation had learnt with concern that nine special conferences had been proposed or scheduled for 1980 and that there would be some overlapping. The remedy for that problem was easy: reduce the number of conferences and shorten their duration. In that connexion, he would like to ask the Secretariat which conference periods it had reserved for the 1980 meetings of the Committee of the Whole of the Disarmament Commission and for the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. On the basis of that information, the Fifth Committee might be able to determine which priorities, schedules and venues in the calendar would have to be altered.

65. He expressed his delegation's appreciation that the Committee on Conferences had decided to change the venue of some meetings from New York to Geneva in order to fulfil the servicing requirements of the first part of the ninth session of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, which would be included in the calendar after the General Assembly had approved its convening.

66. The Secretary-General had taken account of the financial preoccupations of Member States in preparing the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981, and he should continue to do so with regard to demands for additional meetings and conferences. At the same time, Member States must exercise strict self-discipline and scrutinize each additional demand for conferences services.

67. Mr. KULKARNI (India) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts of the Committee on Conferences to tackle the problem of conferences and meetings, which had assumed massive proportions, and was pleased to note the steps taken by the Economic and Social Council to control documentation and limit the number of its meetings. It agreed with the President of the Council that it was desirable that similar decisions should be taken by the Second and Third Committees, and hoped that the action already taken by the Council would be brought to the attention of the Chairmen of those Committees.

68. With regard to the calendar of conferences, the two basic questions were whether too many conferences and meetings were being held and whether the Secretariat was able to cope with them. His delegation believed that a good number

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(Mr. Kulkarni, India)

of meetings now being held were only marginally useful but strained the capacity of delegations to participate in all activities and made it impossible for the United Nations to exert itself on the issues that mattered. For example, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had had to meet concurrently with the present session of the General Assembly and to consider the programme budget in only five days, first of all because documentation had not been ready and then because conference service facilities had not been available.

69. It was obvious that the time had come to exercise some control; for, although in theory the United Nations should be able to organize as many conferences as its Member States required, in fact it could not do so. In order for the United Nations to be a vital, dynamic organization, priorities must be defined and it must not be burdened with a work programme it could not carry out. Otherwise, increased resources for conferences would be needed, and they would be hard to come by because developing countries could not provide them and developed countries were unwilling to do so.

70. In those circumstances, there must be a concentration of focus and Member States must voluntarily accept curbs on the number, frequency and length of meetings, because otherwise the Secretariat would reach the point where it could not provide the necessary services, as had already happened in some cases. Moreover, several subsidiary bodies were now being forced to meet so frequently that they might be greatly overstretched. One example was the Advisory Committee, which was in session for as much as 51 weeks in every biennium.

71. At the same time, the Secretariat should improve its response to the increased workload. In paragraphs 56 and 57 of its report (A/34/32), the Committee on Conferences appeared to accept the argument that the present level of meetings and documentation imposed strains on the capacity of the Secretariat to service those meetings. His delegation did not agree that the workload had been excessive in all cases; rather, there seemed to have been some inability to cope with a workload which had shown only a moderate increase. The proposed programme budget (A/34/6, sect. 29) showed that the number of assignments for interpretation had risen by 20 per cent from 1974-1975 to 1976-1977, but had declined marginally in 1978-1979. Translation work had increased by 6.3 per cent between 1974-1975 and 1976-1977 and by 1.8 per cent between 1976-1977 and 1978-1979. The typing workload had increased by 3 per cent between 1974-1975 and 1976-1977 and had declined marginally between 1976-1977 and 1978-1979. Those figures showed that there had not been an uncontrolled growth in demands for conference services. Although the Secretariat had forecast a heavier workload for 1980-1981, it should be noted that the Advisory Committee, in its report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (A/34/7), had proposed a reduction of \$1 million for conference servicing because it believed that demands would not be as high over the next biennium as they had been during the current one. It must also be borne in mind that, as stated in the budget proposals, while most of the constraints on conference activity imposed by construction work would have been removed by the beginning of 1980, construction work would continue and would still affect conference activity to some extent. There was therefore every reason to believe that conference activity would remain at the same level or might even decline.

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(Mr. Kulkarni, India)

Since the requirements for most conference services had stabilized since 1974-1975, the Secretariat would have to have a greater output if the documentation norms were to be met.

72. Although his delegation had some reservations on the findings of the Committee on Conferences concerning the capacity of the Secretariat, it would vote in favour of the acceptance of the Committee's recommendations.

73. Mr. MASDOUKI (Morocco) expressed his delegation's appreciation for the work done by the Committee on Conferences in preparing its report (A/34/32). Conferences and meetings unquestionably absorbed a large part of the United Nations budget, and they should therefore be programmed according to a calendar under which they could be properly held and there would be no waste of resources which the Organization so urgently needed.

74. Having listened with care to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences, and having studied the Committee's report and chapters XXXVII and XXXVIII of the report of the Economic and Social Council (A/34/3/Add.37 and Add.38), his delegation would like to make a few comments.

75. One of the main problems in the holding of meetings concerned the preparation of documents and translation services. Unfortunately, documents were issued late and that created difficulties for delegations and prevented the various items from being considered at the proper time. That delay was due in part to the fact that there were vacancies in the typing units, because the Secretariat was having difficulty recruiting typists.

76. In the Arabic language services there were special problems, one of which was terminology. His delegation had already observed at the previous session that the terminology used in translations by the Arabic Service should be based on the work done by the League of Arab States at its centre in Rabat. The German Section, which had only just started work, was not experiencing the problems facing the Arabic Service. It was indispensable for the Secretariat to take steps to solve those problems.

77. At its thirty-second session, the General Assembly had set forth in resolution 32/71 a series of guidelines on the scheduling of meetings and on documentation, but not all of them had been implemented. For example, the report of the Committee on Conferences stated in paragraph 75 that, while in 1979 the number of cancellations of scheduled meetings had decreased, so had the average duration of meetings, which had resulted in wastage through the inadequate usage of allocated conference resources and had been detrimental to the optimum utilization of available resources.

78. His delegation supported recommendation 5 of the Committee on Conferences, which emphasized that, as a general principle, invitations from specialized agencies of the United Nations system to United Nations bodies to hold meetings outside their headquarters should not be encouraged, since in the final analysis the Member States had to bear the costs involved. Regarding paragraph 32 (e) of

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(Mr. Masdouki, Morocco)

that Committee's report, indicating that certain bodies could meet alternately in New York and in Geneva or Vienna, his delegation reiterated its concern about the financial implications of travel by staff from one city to another. On the other hand, it agreed with those members of the Committee on Conferences who had proposed (para. 53 (e)) that the Secretary-General should be requested to submit to the appropriate United Nations bodies a study on the feasibility of integrating conference servicing costs with individual programme budgets. It likewise welcomed Economic and Social Council decision 1979/81 on the calendar of conferences and meetings, particularly its subparagraph (d) which stipulated that, once the calendar of meetings had been adopted by the Council, no additional meetings involving departures from the biennial cycle of meetings would be authorized during the biennium. He also wished to mention Economic and Social Council resolutions 1979/41 and 1979/69 on the control and limitation of documentation and expressed the hope that other bodies would follow the Council's example.

79. His delegation would support the recommendations in the report of the Committee on Conferences and also the proposed calendar of conferences.

80. Mr. GEIGER (Chile) said that his delegation, a member of the Committee on Conferences, had already mentioned on other occasions the importance it attached to the work of that body, and the vital need for all Member States to co-operate so that it could fulfil its mandate.

81. As could be inferred from the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32), all the questions it considered affected the work of the United Nations and, for that reason, effective implementation of that Committee's recommendations would to a great extent determine the success of the Organization's work, by permitting the best use of the various human and material resources and means available, however limited they might be.

82. A reading of the report of the Committee on Conferences showed that, to the extent possible, it had fulfilled the mandate given to it by the General Assembly in resolution 32/72, especially with regard to achieving the optimum apportionment of conference resources. That Committee had held fruitful consultations with the Secretariat and the fact that its report had been adopted unanimously demonstrated that, without prejudice to the positions taken by delegations on some of the questions, the Committee's continuing effectiveness was based on its unity and its ability to achieve consensus.

83. His delegation shared the concern of others regarding the problems stemming from the delay in receiving documentation, the question of translation into working languages and the proliferation of meetings, which were becoming so numerous that it would shortly be difficult for the Organization to cope. He therefore supported the recommendations in the report of the Committee on Conferences, in the hope that their implementation would put a stop to bad practices. For example, in recommendation 6, the Committee referred to the overscheduling of meetings and to the timely distribution of documentation, and in recommendation 3, it had taken into account the interest of some delegations in organizing consultations between the Committee on Conferences and the Economic and Social Council. The Committee

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(Mr. Geiger, Chile)

had also welcomed Council resolutions 1979/1, 1979/41 and 1979/69 on the control and limitation of documentation, and had pointed out that other bodies should be urged to follow the Council's example.

84. His delegation endorsed those Economic and Social Council decisions, especially the decision not to authorize departures from the biennial cycle, once the calendar had been adopted. He likewise shared the view expressed by the Committee on Conferences in recommendation 5 that specialized agencies should not be encouraged to invite United Nations bodies to hold meetings away from their headquarters, since that involved additional costs which in the long run were defrayed by Member States.

85. In his report on the rationalization of the procedures and organization of the General Assembly (A/34/320), the Secretary-General made a series of recommendations some of which were being put into practice at the current session with good results. Especially noteworthy were those in chapter V on the maximum utilization of available time, chapter VI on documentation, and chapter VIII on planning of meetings. In chapter VIII, paragraph 31 (a), the Secretary-General recommended that the Committee on Conferences should be authorized to play a more effective role in the planning of meetings and in the use of conference facilities.

86. His delegation hoped that those recommendations, although addressed to the General Assembly and its Main Committees, could be extended to the other bodies of the United Nations system, since they were designed not only to avoid the wastage of resources, but also to enhance the efficiency of conference services.

87. Finally, his delegation found that the report of the Committee on Conferences was accurate and that its recommendations, all of which it endorsed, were valuable. It would thus vote in favour of adoption of the calendar of conferences.

88. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy) said that it was not necessary to repeat that all the members of the Fifth Committee were convinced of the need to halt the proliferation of conferences and the increase in the volume of documentation, which was threatening to suffocate the United Nations. His delegation understood the concern of those delegations which had maintained that the level of conference activity should not be determined on the basis of the priorities of the past, which did not reflect current or future perceptions of Member States or their political will to seek solutions within the framework of the United Nations (A/34/32, para. 54). The exchange of views within the Fifth Committee should have one main objective, namely, to secure more power and more clout for the Committee on Conferences.

89. The Committee on Conferences had submitted a set of recommendations that merited adoption by the Fifth Committee. The Fifth Committee should likewise adopt the calendar of conferences, although decisions to be adopted by the General Assembly at its current session would probably make it necessary to modify that calendar. It would have been preferable for the Fifth Committee to have considered the calendar of conferences towards the end of the session. Under the circumstances, it was fortunate that the Economic and Social Council had already studied the calendar carefully, since many delegations had not had time to consult their Governments on each of the specifics of the calendar.

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(Mr. Majoli, Italy)

90. The Fifth Committee should go beyond reiterating its conviction that the number of conferences and meetings and the volume of documentation were excessive. It should make constructive proposals such as those submitted by the delegation of the Bahamas.

91. It would be advisable for the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences to work more closely not only with the Economic and Social Council, but also with the Chairmen of the Second and Third Committees. It would also be advisable to invite the General Committee of the Assembly to participate in the deliberations whenever they concerned an item related to an increase in the volume of work of the Secretariat's conference services.

92. If that was not done, various bodies lacking an over-all view would most probably decide to hold new conferences or request special reports without duly taking the consequences into account. It would thus be most useful if the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences were to attend the weekly meetings during which the Chairmen of the Main Committees reported to the President of the General Assembly on the general progress of their work.

93. In sum, given the fact that resources were limited and needs considerable, and that the future as well as the present had to be taken into account, it was not enough to consider quotas that might be reflecting priorities of the past, but instead it was necessary to take into consideration the changing role of the United Nations - a mirror of the evolving political realities of international life. The Fifth Committee should thus not limit itself to adopting the recommendations in paragraph 79 of the report of the Committee on Conferences; it should also ensure that greater power was given to the Committee on Conferences.

94. Mr. MA'LKO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that his delegation had studied document A/34/32 carefully and supported the recommendations which aimed, in accordance with the mandate of the Committee on Conferences, at ensuring that the bodies concerned made optimum use of the available conference facilities. It also supported the recommendation that the General Assembly should authorize the Secretariat to set the opening date of the sessions of the functional commissions and standing committees of the Economic and Social Council in a flexible manner, and the recommendation that the General Assembly should reaffirm the existing guidelines for reducing the waste resulting from cancellations of scheduled meetings.

95. A reading of documents A/34/3/Add.37 and 38 (Part I), chapters XXXVII and XXXVIII of the report of the Economic and Social Council concerning, respectively, the control and limitation of documentation and the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1980-1981, showed that the Economic and Social Council had adopted decisions to limit the volume of documentation and reduce the duration of each of the regular sessions of the Council by one week. Moreover, there should be recognition of the efforts made in those areas by the Economic Commission for Europe, which at its 1978 session had considered and adopted the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences on the introduction of methodical procedures for

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(Mr. Ma'lko, Ukrainian SSR)

deciding when meetings would be held. His delegation welcomed the response of ECE to the Committee's recommendations, but it wondered how diligently those recommendations would be put into practice, since many constructive provisions adopted earlier on that subject were still dead letters. For example, as was pointed out in paragraph 58 of the report of the Committee on Conferences, General Assembly resolution 2609 (XXIV) in which it had decided that, as a general rule, not more than one major special conference should be scheduled in any one year, was regularly violated. Actually, in 1978 and 1979 seven major special conferences had been held and nine more were scheduled for 1980. To organize such conferences, preparatory bodies were set up which operated for long periods, giving rise to considerable expense. Moreover, in violation of the resolution mentioned, they frequently duplicated the activities of existing bodies and in some cases operated at a low level of efficiency.

96. It was clearly urgent to strengthen the role of preparatory bodies and increase their effectiveness. In resolution 3351 (XXIX) (sect. II, para. 3 (d)), the General Assembly had decided that the Committee on Conferences should consider the feasibility of a quota system to allocate resources among various fields of activity. Five years had elapsed since that resolution had been adopted and nothing had yet been done in that regard, except to include the question on the agenda, year after year, for consideration by the Assembly. Paragraph 49 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32) indicated that the Secretariat had proposed that the term "quota system" should be replaced by the phrase "set of measures to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the conference activities of the Organization". Once again, it was discouraging that time was being wasted discussing questions of terminology and that no substantive decision was being adopted.

97. His delegation shared the concern of others regarding the cancellation of meetings, and the late opening and early adjournment of meetings. However, it welcomed the fact that the relevant recommendations of the Committee on Conferences were beginning to show results. For example, for the third consecutive year, the Fifth Committee was starting its meetings punctually. Also, according to available data, the time lost since the beginning of the current session of the General Assembly had been three times less than during the corresponding period of the thirty-third session.

98. There none the less remained much to be done. According to the information furnished by the Secretariat, the General Assembly at its thirty-third session had failed to use 392 hours of the time allotted to it: of the 180 meetings scheduled, only 130 had been held.

99. His delegation also wished to point out that the report of the Committee on Conferences provided no data on the number of meetings held in 1978 by bodies financed by extrabudgetary funds that had been charged to the United Nations budget. It was of the utmost importance to stress that such meetings should be paid for solely from voluntary contributions.

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ORGANIZATION OF WORK

100. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee would consider agenda items 98 and 102 at the meeting on Tuesday, 16 October. With regard to agenda item 98, Nigeria had mistakenly been omitted from the list of speakers. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to include Nigeria in the list.

101. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.