



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. PIRSON (Belgium)

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

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

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/34/3/Add.37 and 38, A/34/528)

1. Mr. HAMZAH (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation supported the draft calendar of conferences and meetings contained in annex II to the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32). In general, it also supported the decision by the Economic and Social Council not to add to or amend that calendar after its adoption, since any changes could entail modifications to the necessary budgetary allocations. It could not, however, agree to adopt the calendar in the abstract; in every case, the Committee on Conferences should have the right to introduce changes in accordance with the requirements of a given conference.
2. All United Nations bodies should hold their meetings at their headquarters, where the necessary facilities were available. There was no sense in holding a conference on one subject in two or more different places. His delegation agreed that invitations from specialized agencies to United Nations bodies should not be encouraged, since additional expenses were likely to be involved, and urged that consultation should take place with the Committee on Conferences before such invitations were accepted. He further supported the proper use of documentation and avoidance of wastage, believing that a limit should be set on the resources allocated for documentation.
3. His delegation did not favour the notion of a quota system for the allocation of conference resources. Although such a system would enforce limits on conference resources expenditure and lead to economies, it might limit the Organization's ability to respond to the requirements of certain vitally important conferences. It was to be hoped that the General Assembly would attach special importance to the question of priorities among the different conferences planned; Secretariat participation in discussions on that subject should be at the very highest levels.
4. Mr. KRYEZIU (Yugoslavia) said that the number of conferences had reached a critical point, and it was necessary for the Department of Conference Services to exert maximum efforts in order to carry out its tasks in an adequate manner.
5. Previous discussion of the problem of planning meetings had led to only limited results, owing to a lack of proper understanding of the importance of the problem; meetings should be started on time, be effectively conducted and be made shorter. The Committee should, however, avoid administrative measures which would limit the need for holding meetings, since that would, in turn, impede the normal work of the bodies concerned. Instead, it should suggest that the General Assembly should reaffirm its guidelines concerning the cancellation of scheduled meetings, and instruct United Nations bodies receiving invitations from specialized agencies to consult with the Committee on Conferences before accepting them.

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(Mr. Kryeziu, Yugoslavia)

6. Frequent delays in the issue of documents hampered delegations in their efforts to carry out their tasks. Many documents did not meet delegations' needs at all. Documents should be as short as possible and provide clear and adequate information. His delegation therefore fully supported the resolutions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council relating to the limitation and control of documentation, and endorsed the Council's decision to discontinue the provision of summary records for its subsidiary bodies for an experimental period.

7. The programme of conferences should never be fixed or static. Quota systems would inevitably limit flexibility and the Organization's ability to respond in timely fashion to new needs.

8. His delegation supported recommendations 1 to 6, contained in paragraph 79 of the report, and endorsed the proposed calendars of conferences for 1980 and 1981.

9. Mr. BARTLETT (Jamaica) said that the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences were generally acceptable to his delegation. He was unhappy, however, with the proposals concerning the Consultative Committee on the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women which, according to the report, was due to hold its meetings in Vienna. His delegation, as well as many others, held that a transfer of the Co-ordinator of the Voluntary Fund to Vienna would adversely affect the operations and management of the fund, and intended to present its reasons in the Third Committee.

10. Since the issue of the future location of the Office of the Co-ordinator had not been resolved, the Fifth Committee would be guilty of prejudging the issue were it to adopt the proposal of the Committee on Conferences in that regard. The only action which could correctly be taken at the current stage was to omit from the proposed calendar of conferences any location for the meetings of the Consultative Committee, adopting instead the wording "to be determined", as in the case of certain other meetings. His delegation would in due course submit a formal proposal to amend annex II of the report accordingly.

11. Ms. DIMITY GILES (Australia) said it was clear to her delegation that unless real efforts were made to reduce documentation and make better use of the available time, the prospect of the whole conference process breaking down became very real indeed. The calendar of conferences was badly overcrowded; delegations were under enormous pressure to attend all the meetings, some of whose inclusion in the calendar did not always seem to be justified. She had been pleased to learn of the letter from the President of the Economic and Social Council to the President of the General Assembly (A/34/528) in that connexion.

12. Considerable savings could be made by the effective implementation of suggestions put forward by the General Assembly. It was in the interests of all to reduce documents in both number and length. The length, timeliness and quality of documentation remained of great concern in view of their impact on the ability of

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(Ms. Dimity Giles, Australia)

the Organization to conduct its work effectively. The problem was a product of too many avoidable requests for reports, recurring reports which were too long, and the devotion of excessive resources to précis-writing and the translation of records. Her delegation had been pleased to note that the Economic and Social Council had cancelled the provision of summary records to its subsidiary bodies.

13. More publicity could well be given to the time lost in the Main Committees and plenary meetings of the General Assembly owing to late starting, early closure or cancellation of meetings. The current report of the Committee on Conferences unfortunately lacked any counterpart to the table appearing in an annex to the report for 1978 (A/33/32), showing the results achieved through the proper utilization of meeting-time by the General Assembly and its Main Committees at the thirty-second session. It would also be useful to receive a general estimate of the cost on an hourly basis of the wastage of staff time and services required at various venues when programmed meeting-time was not utilized.

14. For the moment, the Committee on Conferences could do no more than cajole and urge delegations to abide by the admirable guidelines it had set out. Unless more and better results were achieved, the General Assembly should consider what other measures could be taken to enable the Committee to perform a constructive role.

15. Her delegation endorsed the recommendations contained in chapter VI of the report.

16. Mr. STUART (United Kingdom) noted with approval the continued progress in improving and rationalizing the management of conference resources. His delegation supported the various recommendations listed in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32). In particular, he commended the action of the Economic and Social Council in limiting and controlling the number and duration of meetings in its calendar, and in limiting the volume of its documentation.

17. Nevertheless, he expressed disquiet at the uncontrolled growth of the meeting schedule; despite General Assembly decisions limiting the number of special conferences in any one year to one, and later to three, seven special major conferences had been authorized in each year of the expiring biennium and nine had already been proposed or scheduled for 1980. The calendar of conferences, and in particular the schedule of special major conferences, was an integral part of the programme budget and as such must be subject to the same budgetary discipline. Priorities should be applied to conference activities as well as to the substantive programmes of the Secretariat: his delegation would study the Secretary-General's further proposals for the redeployment of resources with particular regard to the schedule of special major conferences and take them into account in deciding its attitude towards the budget as a whole.

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(Mr. Stuart, United Kingdom)

18. His delegation found acceptable the proposed scheduling and locations of meetings and conferences as recommended by the Committee on Conferences for 1980 and 1981, while reserving its position on the major budgetary issue to which he had referred. It did not, however, agree with the proposed venue for the meetings of the Consultative Committee on the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade for Women. The Committee's choice of Vienna assumed that the Co-ordinator of the Fund would be moving to Vienna together with the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. That question had yet to be resolved, and he believed a decision would be taken to keep the Co-ordinator of the Fund in New York, whence it would follow that the venue of the meetings for the Consultative Committee should also be in New York. For the time being, then, the entry under the heading "Location" relating to those meetings in annex II should be amended to read "to be determined"; his delegation had become a sponsor of the Jamaican draft decision to that effect.

19. Ms. MUSTONEN (Finland) said that the calendar of conferences should be so constructed as to allow the effective participation in conferences of all Member States, regardless of their resources. During recent years, the United Nations had suffered from a proliferation of meetings. Since the situation was most alarming in respect of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, her delegation supported the view that the Committee on Conferences and the Council should co-operate more closely in improving the calendar of meetings. It could not but regret the Council's failure to reach agreement on the implementation of those recommendations contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 32/197 relating to the restructuring of the work of the Council itself. Had the Council been able to steer its subsidiary machinery as envisaged in the resolution, there would have been a considerable easing of pressure on the calendar of conferences and the conference servicing capacity of the United Nations. It was to be hoped that the ideas contained in the resolution regarding the more rational organization of meetings of subsidiary bodies of the Council would not be totally rejected, but would be taken up at a more auspicious moment.

20. Her delegation agreed with the proposal contained in paragraph 53 (e) of the report (A/34/32); it suggested that a study should be undertaken, and the results discussed in the Fifth Committee in 1980.

21. A reappraisal of requirements should take into account the ability of Member Governments to participate in meetings. The Committee on Conferences should study, for example, possible modifications to the biennial cycle of meetings: there had been a tendency for meetings of certain bodies to be automatically scheduled for the same period without regard to their specific tasks. It should also examine ways of better relating the functions and agenda of meetings to the time allocated for them. It might also consider the idea of replacing proposed ad hoc special conferences by special sessions of the General Assembly.

22. In order to make the Committee on Conferences a truly effective tool, Finland was prepared to consider proposals for strengthening its mandate and making it the steering body for United Nations conferences.

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23. Mr. KOZUBIK (Czechoslovakia) said that the Committee had successfully accomplished the task set it. If the recommendations it made were consistently carried out, they could facilitate the optimal distribution of resources needed for conferences and meetings, which would doubtless lead to a reduction in expenditure and have a positive influence on the over-all budget of the United Nations. He fully supported co-operation between the Committee and the appropriate United Nations bodies, as well as the consistent implementation of all measures already adopted at previous sessions and directed towards increasing efficiency in the organization of meetings and conferences. It would be in the interests of economy and of all delegations to adopt a decision providing that any constructive proposals either for achieving the general goals in planning conferences or relating to the work of the Committee on Conferences would be adopted on the basis of consensus.

24. His delegation noted with satisfaction the reduced number of variations and changes in the proposed calendar of conferences and the reduced demand for additional appropriations from the budget. As a member of the Committee on Conferences, Czechoslovakia would continue to promote the steady elimination of all shortcomings which hampered the effectiveness of conferences as well as being a burden on the budget. It fully supported the measures taken by the Economic and Social Council to control the length of conferences and meetings, and to impose certain limits on the issue of documents. The Main Committees could also help achieve the goals of efficiency and economy by making a more careful assessment of the number of special conferences and their length, as well as requests for new conferences not included in the calendar.

25. His delegation generally supported the recommendations contained in paragraph 79 of the report. It was aware that financial resources were often wasted because meetings did not begin or end their work on time and therefore supported the suggestion that the current trend towards efficiency and economy should be enshrined in resolutions of the General Assembly so that the Secretariat would make every effort to accomplish those goals, as required in recommendation 4.

26. Mr. BALASUBRAMANIAM (Sri Lanka) drew attention to the fact that \$184 million had been estimated as the requirement for conference and library services in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1980-1981. That represented approximately 15 per cent of the total budget, and showed a 10 per cent increase over the previous biennium. The number of conferences planned for 1980 had increased by a similar percentage. In the light of those facts, his delegation believed that the time had come to make an urgent and critical assessment of the calendar of conferences to determine whether all the conferences and meetings planned were really necessary, and whether it might not be possible to reduce the duration of some of them. While there was general agreement that the current system was unsatisfactory and that urgent remedial action was required, the Committee on Conferences had unfortunately not managed to reach a consensus on any for the allocation of resources. Specific measures to end the malaise might perhaps be found by combining the various approaches to which reference was made in paragraphs 54 and 55 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32). He suggested that that Committee should therefore be authorized to study the matter

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(Mr. Balasubramaniam, Sri Lanka)

further and to report at the thirty-fifth session on a generally acceptable formula to ensure the rational use of limited conference resources.

27. He was appreciative of the efforts made by the President of the General Assembly and the Chairmen of the Main Committees to start meetings promptly, and hoped that that practice would be extended to all other bodies. With regard to the control of documentation, he understood that measures were under consideration to improve efficiency, and hoped that the Committee on Conferences would succeed in adopting measures to streamline and rationalize the system. The measures mentioned in paragraph 70 of the report deserved encouragement. He noted that the statistics for 1979 showed a welcome reduction in the number of cancellations of scheduled meetings. However, there had also been a decrease in the average duration of meetings. His delegation welcomed the steps being taken to prevent wastage of that kind. It endorsed the recommendations and the draft resolution contained in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

28. Mr. BRODODININGRAT (Indonesia) referred to the statement made by the Foreign Minister of his country at the 10th plenary meeting of the General Assembly with regard to the serious problems posed for the functioning of the Organization by the discussion of a growing number of issues in the General Assembly (A/34/PV.10, p.71). That applied equally to other United Nations forums. The ever-growing recognition of the importance of the United Nations and the increased willingness of the international community to solve its problems through collective negotiations should certainly be encouraged and therefore, as a matter of principle, his delegation could not accept a formal, mandatory and rigid quota system which would hamper constructive dialogue in the United Nations. It therefore shared the opinion reflected in paragraph 54 and in the first part of paragraph 55 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32). However, it was not closing its eyes to the real and increasingly difficult problems experienced by the Secretariat in trying to accommodate the ever-growing need for meetings and conferences. For their part, delegations were not only concerned about the alarming state of documentation but were also experiencing growing difficulty in participating in the increasing number of meetings. Some of the solutions to the problem already existed in the form of decisions taken or measures introduced by principal organs such as the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council; similar measures should apply to all the other United Nations bodies.

29. The role played by the Committee on Conferences had had an increasing impact on the conduct of business and organization of work of United Nations bodies, and that had been clearly reflected in the reduction in the number of departures from the calendar of conferences in recent years. It might be useful therefore to consider enhancing the Committee's positive role by strengthening its mandate.

30. Such action on the part of intergovernmental bodies should be matched by equally serious efforts on the part of the Secretariat. There was still room for improvement in the provision of substantive and physical facilities for meetings and conferences. The solution was not to impose on Member States an a priori rigid quota system, but rather to regulate meetings and conferences in such a way that appropriate facilities were provided to enable Member States to participate in a meaningful way.

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(Mr. Brotodiningrat, Indonesia)

31. His delegation fully endorsed the recommendations contained in paragraph 79 of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

32. Mr. KHOLOMA (Malawi) expressed the view of his delegation that consideration of the calendar of conferences could not take place in isolation from discussions on the proposed programme budget, since more conferences and meetings inevitably led to greater expenditure. It therefore believed that in future the calendar of conferences should be accompanied by a statement of estimated costs so that the Committee could consider the matter in relationship to the proposed programme budget.

33. His delegation was not opposed to the holding of important meetings on priority issues, but it was convinced that the number of conferences and meetings in the calendar was excessive and could be reduced without having any detrimental effect on the Organization. The Committee on Conferences had recognized in paragraph 32 (a) of its report the need to consider a biennial programme of conferences in line with the two-year cycle of the programme budget; that was a welcome innovation.

34. Miss MUCK (Austria) said that her delegation supported the recommendations contained in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32), and particularly welcomed recommendations 5 and 6.

35. The question had to be asked whether there could be any real solution to the seemingly insurmountable problems arising from an increasingly heavy calendar of conferences and the need for timely production of increasingly abundant documentation. To say the least, a certain amount of scepticism was justified by the current situation. No Committee succeeded in obtaining the necessary documentation in time in all working languages, requests for further documents increased daily and decisions to hold additional meetings were not subject to any real discipline or restriction, for obvious political reasons.

36. The courage of those who tried to solve what were virtually insoluble problems was therefore all the more praiseworthy. Resolutions 1979/1, 1979/41 and 1979/69 and decision 1979/81 adopted by the Economic and Social Council were especially welcome. By stressing the volume and nature of documentation those resolutions indicated a possible solution, particularly with reference to the rule on a 32-page limit on the length of documents submitted by the Secretariat and the recommendation on the inclusion of a summary of proposals and conclusions. However, she wondered how the figure of 32 pages had been chosen, since it appeared to be somewhat arbitrary, and whether it was sufficient to restrict the number of pages without restricting the number of documents on any specific topic. More precise and detailed rules therefore needed to be laid down, clearly distinguishing between various types of documents, drawing up a list of exceptions to the 32-page rule, and even proposing that the length of some types of documents should be restricted to 10, 15 or 20 pages. It would be advisable if proposals to that effect were referred to the Committee on Conferences by the Secretary-General at the earliest opportunity, and she hoped that the Fifth Committee might envisage submitting a resolution containing such a recommendation. The recommendation on submitting summaries of documents should become a strict rule for documents of more than 10 pages. However, controls of that kind would certainly not bring results unless discipline was

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(Miss Muck, Austria)

exercised, first and foremost on the part of Member States, which should strive to restrict the number of meetings and to moderate their requests for documentation.

37. Mr. MARTIN (New Zealand) expressed the support of his delegation for the recommendations and draft decision contained in paragraphs 79 and 80 of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

38. He noted that that Committee had had no success in reaching agreement on the introduction of a quota system for the allocation of conference resources, and had therefore been unable to make any recommendation on the subject. For practical and political reasons it was unlikely to do any better in the future. First, as had been correctly pointed out by the representative of the Soviet Union, and acknowledged in the report of the Committee on Conferences, there were practical limits to the capacity of the Secretariat to service meetings and the current level of meetings strained that capacity. Although possible in theory, in practice it would be extremely difficult to quantify capacity to service meetings and to establish what had been termed a model pattern of conferences. For that reason, several delegations had considered that it was preferable for the Department of Conference Services to continue taking a pragmatic and flexible approach to conference programming.

39. Secondly, as the report had noted, the level of conference activity by and large reflected the preoccupations of Member States and their concern to seek solutions within the framework of the United Nations. That raised a broadly political, as well as pragmatic, problem. In the past the General Assembly had adopted resolutions setting limits on conference activity and then, at the very same session, had disregarded those limits for what it clearly considered to be good and sufficient reasons. There was no justification for supposing that it would act differently in future, simply because it had approved a quota system.

40. It was against that background, and taking into account the wastage that occurred because the frequency of meetings or the inavailability of documentation prevented delegations from making adequate preparation, that the Committee on Conferences had agreed on recommendation 6. In the light of that recommendation, his delegation hoped that the Main Committees as appropriate, would examine their total conference load and consider not only the frequency, timing and duration of the meetings proposed, but whether some of them really needed to be held at all. In that respect, the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council were a step in the right direction. His delegation supported the approach outlined by the representative of Austria and believed that it would be useful for the Committee on Conferences to consider in 1980 the extent to which the decisions taken by the Economic and Social Council, and any other related suggestions, might be recommended to other subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly. Other areas to which that Committee could usefully direct its attention included the question of workload standards, referred to in recommendation 7, a review of the effectiveness

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(Mr. Martin, New Zealand)

of the previous recommendations adopted by the General Assembly, ways of further improving conference management, and a review of the effectiveness of the Committee's own work.

41. He noted the recommendation made in paragraph 29 of the Secretary-General's report (A/34/320) on the rationalization of the procedures and organization of the General Assembly with respect to the usefulness of subsidiary organs and pointed out that the Committee on Conferences had submitted some concrete recommendations. The Secretary-General should perhaps have proposed simply that the General Assembly should review the effectiveness of the subsidiary organs which had been unable to submit concrete recommendations and decide whether or not they should remain in existence. Although no time-limit had been put on the continued existence of the Committee on Conferences, it seemed to him desirable that the Fifth Committee should evaluate the work of the Committee on Conferences every three years and report accordingly to the General Assembly. His delegation agreed with the Chairman of that Committee that it had a number of useful achievements to its credit and that there was still work it could usefully perform, but it was questionable whether that was sufficient justification for prolonging its life in its present form beyond 1980.

42. There appeared to be a certain disillusionment among some delegations, but it seemed to him that the Committee on Conferences had achieved about as much as could have been expected of it, given that its members ranging from those who wanted conference costs reduced to those who believed that it was unacceptable to impose arbitrary ceilings of any description on conference activities. All it had been able to do in those circumstances was pragmatically to steer a middle course and examine ways of improving the management and use of conference resources without increasing the cost.

43. Finally, if the Committee on Conferences was to play a more effective role in the planning of meetings and the use of conference facilities, in accordance with the recommendation approved by the General Assembly, its terms of reference would clearly need to be broadened and it should, therefore, during the following year, prepare revised terms of reference for the consideration of the Fifth Committee.

44. His delegation would join others in submitting a draft resolution embodying the various suggestions that had been made on the proposed programme of work for the Committee on Conferences in 1980.

45. Mr. PAPENDORP (United States of America) assured the Committee on Conferences that his delegation supported its work and had a continuing interest in further examining any proposals to strengthen its mandate or improve its methods of work so as to secure better management of scarce conference resources.

46. He noted the reference made by the representative of Finland to the suggestion contained in paragraph 53 (e) of the Committee's report (A/34/32) with regard to

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(Mr. Papendorp, United States)

the possibility of integrating conference servicing costs with individual programme budgets. His delegation saw considerable merit in that suggestion and would welcome a study by the Secretary-General along those lines. Some members of the Committee on Conferences had felt that that suggestion went beyond the Committee's terms of reference and should be considered by the Fifth Committee. However, his delegation would have preferred to see that suggestion included in the list of recommendations to the General Assembly and therefore believed that it would be appropriate for the Fifth Committee to add its own endorsement of paragraph 53 (e) and to recommend that the Secretary-General should be asked to make the requisite study. The list of recommendations contained in paragraph 79 should be amended accordingly.

47. He supported the proposal made by the representative of Jamaica concerning items 37 and 128 of the draft calendar of conferences for 1980 and items 29 and 97 of the draft calendar of conferences for 1981 (A/34/32, annex II).

48. He also supported the comments that had been made regarding the decisions taken on the work of the Main Committees of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council. Fewer meetings, briefer reports and discontinuation of summary records for subsidiary bodies would be of substantial advantage to the Organization's work.

49. His delegation endorsed the other recommendations contained in paragraph 79 of the report of the Committee on Conferences and would vote in favour of the draft decision approving those recommendations and the calendar of conferences for 1980-1981.

50. Mr. AYADHI (Tunisia) said that, although conference costs were higher than ever, the real problem lay not in the growing desire of Member States to hold more consultations and meetings, but in the fact that the conference servicing capacity of the Organization had almost reached its limit. His delegation shared the concern of many others on the need to reconcile quantity and effectiveness. The calendar of conferences and meetings for 1980 and 1981 was quite an acrobatic feat on the part of its authors; the slightest change would provoke a chain reaction. For 1980 alone, 207 bodies would be meeting, some of them for two or three sessions, and the vast majority of meetings would be held at Headquarters in New York. He believed that there should be a better balance between the various United Nations offices to reduce the pressure on premises and services in New York.

51. He noted that in several cases the venues and dates of conferences and meetings were undecided, and he wished to request the Committee on Conferences to explain how resources could be planned on the basis of so many unknown factors. He further requested clarification on the nature of the co-ordination and relationship between those units of the Secretariat responsible for programmes and those responsible for conference servicing.

52. It was obvious that even if the proposed calendar of conferences was adopted without amendment it would not be possible to follow it to the letter. A good deal

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(Mr. Ayadhi, Tunisia)

of flexibility was therefore required and, for that reason, his delegation supported recommendations 2 and 3 contained in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences.

53. He deplored the unacceptable delays in the issuing of official documents in all languages, which diminished the value of discussion at the session and posed a serious handicap to many delegations. The volume of documentation alone did not justify the existing situation of de facto language discrimination, which was in itself the cause of enormous waste of resources; what good were documents in a particular language if they were issued six months late? To take but one example, the medium-term plan for 1980-1983, which had been adopted at the preceding session, was still available in only one language. He asked the Secretariat to explain the reasons for that delay. The representative of Morocco had referred to similar delays in the issuing of summary records in Arabic. The reply of the Secretariat had been entirely unsatisfactory. What the Arabic-speaking delegations wanted was not a justification for the existing situation but rather equal treatment for all languages.

54. With regard to the volume of documentation, there was a need to limit the quantity of documents issued through greater self-discipline. The quality of documents, too, could be improved through rational planning and greater controls. In that connexion, his delegation welcomed the measures already adopted by the Secretariat to rationalize conference servicing activities and to increase their effectiveness. Further measures to that end would be welcome. The Secretariat should ensure that its meetings servicing capacity kept pace with the development of the programme of conferences and meetings, since, after all, meetings were the primary activity of the Organization. Meetings added to the approved calendar of conferences should be scheduled so as not to affect the holding of meetings already approved.

55. The introduction of a quota system for the allocation of conference services was an easy solution which would only mask the problems but not eliminate them. The introduction of workload standards for conference servicing staff, on the other hand, would lead to improvements in the management of resources. In that connexion, he noted with satisfaction the staffing standards agreed upon between the Advisory Committee and the Secretary-General and looked forward to their application at Headquarters and at other duty stations. Staffing and workload standards could not, of course, be uniform. While agreeing with the Committee on Conferences, that the establishment of workload standards for staff in such areas as translation was beyond its competence, his delegation felt that the Committee should lay down guidelines and ensure that whatever measures were adopted to increase effectiveness did not result in injustices or inequalities.

56. Mr. HUITRON (Mexico) endorsed the recommendations contained in chapter VI of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/34/32) and enthusiastically supported the draft resolution proposed in paragraph 80 of that report. A group of interested delegations was holding informal consultations with a view to submitting a draft resolution which would reflect the concerns of a number of States, including

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(Mr. Huitron, Mexico)

Mexico, which considered that it was possible, in rationalizing and harmonizing the calendar of conferences and ensuring optimum use of conference servicing resources, to go beyond the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences.

57. While the report of the Committee on Conferences was somewhat modest in its scope, it should be recalled that Committee was passing through a period of consolidation following the adoption of resolutions 33/55, 33/56 and 33/417, which had established important guidelines relating to the conference activities of the United Nations. Those resolutions had unfortunately not been fully implemented, and the Committee on Conferences was of the opinion that, for the time being, the climate was not conducive to the adoption of additional legislative measures by the General Assembly. The modest results achieved by the Committee on Conferences in 1979 were due in part to the fact that many constructive proposals put forward by members of the Committee had not succeeded in commanding a consensus. That did not mean that the Committee was lacking in sound ideas or, even less, that it had completed its mandate and should cease to exist in the near future. Rather, his delegation favoured the strengthening and expansion of the terms of reference of the Committee on Contributions, which could and should contribute to the rationalization of the procedures of the General Assembly, providing an example to other intergovernmental organs and to Secretariat departments, by evaluating its own functions and identifying those areas and issues with which it could deal most effectively and those which were beyond its competence.

58. The efficacy of the Committee on Conferences was noteworthy in the establishment of guidelines for austerity and administrative efficiency. The principles and decisions set out in paragraph 32 of the Committee's report had been of great assistance in the establishment of the calendar of conferences for the biennium 1980-1981. Subparagraph (d), stipulating that intersessional departures from the approved calendar should be financed from approved appropriations for conference services, and subparagraphs (i) and (j), relating to the length of sessions and control over the creation of new organs, would result in considerable economies. His delegation shared the view of the Committee on Conferences regarding invitations extended by specialized agencies to United Nations bodies. Prior to accepting any such invitation, consultations with the Committee on Contributions were not only desirable but imperative.

59. His delegation welcomed the adoption by the Economic and Social Council of resolutions 1979/1, 1979/41 and 1979/69, concerning the control and limitation of documentation. It was to be hoped that other United Nations organs would follow the example of the Council in that important area. His delegation was confident that the Council's decision to suspend the provision of summary records for its subsidiary bodies on an experimental basis would lighten the workload of the Secretariat and release resources which could be used to eliminate bottle-necks in the documents preparation process.

60. His delegation agreed with the Economic and Social Council that there was a need for a strict application of rule 13 of its rules of procedure, which required documents relating to the agenda to be circulated in all the working languages six

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(Mr. Huitron, Mexico)

weeks before the opening of the session. A similar rule would have a salutary effect on the work of the General Assembly, and he suggested that the General Committee should consider the incorporation of that rule into the rules of procedure of the General Assembly at its next meeting.

61. Co-operation between the Economic and Social Council and the Committee on Conferences in the establishment of the calendar of conferences was not only useful but also essential for the smooth functioning of the General Assembly. It was of the utmost importance that the Council's resolutions on documentation and the calendar of conferences should be implemented in their entirety and that the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly should adopt an approach consistent with them. In that connexion, he asked whether, as suggested in paragraph 76 of the report of the Committee on Conferences, documents on the organization of work which could serve as models of full compliance with the Committee's guidelines had been circulated to the secretariats of the various United Nations bodies.

62. The effective and economical utilization of the available resources of the Department of Conference Services had already been dealt with in resolutions of the General Assembly. The Secretariat should be expected to comply strictly with the existing rules concerning the control of documentation and conferences and meetings. The Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments had stated that it was not the staff that prevented the timely issue of documentation, but rather structural and institutional factors. The Chief Editor had said that the additional tasks assigned to the Department were not beyond its capacity. The Director of the Statistical Office had informed the Committee on Conferences that, with adequate planning and sustained effort, documents could be issued within the time-limits prescribed by the General Assembly. His delegation therefore urged all divisions and offices in the Secretariat to ensure that problems of documentation did not undermine the Organization's efforts to carry out its fundamental tasks under the Charter.

63. His delegation fully agreed with the view of the Committee on Conferences that, as a general rule, not more than one major special conference should be scheduled in any one year. That rule, and the necessity of limiting to the fullest extent the number of preparatory meetings for special conferences, should be drawn to the attention of the United Nations system.

64. His delegation could not support the establishment of a quota system for the allocation of conference servicing resources because such a system would limit the flexibility and capacity of the Organization to react to new ideas and ever-changing requirements. The best course was to continue the pragmatic and case-by-case approach followed so far. A similar approach should be taken to the recommendations to limit the number of special conferences.

65. The vacancies in the typing units should be filled as soon as possible since the situation in those units was a possible factor in the noticeable delays in the distribution of documents. His delegation was in favour of the introduction of

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(Mr. Huitron, Mexico)

technological innovations and improvements in the area of terminology and the periodic review of workload standards for staff in the Department of Conference Services. It looked forward to the Secretary-General's report on the feasibility of establishing further workload standards, in particular for technical and complementary conference servicing staff, to be submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

66. Delegations were drowning in a sea of documents, and at the same time there were difficulties in receiving those same documents. The Secretariat, for its part, had the thankless task of producing an increasing volume of documents with resources that were already overburdened. He therefore appealed to all delegations to exercise the greatest restraint in requesting reports from the Secretary-General. The Chairmen of the Main Committees had a role to play in encouraging such restraint. Given the growing number of subsidiary bodies, it was essential, in establishing the calendar of conferences, to enable all bodies to conclude their work well in advance of the opening of the regular sessions of the General Assembly, so that their reports would be available to delegations in good time. As a general rule, subsidiary bodies should not meet during the sessions of the General Assembly.

67. In order to reduce the volume of unnecessary documentation, those reports which contained references to materials which were easily obtainable should indicate only the symbol of the document in question and not include the document as an annex. His delegation also opposed the annexing of summary records to the reports of subsidiary bodies.

68. Mr. OUDOVENKO (Director, Interpretation and Meetings Division) said that the calendar of conferences and meetings for 1980-1981 provided for a very heavy programme, the number of meetings to be held would probably exceed the figures for the preceding biennium. It was possible, for example, that the General Assembly would, at the current session, add a number of important meetings to the calendar, including a special session on economic issues. Replying to a question asked by the representative of the Federal Republic of Germany, he said that it was impossible to state when the special session would take place, since the General Assembly had not yet decided on the dates. Meetings of the Committee of the Whole Established under General Assembly Resolution 32/174 and the Preparatory Committee for the New International Development Strategy were planned for the first half of the year, and those Committees were expected to provide an important input to the work of the special session. The number of meetings and conferences planned suggested that problems might lie ahead in servicing all the proposed meetings.

69. Given the strength of the Interpretation Service provided for in the proposed programme budget, it would be possible to service between 70 and 75 meetings a week at Headquarters, or approximately seven simultaneous meetings each half day. Delegations might assume that that capacity was more than sufficient to service all scheduled meetings, but a closer examination of the calendar would indicate that during the first half of the year the notional maximum interpretation capacity, which was somewhat on the high side as it did not take into account such

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(Mr. Oudovenko)

unpredictable factors as sick leave, would be substantially exceeded during a number of weeks. Consequently, the Secretariat would have to recruit free-lance interpreters to cover the meetings provided for in the calendar of conferences. Of course, overprogramming would reduce the number of free-lance staff needed but the improved efficiency of United Nations bodies would also reduce the rate of cancellation. Thus, it was necessary to be more circumspect in setting the rates for overprogramming. The Secretariat would do its utmost to ensure the efficient management of available resources, but responsibility in that area was shared by Member States. If new requests for meetings were made and adequate conference rooms could not be made available, Member States readily accepted that fact and were prepared to reconsider their requests. When the physical facilities were available, however, and only interpreters were lacking, Member States often went ahead and decided to convene additional meetings, no matter whether additional staff had to be recruited from Europe or whether the Secretariat was able to secure the services of first-rate interpreters. The addition of new meetings to the calendar of conferences was an area in which increased awareness on the part of delegations could contribute to a more economical implementation of the conference programme.

70. Another important factor often neglected in the planning of the conference programme, and particularly special conferences, was the servicing requirements of regional groups. Although meetings of regional groups requiring interpretation services accounted for roughly 20 per cent of all meetings serviced at Headquarters, they were not reflected in the calendar of conferences owing to their informal character. In accordance with a decision adopted by the General Assembly at its thirty-first session, it was current practice to meet requests for servicing of meetings of regional groups on an "as available" basis, when schedule meetings were cancelled. While that arrangement had proved to be more or less satisfactory in the past, recent political developments and the growing need for a regular decision-making process for certain groups called for greater flexibility. During the Assembly session, not only the plenary Assembly and the Main Committees, but also the larger regional groups, competed for the six large conference rooms available at Headquarters, and the Secretariat had the difficult task of reconciling their demands.

71. When approving arrangements for special conferences in the past, the General Assembly had usually provided for conference services adequate to cover three meetings simultaneously. It had always proved possible to satisfy the demands of various regional groups under such arrangements. However, the experience at the Conference on Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries and the Conference on Science and Technology for Development had demonstrated the need to make provision for an additional meeting so that regional group meetings could be adequately serviced. Given the complexity of issues considered at such conferences, it was virtually impossible for regional groups to meet because the Main Committees were in constant session. Very often the participants failed to understand why meetings of regional groups could not be serviced, since those who approved the budgets of special conferences rarely participated in the conferences themselves. The Secretariat took the question of special conferences very

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seriously and intended to submit a detailed report on servicing standards to the Committee on Conferences in 1980.

72. The Department of Conference Services was fully cognizant of the problems of documentation and would make every effort to improve the situation. It was not solely responsible; many documents were not issued in time because meetings of various bodies overlapped.

73. The representative of Australia had suggested that statistics relating to time lost due to late starts and the early adjournment of meetings should be given greater publicity. The Department of Conference Services would have to consult with the President of the General Assembly on that matter. An effort was being made at the current session by the plenary Assembly and the Main Committees to make better use of the time available to them. From 1 to 5 October, for example, the time lost by the General Assembly had amounted to 24 per cent of the total time allotted to it. When the Department of Conference Services received requests for additional meetings, it took the opportunity to remind those requesting conference services of the need to make better use of the time made available.

74. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) asked how much time had been lost by the Main Committees of the Assembly due to late starts.

75. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the representative of the Department of Conference Services could make available to delegations the statistics the Department had compiled relating to the wastage of conference servicing resources.

76. He further suggested that the Committee should take a decision on the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences in paragraphs 79 and 80 of its report early the following week. In that connexion, he drew attention to the fact that an additional recommendation was contained in document A/34/32/Corr.1, thus bringing the number of recommendations to eight. He urged those delegations which intended to submit amendments to the calendar of conferences or draft resolutions on the future work of the Committee on Conferences to do so as soon as possible in order to expedite the Committee's work. The question of documentation would remain open in order to allow the Committee to determine what measures it should adopt as an interim solution to the problem.

77. Mr. RAMZY (Egypt) said that the failure to issue summary records in Arabic was a reflection of structural deficiencies in the Arabic Translation Service at Headquarters. The Chief Editor had informed the Committee that the Secretariat was preparing a comprehensive report on Arabic language services. It was his understanding that the report would meet the requests made by the Assembly in resolution 32/205, deal with the financial implications of the decision adopted at the fifth session of UNCTAD concerning Arabic language services, and furnish information on the status of the Arabic Translation Service at Headquarters. In the view of his delegation, the first two questions should be dealt with together, as they both related to UNCTAD, while the question of the Arabic Translation Service at Headquarters should be discussed separately. In that connexion, he

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(Mr. Ramzy, Egypt)

noted that document A/C.5/33/L.49, dated 9 March 1979, was technically not before the Fifth Committee at the current session. He therefore suggested that it should be updated and discussed by the Fifth Committee as a matter of priority.

78. Mr. EL-HOUDERI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the question raised by the representative of Morocco at the 13th meeting and the report to which the representative of Egypt had just referred were really two separate issues. He asked what measures the Secretariat had adopted to ensure the distribution of summary records in Arabic.

79. Mr. LAHLOU (Morocco) said that when he had raised the question of summary records in Arabic at an earlier meeting, his intention had not been to initiate a discussion of the question of Arabic language services in general. He had merely raised a point of order relating to the conduct of the Committee's work requesting that the summary records in Arabic should be provided.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.