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at 10.30 a.m.
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KUYAMA (Japan)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 109: PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1984-1985 (continued)

AGENDA ITEM 110: PROGRAMME PLANNING (continued)

(a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME AND CO-ORDINATION (continued)

(b) REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

General debate (continued) (A/38/3, A/38/6, A/38/7, A/38/38, A/38/133 and Corr.1; A/C.5/38/6 and Corr.1, A/C.5/38/7; A/C.5/38/SR.7)

1. Mr. HOLM (Norway) said that his delegation wished to commend the Secretary-General for presenting a programme budget which demonstrated strong budgetary discipline, thus meeting the concern expressed by some of the main contributory countries. Nevertheless, his delegation was not in favour of zero growth as a principle. A moderate increase in the budget was both natural and desirable in the light of the many important tasks entrusted to the Organization.

2. If Members wished to implement programmes or new activities decided upon by the General Assembly in a considered and responsible manner, with due regard to the financial implications, they had, of course, to be prepared to provide the necessary means and not simply to request that they should be financed within existing budgetary sources. If Members were not prepared to contribute financially to approved common activities, the authority and credibility of the United Nations would be undermined. The Organization should, however, do its utmost to streamline its programmes, and terminate obsolete, ineffective or marginal activities. All Member States should consent to the redeployment of resources in accordance with reordered priorities.

3. Members must also bear in mind that they had a collective responsibility for United Nations activities. There was a growing tendency for Members to withhold part of their contributions because they disagreed with certain United Nations activities, while more activities were being financed from extrabudgetary sources. The collective responsibility of Member States for all United Nations activities should be emphasized, and there should be a greater transfer of funds from extrabudgetary sources to the regular budget.

4. His delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to establish a high-level advisory group on administrative reform, with the object of improving efficiency. It was essential to have a streamlined administration with the authority and ability to implement the activities called for by Member States. He had noted with sympathy the Secretary-General's appeal for a moratorium on organizational changes and programme, budget and personnel regulations.

5. Although the United Nations had been established nearly four decades ago, it was still not an effective instrument for the maintenance of international peace and security, nor would it be until Members took their commitment to the Organization more seriously. One way of strengthening the Organization would be to settle its financial problems. Norway had always shouldered its fair share of the

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(Mr. Holm, Norway)

cost of United Nations activities, whether funded from assessed or voluntary contributions. All Member States should remain faithful to the principle of collective responsibility and should pay their assessed share of the common expenditure.

6. Mr. YOACHAM (Chile) said that the Committee's consideration of the proposed programme budget should be based on four fundamental factors. First was the need to avoid controversy and not to cause difficulties for the Secretary-General in his task of management. In that connection, he recalled the Secretary-General's reference in his report on the work of the Organization (A/38/1, p. 10) to the stresses and strains imposed by the fact that often there was on one side of an administrative or budgetary issue a relatively small number of Member States that provided the bulk of the budget and on the other a majority in the General Assembly that did not. The Committee must bear in mind the need to maintain a fair and proper balance that would enable the Organization to meet its requirements in a pragmatic fashion.

7. Secondly it should be borne in mind that although the proposed budget envisaged a very low real rate of growth in comparison with the previous biennium, it was the largest ever presented to the Organization; yet, as the Secretary-General had indicated, it was the minimum needed to carry out the wide range of United Nations activities. The Committee would have to reflect seriously on the use of the funds needed for the various programmes and the benefit to be derived from them. The Chilean delegation believed that a budget should be dynamic, responding to needs as they presented themselves over time. The figures proposed by the Secretary-General were higher than in previous years, but then they reflected a substantive growth in the work of the Organization as a result of the enlargement over the years of its sphere of activity by the General Assembly. That was in part a reflection of the political will of the Member States, which had gradually become aware of new and important needs in a changing world, where the intensification of development problems and the profound economic crisis affecting the whole world had made the important role of the United Nations more relevant than ever for many of its Members and in some cases almost vital.

8. Since needs had become greater and resources were limited, a closer watch than ever must be kept over the way in which those resources were used. That could only be done if programmes were based on real and current needs and if a pragmatic and systematic order of priority was established, avoiding duplication of effort, rationalizing programmes and determining their feasibility in a scientific manner. In that connection, his delegation welcomed the progress that had been made in designating high-priority and low-priority programme elements and the consequent redistribution of resources. It hoped that in future the process could be extended to all sections of the programme budget at all levels.

9. Thirdly, his delegation considered that the proposed budget represented a serious effort to attain efficiency and effectiveness. It hoped that the effort could be continued through the studies to be carried out by the Secretariat to improve techniques for evaluating programmes and assigning priorities to them with a view to maximizing their scope and benefit. The monitoring and follow-up of programmes should also be continued. For the budget to yield the hoped-for result,

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(Mr. Yoacham, Chile)

it should be carried out in toto, receive the support of Member States, and be implemented by the appropriate parties.

10. Lastly, the Committee's deliberations should keep in view the importance of the functions and responsibilities of the Secretary-General under the Charter. Only the existence of an independent and unified Secretariat with the necessary authority to maintain the Organization's financial integrity would ensure that those functions and responsibilities were duly carried out.

11. Mr. MA Longde (China) said that the activities financed by the United Nations budget must accord with the principles and purposes of the Charter and implement all resolutions in pursuance of those principles and purposes. While his delegation agreed that there was no simple correlation between the strength of the United Nations and the size of its budget, as noted in paragraph 5 of the foreword to the programme budget (A/38/6, vol. I), there was nevertheless a relationship between the budgetary resources available to the United Nations and its ability to deliver efficiently and effectively, through its programmes, the services requested by Member States. At a juncture when the international community was unanimously urging that the United Nations should be strengthened, that relationship was increasingly important. Unless guaranteed financing and some other essential elements were present, it would be difficult to strengthen the United Nations and to realize its main objectives of maintaining international peace and security and promoting economic and social progress.

12. His delegation accordingly agreed with the general policy of the Secretary-General that, in formulating the proposed programme budget, no a priori growth rate should be set but only a general guideline of maximum restraint. That methodology was in keeping with the realities, since it established estimated expenditures on the basis of the medium-term plan already approved and in accordance with the actual needs and priorities of the various essential activities. The proposal by a few developed countries that the United Nations budget should be frozen would not help to strengthen the work and role of the Organization, nor was it in conformity with the desires and requests of the developing countries.

13. Although the budgetary expenditures should support and guarantee all necessary United Nations activities, the principles of economy and efficiency should at the same time be adhered to in formulating and implementing the proposed budget. In that connection, much remained to be done. In the formulation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1984-1985, due regard has been paid to such questions as priorities, the termination of programmes which were obsolete, ineffective or of marginal usefulness and the shifting of resources to high-priority activities. Nevertheless, it could be seen from table 1 of the introduction, (Priorities, Terminations and Redeployment), that while some departments had done a commendable job, others had done too little and some had taken no action at all. As chief administrative officer of the Organization, the Secretary-General had the authority to instruct all departments to take the appropriate action. In any further efforts to reduce and terminate programmes which were obsolete or, ineffective, the structure of the Secretariat and its personnel should be adjusted accordingly, so that the abilities and talents of staff members could be fully tapped and all the Organization's human and material resources put to the best use.

14. Mr. FERNANDEZ-MAROTO (Spain) said that the budget estimates for 1984-1985 represented a substantial increase over actual expenditure and income for 1980-1981: 20.6 per cent, according to the Advisory Committee's calculations, or 32.2 per cent if computed in constant dollars. That increase could largely be explained by inflation, although there had been some real growth in the Organization's activities. The Secretary-General had urged that not too much attention should be given to the question of growth, in view of the lack of a satisfactory definition; yet, the importance of assessing real growth in the Organization's activities and of distinguishing it from monetary growth caused by inflation could not be over-estimated. Accordingly, endeavours to satisfactorily define real growth should be continued by means of an increasingly accurate evaluation of the actual activities carried out by the United Nations and the services produced in implementing programmes. Comparisons should be made with earlier periods, and the monetary factor should be discounted to the extent that it was influenced by inflation. It would then be possible to have a clearer idea of the Organization's achievements. The discrepancy between initial estimates and actual expenditure should be reduced. With respect to the current budget proposals, his delegation trusted that the anticipated real growth rate of 0.7 per cent for the biennium would prove accurate.

15. It should be noted that the proposed budget did not include all the foreseeable expenditure for the biennium. If initial estimates were to be accurate, that should clearly not be the case. With regard to the remarks contained in paragraphs 13 and 21 of the introduction to the budget (A/38/6, vol. I), his delegation wondered whether the obligations relating to activities arising under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and those relating to the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the International Court of Justice could not have been included in the initial figures, if only provisionally. That would have been far better than merely omitting them, since the initial figures submitted to the General Assembly were thereby distorted.

16. The reductions recommended by the Advisory Committee amounted in all to some \$17.7 million, which represented only 1.1 per cent of the proposed gross expenditure for the biennium. That figure was extremely moderate, particularly given that many of the reductions were only provisional. Real reductions amounted to only \$11 million, or less than 0.7 per cent of gross expenditure. There was no doubt that the Advisory Committee had genuinely observed "maximum restraint" in recommending reductions, with which his delegation fully agreed.

17. With regard to the revalued resource base, it was regrettable that there had been a calculation error of \$28.5 million, which had hampered the work of the Advisory Committee. His delegation fully agreed with the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee on that matter, and trusted that they would be acted on by the Secretariat.

18. The question of inflation and adjustment for inflation was of great importance. The observations made by the Advisory Committee in paragraph 25 of its report (A/38/7) suggested that the total adjustment made for inflation would not be particularly accurate, an impression which had been confirmed by the statement of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee. His delegation thus strongly supported the

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(Mr. Fernandez-Maroto, Spain)

recommendation made by ACABQ in that paragraph that the matter should be kept under careful review during the remaining months of 1983 and that, if warranted, an adjustment should be proposed towards the end of the thirty-eighth session to reflect the most recent movements in inflation rates. Such a recalculation would be indispensable in the interests of making the initial budget estimates more precise.

19. Turning to personnel questions, he noted that the increase in posts requested by the Secretary-General was far higher than the increase requested for the current biennium had been. The additional posts included the conversion of posts financed from extrabudgetary resources into posts financed from the regular budget, and the conversion of appropriations for temporary staff into appropriations for Professional and General Service posts. Such conversions had become habitual, and had led to increased personnel costs in the regular budget which had not always been fully justified. His delegation thus fully supported the Advisory Committee's analysis and the reductions which it had recommended. With regard to extrabudgetary posts, his delegation regretted that the Advisory Committee had been unable to provide a summary, owing to the absence of any information. Particular attention should be given to the matter in future, so that the relevant information could be submitted to the General Assembly.

20. Some \$4 million had been appropriated for the renting or acquisition of word processing equipment. While it seemed that the acquisition of such equipment was justified in principle, if the intention was to introduce such equipment on a large scale, a detailed cost benefit analysis should be carried out. The appropriate option of renting or purchasing should be exercised, taking account of the constant appearance of new and more modern equipment. Due account should also be taken of the varying needs of the different offices within the Organization. The introduction of such equipment, should it prove viable, should be carried out gradually. Members might note the remarks made by the Advisory Committee that the acquisition of such equipment seemed to have proceeded on an ad hoc basis, in a poorly co-ordinated and ill-advised manner. His delegation agreed with the need for a review of the matter, in particular so as to ensure compatibility between related applications.

21. In general, the Secretary-General's proposals were modest in real terms. With regard to the percentage distribution of resources by field of activity, it was apparent from paragraph 41 of the Advisory Committee's report that the initial estimates contained an increase of 1.4 per cent for administrative and common services, while programmes of activity registered slight decreases. His delegation agreed with the representative of Japan that it would be useful to establish a ceiling on administrative and common services.

22. Since the budget before the Committee was the first prepared under a medium-term plan already approved by the General Assembly, all aspects relating to programme planning assumed particular importance. The various aspects of programme planning should be carefully integrated into a coherent and effective policy, due account being taken of the Regulations annexed to General Assembly resolution 37/234. In that connection, his delegation trusted that co-ordination between the relevant departments would be improved and the errors and delays which had occurred in the current exercise would be avoided.

23. Mr. SHUSTOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that over the past 10 years the confidence of many Member States, particularly the major contributors, in the budget policy of the United Nations had been steadily eroding because, despite frequent calls for economy and restraint on the part of the Secretariat, the budget of the Organization had quadrupled. Such an increase in United Nations expenditure created serious financial difficulties for the membership, as a large number of delegations had openly stated during discussions on the scale of assessments. A growing number of Members were expressing their lack of confidence by voting against appropriations requested by the Secretariat. The previous session of the General Assembly, when States which together met almost 90 per cent of the Organization's expenses had been unable to support the budget, was a telling example.

24. The logical conclusion to be drawn was that there was an urgent need for increased economy and efficiency in the administrative apparatus of the Organization. Indeed, the Secretariat had taken some steps to improve the budget preparation process, including the incorporation into that process of the goals established in an approved medium-term plan. The Secretary-General had acknowledged that an effective and economic administrative apparatus was vital to the Organization and had affirmed that he intended to lighten and modernize that apparatus while maintaining strict budgetary economy. Nevertheless, the budget continued to grow at an unjustifiable rate. Of course, the increase was partly explained by decisions by intergovernmental organs to undertake additional activities. But the budget document showed that such decisions were certainly not the cardinal reason for the requests for additional resources.

25. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 1984-1985 suffered from many of the shortcomings that had been repeatedly criticized in the past. To begin with, the real rate of budget growth was clearly understated because of the exclusion from the calculations of many "non-recurrent" items of expenditure which in fact represented long-term commitments. Examples of such items were the hiring of temporary staff, building reconstruction and maintenance, and travel expenses for experts and consultants; the ratio of real growth would significantly exceed the 0.7 per cent figure cited if those very real outlays were included. Secondly, the Secretariat was not being strict enough in its evaluation of existing programmes in terms of their importance, topicality, effectiveness and value, and the results of its efforts were correspondingly modest. Member States were therefore still not able to tell to what extent new United Nations activities could be carried out by redeploying resources, or what justification there was for the appropriations requested in the budget. Thirdly, appropriations were requested for 211 additional established posts. Since the Secretariat already had a very large body of staff and extensive funds at its disposal for temporary assistance, experts and consultants, the request for new established posts was inadmissible. Fourthly, the proposed programme budget contained unwarranted and improper proposals for the reclassification of 55 posts, the transfer of 30 extrabudgetary posts to the regular budget and the establishment of new temporary posts, all of which would be costly. Fifthly, the Secretariat once again proposed that the costs of anticipated inflation should be entirely met by additional contributions from all Member States, and had done nothing to compensate for the adverse effects of inflation, if only in part, from its own internal resources. Sixthly, the proposed programme budget again contained items of expenditure that violated the Charter, namely the

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(Mr. Shustov, USSR)

payments in respect of the United Nations bond issue and the provision of technical assistance.

26. His delegation was convinced that the activities of the United Nations over the forthcoming two-year period could be carried out without any increase in the level of appropriations, and it would therefore endeavour to ensure that the budget was frozen at its current level in absolute terms. The level of United Nations activities should be determined by the quantity of resources which Member States were prepared to give to the Organization. A hierarchy of activities should be established on the basis of their importance and urgency and the financial resources available for them. Programme priorities should be determined in the light of the resources available throughout the United Nations system, with efforts to improve co-ordination and eliminate surplus expenditure due to duplication.

27. The time had come to make it a rule that any new United Nations activity unrelated to the Organization's basic tasks - the maintenance of international peace and security - should be funded with resources made available by the completion, curtailment, reorganization or other adaptation of programmes and through increased staff productivity. His delegation would consistently vote against new programmes unless internal resources could be found to finance them. States should be provided with exhaustive information on the staff and resources released by trimming United Nations programmes and activities which, in the Secretariat's view, were obsolete or ineffective. The Secretariat's proposals in that regard should be discussed in the appropriate Main Committees before their financial implications were taken up in the Fifth Committee, and statements of programme, financial and administrative implications should invariably include suggestions by the Secretariat as to how the new activities might be financed. How actually to redeploy the resources released by the elimination of current activities should be a matter for intergovernmental bodies, not the Secretariat, to decide.

28. Urgent steps were needed to make more rational use of the Organization's staff and halt the constant growth in Secretariat personnel. Staff resources for new programmes should be found by introducing strict office discipline, organizing work better, and transferring personnel from obsolete or only marginally useful activities.

29. The costs to the United Nations of inflation and monetary instability should be covered by savings and adjustments within the budget and by additional contributions from the developed States that were primarily responsible for those phenomena. The Secretariat should hold consultations with the developed countries where Secretariat units were situated - which derived significant benefits from their presence - with a view to securing voluntary payments to offset the additional costs to the United Nations caused by inflation and variations in the exchange rates of their national currencies.

30. Meetings of any new bodies and conferences should be funded by releasing resources through priority-setting, by reducing the number of United Nations bodies and shortening their sessions, by organizing meetings more rationally and by reducing documentation costs. A reduction in appropriations for research purposes,

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(Mr. Shustov, USSR)

experts and consultants could make for considerable savings: the United Nations was not, after all, a research institution. A more rigorous approach should be adopted with regard to acquisitions of fixed and other equipment, building construction and maintenance and other such matters.

31. The resources made available under the budget should be used primarily for the purposes set forth in the Charter. As a matter of principle, his country could not agree to the use of its contributions or those of other States for purposes other than those for which the Organization had been created, still less for ends that contradicted the Charter. Accordingly, his country would bear no part of the costs connected with the United Nations bond issue. In accordance, likewise, with the strict sense of Article 17 of the Charter, his country would once again make a proportionate voluntary contribution towards technical assistance in its national currency.

32. Mr. PAVLOVSKY (Czechoslovakia) said that the arguments put forward in the proposed programme budget to justify an increase of 8.7 per cent were unconvincing. United Nations expenditure was expected to rise by 20.6 per cent over the period 1980-1985. His delegation agreed entirely with the Secretary-General that there was no direct link between the strength of the United Nations and the size of its budget. Until the Organization's considerable internal resources and reserves were mobilized, there was no justification for an increase in the budget. The costs of new programmes should be met by redeploying funds already appropriated.

33. The principal factor in the growth of the budget was the correction for anticipated inflation. The source of the inflation was to be found in the policies and practices of the developed capitalist States in which the main units of the Secretariat had their headquarters. Accordingly, the provision for inflation in the budget should be covered by voluntary contributions from those countries.

34. His delegation was seriously concerned at the Advisory Committee's conclusion that United Nations spending on the activities of the Department on Technical Co-operation for Development, UNCTAD, the International Court of Justice and the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea could continue to grow over the biennium 1984-1985. It supported the Advisory Committee's proposals to reduce the Secretary-General's forecast requirements by almost \$18 million and the Committee's other recommendations designed to make better use of the resources provided by Member States.

35. Once again, the proposed programme budget included items of expenditure incurred as a result of resolutions that ran counter to the Charter. His country's position on that subject was unchanged: it would pay no part of the costs involved.

36. Special attention should be accorded to the Secretary-General's many requests for staff. Although the foreword to the budget referred several times to the redeployment of resources, 69 new permanent and 26 new temporary posts were requested. The Advisory Committee's recommendation against the establishment of 30 of the 69 permanent posts was a step in the right direction; his delegation felt,

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(Mr. Pavlovsky, Czechoslovakia)

however, that the General Assembly should condemn the practice of requesting new posts every two years and should withhold its approval of even the 39 new posts which the Advisory Committee endorsed. It should also recommend to the Secretary-General that he redeploy resources to those spheres of activity which he considered of primary importance. The Assembly should also roundly condemn the requests in the proposed programme budget for the reclassification of existing posts: reclassifications were responsible for a constant, if imperceptible increase in budgetary expenditure. The Advisory Committee recommended acceptance of only 32 of the proposed reclassifications; his delegation felt that even that number was unacceptable. The Secretary-General should be requested to ask for no further reclassifications until the International Civil Service Commission had classified all posts both in the Professional category and above and in the General Service category and its classifications had been adopted in the secretariats of all organizations in the United Nations system.

37. In the light of the Fifth Committee's discussions the previous year, it would have been logical for requests for new experts and consultants to be kept to a minimum. The proposed programme budget, however, contained requests for 130 new posts. The Advisory Committee's recommendation for a sharp reduction indicated that the requests were unjustified. At its current session the General Assembly should freeze the number of experts and consultants.

38. Mr. SOEPRAPTO (Indonesia) congratulated the Secretary-General on his tireless efforts on behalf of the effective and efficient management of the Organization. His maximization of budgetary restraint and his economical use of resources were to be highly commended.

39. Once the proposed budget was approved by the General Assembly, it would be the Organization's basic instrument for implementing its wide-ranging and varied programmes of work. Many of those programmes were designed to assist the large number of Member States which were developing countries. It was right that the United Nations budget should reflect those countries' concerns and growing development needs. Programme-oriented principles should take precedence over budget considerations in setting the United Nations budget, although economy, productivity, the redeployment and reallocation of resources and the setting of priorities were still important. Management must also be strengthened in order to ensure a sounder utilization of budget resources and more effective programme delivery.

40. It was heartening to note that the proposed programme budget adequately reflected the objectives and activities set forth in the medium-term plan for 1984-1989. The essential relationship between the programme budget and programme planning had been maintained, which meant an enhancement of the ability of those programmes to deliver the Organization's services to the international community efficiently and effectively.

41. The promotion of conditions favourable to the economic and social development of the developing countries was one of the United Nations main objectives. The Organization's programmes and activities should therefore be directed primarily towards meeting the needs of those countries. Budgetary restraints should not adversely affect activities and programmes that were of critical importance to the

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(Mr. Soeprapto, Indonesia)

developing countries. The Committee should therefore consider in depth whether the distribution of available resources was compatible with the needs of the developing countries. In that connection, he wondered what had led the Secretary-General to propose a low priority for section 24, Regular programme of technical co-operation. Technical co-operation activities were important for promoting the development of the developing countries. Although the Indonesian delegation would not oppose any figure for that section presented by the Secretariat it considered it unfortunate that it had been accorded such a low priority, particularly in view of the recent severe financial difficulties experienced by technical co-operation activities within the United Nations system. Some developed countries seemed to be leaning towards selective bilateral measures rather than long-term multilateral arrangements, and such measures would have an adverse effect on United Nations technical co-operation activities not only for the present but in the future. If the proposed low priority was shown to be justified, the Indonesian delegation would appeal to the developed countries to make a substantial increase in their voluntary contributions, particularly to the United Nations Development Programme, in order to enhance its capability to deliver technical assistance to the developing countries.

42. Although his delegation appreciated the way in which the Secretariat, and the Programme Planning and Budgeting Board in particular, had prepared the proposed programme budget, it was concerned about the delays experienced in the issuing and distribution of documents and their detrimental effect on the work of the Organization. Delay in the issuing of documentation before the twenty-third session of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination had caused the Committee to schedule a resumed session immediately before the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly, which had meant not only greater expense for the Organization but much pressure on the timetables of delegations. Unless a concerted attempt was made to redress the problem immediately, no improvement could be expected. A comprehensive review should be carried out, therefore, to identify the underlying causes of the problem. In that connection, his delegation concurred in the view expressed by the Advisory Committee regarding consultations between Member States and the Secretariat on ways and means of simplifying the enormous and complex documentation (A/38/7, para. 4). His delegation was greatly encouraged by the assurances given by the Secretary-General in his address to the Committee (A/C.5/38/SR.7). His promise to institute the necessary improvements in the process so that problems of delay in documentation would not arise in 1985 was most welcome and reassuring.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.