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SECOND COMMITTEE

25th meeting

held on

Friday, 29 October 1976

10.30 a.m.

New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VALDES (Bolivia)

later: Mr. LOHANI (Nepal)

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AGENDA ITEM 60: UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (continued)

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 60: UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (A/31/25, A/31/210, A/31/211, A/31/156 and Add.1 and 2 and Add.2/Corr.1, A/31/227; A/10225; A/31/3; A/C.2/31/5, A/C.2/31/8, A/C.2/31/9, A/C.2/31/12; A/C.2/31/L.7 and Corr.1 (Spanish only), A/C.2/31/L.9) (continued)

1. Mr. KHELIL (Tunisia) said that the concerns which had led to the convening of the Stockholm Conference and the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme were as acute as ever, as were the causes which had given rise to them. However, in recent years, they seemed to have been relegated to a lower priority by the international community. Thus, forgetting the obligations they had assumed in the environmental field, certain parties seemed to be seeking the suppression of some of the most important constituent elements of the Programme. However, if the importance of UNEP had been clearly apparent in a period of relative calm, it should be even more evident in a time of crisis in order to ensure the essential continuity in that vital sector.

2. In the face of that heavy responsibility, UNEP had to impose a certain amount of self-discipline, and his delegation therefore noted with satisfaction that it was endeavouring to concentrate its activities on areas of particular interest to humanity as a whole and, primarily, to the developing countries. The latter were the most vulnerable to the effects of the pollution which was often imposed upon them and also, above all, to damage caused by natural disasters, desertification, malnutrition, and so on.

3. Since the Environment Fund had been set up to help towards the attainment of objectives in those fields, his delegation welcomed the assurances given by the Executive Director on the future financial situation of the Fund and expressed the hope that operations would quickly regain their normal rhythm. That was the only way to ensure that UNEP would continue to play the catalytic role it had played to date.

4. His country had been among the first to call for the convening of a conference on desertification. Consequently, it welcomed the interest with which the international community was preparing for that conference in order to ensure its success. Even greater efforts could, however, undoubtedly be made to that end; in particular, more widespread dissemination of the objectives of the conference would increase the awareness of public opinion and authorities in all countries, particularly in those countries which had the necessary technical and human resources to solve the problem. For its part, his country would make all the experience it had acquired in that field available to the conference.

5. It was also important to emphasize the role of UNEP in the field of marine environmental protection. The Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, which his country had just signed, together with the two protocols thereto, would contribute to the conservation of that sea and help it to revert to being a "lake of peace" thereby promoting development and genuine co-operation among the countries bordering it.

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(Mr. Khelil, Tunisia)

6. Despite the regrettable refusal of some countries to associate themselves with certain passages in the documents adopted at the Vancouver Conference, that Conference had reached agreement on a range of measures and recommendations which would have important repercussions on national policies and international co-operation in the field of human settlements. The General Assembly should now provide the necessary follow-up on all questions submitted to it by that conference, including the question of the living conditions of the Palestinians in occupied territories. It was to be hoped that during the four months which had elapsed since the end of the Conference, those who had been hesitant had become convinced of the need for unanimity on that entire range of truly historical recommendations.

7. Mr. RIVAS (Colombia) said it was not surprising that the question of the environment gave rise to such a lively and fruitful discussion. The problem affected all the members of the international community and they should act jointly and resolutely in order to find a solution to it.

8. As it had stated on previous occasions, his country considered that UNEP's dual role as a catalyst and co-ordinating organization should be strengthened. Without wishing to prejudge the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring, he emphasized the need to maintain the essential functions of the Programme in order to ensure that it continued to assume responsibility for the global aspects of the problem, to offer guidelines for international activities in that field, to provide the necessary services in the formulation of international instruments, to propose solutions to the problem of environmental conservation, to provide effective management of the Fund, and to respond to the needs of both developing and developed countries.

9. The conferences on water and on desertification to be held in 1977 were closely interrelated. However, it was preferable to hold two separate conferences since the decisions they would adopt would affect different aspects of the problem of water resources. His country would participate actively in both conferences.

10. His delegation hoped that the General Assembly would recommend that all Member States implement all the recommendations of Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, particularly those relating to measures to be adopted at the national level. Indeed, although action at the international level was essential in order to promote global treatment of the problem, only a determined effort by Governments could avoid the disasters which would result from a lack of planning in the field of human settlements.

11. Agreement should be reached on the institutional arrangements relating to human settlements in order not to lose the momentum achieved at Vancouver. His country fully supported the recommendation made in that connexion by the Latin American countries at the regional meeting on human settlements organized by ECLA. That recommendation called for the creation of an intergovernmental body and of a centre under the jurisdiction of an Under-Secretary-General which would utilize the human and financial resources of existing bodies and be responsible to the intergovernmental body at the institutional level. Close co-ordination would be established with UNEP. The decision with regard to the location of the

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(Mr. Rivas, Colombia)

centre could be adopted following consultations, which he felt sure would take place in the spirit of co-ordination which had been demonstrated to date.

12. Mr. MAKWETA (United Republic of Tanzania) said he was happy to note that the United Nations Environment Programme was discharging its functions satisfactorily, despite its lack of experience. In order to ensure that that success continued, UNEP should endeavour to concentrate its efforts and should constantly bear in mind that its primary role was catalytic and co-ordinative and not operational.

13. The primary aim of activities in the field of human settlements should be to improve the quality of life of the population. Since the vast majority of the population of developing countries lived in rural areas, efforts to achieve that objective should be concentrated on that part of the population which, to date, had been bypassed by the development process. His own country's development philosophy emphasized the need to improve the quality of life in rural areas.

14. Issues relating to the improvement of human settlements - urban slums, rural poverty, housing, water supply, waste disposal and transportation, among others, were essentially socio-economic in nature. Although they had a certain environmental dimension, particularly as far as the developing countries were concerned, they were an integral part of the development process itself, a fact which had been recognized at Vancouver. Moreover, it had been emphasized in the general debate at Habitat (para. 119) that the problems of human settlements were not isolated from the social and economic conditions of countries and could not be set apart from international economic relations. His delegation therefore considered that, in the interests of effectiveness, the question of human settlements should be linked to the economic and social sector of the United Nations system. In considering the question of institutional arrangements to be adopted in the field of human settlements, it was essential, above all, to avoid anything which would slow down the momentum created in Vancouver or which might in any way impair the effectiveness of UNEP or modify its role as defined in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII).

15. It was to be hoped that the General Assembly, at its current session, would take the necessary steps to implement the decisions of the Vancouver Conference on which there did not appear to be any differences of opinion. He had in mind, in particular, decisions relating to action and co-operation at the regional and subregional level.

16. In his delegation's view, the question of the location of the proposed centre on human settlements was secondary. The primary consideration should be the desire to ensure maximum effectiveness.

17. Mr. BRUCE (Canada) said that the Stockholm Conference and the work of UNEP had made the international community aware of the need to preserve the environment. The fact that the decisions of the fourth session of the Governing Council of UNEP had been taken by consensus was of course an indication of the growing body of expertise on environmental questions, the strengthening of the

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(Mr. Bruce, Canada)

secretariat and the quality of the delegations; however, it was particularly indicative of the spirit of collaboration which had been evident in the discussions and of the desire to establish international environmental co-operation. His delegation was confident that the General Assembly would take the action requested in the report.

18. Canada continued to be satisfied with UNEP's current institutional arrangements. It was particularly pleased with the decision of the Governing Council to strengthen its role in providing policy guidance and in leaving programme matters to its secretariat. The progress made in the Environment Co-ordination Board and the establishment of joint programming with other United Nations bodies were concrete evidence of the catalytic and co-ordinating role envisaged for UNEP at Stockholm.

19. His country endorsed the general thrust of UNEP's activities. It recognized the need for greater emphasis on communications with Governments and the public in order to improve the quality of documentation and welcomed the role played by UNEP in the signing of the Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution - a good demonstration of the effectiveness of UNEP in the area of regional co-operation. Earthwatch, which would facilitate the transfer of technology and would be of service to both developing and developed countries, was essential. Canada, which had endorsed the incorporation of the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals within Earthwatch, had been keenly interested in the other components of Earthwatch, in particular, the Global Environmental Monitoring System and the International Referral Service, and its interest would continue.

20. However, the priority area for UNEP involvement should be environment and development or, more precisely, the environmental impact of industrial processes. In that connexion, he welcomed the convening of seminars on the environmental problems of certain industries and the decision to promote programmes for the rational utilization of renewable energy resources. Indeed, although the problem of pollution was not yet as serious in the developing countries as it was in the developed countries, each country must bear environmental considerations in mind as a fundamental parameter in economic planning. UNEP should strive to find the means to achieve that goal, thereby facilitating ecodevelopment in the true sense of the word.

21. While each State must retain its sovereign right to take its own decisions concerning its growth and development, Canada remained convinced that the principles of the Stockholm Declaration provided the only viable basis for the long-term survival of mankind. Shared rivers, basins and coastlines gave rise to many problems which could only be resolved by agreement between neighbouring countries. While Canada had a great deal of experience in the bilateral solution of mutual environmental concerns - the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement was but one example - it believed that it was necessary to elaborate international standards and principles in that regard. The forthcoming United Nations Water Conference undoubtedly would give impetus to the work of the Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on Natural Resources Shared by Two or More States.

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(Mr. Bruce, Canada)

22. With regard to Canada's contribution to the Fund, he recalled that at the Stockholm Conference his country had indicated its intention, subject to parliamentary approval, to contribute between \$5 million and \$7.5 million over five years, the amount to be determined each year by the needs of the Fund and its progress in meeting its objectives. To honour its pledge for the remainder of the five-year period, his Government intended to contribute \$2.5 million in 1977, subject of course to parliamentary approval and a demonstrated need for funds by UNEP. His Government had already begun reviewing the position it would adopt after 1977 and hoped to be able to advise the Executive Director on the matter shortly.

23. He introduced draft resolution A/C.2/31/L.9 concerning Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. He was pleased that three other countries, Ecuador, Kenya and New Zealand, had become sponsors. The sponsors had been motivated to introduce the draft resolution by their desire to demonstrate the importance which they attached to the Habitat Conference and to reconfirm publicly their Governments' determination to implement its decisions and recommendations. They had also wished to confer upon the United Nations, the specialized agencies, the regional economic commissions and various regional meetings the necessary authority to implement them. The draft resolution should contribute to the forthcoming debates on the elaboration of the strategy for the third development decade and the establishment of the new international economic order. Inasmuch as the text was the result of lengthy consultations, his delegation hoped that the Committee would be able to adopt it by consensus and recommend its adoption to the General Assembly, thus enabling the United Nations system to advance in the implementation of the decisions taken at Vancouver.

24. Mr. CZARKOWSKI (Poland) said that he wished to propose an amendment to the draft resolution introduced by the representative of Canada (A/C.2/31/L.9). He wished to insert a paragraph in which the General Assembly would express its gratitude to the Government and people of Canada for their contributions to the success of the Vancouver Conference and for their generosity and hospitality. His delegation would submit the text of its amendment to the Secretariat at a later stage.

25. Mr. AL-JEAN (Kuwait) said that from the beginning of its development efforts, Kuwait had been aware of the need to protect the environment and awaken public opinion to that need. His had been the first country of the Gulf to sign the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution of the Sea by Oil. He underscored the importance of decision 67 (IV) adopted by the Governing Council of UNEP in that connexion. Kuwait had offered to organize a meeting of the Gulf States on the subject, for without the co-operation of all the riparian States, the use of the Arabian Gulf for drinking water supplies and fishing would be threatened. His country had also organized seminars and other national meetings on the subject. Lastly, a national agency for the preservation of the environment had been established to formulate a national policy.

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(Mr. Al-Jean, Kuwait)

26. His delegation endorsed the principles governing the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme. Inasmuch as the environment was of concern to all countries, action should be taken at the international level; however, it could not be over-emphasized that such action must be based on national efforts. It was therefore to be hoped that UNEP would encourage all activities undertaken at the national, regional and subregional levels. In that connexion, his delegation hoped that co-operation between the Gulf countries would increase, the sovereignty of each State naturally being respected.

27. As a country which consisted almost entirely of deserts and which was heavily dependent on desalination for its drinking water supply, Kuwait was keenly interested in the two conferences on water and desertification and would participate actively in the preparatory work for those two international meetings.

28. Lastly, his delegation emphasized the importance of the results obtained at Vancouver, in particular, resolution 3 concerning the living conditions of the Palestinians in occupied territories. It hoped that the General Assembly would endorse that recommendation so that the Secretary-General would be able to submit a report to it on the subject at its thirty-second session.

29. Mr. van BUUREN (Netherlands) said that the report of the fourth session of the Governing Council of UNEP highlighted encouraging progress which had been made in strengthening the co-ordinating and catalytic role of UNEP.

30. In that respect, his delegation had studied with interest the report of ACABQ on co-ordination questions in the activities of the United Nations Environment Programme (A/31/227). It welcomed the joint programming exercises carried out with UNESCO and other specialized agencies and shared the opinion expressed by many other delegations that UNEP should refrain from undertaking operational activities. The projects financed by the Environment Fund should be selected carefully in order to ensure that available resources were put to the best possible use.

31. His delegation was glad to learn that UNEP seemed to have overcome its financial difficulties and that the target for 1977 was likely to be reached. As it had already pointed out, it would be desirable for the Governing Council to set a new five-year target at its fifth session in 1977. In addition, UNEP should review the way in which the resources of the Environment Fund were allocated.

32. With regard to the United Nations Conference on Desertification which was scheduled to be held from 31 August to 9 September 1977, after having examined the draft plan of action to combat desertification, his Government had set up a task force to participate actively in the preparations for the Conference. The Netherlands also hoped to be able to participate in one or more of the regional meetings scheduled for January and February 1977.

33. His delegation believed that it was particularly important to move even faster in the establishment of the three components of the Earthwatch Programme, namely, the International Referral System (IRS), the Global Environmental Monitoring

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(Mr. van Buuren, Netherlands)

System (GEMS) and the International Register of Potentially Toxic Chemicals (IRPTC). In addition, it was following with interest the efforts of the working group to prepare criteria for the conservation and rational exploitation of natural resources.

34. His delegation would be interested to know what initiatives were being envisaged to promote public awareness of environmental issues, a field in which, according to the Executive Director himself, much remained to be done. For its part it believed that the support of scientific and other non-governmental organizations should be enlisted, for they could contribute greatly to improving knowledge and to encouraging concrete action by influencing public opinion.

35. UNEP had made a significant contribution, both financial and intellectual, to the preparation of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. Although the Netherlands had voted against the Declaration of Principles adopted at Vancouver, it firmly believed that many of those principles merited application by all countries. The recommendations for national action rightly focused on the needs of the most deprived and vulnerable groups of society. A number of those recommendations were of crucial importance for the elaboration of effective and integrated human settlement policies.

36. The question of the institutional arrangements for human settlements should be considered, taking into account the role and function of UNEP as laid down in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII). In that connexion, his delegation, like the United Kingdom delegation, believed that UNEP's responsibilities should not be expanded to include operational development assistance of the kind envisaged for human settlements. Although it was aware of the interrelationship between the man-made environment and the natural environment, it believed that the coherence and effectiveness of the human settlement activities within the United Nations system could best be guaranteed if those activities were carried out within the framework of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs preferably with the Economic and Social Council as the governing body. In that case, the Committee for Housing, Building and Planning would be discontinued. The Centre for Housing, Building and Planning could serve as the Secretariat unit. The United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation could be placed temporarily under the supervision of the Economic and Social Council. Finally, the main emphasis should be on regional and subregional activities.

37. Before taking a final decision on the institutional arrangements, the Committee should take two factors into account: firstly, that the decisions of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System could influence the arrangements made with regard to human settlements and, secondly, that the information on the financial implications of the various institutional arrangements contained in document A/31/156/Add.2 was not sufficiently precise. The Fifth Committee should be asked to review those financial implications so that the Second Committee could use them as a basis for its decision.

38. Mr. GAMBOA (Venezuela) said that the work of the Governing Council at its fourth session was particularly interesting, specifically because the link between environment and development had been examined for the first time at that session

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(Mr. Gamboa, Venezuela)

and particular attention had thus been given to the problems which developing countries had to face due to external actions.

39. As a developing country, Venezuela believed that all international action in the field of environment and development should be based upon the principles contained in the Declaration and Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order and in the Charter of the Economic Rights and Duties of States, and that its main objective should be the welfare of mankind. The validity of the measures taken by the developing countries on the national level would depend upon the action the international community took to establish more equitable international economic relations.

40. Citing the interest which his country took in environmental questions, he recalled that the President of the Republic of Venezuela had recently promulgated an organic law on the environment which set forth, within the framework of the country's development policy, guidelines for the protection, defence and improvement of the environment. It set forth norms which were essential for the protection of natural resources and established executive, administrative and supervisory organs. In addition, the Government proposed to establish a Ministry of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources in the near future.

41. With regard to the institutional arrangements for international environmental co-operation, while recognizing that UNEP had done constructive work so far, he said that the Committee must remain open to any proposal that might be made for increasing UNEP's effectiveness, particularly to those that might be formulated by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System.

42. Similarly, it was concern for the Programme's effectiveness which led his delegation to stress the need for decentralization and regionalization of UNEP's activities. The means of action of the regional offices should be strengthened so that specific programmes might be implemented at the regional, subregional and local levels.

43. His delegation attached the greatest importance to the forthcoming conferences on water and desertification. The need to co-ordinate the work of those two conferences so as to achieve the most specific and positive results could not be over-emphasized.

44. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements represented an unprecedented effort of the international community to identify and analyse problems relating to human settlements and, above all, to draw up the principles that should guide the search for solutions to those problems. There was no doubt that the decisions which had been taken at Vancouver would be implemented in the coming years, both nationally and internationally.

45. The regional commissions had a major role to play in promoting and co-ordinating activities to be undertaken at the international level. The Latin American regional meeting on human settlements, held in Mexico from 13 to 17 September 1976, had been called at the initiative of the Economic

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(Mr. Gamboa, Venezuela)

Commission for Latin America. The purpose of that meeting had been to consider what measures should be taken in order to implement the Vancouver recommendations for national, subregional and regional action and those relating to international co operation. The Latin American countries which had participated in that meeting had made the following recommendations: that an intergovernmental body for human settlements should be established as envisaged in the annex to resolution 1 adopted at Vancouver, and that a United Nations centre for human settlements should be created as a secretariat organ responsible for all activities relating to human settlements. Such a centre would be linked functionally to the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations and would be under the direction of an Under-Secretary-General who would be directly responsible to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Those recommendations did not involve the creation of a new international organization but the restructuring of the human and financial resources currently available in existing organizations.

46. The countries of Latin America had also recommended that the human and financial resources which the United Nations system devoted to activities relating to human settlements should be increased and that part of the resources to be made available to the new centre should be reserved for activities undertaken or supported by the regional commissions in connexion with human settlements. Finally, the Committee should reaffirm the consensus that had emerged during the meeting which the Latin American countries had held at Caracas from 8 to 11 March 1976, and should accept the Mexican Government's offer to act as host to the centre for human settlements.

47. It was to be hoped that the recommendations of the group of Latin American countries would be well received by the other regional groups and by the Group of 77, since the recommendations could facilitate a decision on the institutional arrangements for human settlements.

48. Mr. MUTOMBO (Zaire) expressed satisfaction that, owing to the spirit prevailing at the Stockholm Conference, it had been possible to implement smoothly the institutional arrangements for UNEP. It would be recalled, however, that the choice of a site for its headquarters had given rise to much controversy and that allegations had been made according to which Kenya, and Africa in general, lacked sufficient guarantees to act as host to the headquarters of a United Nations agency. The services provided thus far in order to ensure the proper functioning of UNEP headquarters, and those provided for the fourth session of UNCTAD, recently held at Nairobi, belied those allegations and were a credit to Kenya and to Africa.

49. With regard to human settlements, he felt that the page should now be turned and a new chapter opened on that important matter. While the participants of the Vancouver Conference had not succeeded in agreeing on all questions, the responsibility rested not with the secretariat but with the Conference itself.

50. He welcomed the fact that CPC and ACC had finally engaged in a constructive dialogue and that they had been able to establish a better definition of their respective roles. During the joint meetings which those two bodies had recently held, the representatives of the developed countries in CPC had emphasized the need to co-ordinate and intensify interorganizational activities with a view to

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(Mr. Mutombo, Zaire)

assisting the less privileged peoples of the earth. Words should now be transformed into deeds and progress should be made in international co-operation and the North-South dialogue.

51. As to the institutional arrangements for human settlements, care must be taken to avoid setting up an organ that was not equipped with effective means of action. His delegation supported the idea of establishing a separate secretariat responsible to the United Nations. Yet, while it had been necessary to accept the incorporation of that secretariat into UNEP, such a measure should be only a provisional one. The fact was that, while it could not be denied that the environment and human settlements were closely related fields, it was none the less true that the objectives to be attained in each of those fields called for different means of action.

52. The secretariat could be established not only in New York, Nairobi or Vienna, as suggested in the Secretariat documents, but also in another city. The financial implications would of course be decisive, but it should not be forgotten that the overriding aim was the establishment of an operational and effective secretariat to serve the most disadvantaged countries, which were greatly in need of assistance in the field of human settlements.

53. Mr. Lohani (Nepal) took the Chair.

54. The CHAIRMAN announced that Egypt, Argentina and the United Republic of Tanzania had joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/C.2/31/L.9.

55. Mr. DHARAT (Libyan Arab Republic) said that UNEP had thus far discharged its responsibilities extremely well as a co-ordinating agency for environmental activities; but that Governments and the international agencies should strengthen their support of the Programme so that the latter could provide all countries, especially the developing countries, with the advisory services that they needed for the purposes of environmental protection.

56. As the Habitat Conference had shown, the international community had become aware of the fact that human settlements constituted an essential factor for economic and social development and that there was a close relationship between that development and the problems of the environment and human settlements.

57. A corollary to that fact was the need to harmonize and co-ordinate the activities of international institutions in those various fields. The establishment of a global intergovernmental body for human settlements, in accordance with resolution 1 of the Vancouver Conference, would make it possible to strengthen co-operation between the developing and the developed countries and to direct international action in that field towards satisfaction of the needs of the developing countries. In that connexion it was to be hoped that the question of the organization link between that organ and the United Nations agencies, and the problem of the headquarters, left pending by the Conference, would quickly be settled.

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(Mr. Dharat, Libyan Arab Republic)

58. He recalled that resolution 3 of the Conference concerned the living conditions of the Palestinians in occupied territories and said that his country hoped that the recommendation contained in that resolution would be applied, since the wilful destruction of the cultural habitat of the Palestinian people constituted a threat to international peace and security.

59. The Libyan Arab Republic attached overriding importance to the forthcoming United Nations Water Conference, since the problem of water was a vital one for most developing countries. For its part, it had established several years earlier a general water agency to co-ordinate activities in the field of research, studies, boring and water-resource exploitation, and had just established a Ministry of Dams and Water Resources.

60. His country naturally followed very closely the preparatory work carried out by UNEP for the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Desertification, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3511 (XXX), as well as activities carried out at the regional level and the studies undertaken by Governments, with the participation of UNDP, UNESCO and other international agencies to provide a better understanding of the desertification process and to reverse it. The Libyan Arab Republic attached particular importance in that respect to decision 73 (IV), in which the Governing Council of UNEP requested, inter alia, that Arabic should be included as a working language of the Conference, that the liberation movements should be invited to participate in it and that the Executive Director should take part in its preparation.

61. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 3435 (XXX), the Governing Council at its fourth session had adopted decision 80 (IV) on the study of the problem of the material remnants of wars, particularly mines, and their effect on the environment, and had requested the Executive Director to proceed with the study, in consultation with the various Governments concerned, and to render assistance to States, upon request, in preparing their own programmes for the elimination of mines in their territories. In that connexion, his country regretted that the Secretary-General's report on that question (A/31/210) had not been ready in time for the current session of the General Assembly. His country, for its part, maintained permanent contact with UNEP on that subject, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 3435 (XXX).

62. The Seventh Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, held at Istanbul in May 1976, had taken the view that the problem of the material remnants of wars could not be solved unless the colonialist States responsible undertook to compensate the developing countries that had suffered from that problem and to provide those countries with the necessary information on the location of the mines; and the Conference had called for the convening of an international conference to consider that problem. The Fifth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held at Colombo, had adopted a resolution along the same lines and had requested the United Nations to convene such a conference. The Libyan Arab Republic requested the Governing Council of UNEP to consider the question of organizing the conference, with particular regard to environmental aspects, and to report to the General Assembly at its thirty-second session in the context of the study which it was required to submit under General Assembly resolution 3435 (XXX).

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(Mr. Dharat, Libyan Arab Republic)

63. He stressed the importance of the results of the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the Coastal States of the Mediterranean Region for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea, held at Barcelona in February 1976, which had been reflected by the adoption of a Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, particularly against oil pollution. UNEP had played an important role in the formulation of that programme.

64. Mr. Valdés (Bolivia) resumed the Chair.

65. Mrs. FORRESTER (Australia) recalled that the General Assembly had, in resolution 3437 (XXX), requested the Executive Director to inform it, at its thirty-first session, of action taken pursuant to paragraph 7 of Assembly resolution 3226 (XXIX) regarding co-operating between UNEP and the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. Her delegation had therefore been gratified to learn that the organizational responsibility for the secretariat of the Scientific Committee had been transferred to UNEP and that the Scientific Committee would continue to provide the Global Environmental Monitoring System with the necessary data concerning radio-active contamination. Those steps would help to achieve the desired co-operation.

66. With regard to the difficulties encountered in the operation of the Programme and its main components - the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS) and the International Referral System (IRS) - she said that a seminar had been held in Australia to help to make IRS more generally known and to indicate its usefulness to the countries of the Asian and Pacific region.

67. Her delegation had been pleased to learn that the preparations for the Desertification and Water Conferences were making satisfactory progress, in view of the importance of the two subjects.

68. With regard to UNEP's role in the United Nations system and in the field of international environmental co-operation, Australia considered that the present institutional arrangements enabled UNEP to play correctly the role of co-ordinator and catalyst for which it had been established. UNEP's role was radically different from that of other international organizations, a fact which had sometimes been misunderstood. For example, UNEP's intervention in the programmes of other United Nations bodies had sometimes been viewed as duplication. But a careful distinction must be drawn between wasteful duplication and the beneficial results that could be obtained from UNEP's system-wide co-ordinating role. By bearing in mind the report of the ACABQ and the review on environmental programmes contemplated by CPC, UNEP would be able to avoid leaving itself open to such charges in the future. In her country's view, some improvement could be made by reducing the number of programmes undertaken by UNEP and entrusting some of them to other bodies. However, that question came within the competence of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System.

69. With regard to the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, her country believed that there was an urgent need for a reorganized and revitalized organization, closely linked with the principal decision-making organs of the United Nations system, to co-ordinate the many United Nations

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(Mrs. Forrester, Australia)

activities in the field of human settlements and to allocate priorities. That human settlements body should not, however, be established within UNEP, which would give it a sectoral nature, but should be linked with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. To be effective, there should be a large degree of regional participation in the body and it should have a number of regional offices to collect information, carry out research and co-ordinate programme delivery. The Conference on Human Settlements had not resolved the problem of the institutional link and location of that unit, but the draft resolution which it had adopted in that regard provided an excellent framework for a decision by the General Assembly. The differences of view on those questions must be resolved so that the General Assembly could resolve the problem of institutional arrangements at the current session; to do otherwise would be to let lapse the momentum generated by the Vancouver Conference. In that regard, delegations should bear in mind the work done by the Ad Hoc Committee on Restructuring. It was not easy to ascertain the financial implications of the various institutional arrangements proposed, since document A/31/156/Add.2 was not very clear in that regard and did not cover all the alternatives.

70. Her delegation considered that the recommendations for national action, in the preparation of which Australia had actively participated, constituted a comprehensive framework for national policies in the field of human settlements. Given the part which it had played in the work of the Conference, Australia had deeply regretted to find itself in the position of being compelled to vote against the Vancouver Declaration of Principles. However, as the Swedish representative had explained, the explanations of vote given at that time had made it clear that there was a broad consensus on matters of substance in the document. That consensus should be reflected in any resolution of the Second Committee relating to the report of the Conference.

71. Her delegation also hoped that a draft resolution would be proposed on future arrangements for the use of the audio-visual materials made available for the Conference.

72. Her delegation supported the Polish proposal regarding the amendment to be made to draft resolution A/C.2/31/L.9.

73. Mr. BERG (France) said that in general UNEP was correctly carrying out its co-ordinating and catalytic role within the United Nations system for activities relating to environment and had already achieved notable results. In that regard, he mentioned the programme for the Mediterranean and the role played by UNEP in the preparation for the United Nations Conference on Desertification. However, UNEP should avoid the temptation of becoming involved in too many activities and adhere strictly to its planning and co-ordinating role.

74. With regard to the effects on UNEP of the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Restructuring of the Economic and Social Sectors of the United Nations System, he recalled that the Executive Director of the Programme had had an opportunity of pleading his case in the Committee; in any event, it did not seem that the Programme's autonomy should be questioned. However, the Committee

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might perhaps wish to reaffirm certain principles which were essential to maintaining the unity of action of the United Nations system. Thus, UNEP should consent to a review of its programmes by CPC. Furthermore, in order to strengthen the cohesiveness of the activities of all the components of the United Nations system, UNEP's activity should be adapted with the greatest possible care to the policies of other bodies. A key element of such co-ordination should be the body which comprised the representatives of the various bodies or institutions concerned, it being understood that the Executive Director's ultimate responsibility to the Council would be maintained. UNEP and the General Assembly must therefore take the greatest account of the criticism made by ACABQ concerning co-ordination in its recent report on UNEP.

75. The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements had had the merit of making world public opinion aware not only of the crucial and universal nature of problems of human settlements but also of the fact that their solution should be sought first at the local level - even municipal - within the framework of national policies where regional co-operation could also take place. That special characteristic of the human settlements sector should be borne in mind and efforts should be made to avoid the creation of an unduly heavy and centralized structure.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

76. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should approve in principle the new programme of work contained in document A/C.2/31/L.10, on the understanding that the deadline set out in paragraph 3 could be changed.

77. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.