



SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 12th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

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

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

AGENDA ITEM 114: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES; REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES
(continued) (A/39/32)

1. Mr. MELTKE (German Democratic Republic) said that the draft revised calendar of conferences for 1985 reflected the continuing tendency for meetings to be held away from established United Nations conference locations and his delegation shared the view of the Under-Secretary-General for Conference Services and Special Assignments that there was a limit to the Department's capacity to organize too many such events during a particular period. In supporting draft resolution A as contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences, his delegation urged consistent adherence to the principle set forth in operative paragraph 4 and assumed that the proposal in operative paragraph 5 would not only be carried out within approved resources but would also lead to savings.

2. Commending the balanced nature of draft resolution B, which took appropriate account of the views expressed at the thirty-eighth session, he said that operative paragraph 3 must in no way lead to a limitation of the authority and competence of subsidiary organs in organizing their sessions. With regard to operative paragraph 4, every chairman of a subsidiary organ had a special responsibility for the organization of that organ's work and thus for its rational use of conference-servicing resources.

3. After expressing support for draft resolution C, he endorsed the view that the basic principles set forth in General Assembly resolution 31/140 remained the most important single piece of legislation governing the scope and periodicity of United Nations activities and therefore warranted further careful study.

4. Both the approach and the detailed provisions of draft resolution D were sound. With regard to the proposed abbreviated summary record, his delegation shared the Committee's view that substance should not be sacrificed to brevity and that the utmost caution should be exercised in that regard. It strongly favoured the measures proposed in operative paragraph 3 and the Under-Secretary-General's intention of issuing appropriate instructions to ensure an improved approach to the problems dealt with in that paragraph.

5. Mr. ZAHID (Morocco) observed that the kind of practice described in the first sentence of paragraph 5 of the report of the Committee on Conferences undermined the rational and effective use of conference-servicing resources. His delegation therefore endorsed the Committee's decision to remind bodies wishing to reschedule their sessions that they should make a recommendation to that effect in their reports to the General Assembly. He would, however, have liked to know what form that reminder had taken and whether it had prompted reactions from the bodies concerned.

6. With regard to the pattern of conferences, despite all its efforts the Committee on Conferences had been unable to fulfil its mandate under resolution 38/32 C. His delegation could agree to renewing that mandate in the hope that it would increase the effectiveness of conference services.

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(Mr. Zahid, Morocco)

7. The shortening of sessions or the introduction of a biennial cycle of sessions had been proposed as a means of maintaining the current level of activities of United Nations organs despite the steady decline in resources. Full utilization of conference-servicing resources was becoming a growing imperative and his delegation therefore endorsed the Committee's invitation to organs which had used less than 75 per cent of their conference-servicing resources to consult with it on the possibility of reducing their allocation. He regretted to note that many organs had not responded to the Committee's initiative and that the latter had been forced to resort to what was possibly a less democratic approach, but welcomed the fact that those bodies which had responded seemed now to be more aware of the extent of the problem and prepared to help resolve it. The Committee should continue its dialogue with United Nations bodies with a view to eliminating or at least limiting such waste.

8. The proliferation of documentation was counter-productive and his delegation supported the Committee's efforts to reverse that trend. Such efforts would, among other things, help to ensure that documents were distributed on time. In that connection, his delegation reiterated its support for the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 38/32 E. Pursuant to that resolution, the Committee on Conferences had, inter alia, considered the possibility of introducing an abbreviated form of summary record. Views had differed sharply on that issue, but the ideas put forward were constructive and merited further consideration. On the basis of replies from the various organs concerned, the Committee might then consider the question in greater detail. With regard to delays in the publication of United Nations documents, that was a problem which could be solved only through the joint efforts of the Secretariat, the Committee on Conferences and all Member States.

9. Mr. YAKOVENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that, on the whole, his delegation could support the draft resolutions contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences. While the Committee had made serious efforts to rationalize conference-servicing activities, however, it had so far done little to fulfil its main task, that of halting the growth of the budgetary resources allocated to conference servicing. It had drafted a number of useful recommendations, strict compliance with which should increase the effectiveness of such activities, but it must now concentrate on securing the implementation of existing General Assembly resolutions. The need to improve the efficiency of the United Nations must prompt the Committee to draft recommendations which rationalized conference-servicing activities and enhanced their cost-effectiveness and it was from that standpoint that consideration must be given to the idea of unifying the conference-servicing resources in Vienna.

10. The Committee's recommendations on ensuring a direct relationship between the resources allocated to United Nations bodies and their effective use were valuable. At the same time, there was a need for flexibility and for the specific nature of the work of individual organs to be taken into account.

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(Mr. Yakovenko, USSR)

11. With regard to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on publications policy and practice in the United Nations system (A/39/239), JIU had noted that the statistical accounting documents on which the inspectors based their work made it impossible to determine precisely what resources were spent on publishing activities. The report also showed that there was within the United Nations system no unified and accurate system of accounting for publishing activities. The time had clearly come to consider that question further and to introduce a unified system of indicators and statistics which would facilitate consideration of that problem and lead to more rational publishing expenditures.

12. Finally, his delegation hoped that the expenditures for meetings and conferences in 1985 would not exceed approved resources.

13. Mr. TAKASU (Japan) observed that the proliferation of conferences and meetings placed a growing burden on Member States if they were to participate fully in such meetings and not to waste valuable conference-servicing resources. It was essential, therefore, that the number and duration of conferences be kept to a manageable level. To that end, the Committee on Conferences had sought to shorten the sessions of United Nations organs or to place them on a biennial basis, but had left the decisions of such matters to the organs concerned, with the result that progress thus far had been slow. While many United Nations organs had become increasingly conscious of the need for more efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources, it would require a continuing effort by the Committee before further improvements were seen. His delegation therefore strongly supported draft resolution B, in particular the proposal that the officers of subsidiary organs should be responsible for the rational use of conference resources. In that connection, the secretaries of such organs had an important part to play in formulating practical plans for rationalizing their organization of work.

14. With regard to the pattern of conferences, his delegation agreed that considerable justification existed for the various existing provisions governing the management of conference services. The main thrust of future efforts must therefore be directed at ensuring the implementation of existing rules rather than at devising new ones. The host country arrangement was one of the most basic rules and any departure from it should be strictly avoided. His delegation agreed that an in-depth study of all existing provisions must be made before final recommendations were prepared.

15. While some progress had been made towards controlling and limiting documentation, future efforts should be directed at those organs which continued to issue excessively lengthy reports. His delegation's main concern, however, was the late issuance of documents, which made it difficult for delegations to give them sufficient attention, a situation which hampered the flow of governmental and intergovernmental deliberations. His delegation suspected that the primary reason for delays was the late submission of documents to the Department of Conference Services rather than the latter's inefficient handling of them. It therefore endorsed fully the Committee's recommendations in draft resolution D.

(Mr. Takasu, Japan)

16. His delegation supported fully the direction proposed for the Committee's future work, whereby the latter would concentrate on monitoring the existing provisions and guidelines governing conference services and documentation. It also supported the suggestion that the Committee should alternate its consideration of its two main areas of concern each year. It hoped that the Committee would give immediate attention to the late issuance of documentation in the coming year and suggested that the Committee might benefit from holding only one substantive session a year.

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

Adequacy of the conference facilities of the Economic Commission for Africa at Addis Ababa (A/39/7/Add.2; A/C.5/38/82; A/C.5/39/8)

17. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's third report on the adequacy of the conference facilities of the Economic Commission for Africa at Addis Ababa (A/39/7/Add.2), recalled that, by its resolution 36/176, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to study the adequacy of the conference facilities of the Economic Commission for Africa at Addis Ababa and, at its thirty-seventh session, had authorized the necessary architectural and engineering studies. The results of the engineering study had been reproduced in the Secretary-General's report in document A/C.5/38/82, as updated by document A/C.5/39/8.

18. In considering the above-mentioned documents at its sessions in 1984, the Advisory Committee had also taken account of information and recommendations available in other relevant documents, including those referred to in paragraph 1 of its latest report. The Secretary-General's proposals, which were summarized in paragraphs 4 to 15 of its report, had been considered at great length by ACABQ, which had exchanged views with representatives of the Secretary-General, ECA and the firm that had produced the conceptual design report.

19. The Advisory Committee had encountered considerable difficulties as a result of various factors, the first being that the project described in document A/C.5/38/82 differed in several respects from that communicated to the Committee and the General Assembly at the thirty-seventh session. The Advisory Committee had also devoted considerable attention to the expansion factor proposed for the new conference rooms and had tried to elicit from the secretariat of ECA and from the Secretary-General's representatives in New York the rationale for that factor and some indication of the timing for its implementation. The reference in paragraph 25 of document A/C.5/38/82 to JIU's observations on the need for flexibility in the design of new buildings did not answer the question as to whether such flexibility was equally applicable to new office and conference buildings. Flexibility for office buildings presupposed that there would be an increase in staff and other office requirements. In the case of conference buildings like the one being proposed for ECA, flexibility would imply an increase in the membership of ECA in the future. If no significant increase was envisaged in the membership, some other justification would have to be found for the

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(Mr. Mselle)

expansion factor. The reference in the same paragraph to the possibility of holding a major United Nations conference in Addis Ababa and the statement in paragraph 54 of the same document that the expansion factor was designed to meet ECA's medium- and long-term needs had compounded the Advisory Committee's difficulties and raised issues which were not dealt with in the Secretary-General's report. In particular, it was not clear whether it was being suggested that ECA was to be designated as a United Nations conference centre comparable with other such centres, in which case it was questionable whether it was up to the Advisory Committee to determine such a function. Moreover, a representative of the Secretary-General had informed the Advisory Committee that a major United Nations conference would require a minimum of three conference rooms, each with a capacity to seat 200 delegates at tables. The conference facilities proposed in the Secretary-General's report did not have that kind of capacity.

20. The Advisory Committee had examined statistics on the number of meetings held by ECA at and away from Addis Ababa, and how many would be held at the regional headquarters following the construction of the new conference facilities. It had been concerned to ensure that the new facilities would be fully used. The Advisory Committee's visit to Addis Ababa had been instrumental in convincing it that Africa Hall was often crowded and that other conference facilities were substandard.

21. Taking into account all the information before it, the Advisory Committee had accepted the Secretary-General's proposals, except that it believed that there was no need to incorporate an expansion factor for the small conference rooms and that any decision on the modification of Africa Hall should be postponed. The reasons for those recommendations were that the small conference rooms had never been intended to accommodate the entire membership of ECA and all the other participants normally invited to ECA meetings. Work on the expansion of Africa Hall would not begin until construction of the other facilities had been completed. Further consultation should be carried out to determine the extent to which the Hall should be modified, bearing in mind the level of the conference programme after the new conference rooms had been completed.

22. Not all delegations would feel comfortable with the Advisory Committee's recommendations. Its recommendation in favour of the incorporation of an expansion factor for the new medium and large conference rooms might give the impression that the new facilities were more than the Commission required. Yet account should be taken, not just of the narrow context of the meetings generally held at Addis Ababa by ECA, but of the broader context of larger meetings which might be organized by ECA and the United Nations.

23. The Secretary-General's estimate amounted to \$66,220,000 at 1984 prices, which, on the assumption of a 7.5 per cent compounded annual inflation factor, produced a total cost estimate of \$89,360,000 over six and a half years. Costs would be affected by the need to import most material and specialized labour.

24. The Advisory Committee had recalled the findings of the Joint Inspection Unit in its report on building construction procedures (A/36/297). JIU had concluded

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that construction cost overruns were often caused by initial estimates that were too low, rates of inflation higher than anticipated, exchange rate fluctuations, changes in projects after they had been approved, and delay by the secretariat in authorizing commencement of work.

25. The Advisory Committee had accepted the estimated annual inflation rate of 7.5 per cent, and, with the deletions proposed in its report, had arrived at a final cost estimate of \$73,501,000. That estimate was based on preliminary plans, which would be presented in more detail once the Assembly had approved the project.

26. Paragraphs 40 to 45 of the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/38/82) and paragraph 8 of the Advisory Committee's report dealt with the type of contract to be used for the project. The Advisory Committee had been informed that it would be possible to incorporate a guaranteed maximum cost in the contract, thus averting cost overruns. The project had future financial implications, as indicated in paragraphs 28 and 29 of the ACABQ report.

27. The Advisory Committee had been concerned over the respective roles to be played by ECA and Headquarters in developing, supervising, controlling and managing the project. It concurred in the creation of an ECA planning unit, with the responsibilities outlined in paragraph 13 of its report.

28. The Joint Inspection Unit had recommended that outside experts should be brought in to advise on the execution of construction projects in an endeavour to improve management supervision and control. The experts concerned should be independent of the architects and contractors. In view of the importance of the matter, the Secretariat might wish to comment on the views in paragraphs 25 and 26 of the ACABQ report. It might be useful to confirm that the type of contract to be entered into would in fact be free from the weaknesses identified by JIU.

29. Mr. PEDERSEN (Canada) said that it was particularly important to improve co-ordination between ECA and Headquarters, and to establish a clear delineation of responsibility in managing the project. The Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management and the Assistant Secretary-General for General Services should serve as a focal point.

30. Inasmuch as it would help Africa, the project represented an extension of the United Nations as a whole. Yet his delegation did have reservations concerning the size of the project, given the requirements of the African region, and felt that it would be more rational to deal with the question of constructing a major conference centre as a separate issue.

31. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that the Secretariat's comments on co-ordination between ECA and Headquarters would be of interest, since they would be of relevance to other United Nations projects.

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32. Mr. AMNEUS (Sweden) said that his delegation agreed with the construction proposals designed to meet the needs of ECA itself but had doubts about the wisdom of providing for larger conference rooms than were actually required by ECA, in order to accommodate a major United Nations conference at Addis Ababa. Although it might be argued that, since new facilities were being built, it would be cheaper to construct large facilities now rather than later, there were certain consequences to that logic which merited consideration. For the first time it was being assumed that a regional commission should be able to host a major conference without resorting to any facilities in the host country. Should the entire project be approved, the United Nations would, in effect, be spending millions of dollars to provide empty space in two conference rooms. The existence of that space would provide an incentive to hold a major conference at Addis Ababa. Once that conference was over, there would be a wastage of capacity until the next major conference. Other regional commissions were likely to request an expansion of their own facilities, in which case the Organization might end up with a considerable amount of extra space, while the increased incentive to hold major conferences outside established centres would lead to higher conference-servicing costs. His delegation, out of a concern for fiscal responsibility, questioned the desirability of providing for an expansion factor beyond the needs of ECA.

33. Mr. NYGARD (United States of America) said that his delegation recognized the need for additional conference facilities at ECA, but the proposed project was excessive and too costly. When the Committee had first considered the matter, the proposal had been to provide adequate conference resources for ECA, but now it was a question of providing facilities for major conferences, such as already existed at Nairobi and for which ECA had no need. Acceptance of the proposal would establish a precedent for such facilities at each regional commission. Before a decision was taken, consideration should be given to other projects proposed for Africa which might have greater utility. His delegation therefore moved, under rule 116 of the rules of procedure, that debate on the matter should be adjourned.

34. Mr. GEZAHEGNE (Ethiopia) said that the matter of new conference facilities had dragged on and an urgent decision was required. He did not see any link with other projects being carried out in Africa and therefore opposed the United States motion.

35. Mr. EL-SAFY (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, said that he too was opposed to the United States motion. The issue before the Committee was not related to any other matter. The Committee had already considered the merits of the question and now had before it the Advisory Committee's recommendations. Further delay was unnecessary.

36. Mr. MURRAY (United Kingdom), seconding the motion, said that the Fifth Committee would be in a better position to judge the implications of the project, which involved substantial expenditure of United Nations funds, in the light of the discussions currently being held in other committees with regard to the economic situation in Africa. Postponement of a decision for two to four weeks would therefore be advisable and would not delay action on the project, which was scheduled to start in 1985.

37. The CHAIRMAN put the motion to the vote.

38. The motion was rejected by 73 votes to 21, with 2 abstentions.

39. Mr. FORAN (Controller), replying to the questions raised by the representative of the Philippines and the Chairman of the Advisory Committee, said that the type of proposed contract and the system of project management and supervision had been designed to avoid the weaknesses identified by ACABQ and JIU in previous United Nations construction programmes. The Secretariat was in full agreement with the recommendations contained in paragraphs 25 and 26 of the ACABQ report, particularly with regard to the need for a central point of overall direction and control. In order to ensure the required degree of co-ordination and to avoid duplication, it was essential for Headquarters to perform that central role. At the same time, the staff at ECA would undertake day-to-day management functions during the construction phase. In that connection, he recalled that a proposal to expand conference facilities at ESCAP was also under consideration. ACABQ's recommendations for flexibility were therefore doubly relevant: the pooling of resources could be achieved by appropriate budgetary means and close consultation with ECA and ESCAP for the benefit of both projects. The flow of supervisory responsibility would have to be discussed in detail with the Executive Secretaries of ECA and ESCAP, but he anticipated no difficulties in improving communications with Headquarters.

40. The CHAIRMAN, on the basis of the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, proposed that the Fifth Committee should recommend to the General Assembly the adoption of the following decision:

"The General Assembly, having considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the adequacy of the conference facilities of the Economic Commission for Africa at Addis Ababa (A/C.5/38/82 and A/C.5/39/8) and the related report of the Advisory Committee (A/39/7/Add.2),

"(a) Concurs in the comments and observations of the Advisory Committee as contained in its report (A/39/7/Add.2);

"(b) Accepts with appreciation the generous offer of the Government of Ethiopia for approximately 42,400 square metres of land immediately adjacent to the existing site of the Economic Commission for Africa, taking due account of the assurance by that Government that all goods will be imported free of duty and sales taxes;

"(c) Approves in principle the project at an estimated cost of \$73,501,000 (excluding the cost of the ECA Planning Unit);

"(d) Decides that the appropriation of \$3,120,000 approved for the biennium 1984-1985 in order to formulate detailed designs should be placed in a construction account and any unexpended balance carried forward until the completion of the project, and

(The Chairman)

"(e) Requests the Secretary-General to submit annual progress reports thereon to the General Assembly."

41. He further proposed that the Fifth Committee should approve the following appropriations under the programme budget for the biennium 1984-1985: \$3,120,000 under section 32 and \$95,100 under section 13, together with an appropriation of \$16,300 under section 31 (Staff assessment), which would be offset by an increase under income section 1 (Income from staff assessment).

42. At the request of the United States representative, a recorded vote would be taken on the proposal.

43. Mr. MAJOLI (Italy), explaining his vote before the vote, said that the Fifth Committee, while remaining mindful of the need for maximum restraint and economy, should also weigh the benefits to be derived from the new complex. ACABQ's careful study made it clear that the scattered and dilapidated premises at Addis Ababa were inadequate to meet the needs of ECA, whose importance over the coming decades as a tool for promoting the peaceful socio-economic development of the African continent would undoubtedly increase. In voting for the proposal, he nevertheless wished to emphasize the need for effective monitoring of project execution so as to ensure the wise and careful spending of resources.

44. Mr. EL-SAFETY (Egypt) recalled that the ECA complex was not a new scheme. The matter had been before the Committee for a considerable time and it was no secret that some delegations would have preferred to follow the Secretary-General's original proposal for the project. The Group of 77 had been accused of financial irresponsibility, yet its representatives had entered into the discussion in a spirit of co-operation rather than confrontation. Indeed, they were prepared to accept the compromise solution submitted by ACABQ. That expert body could hardly be accused of irresponsibility, and he hoped the Committee would therefore follow its recommendations and vote in favour of the proposal.

45. Mr. MONTHE (Cameroon) thanked the Secretariat for its efforts to speed up consideration of the project, which was long overdue. There was no question that ECA required better facilities. It was necessary to plan for the future; the project met an obvious need, and the costs had been carefully studied by ACABQ. Certain delegations had argued that a decision should be deferred on the pretext that the project was linked with items under consideration in other committees. If the Fifth Committee took that approach on every matter, its deliberations would quickly come to a halt. With a view to achieving a reasonable compromise based on ACABQ's expert findings, his delegation would vote in favour of the Chairman's proposal rather than press for a reconsideration of the Secretary-General's original recommendations.

46. Mr. DE CLERCK (Belgium) said that his delegation would abstain in the vote. While in general it endorsed ACABQ's findings, it had serious reservations about the intended use of the ECA facilities for holding a major United Nations conference. That plan was inconsistent with the rational utilization of existing conference-servicing resources and encouraged centrifugal tendencies within the United Nations.

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47. Mr. GEZAHEGNE (Ethiopia) observed that the need for the new ECA complex had been generally recognized. As to the expansion factor, which was the real issue in the present debate, ACABQ had taken account of the need for economy and was advocating a lesser facility. As host country, Ethiopia had agreed to provide 42,400 square metres of land for the complex, which, together with concessions on all imported goods, represented a major contribution that had been overlooked by some speakers.

48. ECA was of paramount importance for the economic and social development of the African continent and many regional organizations came under its umbrella. Efforts were being made to intensify regional co-operation and the expansion of ECA was designed to meet future needs. The project had now been under consideration for many years, and he urged the Committee not to delay its implementation any longer.

49. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) said that his delegation would vote in favour of the proposal. ECA was a United Nations body and it was illogical to argue that the new facilities would be of advantage solely to Africa. He deplored the attempts of some delegations to link the scheme with the Organization's other activities on that continent and dismissed the implied criticism that it represented an undesirable transfer of resources. His delegation would have preferred the Secretary-General's original proposal, but it was prepared to go along with the reasonable compromise solution recommended by the Advisory Committee.

50. Mr. PINHEIRO-GUIMARÃES (Brazil) thanked Ethiopia for acting as host to ECA over many years and for its offer of land to build the new complex. He agreed with the representatives of Cameroon and Egypt that ACABQ had conducted a serious and careful examination of the project, and believed that a vote in favour of the Chairman's proposal was, indeed, a demonstration of financial responsibility.

51. Mr. REFRHAL (Norway) said that his delegation would not vote in favour of the proposal. He shared the doubts of the representative of Sweden with regard to the expansion factor and was likewise concerned about the consequences of establishing a precedent by incorporating such a provision into the ECA project.

52. At the request of the representative of the United States of America, a recorded vote was taken on the proposal.

In favour: Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burma, Burundi, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, Democratic Yemen, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, German Democratic Republic, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Jordan, Kuwait, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Sudan,

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Swaziland, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Viet Nam, Yemen, Yugoslavia, Zambia.

Against: Netherlands, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

Abstaining: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Federal Republic of, Ireland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden.

53. The proposal was adopted by 83 votes to 3, with 13 abstentions.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.