

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

TWELFTH SESSION

Official Records


**706th
PLENARY MEETING**

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at 4.30 p.m.

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Chairman: Sir Leslie MUNRO (New Zealand).

AGENDA ITEM 8

Adoption of the agenda (continued)

FIFTH REPORT OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE (A/3702)

1. The PRESIDENT: The Assembly has before it the fifth report of the General Committee [A/3702], which deals with Syria's request for the inclusion of an additional item in the agenda of the present session.

2. I would suggest the following procedure. There can, of course, be three speakers on either side, but if no Member wishes to take the floor, I shall put to the vote the recommendation of the General Committee. The Assembly will then take up the General Committee's recommendation that this item should be considered in plenary meeting. I think I can probably put that to the Assembly without taking a formal vote. Following that, I shall call upon Members who wish to explain their vote.

3. I shall now put to the vote the recommendation of the General Committee [A/3702, para.1] to include in the agenda of the present session an additional item entitled "Complaint about threats to the security of Syria and to international peace".

The item was included in the agenda by 66 votes to none, with 1 abstention.

4. The PRESIDENT: If there are no objections, I assume that the Assembly adopts the General Committee's recommendation [A/3702] that this matter should be considered in plenary meeting, without reference to a Committee?

The recommendation was adopted.

5. Mr. WALKER (Australia): I am grateful to have this opportunity to explain the Australian vote in support of the inclusion of this item in the agenda because I make no secret of the fact that we have cast this vote with serious misgivings. I should like to emphasize that we regard the inclusion of this item as a matter of very great importance. The Syrian Government has submitted to the Assembly the gravest charges against the Government of Turkey and, by implication, against other Governments. The Soviet Union, in a characteristic letter from its Foreign Minister, has supported these grave charges and has made the most serious threats regarding the action which the Soviet Union would take in certain eventualities. The United States Government, for its part, has met this situation with a clear statement of its intentions under the treaty obligations which it has assumed in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.

6. In supporting the inclusion of this item I wish to say, as far as the Australian delegation is concerned, that—as was said by several representatives in the General Committee on behalf of their delegations—our support of the inscription of this item does not imply in any way that we accept the allegations that have been made by the Syrian or Soviet Union delegations in their communications to the President of the Assembly.

7. I think I should also say that we are concerned about the dangerous situation that confronts us when the two greatest Powers in the world feel obliged to say plainly that if certain things happen in this troubled region there will be war. No one, I think, would deny that this is a situation fraught with the most awful responsibilities.

8. I wish to say that in supporting the inclusion of this item Australia does not believe that the countries directly concerned are in fact poised for an attack one against the other—an attack which, if the Powers concerned mean what they say, could lead to a most terrible war. But we do believe that, in such a situation, perhaps a mistake by some junior officer or even a civilian carried away by the tensions which are so often engendered by propaganda could lead to incalculable results.

9. This situation has been brought to the General Assembly. In our view, the General Assembly is not, in the first instance, the body to which the matter should have been referred. Again I note that several members of the General Committee stated clearly this afternoon that it would be appropriate for a matter of this kind, which is presented as a threat to the peace of the world, to be dealt with by that organ of the United Nations which, under the Charter, is empowered to deal with such matters, namely, the Security Council. Several members of the General Committee stated that under the Charter the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and that if there is a threat to the peace or a breach of the peace the Security Council is the only organ authorized to take enforcement measures.

10. Of course, in a situation like the present one, it may be thought that consideration in the Security Council might present certain difficulties before agreed measures under the Charter could be adopted to redress the situation. But this does not mean that constitutional processes should be disregarded, or that the General Assembly should necessarily assume that the Security Council would fail to carry out its functions, whether or not the great Powers find themselves in positions opposed to each other. Therefore, it is with misgivings that we support the inclusion of this item in the agenda of the Assembly.

11. Then why are we acquiescing in it? I think we

should be honest and admit that there is a good deal of wishful thinking in our position. We are hoping that the situation is not really as serious as some of the statements that have been made would lead us to believe, that we are in fact dealing here with what might be called a propaganda contest—that is, we are assuming that none of the countries concerned really intends to attack another, that the military forces of the great Powers will therefore not be put into action and that there will not be war in Asia Minor, that all we have to do is to fight a battle of words in this Assembly hall. The Australian delegation profoundly hopes that this is the case and that we are dealing with a propaganda barrage by Syria, backed by the Soviet Union, and not with a cold-war situation which could degenerate readily into a much more dangerous situation.

12. In accepting, therefore, the inclusion of this item, we wish to say that if propaganda advantage is all that is involved—and let us pray that it is—we are sure that our debates will show plainly where the right lies in this matter, and eventually, we hope, it will show what the true facts are.

13. I have already said that, in agreeing to the inclusion of the item, we do not accept the allegations made by the Syrian and Soviet representatives against Turkey and against the United States, nor do we agree that it is a proper procedure for the Security Council to be side-stepped on a matter which is presented as a threat—and a dangerous threat—to the peace of the world. We have to judge the situation accordingly.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.