



# General Assembly

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## Fifth Committee

### Summary record of the 2nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 October 2013, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Taalas ..... (Finland)  
*Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Ruiz Massieu

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\* Reissued for technical reasons on 22 January 2014.

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 5: Election of the officers of the Main Committees** (*continued*)

1. **The Chair** said that Mr. Dosseh (Togo), Ms. Fiodorow (Poland) and Mr. Funes Henríquez (El Salvador) had been nominated by the African States, the Eastern European States and the Latin American and Caribbean States, respectively, for the posts of Vice-Chairs.

2. *Mr. Dosseh (Togo), Ms. Fiodorow (Poland) and Mr. Funes Henríquez (El Salvador) were elected Vice-Chairs by acclamation.*

3. **Mr. Dimri** (India) nominated Mr. Siah (Singapore) for the post of Rapporteur.

4. *Mr. Siah (Singapore) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.*

5. **The Chair** noted that the delay in electing the Chair of the Fifth Committee for the current session — the election having taken place only two days, and not, as required by the rules of procedure, three months, in advance of the opening of the session — was attributable to the reluctance of the regional groups to assume the role, owing to the experience of the previous session, when the Committee had made news for the wrong reasons. However, the Committee played a pivotal role in the United Nations system and the problems that it had faced in the past should not be a source of discouragement. Instead, the Committee should seize the opportunity to improve its working methods. He pledged to ensure that the Committee's deliberations were transparent and predictable, and adhered to the agreed timetable.

6. In setting the course of the Organization for years to come, members needed to transcend national perspectives and narrow interests and bring their collective experience to bear with the aim of taking multilateral decisions that were in every country's national interest. Impartial coordinators had a crucial role to play in finding common ground, and he therefore urged delegations to come forward to fill the remaining spots.

7. The Committee should focus on policy issues and achievable results by adopting the programme budget for 2014-2015 and tackling other important issues such as the capital master plan, the strategic heritage plan for the Palais des Nations and staff mobility, while also

addressing programme budget implications. It must also stay abreast of the reform projects under way, such as Umoja and the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS), since those reforms would shape the future administrative landscape of the United Nations. The agenda was heavy and he therefore appealed to members to expedite the proceedings by refraining from unnecessary written questions, the number of which had been excessive during the consideration of the previous budget proposal. With commitment on the part of all, the Committee could be in the news in 2013 for the right reasons.

**Organization of work** ([A/C.5/68/1](#); [A/C.5/68/L.1](#))

8. **The Chair** invited members to consider the proposed tentative and provisional programme of work of the Committee for the main part of the session and the note on the status of preparedness of the relevant documentation ([A/C.5/68/L.1](#)). A separate list on the status of documentation would be issued for the first and second parts of the resumed session. He wished to highlight some of the recommendations made by the General Committee in its first report ([A/68/250](#)) and adopted by the General Assembly at its 2nd plenary meeting. With regard to the rationalization of work, the General Assembly had requested each Main Committee to further discuss its working methods at the beginning of every session, and had invited the Chairs of the Main Committees, at the sixty-eighth session, to brief the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, as appropriate, on the discussions on the working methods.

9. The Committee should complete its work for the main part of the session by 13 December 2013. In view of financial constraints, meetings of the Main Committees, including informal meetings, should start promptly at 10 a.m. and be adjourned by 6 p.m. In accordance with past practice, the requirement that at least one quarter of the members should be present in order to declare a meeting open and to permit debate to proceed should be waived. The General Committee had drawn attention to rules 99 (b), 106, 109, 114 and 115 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly regarding the conduct of meetings.

10. Efforts should be made to reduce the number of resolutions adopted, and resolutions should not contain requests for reports from the Secretary-General unless such reports were strictly necessary for the implementation of those resolutions or for the

continued consideration of an item. Resolutions should be short and action-oriented. In addition, the Main Committees should merely take note of the reports of the Secretary-General or of subsidiary bodies which did not require a decision by the General Assembly and should neither debate nor adopt resolutions on them unless specifically requested to do so.

11. **Mr. Thomson** (Fiji), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that adequate time must be allocated to allow thorough consideration of the various items in the proposed programme of work and their successful conclusion. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 was a particularly important item, and the Group was seriously concerned at the proposed budget cuts, which could have an impact on the implementation of mandates approved by intergovernmental bodies, especially under the development pillar. The Group was also concerned that the proposed cuts had been interpreted as a request from Member States through the budget outline resolution.

12. The Group remained concerned that important reports had yet to be issued. All documents must be issued in all official languages in a timely manner, in accordance with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, so that the Committee could carry out its work effectively and take well-informed decisions. The failure of the Secretariat to present those reports in accordance with the rules of procedure often forced Member States and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to work under time pressure and had a serious effect on deliberations.

13. The Group welcomed the balanced programme of work prepared by the Bureau, which should be adjusted throughout the session in the light of the progress made. In accordance with past practice, it would endorse the proposed programme of work on the understanding that it would be reviewed and amended after the first week, as needed.

14. The Group had always stressed that negotiations should be conducted in an open, inclusive and transparent manner to ensure that decision-making took place among the entire membership, not within small groups. The negotiation process, a confidence-building exercise driven by Member States, must be allowed to run its course. Member States had a collective responsibility to take decisions that were beneficial to the Organization and enabled it to discharge its mandates effectively and efficiently.

15. **Mr. León González** (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), said that the Community would pay close attention to the deliberations on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2014-2015 and hoped that the negotiations would be conducted in a constructive, transparent manner taking into account the concerns and interests of the entire membership, in particular the efficient functioning of the Organization and prompt implementation of the mandates adopted by Member States. Holding consultations on the proposed programme budget outside United Nations Headquarters would undermine the legitimacy and transparency of those deliberations.

16. CELAC would also pay close attention to the discussions on the second performance report, the report on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, human resources management and the United Nations common system. Funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions was of particular importance to the Latin American and Caribbean region, and the Community was concerned that the item would not be formally introduced until 19 November 2013. The Committee must have sufficient time to reach agreement on that item to prevent it from being deferred again.

17. It was crucial that all the necessary official documentation was available to ensure that the Committee could work efficiently and hold proper negotiations. CELAC therefore reiterated its call for strict respect of the principle of timely distribution of documents in all working languages, in accordance with successive resolutions of the General Assembly on the pattern of conferences and the rules of procedure. Lastly, CELAC would actively engage in transparent, inclusive negotiations on all agenda items in order to reach agreements that were satisfactory to all Member States and conducive to the proper functioning of the Organization.

18. **Mr. Coffi** (Côte d'Ivoire), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group was seriously concerned that the continued delay in issuing official documentation was becoming a perennial trend that was affecting the Committee's decision-making processes. In the case of the reports of the Board of Auditors, the delay had affected the scheduling of that agenda item. That was a serious issue and, in the interests of accountability, the Secretariat should provide a transparent and full explanation for the delay.

The report of the Board of Auditors had not been available in its edited, bound form at the start of the second part of the resumed session in May 2013, and the Secretary-General must take concrete steps to address those shortcomings. Similarly, the first report of ACABQ on the proposed programme budget for 2014-2015 (A/68/7) was still not available in the six official languages, and the Secretariat should indicate the full reasons for that delay as soon as possible, since the late issuance of that report would affect the Committee's ability to swiftly consider such a lengthy document.

19. The Group would pay close attention to the budgetary proposals, procedures relating to the implementation of mandates and proposals related to the financing of the three peacekeeping missions to be considered by the Committee. Negotiations should be conducted within the allocated time and in an open, inclusive and transparent manner instead of in small groups behind closed doors.

20. Lastly, a speedy decision should be taken on the scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations, in accordance with Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations, to enable the countries concerned to fully participate in the work of the General Assembly without delay.

21. **Mr. Vrailas** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the stabilization and association process countries Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; and in addition the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the Committee's heavy agenda contained important and complex items, and completing its programme of work by the agreed deadline would require a collective effort and constructive negotiations. The timely availability of documentation was a precondition for a successful outcome of the Committee's work but, despite the Secretariat's efforts, the submission of relevant reports had again been delayed. All documents were needed in all official languages, particularly on key issues such as the budget for special political missions.

22. United Nations financial resources must be managed efficiently on the basis of the principles of budgetary discipline and coherence, and the Organization must apply the same strict budgetary discipline to its budgets that Member States were

applying domestically. Consequently, the Committee must do its utmost to adhere to the level of \$5.396 billion agreed upon for the 2012-2013 programme budget. Moreover, the decision taken by the General Assembly in 2012 to further defer consideration of the issue of recosting was not a mere postponement and it should not be assumed that further funding would be forthcoming.

23. In adopting a programme budget for the next biennium, the Committee should seek further savings to reduce the level to below the figure of \$5.392 billion agreed in the budget outline. The Organization should continue to make every effort to innovate and improve its working practices, to manage its resources as efficiently and effectively as possible and to work constructively with Member States. In particular, the budgets of the special political missions would be closely scrutinized.

24. The European Union looked forward to considering the Secretary-General's refined policy on mobility with a view to agreeing on a workable new scheme covering costs and recruitment, as well as to constructive dialogue on funding and backstopping arrangements for special political missions. It would also carefully scrutinize the proposals for financing major construction projects such as the capital master plan and the strategic heritage plan for the Palais des Nations, as well as those relating to after-service health insurance liabilities.

25. **Mr. Al-Mouallimi** (Saudi Arabia) said that the financial health of the United Nations was of the utmost importance to his country, as was the strategic direction of the Organization. The Secretary-General must be provided with the necessary funds to carry out his mandate and programmes should not be adversely affected by across-the-board budget cuts. In particular, it was important to ensure that sufficient funds were allocated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) under the development pillar. IPSAS and other reform initiatives such as enterprise resource planning and Umoja should also be monitored closely to ensure their effectiveness. Lastly, it was hoped that Member States would act in a timely manner to apply Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations to ensure that countries in arrears for reasons beyond their control would be able to participate fully in the General Assembly.

26. **Mr. Yamazaki** (Japan) said that his delegation would carefully assess the appropriateness and affordability of all potential additional requirements under the 2012-2013 budget, as well as the proposed appropriations for 2014-2015. It would also participate actively and positively in the negotiations on the proposed staff mobility framework and common system issues, since those matters would have a significant impact on the future of the Organization. His delegation attached great importance to the gradual implementation of the Umoja and IPSAS projects and looked forward to discussing the capital master plan and the strategic heritage plan for the Palais des Nations. It would also work with other delegations to ensure effective, efficient running of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and other special political missions and peacekeeping operations. Lastly, his delegation hoped that consensus would be reached on all items by the deadline set and that reports of the Secretary-General would be received in a timely manner.

27. **Mr. Torsella** (United States of America) said that the regular budget had increased by an average of 15 per cent each biennium between 2000 and 2011. Many factors had contributed to that growth, but the primary drivers had been the failure to effectively manage the number and total cost of posts, a broken budget process and a culture that treated budgets as temporary suggestions rather than binding envelopes.

28. In 2011, recognizing that only an affordable United Nations was a sustainable one and that continuing the pattern of unchecked budgetary growth would have grave consequences for the Organization; the Committee had charted a new, more responsible course. Consequently, it had agreed on a historic regular budget appropriation of \$5.152 billion for the biennium 2012-2013. In 2012, the Committee had approved a revised 2012-2013 budget of \$5.396 billion, a budget outline of \$5.392 billion for 2014-2015, and a modest six-month pay freeze for United Nations employees in its pursuit of significant and structural savings.

29. When the Committee considered the final performance report for 2012-2013 and the actual initial budget for 2014-2015, it would face a simple choice: either to embrace or reject the new course of belt-tightening and restraint. Even with the addition of new tasks on its agenda, the Organization must respond to the financial constraints of the time by holding the line on spending and breaking with the past pattern of

unsustainable growth. Similarly, taxpayers must not be asked to pay for failures of management. In 2011, members had agreed to defer consideration of recosting on the understanding that the Secretariat would strenuously seek to find ways to offset any increases that recosting might entail. The Secretariat had made some very real and encouraging progress by reducing spending on special political missions by \$67 million year on year, introducing new initiatives relating to the management of vacancies and tackling important structural issues in the 2014-2015 budget proposal. However, his country was keen to know what cuts had been made in the remaining portion of the regular budget to offset the potential \$168 million in recosting that had been forecast for 2013, and what efforts had been made to retain a cushion in order to avoid an additional bill to taxpayers.

30. His country could not agree to a 2014-2015 budget that was not coupled with steps to fix the practice of recosting, which did not exist outside the Organization. An abstruse and technical vocabulary was being used to disguise what were mostly changes in staff costs after budgets had been approved. In addition, new measures were needed to rein in spiralling staff costs. Although his country was deeply grateful for the work done by United Nations staff, it simply could not justify historically high compensation levels that were now significantly out of step with the average United States civil servant's salary. Several common system organizations were finding that the continued increases in staff costs were unsustainable, and if that fundamental problem was not addressed now it would result in more draconian measures later.

31. Fresh commitment and new mechanisms were needed to ensure that any new spending requirements were offset by equal reductions or the elimination of obsolete programmes. If the Secretariat encountered difficulties in managing within the approved level of the budget, it should present specific, actionable proposals on the matter and, similarly, on any constraints it faced as a result of obsolete and overlapping mandates.

32. Lastly, the Group of 77 must not to lose sight of Member States' common interests. It was not only possible to do more with less; it was often possible to do better with less, and Member States should explore new, creative approaches that met their mutual needs. A United Nations that was both effective and sustainable served everybody, including future generations.

33. **Mr. Dadu** (Nigeria) said that his delegation hoped that the Committee would make history by meeting the deadline set in the programme of work. To that end, the timely availability of reports was essential, and there should be no attempts by the Secretariat or Bureau to make any changes to the programme of work, except in exceptional circumstances, such as those experienced the previous year as a result of Storm Sandy. Any change to the programme of work would signal the first step towards extension and would kill the spirit of making history to which the Chair had referred.

34. Contemporary international relations made it more difficult to differentiate between national and international interests, and Member States should bear that in mind in the negotiations. In line with that logic, his delegation had systematically avoided declaring open support for any statements delivered by groups and encouraged other delegations to avoid associating with the various groups, focusing instead on working as a single body and promoting constructive negotiations. It was important to recognize and pursue a collective agenda.

35. **Mr. Ahoussoubemey** (Benin) said that his delegation hoped that the Committee would complete its work by the deadline set. To that end, members should reconsider their negotiation strategies, especially the use of package deals, which made hostages of draft resolutions that could otherwise have been adopted in order to use them as tokens of exchange in negotiations on other issues. Besides being a waste of time and energy, such strategies handed over to closed groups the powers that belonged to the Committee. The Committee's deliberations should more transparent and inclusive, which would guarantee a successful outcome.

36. **The Chair** said that he took it that the Committee approved the proposed tentative and provisional programme of work on the understanding that the Bureau would take into account the views expressed and make the necessary adjustments.

37. *It was so decided.*

38. **The Chair** suggested that a deadline of 14 October should be set for the submission of candidacies for appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary bodies and other appointments and that the elections should be held on 1 November. He took it that the Committee had no objection to the suggestion.

39. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.*