



DEC 5 1984

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

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

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Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/39/SR.23
12 November 1984

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 118: UNITED NATIONS PENSION SYSTEM: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS JOINT STAFF PENSION BOARD (continued) (A/39/9 and 608; A/C.5/39/15 and Corr.1 and A/C.5/39/29)

1. Mr. WEDICK (Canada) said that his delegation was pleased that the overriding investment criteria of safety, profitability, liquidity and convertibility had been prudently observed by the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board. In addition, the Board had continued to focus on measures to reduce the actuarial imbalance of the Fund, which at 1 January 1984 had stood at 4.04 per cent of pensionable remuneration. Although an annual real rate of return on investments of 3 per cent had been used in the actuarial valuation, the inflation-adjusted total rate of return had for many years been only 1.3 per cent, casting doubt on the accuracy of the valuation and indicating the need for remedial action, the burden of which should be shared equitably among member organizations, participants and beneficiaries.
2. His delegation recognized the need to protect pensioners, most of whom did not receive national social security benefits, from currency fluctuations adversely affecting the purchasing power of benefits, and had thus accepted the two-track system. Yet it had never been intended for the system to yield the windfall gains currently being received owing to the weakening of major currencies against the United States dollar. Dollar track benefits up to 40 per cent higher than the local track were unjustifiable. Pensioners on the local track received adequate protection already through twice-yearly adjustments. Accordingly, the proposed 120 per cent cap should only be adopted as a provisional measure.
3. His delegation recognized the saving which would result from reducing the first cost-of-living adjustment that became due in each country after 1 January 1985 by 1.5 per cent. However, on social and humanitarian grounds, it was unfair to expose individuals receiving low pensions to a decrease in real pension benefits.
4. Canada supported the proposed increase in the discount rate applied in calculating lump-sum payments, which, it felt, would not discourage participants from opting to commute their benefits. The discount rate to be applied prior to 1 January 1985 should be increased, perhaps to a weighted average of 5.5 per cent, phased in over a five-year period. Acquired rights should be examined in the light of the requirements for a sound Fund and for fair treatment of new and future participants in any package of remedial measures to be adopted.
5. The proposal to raise the mandatory age of separation to 62 had considerable merit. Not only would the Fund benefit, but the United Nations would profit from the expertise of staff members for longer. The average international civil servant had a career span one-third less than his counterpart in the United States civil service, a disturbing anomaly which would be partly offset by the measure. Given that the United Nations promoted human rights, it should support the proposed extension.

(Mr. Wedick, Canada)

6. The question of the actuarial imbalance had been raised at successive sessions since 1979. A reasonable compromise package should be adopted at the current session that would reduce or eliminate the imbalance. Efforts should be made to time discussion of the issue to coincide with the actuarial investigations required once every three years under the Regulations of the Fund.

7. Mr. LANDAU (Austria) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts made by the Board to devise a package of measures to close the actuarial gap which would be acceptable to all concerned. Such a package could not be based entirely on technical considerations, but should take account of the various interests involved. Austria agreed with the recommendation to raise the total rate of contributions to 24 per cent by 1990. No action was required before the fortieth session, since the next increase of 0.75 per cent was not due until 1 January 1986.

8. Raising the statutory age of separation to 62 was financially desirable, and accorded with the recommendations of the World Assembly on Aging. Although there was controversy concerning the geographical distribution of Professional posts, the General Assembly had long ago suggested that General Service staff members should be extended if they had fewer than 20 years of contributory service at the age of 60. The recommendation was currently applied in a very restrictive manner, extensions being granted only if the local staff union concurred. While staff unions had a role to play, extensions were an important personnel matter for which the Secretary-General, as the chief administrative officer, had sole responsibility.

9. The Board had proposed raising the discount rate used in calculating lump-sum commutations from 4.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent in respect of service performed after 31 December 1984. Calculation of the lump sum was based on the average of the rates of interest in force during a participant's service. Yet it was doubtful whether past experience offered a sound basis for projecting a future discount rate. His delegation agreed with the Advisory Committee that there was no acquired right to a particular discount rate. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that inequities could arise between participants retiring before the end of 1984, when the old rates applied, and those leaving afterwards. Nevertheless, that was not sufficient reason to apply the new rate only for service after 1 January 1985. Adoption of the proposal to apply a uniform discount rate of 5.5 per cent for years prior to 1985 instead of the current, much lower rates would avoid the difficulty. Appropriate transitional measures could be adopted, over a five-year period, to avoid creating anomalies. Such a solution would benefit the Fund, and thus the interests of all the participants. Although it had been argued that lump-sum commutation reduced the Fund's long-term financial liabilities, that was so only if realistic discount rates were applied.

10. His delegation noted that pension benefits would henceforth be adjusted only annually, unless there was serious inflation or drastic currency fluctuations. Austria concurred with the capping of the dollar track at 120 per cent of the local track. The proposed transitional measures should fully protect beneficiaries.

11. It had also been proposed to reduce the next cost-of-living adjustment by 1.5 per cent. Only recipients of minimum pensions would be exempted. It should be

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(Mr. Landau, Austria)

realized that minimum pensions were defined in a most restrictive way, with the result that the highest minimum benefit was only \$1,800 a year. The special measures proposed at the thirty-seventh session to protect recipients of pensions of less than \$4,000 a year and those receiving benefits which were less than half of the net base salary of a staff member at the P-1, step 1, level had not been included. Those two groups should also be exempted from the cost-of-living reduction.

12. The new approach taken by ICSC in determining pensionable remuneration appeared to be rather complex, and possibly open to question. Nevertheless, his delegation accepted the proposed new schedule of pensionable remuneration, and the argument for increasing pensionable remuneration for Professional staff members by 5.4 per cent with effect from 1 October 1984 in order to maintain uniformity throughout the system. His delegation had doubts concerning the proposal that the pensionable remuneration of staff in service at 31 December 1984 should be kept at the 1 October 1984 level until subsequent adjustments to the new schedule had brought it up to their level. It seemed that the position of present participants was well-protected, and that it would be unfair to put the burden of the reductions reflected in the new schedule solely on new entrants.

13. Finally, his delegation wished to express its satisfaction at the results of the Fund's investment policies. Caution was necessary, and high returns could not be expected every year.

14. Mr. SHUSTOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that a strict balance should be maintained between the interests of staff members and Member States, taking account of the financial capacity of the Fund. In recent years, unfortunately, the balance had been tipped in favour of the staff. Over the past decade United Nations pensions had tripled, while those of the comparator service had only doubled. United Nations pensions, in some cases, exceeded pensions paid by the comparator service by over 60 per cent, which was inadmissible in view of the Noblemaire principle.

15. Unjustified increases in United Nations pensions had led to an imbalance between the Fund's income and its liabilities. The introduction of the dual-track system and cost-of-living differentials under the Washington formula had been particularly negative. In order to correct the imbalance, Member States had consented, as an exception, to a temporary increase in their rate of contribution to the Fund, while reaffirming that there should be no increase in their liabilities. There had been an expectation that the Board would devise measures to eliminate the major cause of the actuarial deficit, namely inflated pensions. Yet those expectations had failed to materialize. The Board had proposed only cosmetic changes, leaving pensions almost intact. The burden had, rather, been shifted to Member States.

16. His delegation could not accept that approach. In particular, it objected to the new scale of pensionable remuneration proposed by ICSC and approved by the Board, since it would be tantamount to renouncing the applicability of the

(Mr. Shustov, USSR)

Noblemaire principle to pensions. ICSC had devised a scale on the basis of the ratio of net salaries to pensions in the comparator civil service, proposing that the same ratio should be applicable to the United Nations. Yet, owing to the recent revision of the New York post adjustment, United Nations net salaries exceeded those in the comparator service by more than 30 per cent. That inevitably inflated pensions. Moreover, even without any such discrepancy in salaries, there was no need to incorporate an expatriation factor in determining pensions, since pensioners were not expatriates.

17. To justify its decision, ICSC had evolved a "theory" which posited a United Nations obligation to compensate staff for their shorter average length of service. That supposed that staff members had not been employed elsewhere before entering the Organization and had not acquired any pension rights, and that the Noblemaire principle should be applicable to the remuneration which United Nations staff members had received before they had entered the Organization. The artificiality of the argument was self-evident. Accordingly, his delegation could not accept the proposed new scale of pensionable remuneration, rejected the Board's recommendation to further increase Member States' contributions, and considered the measures devised by the Board to be inadequate. It was not surprising that the Board had proposed the measures it had, since staff members with a vested interest in pension increases comprised two thirds of its membership. Drastic measures were necessary to improve the situation. In particular, the composition of the Board should reflect the relative contributions of Member States and Pension Fund participants. An ad hoc intergovernmental committee should be established to review all aspects of the pension system.

18. Mr. GARRIDO (Philippines) said that the measures proposed by the Pension Board to eliminate the actuarial imbalance were steps in the right direction. Since the problem was of a long-term nature, however, he suggested that it should be made a regular item on the Board's agenda.

19. Among the economy measures suggested, the proposed increase in the rate of interest used in calculating lump-sum commutations would enable the Fund to achieve actuarial savings over the long term, particularly since the improved longevity of participants would result in the payment of larger lump sums. On the basis of the arguments in paragraphs 26-30 of the Board's report (A/39/9), his delegation agreed that lump sums should be determined on a gross basis, in line with the principle adopted by the Pension Review Group and later approved by the General Assembly. It also agreed with the Board's view that the Pension Fund should not reimburse national income taxes on lump sums thus ruling out the necessity for a Tax Equalization Fund. In the spirit of General Assembly resolution 34/165, however, the acquired rights of participants should be protected.

20. As far as the modification of the early retirement provisions was concerned, his delegation concurred in the recommendation that the reduction factor for participants retiring between the ages of 55 and 60 with 25 or more but less than 30 years of contributory service should be increased from 2 to 3 per cent for every year under age 60 for service performed after 1 January 1985. The Board might wish

(Mr. Garrido, Philippines)

to study the implications of increasing the current five years' contributory service required for eligibility for pension benefits as another possible economy measure. On the recommendation to raise the statutory age of separation to 62, his delegation's position was flexible.

21. He noted that the Board had not endorsed the proposal to impose a ceiling on the highest level of pensionable remuneration. It might be better to consider that matter in the wider context of the salary system, which came within the competence of ICSC. In that connection, his delegation had noted with interest that the new scale of pensionable remuneration recommended by ICSC would have the effect of reducing the actuarial imbalance.

22. His delegation would accept the maintenance of the two-track pension adjustment system and the Washington formula, while hoping it would not result in any extra cost to the Fund. It would also endorse the proposal to adjust benefits once a year, with exceptions for countries with high inflation rates, and the recommendations that the "trigger point" for adjustment should be lowered to 3 per cent and the first cost-of-living adjustment due in each country after 1 January 1985 be reduced by 1.5 per cent. These measures should not, however, result in hardship for retirees receiving very small pensions.

23. His delegation had no objection to alternative ways of financing survivor benefits under the Regulations of the Fund, provided the survivor's interests were protected and the social security aspect safeguarded.

24. In its report on the accounts of the Pension Fund (A/39/9, annex III), the Board of Auditors had drawn attention to the fact that some contributions from organizations had been delayed. As the Auditors had pointed out, additional interest income would be generated by timely payments of fixed monthly contributions.

25. His delegation had no objection to increasing the total rate of contribution to 24 per cent and was prepared to endorse the full package of economy measures proposed in 1982 and 1983, together with the recommendations made the current year. Although the Board envisaged the virtual elimination of the actuarial imbalance, it would be necessary to await the valuation at the end of 1984 to determine whether further measures would be necessary.

26. He stressed that General Service staff must not be forgotten. The Pension Board should look into their pensionable remuneration at duty stations where the local currency had undergone heavy devaluation and include recommendations on the matter in its next report.

27. Regarding the Fund's investments, his delegation welcomed the 13.01 per cent return for the year and noted the wide diversification of the portfolio. It was pleased to see that more investments had been made in developing countries and regional development banks. It would be useful, in view of the remarks made about the advisability of judging returns over a longer period, for the next report to

(Mr. Garrido, Philippines)

include more information on the assessment of the Fund's investments. As one of the early exponents of biennial budgeting, his delegation would have no objection to amending article 15, paragraph (b), of the Regulations, thus enabling the Fund to submit a biennial budget for administrative expenses for the years 1986-1987. Such a step would promote budgetary co-ordination between the Fund and the agencies of the United Nations system which had adopted similar schemes.

28. Pending the Committee's decision on the ICSC's recommendation on the level of pensionable remuneration, his delegation would reserve its position on the draft resolution in annex XI.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

- (a) COMPOSITION OF THE SECRETARIAT: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/39/453)
- (b) RESPECT FOR THE PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES OF OFFICIALS OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/C.5/39/17)
- (c) OTHER PERSONNEL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/39/483 and Add.1; A/C.5/39/2, 4 and Corr.1 and Add.1, 6 and Corr.1, 9, 11 and 23)

29. Mr. HUCKE (German Democratic Republic) said that although progress had been made in implementing the career development system and increasing the proportion of women in the Secretariat, the situation with regard to unrepresented or underrepresented Member States was unchanged. Although it was the smallest regional group, the Group of Eastern European States had the highest number of underrepresented countries. The failure to implement the medium-term plan of recruitment seemed to be due both to resistance in some departments of the Secretariat and to the inadequacy of the guidelines that had been laid down. A number of measures could be adopted to remedy the situation. All recruitment from overrepresented States should be halted until the targets of the medium-term plan of recruitment had been reached; the proportion of vacant posts earmarked for unrepresented and underrepresented States should be increased to 55 per cent; the replacement system for nationals of underrepresented countries on fixed-term contracts should be handled less bureaucratically; and preferential consideration should be given to nationals of unrepresented and underrepresented States already on the Roster.

30. The temporary recruitment freeze put into effect by the Secretary-General must not be allowed to make the unsatisfactory situation of unrepresented and underrepresented States still worse. His delegation welcomed the assurances given by the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services that exceptions would be made for those States. It would have been desirable to take steps for additional recruitment from those States before the freeze was announced.

31. Competitive examinations could be only one element in an active recruitment policy. His country's experience in that regard had not been very happy,

(Mr. Hucke, German Democratic Republic)

coinciding in essence with the criticism expressed in the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (A/39/483). The suggestion that candidates who had been successful in examinations but could not be recruited for lack of vacancies should be recruited automatically if confirmed candidates cancelled should be put into practice immediately by the Office of Personnel Services (OPS). His delegation was very doubtful about extending the competitive examinations to the P-3 level, at least without further study.

32. Progress in increasing the proportion of women in the Secretariat, though constant, had been limited. Further improvement of the situation would be possible only through additional efforts by the Member States. However, the increase should not be an end in itself; it was desirable only provided the fundamental principles of equitable geographical distribution and the highest standards of competence were adhered to.

33. He would like to know how staff members on fixed-term contracts would be included in the proposed system of career development. It would be logical, if they applied again to work in the Secretariat after working in their home countries for them to be given preference in recruitment and appointed at a higher level. Furthermore, in the interest of making the Secretariat truly international the proportion of staff on fixed-term contracts should be increased. The implementation of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 35/210 in that regard would help to make the staff more efficient and competent without the need for expensive training programmes. Any attempt to raise the established proportion of vacancies to be filled through promotion of General Service staff to the Professional category should be rejected as tantamount to renouncing equitable geographical distribution. It would open the way to a one-sided recruitment policy running counter to the interests of the majority of Member States, as would increasing the mandatory age of separation.

34. The Secretary-General's report on personnel policies (A/C.5/39/9, para. 3) made it clear that the most important prerequisite for reducing the number of unrepresented and underrepresented countries was full co-operation between the Secretariat and Governments. The German Democratic Republic, which was still underrepresented, having only 15 posts out of its desirable range of 29 to 40, was prepared to continue its constructive co-operation in order to remedy that unacceptable situation.

35. Mr. ZSOHAR (Hungary) said that there had been a disappointing lack of progress in realizing the principle of equitable geographical representation and in improving the representation of women in the Secretariat. Table B in document A/39/453 showed that of the 11-member group of Eastern European States one was still unrepresented and four underrepresented, while none were overrepresented. As to the quality of posts held, the mid-point of the group's weighted points was 16,161, while the actual position was 12,278. His delegation was accordingly in favour of immediate steps to bring unrepresented or underrepresented countries within their desirable ranges.

(Mr. Zsohar, Hungary)

36. On the question of fixed-term versus permanent contracts, his Government's position was based on the requirements of the Charter and on the need to increase the Organization's effectiveness. An increase in the ratio of fixed-term contracts would help to make the principle of equitable geographical representation a reality.

37. While his delegation appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts to increase the efficiency of the staff, it felt that the suspension of recruitment would be to the disadvantage of the unrepresented and underrepresented countries and would make improving geographical distribution more difficult. The suspension should apply only to the overrepresented countries.

38. His delegation deplored the trend towards stagnation, if not actual regression, in the employment of women, despite the many relevant decisions of United Nations bodies. Greater efforts were therefore needed to appoint qualified women.

39. Regarding the JIU recommendations on competitive examinations and the Secretary-General's proposal to extend that method of recruitment to posts at the P-3 level, he stressed that, although such examinations had many advantages, the organs involved would have to take great care to see that they were administered in a manner consistent with the operational requirements of the Organization and the necessity of improving the geographical distribution and sex composition of the Secretariat.

40. Mr. MURRAY (Trinidad and Tobago) said that nothing in the concepts of equitable geographical distribution and distribution by sex was at variance with the fundamental tenets of Article 101 of the Charter. What could undermine recruitment policy, however, and had on occasion done so, was bureaucratic resistance to the application of the accepted principles and the relevant decisions and resolutions of the General Assembly. That resistance took many forms, some of which were detailed in the JIU report on competitive examinations in the United Nations (A/39/483). Such practices, which were unbecoming to an international organization, must be eliminated.

41. It was disappointing that the modest target for the employment of women by 1982 had not yet been met. The role and status of women had long been established, and the Organization should be setting an example in that respect. Numerical targets, however, were not enough: the imbalance in the representation of developing countries in senior and policy-formulating posts must also be righted.

42. It was essential to ensure that the recruitment process was seen to be fair. Staff members would then more easily accept the proposed career development plan and criteria for promotion as also being fair. His delegation would like to see the greater emphasis on staff development proposed in the Secretary-General's reports (A/C.5/39/9 and 11). Clearly, however, training programmes would have to be accompanied by comprehensive long-term manpower planning. An adequate training programme could not be prepared on the basis of a medium-term recruitment plan alone. The Organization's training programme should also cover personnel management.

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(Mr. Murray, Trinidad and Tobago)

43. Staff-management relations would be good and morale high only if the staff were given maximum scope to use their capabilities to the full, to experience job satisfaction and to develop within the Organization. There should be equal opportunities for promotion, including promotion from the General Service to the Professional category. Though his delegation continued to support the system of competitive examinations, it believed that promotion must also be based on the impartial and objective evaluation of job performance.

44. It was unfortunate that the representatives of the staff should feel that there was a crisis in the administration of justice in the Secretariat. Delays in redressing grievances and the loss of confidence in the system had led to the proposal to establish an ombudsman. His delegation would welcome further consideration of the establishment of an impartial and effective unit to assist in the conciliation and arbitration process. In the long run, however, prevention would be better than cure.

45. In an organization as complex as the United Nations, there was no clear-cut definition of management. It was not solely the responsibility of the Department of Administration and Management or of OPS but rather it was part of the functions of all supervisory staff. It was where that was not catered for within the context of staff development that problems, and thus grievances, arose.

46. His delegation was greatly concerned at the continuing violations of the provisions of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. In upholding the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, however, it was not advocating disrespect for the laws of host countries but simply seeking to ensure that the work of the United Nations could be pursued to the full. It trusted that all outstanding cases would be speedily and satisfactorily resolved.

47. In his report on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General had said that the success of any programme for administrative improvement would require the active co-operation not only of all members of the Secretariat but also of all Member States. His delegation shared those sentiments and trusted that all would be able to contribute to the development of an outstanding and efficient international civil service, capable of achieving the Organization's aims and objectives.

48. Mr. MOUSSAKI (Congo) observed from the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/39/453) that the latest recruitment efforts had done little to redress the situation of unrepresented and underrepresented countries. The usual justifications had been advanced for the lack of progress in ensuring equitable geographical and gender distribution of staff in the Secretariat, but any serious analysis must go beyond those superficial factors and identify their underlying cause. The repeated failure to implement recruitment policies satisfactorily was in fact attributable primarily to bureaucratic resistance in the Secretariat.

49. His delegation could not tolerate a situation in which African countries were inadequately represented in the Secretariat, particularly at the senior and

(Mr. Moussaki, Congo)

policy-making levels, a situation in which a select few always had others do their bidding and excluded them from positions of authority because of their geographical origin. Out of an attitude bordering on racism, heads of department had sometimes refused to work with Africans duly recruited through the competitive examination, even though they met the criteria defined by those same heads of department. Such an attitude tainted the honour of the Organization and further increased the gap between overrepresented and under or unrepresented countries.

50. In seeking a solution to such recruitment problems, the Fifth Committee might consider making OPS autonomous so that it could regain its authority and also enjoy a certain latitude in implementing its programme. By "autonomous", he meant that OPS would have direct access to the Secretary-General instead of having to go through unnecessary intermediaries.

51. As a method of recruitment, the competitive examination was ideal in that it placed candidates on an equal footing and also shielded recruitment bodies from lobbying and undue pressure. The competitive examination and traditional recruitment procedures must continue to coexist, however, at least for the time being.

52. His delegation welcomed the proposed career development system, which would offer equitable promotion opportunities to all members of the staff and also encourage productivity and efficiency. On the other hand, the continuing under-representation of women in Professional posts was iniquitous. Efforts should be made to not only meet but also exceed the 25 per cent target. Continuing discrimination against women reflected a failure to adopt to changing times and was detrimental to mankind in general.

53. With regard to the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, his delegation had every respect for the international civil service but believed that the status of international civil servant did not confer the right to infringe laws or exercise unlimited freedom. The Secretary-General should therefore draw the attention of the staff to the need to abide by the laws of host countries.

54. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ (Venezuela) reiterated her delegation's concern at the continuing failure to ensure balanced representation of States in the Secretariat. Twenty-four countries, Venezuela among them, were still underrepresented and 15 more, unrepresented. She wondered what had happened to the principle of equitable geographical distribution and why the recruitment of nationals from overrepresented States had not been frozen. In view of that manifestly unfair situation, her delegation strongly urged that the principle of equitable geographical distribution be applied strictly.

55. The performance of the Secretariat obviously depended on the qualifications and dedication of its staff; hence the importance of objective recruitment and promotion methods. Her delegation supported the use of competitive examinations for recruitment to the P-1 and P-2 levels, which could help to achieve the desired balance in the Secretariat. It also believed in an effective system of career development as a means of planning the rational use of the Organization's human resources and using their professional capacities to the full.

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(Mrs. Rodriguez, Venezuela)

56. The fact that the target for the recruitment of women was still far from being achieved was a matter of grave concern. For instance, of 103 officials recruited during the period 1983-1984, only 6 had been women. She wondered whether one of the main reasons for that situation was a reluctance to alter established patterns. The idea that women's place was in the home was out of touch with contemporary reality. Women had proved to the world how efficient they could be not only in carrying out their traditional functions but also in performing difficult administrative and management functions; in fact, in most cases they managed to combine the two successfully. The target for the recruitment of women must therefore be met without delay.

57. With regard to the report on respect for the privileges and immunities of United Nations officials, her delegation was concerned at the fact that 10 such officials were still being detained. The violation of the principles set forth in Articles 100 and 101 of the Charter threatened not only the individuals in question but also the authority of the Organization. As a result, a mutual commitment to those principles was required on the part of both United Nations officials and Member States. Her delegation supported the creation of an interdepartmental advisory committee and the designation of a United Nations security co-ordinator, to act as a focal point for the reporting of arrests and detention cases.

58. Mr. TOMMO MONTHE (Cameroon) observed that the concept of so-called "desirable ranges" was, at least in its present form, most undesirable in an organization such as the United Nations where countries enjoyed sovereign equality. The choice of the contribution factor and the undue weight given to it at the expense of the membership factor had distorted the equitable nature of the geographical composition of the Secretariat and made the unfair distribution of posts a more or less permanent feature. His delegation therefore awaited with considerable interest the review called for in General Assembly resolution 35/210 and continued to believe that a sliding scale formula should be applied in filling vacancies in order gradually to restore fair weight to the membership factor.

59. In Professional and senior and policy-making posts, the same imbalance had persisted for years, despite General Assembly resolutions calling for corrective action. There were many units and departments where the geographical distribution of staff warranted close scrutiny, and numerous senior and policy-making posts remained the exclusive preserve of a handful of States. While the Secretary-General did face a number of difficulties in dealing with that situation, he none the less had some room for manoeuvre in applying the General Assembly's guidelines.

60. Competitive examinations were an objective method of recruitment which could not only provide the Organization with a nucleus of highly qualified, competent career civil servants meeting the requirements of Article 101 of the Charter but also improve the geographical composition of the Secretariat. While the use of such examinations seemed to be gradually gaining acceptance in the Secretariat and among the staff, the tremendous delays in appointing, and even the failure to appoint, successful candidates to appropriate departments were still cause for concern. He trusted that recommendation No. 1 in the JIU report (A/39/483) would rectify that situation.

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, Cameroon)

61. With regard to the extension of the competitive examination to P-3 posts, his delegation believed that there was still much to be learned from the introduction of the examination at the P-1 and P-2 levels, to which moreover numerous exceptions still applied. Furthermore, since the introduction of the competitive examination had led to a reduction in the number of P-1 and P-2 posts, the same phenomenon might arise at the P-3 level, and then who knew where the process of "grade creep" would end? Finally, for most countries with a fairly limited desirable range, the extension of the examination to the P-3 level would reduce their options for making staff available to the Secretariat. All those points must be clarified before the General Assembly could take a final decision on the subject.

62. Recruitment based on an objective procedure which enabled high levels of competence and integrity to be identified in prospective candidates also served the purposes of equitable geographical distribution. Like its predecessors, however, the latest recruitment plan had yet to achieve significant results in that regard. Although several factors could be blamed for that situation, the main cause was the persistence of ambiguities which undermined the authority of OPS in its relations with different administrative units. While the Secretary-General had acknowledged that OPS enjoyed very little authority, he had recommended no specific measures to resolve that situation, despite repeated requests by the General Assembly. On the contrary, it appeared from his report in document A/C.5/39/9 that the Secretary-General had every intention of maintaining the status quo. In those circumstances, his delegation was inclined to share the view of the representative of the Staff Union that OPS should be given the necessary authority to enable it to implement the objectives set by the General Assembly; otherwise, heads of department rather than OPS should be held responsible for any failures in that area.

63. Despite the reassurances given by the Secretary-General with regard to the so-called temporary measures he had taken, in particular the cuts in expenditures for consultants and official travel and the sixth-month suspension of recruitment, his delegation wondered whether in fact the Secretary-General had the authority to suspend the implementation of personnel and budgetary objectives fixed by the General Assembly. Moreover if, as it appeared, such measures lent themselves to various interpretations, they might equally well lend themselves to arbitrary implementation.

64. The Secretary-General had given assurances that the temporary measures would not affect programme delivery, but it was conceivable that disruptions in an apparently minor programme might have a domino effect on other programmes. As for their projected financial implications, it should be recalled that budget appropriations were sometimes approved by the General Assembly only after a hard-fought vote and when the Secretary-General had given assurances that they represented a strict minimum. The methods for making preliminary estimates of such appropriations would therefore have to be revised, unless the Secretary-General was suggesting by the above-mentioned temporary measures that, each time he had proposed the minimum appropriation necessary, a corresponding adjustment would be made in the form of a reduction of that appropriation by an amount equivalent to two or three operating days.

(Mr. Tommo Monthe, Cameroon)

65. His delegation agreed with the broad outlines of the proposed career development system, but noted that some of the activities advocated had been approved by the General Assembly several years previously, in the light of ICSC and JIU recommendations, yet were only now being implemented. Such delays militated against rapid career development, at least in the Professional category.

66. With regard to conditions of service, his delegation acknowledged the pressing need for the privileges and immunities of international officials to be respected. At the same time, such officials must act with the courtesy, restraint and moral and intellectual integrity befitting their privileged status.

67. With regard to pensions and remuneration, it was clear that any administration must look to the welfare of its human resources. Moreover, the Fifth Committee was legislating for a group of organizations whose ideals of humanity and justice were well known. At the same time, however, no one was better placed than the staff of those organizations to measure the extent of the current deterioration in the situation of most countries of the world, particularly the developing countries. The latter were being forced by disasters and problems of all kinds to constantly re-order their priorities and to call on both employers and workers to act with realism and pragmatism in the face of such a situation. The staff of the United Nations should show similar restraint when requesting adjustments in their conditions of service. A happy medium must be achieved: the Fifth Committee could not let the staff go away empty-handed and discouraged; in turn the staff, imbued with the ideals of the Charter and alive to Member States' current difficulties, should not force the Committee's hand, still less tarnish the image of the United Nations by making excessive, and sometimes arbitrary demands.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.