



DEC 21 1984

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 48th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MAYCOCK (Barbados)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 116: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

(c) OTHER PERSONNEL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 12.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 116: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

(c) OTHER PERSONNEL QUESTIONS: REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (continued)  
(A/C.5/39/CRP.4)

1. Mr. RUEDAS (Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management) said that the interest displayed by the Committee in the proposed appointment of a senior official as Co-ordinator for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat of the United Nations reflected its concern to increase the representation of women, an aim shared by the Secretary-General. The considerations raised by the Committee would be taken into account by the Secretary-General in making the appointment. In particular, the link between the Office of Personnel Services and the Co-ordinator would be a firm and obvious one, involving no weakening of the authority of OPS. The proposal made by the representative of Japan that the Co-ordinator should assist the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services, working within OPS, could meet the concerns expressed by the Committee and those of the Secretary-General.
2. With respect to administrative and financial implications, he said that the post could be financed from savings made in connection with established posts in 1985. Precise details would be provided in the performance report on the programme budget. The Secretary-General would report on the matter to the General Assembly at its fortieth session.
3. Mr. RAMBISOON (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the details provided in document A/C.5/39/CRP.4 confirmed his delegation's worst fears that the proposed appointment was totally unnecessary and had dangerous implications for personnel management in the United Nations. The functions listed in the paper were, it seemed, identical to those already being carried out by OPS. There was no point in duplicating work already being done and, moreover, he could not help wondering who would undertake such functions in respect of men. His delegation was totally opposed to separating personnel management into units based on gender.
4. His delegation was gravely concerned about the relationship between the Co-ordinator and OPS and feared that the proposals outlined in paragraph 3 of the paper would give rise to chaos. It agreed that additional support was needed to achieve the Assembly's objectives with respect to the employment of women, but the proposed appointment, which would change the operational structure of the Organization, was not the answer.
5. He stressed that his delegation fully supported women's rights. There was no doubt that a problem existed, but the Secretary-General should solve it by correcting the attitudes which prevented policy directives from being implemented. It was time that women were recruited and promoted without prejudice, on the basis of merit.

6. Mr. LANJOUZI (Algeria) said that the conference room paper shed little new light on the Co-ordinator's functions and did not explain how the two officials at the Assistant-Secretary-General level would co-operate effectively.
7. Mr. KASTOFF (Denmark) said that his delegation had long supported efforts to improve the situation of women, and accordingly welcomed the Secretary-General's decision to appoint a Co-ordinator. It would be difficult for the appointee to change the situation in the short period allotted, but his delegation trusted that the initiative would provide the necessary impetus to effect a long-term solution. The details provided in the conference room paper should reassure those delegations which were concerned about maintaining the authority of OPS.
8. Mr. FORBES (Ireland) said that his delegation supported the decision to appoint a Co-ordinator. It was gratifying that a programme of action had already been determined, allowing the Co-ordinator, once appointed, to begin the task at hand, and providing the Assembly with a yardstick against which to measure the success of the appointment. The level proposed was appropriate, and would allow the Co-ordinator sufficient authority to act effectively. Ireland trusted that the structural arrangements envisaged would prove practical.
9. Mr. WEDICK (Canada) said that his delegation supported the temporary appointment of a Co-ordinator at the Assistant-Secretary-General level, given the lack of progress in recruiting women. Yet the relationship between the appointee and OPS gave cause for concern. It was to be hoped that the Co-ordinator would be empowered to ensure compliance with policy directives on women.
10. Mr. ST. AIMÉE (Saint Lucia) said that it was not clear what procedures would be followed once the proposed Co-ordinator had identified candidates, or who would take the final decision on their appointment. According to the conference room paper, the new Assistant Secretary-General would have his own unit, which would not necessarily be responsible to OPS. There was thus a danger of creating two separate entities for appointing men and women respectively. Further thought should be given to the matter.
11. Mr. FONTAINE ORTIZ (Cuba) said that his country was in the vanguard of those States supporting women's rights. With respect to the Co-ordinator, it was not clear how working relations could be established between two officials of the same rank. In any event, the appointment should not be used as a justification for appointing officials from overrepresented States. The Secretary-General should choose someone from an underrepresented or unrepresented country.
12. Mr. JEMAIEL (Tunisia) said that while his delegation had no objection to the appointment of a Co-ordinator, it did not believe that it would be possible for the Co-ordinator to work in harmony with the Assistant Secretary-General for Personnel Services, since they would have the same rank. The statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management at the current meeting had not allayed his delegation's concerns in the matter. The Office of Personnel Services (OPS) had made a good beginning in efforts to recruit more women and it should be strengthened.

13. Mr. GOGUIKIAN (Lebanon) said he felt that excessive emphasis was being placed on geographical imbalances in the Secretariat staff and on the situation of women in the Secretariat. While it was true that improvement was needed in both areas, it was unnecessary to appoint a Co-ordinator for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat. One official already familiar with OPS practices could be entrusted with responsibility for both matters. In the final analysis, Governments themselves, and not OPS, were responsible for the inequities, since they did not recommend sufficient qualified candidates.

14. OPS should broaden the publicity it gave to vacancies and should increase its contacts with Governments which considered themselves underrepresented. It was making steady progress towards attaining the targets established with regard to the geographical distribution of posts and the situation of women in the Secretariat.

15. Ms. van DRUNEN LIJTFEL (Netherlands) said that, before the Secretary-General had announced his intention to appoint a Co-ordinator on women's issues, all delegations had stressed the need to increase the number of women in Professional posts. It now appeared that some members of the Committee hesitated to support the Secretary-General. She rejected the suggestion that discrimination against men would result from the appointment of the Co-ordinator. Women should be given the opportunity to pursue their goals without impediment, and the appointment of a Co-ordinator on women's issues would facilitate the identification of the obstacles to be overcome. The fewer the obstacles, the sooner the Co-ordinator's post would become unnecessary.

16. Mr. REFSHAL (Norway) said that his delegation welcomed the decision of the Secretary-General to appoint a Co-ordinator on women's issues at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. That appointment would give new impetus to efforts to improve the status of women in the Secretariat and, it was to be hoped, would inspire other organizations in the United Nations system to take similar steps. The appointment would strengthen - not interfere with - the authority of OPS. It would remain the responsibility and within the authority of OPS to implement any new ideas or policies.

17. By its resolution 35/210 the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to examine additional measures to improve the situation of women in the Secretariat, including the possibility of designating a senior official for that purpose, and the time had come to take action on that request, in view of the unsatisfactory results in the four intervening years. It should also be borne in mind that the appointment was to be made on an experimental basis for 1985 alone. His delegation looked forward to the appointment and to the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly at its fortieth session on the results of the experiment.

18. Miss ZONICLE (Bahamas) said that many delegations, instead of focusing on the need for the balanced representation of women and men in the Secretariat, had stressed other issues, which, although relevant, were not of paramount importance. Far from weakening OPS, the appointment of a Co-ordinator on women's issues would, if the desired results were achieved, only strengthen that Office, particularly

(Miss Zonicle, Bahamas)

since, as was noted in document A/C.5/39/CRP.4, OPS would continue to be responsible for the implementation of General Assembly directives and the Secretary-General's policies in personnel matters.

19. The report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/39/453) clearly showed that there were still inadequate numbers of women in the Secretariat. That was particularly evident from the statistical data provided and, in fact, the only positive element in the report was the indication in paragraph 16 that the attention of all the heads of departments and offices was drawn every six months to the proportion of female staff within each organizational unit.

20. The terms of reference of the Co-ordinator, which were spelled out in paragraph 6 of document A/C.5/39/CRP.4, went a long way towards covering the bureaucratic, social and cultural factors involved in ensuring the balanced representation of women in the Secretariat. Moreover, paragraph 8 demonstrated an awareness that efforts to achieve that goal should not affect the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

21. The truth of the matter was that document A/C.5/39/CRP.4 did not go far enough, since it did not address problems relating to attitudes towards women in general. It would be preferable for the Secretary-General to appoint a special representative who would report directly to him and would consider all aspects of the question of women in the Secretariat. However, her delegation was prepared to go along with the appointment of a Co-ordinator.

22. She did not agree with those delegations which claimed that the appointment of a Co-ordinator was a mere publicity stunt intended to mask what was really happening. The work of the Co-ordinator would be subject to scrutiny, and she reminded those who objected to the appointment that the Co-ordinator's post was only temporary.

23. Mr. KUTTNER (United States of America) said that his delegation was in favour of appointing a woman as Co-ordinator with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General. That individual would face an extremely difficult task during the one-year appointment, and he trusted that she would be selected strictly on the basis of competence.

24. Mrs. ARCHINI (Italy) said that any measures to accelerate compliance with the General Assembly's directives were welcome. Her delegation had felt from the outset that OPS, for institutional reasons, should be in a position to deal with all the matters to be entrusted to the Co-ordinator. It therefore reserved its judgement until the Secretary-General had submitted his report on the Co-ordinator's year of work.

25. Her Government would be pleased to make suggestions as to ways to increase the number of women in the Secretariat, in which her country was underrepresented.

The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.