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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Forty-fourth Session

ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

SUMMARY RECORDS OF THE FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND TO  
FOUR HUNDRED AND FIFTY-SECOND MEETINGS

Held at Headquarters, New York,  
from 7 to 27 May 1968

The list of representatives attending the forty-fourth session of the Economic and Social Council is included in the prefatory fascicle to the summary records of the plenary meetings of the Council (see Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Forty-fourth Session).

Chairman:

Mr. BILLNER

Sweden

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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FOUR HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND MEETING

Held on Tuesday, 7 May 1968, at 11.5 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. BILLNER

Sweden

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INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN CARTOGRAPHY (E/4456, E/4477, E/CONF.52/4, E/CONF.53/3)

Mr. BARNEA (Acting Director, Resources and Transport Division) drew the Committee's attention to documents E/4456 and E/CONF.52/4 on the Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East and to documents E/4477 and E/CONF.53/3 on the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The Iranian Government had offered Teheran as a site for the sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East and the Committee would no doubt wish to consider that proposal. With regard to the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, it should be noted that the Conference had, among other things, recommended the establishment of a United Nations Permanent Committee on Geographical Names and the convening of a second Conference in 1970, but that the Secretary-General considered that the Conference should not take place before the second quarter of 1971.

Mr. NASINOVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that it was necessary for the Secretariat to prepare and circulate the working papers rapidly in all languages so that all delegations, including his own, could take an active part in the Committee's work. He then asked whether the two questions making up agenda item 17 would be considered together or in succession and, in the latter case, in what order they would be taken up.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that, if there were no objections, the Committee should begin by considering the report of the Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East.

(a) Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East

Mr. NASINOVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the USSR had taken an active part in the Canberra Conference, as in the previous Conferences.

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(Mr. Nasinovsky, USSR)

His delegation recognized the major importance of cartography for all countries, whether Members of the United Nations or not, and for the specialized agencies, and felt that international co-operation in that sphere should continue. The progress made in cartography, such as the preparation of the International Map of the World on the Millionth Scale, of regional maps and of atlases and satellite geodesy, enabled all countries to obtain valuable data. Geodetic methods facilitated the detection of crustal movements, particularly tsunamis and earthquakes. In a word, cartography could be of assistance to all States, without exception. It would therefore have been desirable if all of them had been able to participate in the work of the Fifth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, and it was unacceptable that some countries in the region had not been invited to take part in its work. His delegation therefore hoped that when the Council took up the question of convening subsequent Conferences, it would invite all the countries of the world, without discrimination, in keeping with the principle of universality by which the United Nations should be guided.

Mr. ABE (Japan) was glad to note the work that had been accomplished at the United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East and said that Japan, as a member of ECAFE, had taken an active interest in the activities of the Conference and had already taken action on some of the recommendations made there. Particular attention had been given to the one concerning training opportunities in cartography. Since 1959 specialized institutes in Japan had given places to a total of seventy-eight trainees from developing countries to enable them to acquire technical training in surveying, mapping and hydrography. The Japanese delegation thanked the Iranian Government for generously offering Teheran as a site for the sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East in October 1970, and welcomed the recommendation of the fifth Conference in that respect.

Mr. BLAU (United States of America) stressed the substantial contribution of the cartographic conferences to regional co-operation, in view of the fact that a country's economic development depended on a thorough knowledge of its topography, and said that the Canberra Conference had been particularly fruitful.

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(Mr. Blau, United States)

Given that the Economic and Social Council was primarily concerned with countries' economic and social development, it should also deal with certain technical activities, provided that they contributed to that development. The recommendations of the Canberra Conference would particularly encourage the development of regional co-operation in that sphere. There were two aspects of the Conference's report which required a decision from the Council. The first concerned the recommendation on the convening of the sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East, for which the Government of Iran had offered to act as host at Teheran in 1970. While he associated himself with the Japanese representative's expression of appreciation to the Iranian Government, he said that it must be borne in mind that proposals on the convening of conferences were subject to the approval of the General Assembly, in accordance with resolution 2239 (XXI). With regard to the recommendation that a second seminar on aerial survey methods and equipment should be convened as soon as possible, he said that the first seminar on the subject had been organized under the auspices of ECAFE in 1960, pursuant to the decision of the ECAFE Sub-Committee on Mineral Resources Development, and that its main purpose had been to study the spread of basic data on methods and equipment in use at the time, the circumstances and limitations of their use, and the particular problems in the region. In view of the fact that nearly ten years had passed since the first seminar, and considering the advances in method and improvements in equipment since then, a second seminar appeared to be desirable, provided that it could be financed outside the regular budget. His delegation was ready to support a decision to take note of the report and recommendations of the Conference. He would like to know whether decisions had been taken at the recent ECAFE meeting at Canberra concerning the sixth Regional Cartographic Conference and the second seminar on aerial survey methods and equipment. He would also like to know whether the ECAFE secretariat could not be asked to play a greater role in servicing the Conference in order to avoid travel costs and to make as little use as possible of the staff of the Cartography Section of the Resources and Transport Division.

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Mr. GEORGE (France) said that it was difficult for the members of the Committee to study technical cartography problems in detail, since they were not specialists in the field, and that they should therefore confine themselves to a fairly general consideration of those problems. The delegation and Government of France fully appreciated the importance of the regional cartographic conferences and recognized the substantial progress achieved between conferences and the steady improvement in the quality of their work. That was the opinion of French experts who had taken part in the work of the Fifth Conference.

The regional conferences should remain essentially practical in character. It would therefore be desirable for certain highly technical questions, such as scientific and theoretical communications, to be treated by other bodies, as moreover those communications referred to activities outside the region. With regard to the implementation of the recommendations on technical training, particularly the provision of detailed information on cartography training centres open to foreign students, the French Government had already communicated the required information on the Cartography Section of the National Geographic Institute to the Cartography Section of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Mr. ZORRILLA (Mexico) referred to the progress made in cartography, particularly as a result of aerial geodesy and photography and the use of satellites, and emphasized its importance for economic development and inventories of natural resources.

The international conferences organized in that field were of particular importance to the Latin American countries and, as the Mexican delegation had pointed out at the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, it would be worth while to introduce a uniform world system of collecting information by satellite geodesy. The Economic and Social Council could ask the countries sufficiently advanced in that subject to make the necessary information available to the countries concerned.

Mr. FARNEA (Acting Director, Resources and Transport Division) said, in reply to the questions asked by the United States representative, that ECAFE had no cartography section and was therefore obliged to call on the Cartography Section of the Resources and Transport Division for substantive support and

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(Mr. Barnea, Acting Director, Resources  
and Transport Division)

As a general rule, there were no more than one or two experts from Headquarters at the conferences organized by ECAFE; co-operation between the two secretariats was very effective and that method was probably the least expensive one.

In regard to the steps ECAFE had been able to take in pursuance of the report of the Fifth Conference, he hoped to be in a position to supply the required information at the following meeting.

Mr. AMIRMOKRI (Iran) thanked the members of the Committee for their kind words in connexion with the invitation of the Iranian Government to hold the Sixth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East at Teheran. He pointed out that his country already had experience as a host for large international conferences and assured the members of the Committee that his Government would spare no effort to see that the Conference would be held under the most satisfactory conditions.

(b) United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Mr. NASINOVSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that in its report (E/CONF.53/3), the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names had arrived at certain conclusions and recommendations and, in particular, had proposed that a second Conference be held in 1970. The standardization of geographical names was a question of immediate interest to all countries and a conference on the subject should be prepared with the greatest care. Bearing that in mind, he shared the point of view expressed in the report of the Secretary-General (E/4477, para. 10) that the second Conference should not be held before the second quarter of 1971. Before the Conference met, the question would have to be considered at the Sixth Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Far East and at the Third Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa to be held during the year; any conclusions and recommendations arrived at by the two regional conferences would then be available.

Finally, it was important that all countries should be able to participate in the Second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names; accordingly, he felt that all States, whether or not Members of the United Nations, should be invited.

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Mr. ROUAMBA (Upper Volta) welcomed the detailed report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (E/4477), but would have liked to obtain exact information on certain points.

To begin with, so far as the creation of a United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names was concerned, he pointed out that the Conference had set up an ad hoc group of experts to ensure that the co-operation achieved did not lose momentum. He asked if it was possible to be informed of the progress of the work of the group and what contacts it had been able to establish with the regional cartographic conferences.

In regard to the application of science and technology, especially automatic data processing and the use of computers, the Conference had recommended that the Member States which were most advanced in that field submit reports to the United Nations Secretariat; he asked what information it had been possible to collect on the subject so far. The Conference had also recommended that meetings be organized each year at the expense of the Governments represented. Would it not be possible to proceed in such a way that countries without the resources to be represented at such meetings could nevertheless contribute to them and have access to the documentation through the Secretariat?

The Conference had also adopted certain resolutions on systems for the recording and transcription of names from unwritten, more particularly African, languages. Because of the absence of written languages in certain regions which had formerly been colonized, geographical names had often to be transcribed with the aid of letters and phonemes borrowed from the language of the colonizing country. That system was satisfactory up to a certain point, but he felt that such names should now be standardized with the assistance of nationals who knew the languages of the country. However, it was sometimes difficult for such persons, because of the geographical area to which they belonged, to participate in the work of the various conferences. Some action should be taken in that connexion.

Mr. BARNEA (Acting Director, Resources and Transport Division) stated that, so far as the creation of a United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names was concerned, the Economic and Social Council had to take the decision. Meanwhile, the members of the ad hoc group of experts set up by the Conference kept in contact by correspondence on the various aspects of their work.

Mr. BLAU (United States of America) said that most of the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names had been decisions of a technical nature on which no action was required by the Economic and Social Council. The number of participants in that Conference was evidence of the importance attached to the standardization of geographical names for the purposes of international trade and communications.

Some of the Conference's resolutions did, however, call for decisions by the Council, and in particular resolution 1 regarding the establishment of a United Nations Permanent Committee of Experts on Geographical Names, which would meet annually.

He considered that such a committee would be superfluous, since the standardization of geographical names was mainly the responsibility of the various national authorities, and any international body could only perform a co-ordinating function. Furthermore, there did not seem to be any point in setting up a permanent committee in such a narrow technical field. Referring to Economic and Social Council resolution 715 A (XXVII), he recalled that all that had been anticipated was the setting up of a small group of consultants chosen, with due regard to equitable geographic distribution and to the different linguistic systems of the world, from those countries having widest experience of the problems of geographical names, such consultants to be made available at the expense of their respective Governments. It would be preferable to retain that group and to ask the Secretary-General to examine the possibility of enlarging its membership in order to ensure better representation of specific geographic and linguistic groups, especially those in Africa. On the assumption, moreover, that the experts would carry out most of their work by means of written communications, it did not seem necessary that they should meet annually.

He agreed with the Secretary-General and the Soviet representative in thinking that 1970 was too close a date for the second United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The present Ad Hoc Committee of Experts, expanded as he had suggested, would be in a better position to advise the Secretary-General upon a suitable date for the holding of a second Conference, should the need arise.

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(Mr. Blau, United States)

His delegation had no objection to the holding of regional or sub-regional conferences by interested Governments in so far as that did not involve extra expense for the United Nations. His delegation was likewise in favour of the United Nations Secretariat assuming an increasingly greater role as a clearing house for the collection and dissemination of information, provided that that did not entail the creation of any new permanent posts. His Government would gladly supply whatever information it had available.

Finally, he felt that the Economic and Social Council should adopt a resolution in that matter. His delegation was therefore at present engaged, in co-operation with other delegations, in drawing up a draft resolution which it hoped to be able to submit shortly for the consideration of the Committee.

Mr. ROUAMBA (Upper Volta) said that it was important to know what stage the work of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts had reached, since it was they who must determine whether or not the holding of a second Conference in 1970 or 1971 was justified. Conferences of that type required careful preparation by experts, and it seemed unnecessary to set up a United Nations Permanent Committee without having made the fullest possible use of the present Ad Hoc Committee. It was too soon to say whether such a Committee was needed, and it would perhaps be better if the members of the Economic Committee gave more thought to the possibility of drawing up a draft resolution on that subject.

The reason why he had inquired about the stage reached in the consultations between Member States in a position to supply information on the automatic processing of data was that he regarded that as offering a possible solution to the problems of financing and classification resulting from the proliferation of documentation.

Mr. BARNEA (Acting Director, Resources and Transport Division) said that the Ad Hoc Committee was awaiting the Council's decision regarding the setting up of a Permanent Committee of Experts. If it was decided to set up a Permanent Committee, the present committee would be dissolved, but if the reverse were the case, the Ad Hoc Committee would have to assume the functions contemplated for the Permanent Committee. It was his impression that the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts would welcome an increase in its membership, provided, of course, that the resulting expenses would be met by member Governments.

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Mr. GEORGE (France) asked whether the increase in the membership of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts was intended to rectify an imbalance in its linguistic and geographic representation, since such an imbalance did not emerge from the description given in paragraph 8 of document E/4477.

Mr. BARNEA (Acting Director, Resources and Transport Division) recalled that the composition of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts had not been determined by the Secretariat; it could in any case be altered if the Economic Committee thought it necessary to do so. The Ad Hoc Committee had been set up on a provisional basis by the Conference, which had tried to ensure equitable geographic and linguistic representation. In the last analysis, however, that was a question on which the Economic Committee must come to a decision. If, moreover, it was decided to give the Committee a permanent status, some guiding principles would have to be formulated with regard to its membership and terms of reference.

Mr. BLAU (United States of America) recalled that nine years ago, in resolution 715 A (XXVII), the Council had requested the Secretary-General to set up a small group of consultants chosen, with due regard to equitable geographic distribution and to the different linguistic systems of the world, from those countries having widest experience of the problems of geographical names. It was that same group, moreover, which had proposed the holding of the Conference. As its membership had been somewhat limited, and as the number of States Members of the United Nations had greatly increased in the meantime, it was obvious that that group no longer adequately represented the linguistic and geographic groups in the United Nations as a whole. Therefore the Conference had decided to set up an ad hoc committee of experts representing the majority of the fourteen linguistic and geographic groups which it had provisionally suggested.

According to the recommendation being submitted by his delegation, the group of consultants set up by the Secretary-General would be reinstated, but its membership would be increased so that it represented each of the fourteen linguistic and geographic groups. In short, there were at present three groups under discussion: the reinstatement of the group of consultants set up by the Secretary-General and the enlargement of its membership, the retention of the Ad Hoc Committee of Experts set up by the Conference, or the establishment of the Permanent Committee of Experts which had been recommended by the Conference.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.