

United Nations  
**GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**

FOURTEENTH SESSION  
Official Records



**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 165th  
MEETING**

Thursday, 3 December 1959,  
at 10.55 a.m.

NEW YORK

**CONTENTS**

<i>Agenda item 62:</i>	
<i>Question of the consistent application of the principle of equitable geographical representation in the election of the President of the General Assembly (continued) . . . . .</i>	<i>175</i>

**Chairman: Mr. Charles T. O. KING (Liberia).**

**AGENDA ITEM 62**

**Question of the consistent application of the principle of equitable geographical representation in the election of the President of the General Assembly (A/4182, A/SPC/L.39) (continued)**

1. Mr. MACHOWSKI (Poland) said that during the past few years efforts had been made to avoid the unfortunate rivalry and conflict arising out of elections to the various organs of the United Nations and to functional offices. The adoption of resolution 1192 (XII) on the composition of the General Committee had helped to ensure an equitable geographical distribution in the election of the Vice-Presidents and the Chairmen of Main Committees, but nothing had yet been done to crystallize the principles governing the election of the President of the General Assembly.

2. Constitutionally speaking, neither the United Nations Charter nor the rules of procedure of the General Assembly established any criteria for selecting the President of the Assembly. The question could therefore only be considered from the point of view of the general principles of the Charter, and of established practice. It could not be denied that equitable geographical representation was the basic principle governing most United Nations elections, and it had been included in the rules of procedure of the majority of its principal and subsidiary organs, in the resolutions which established such organs and in their terms of reference. In actual practice, in fourteen years of selecting United Nations presiding and functional officers, a firm tendency to observe the principle of equitable geographical distribution had been evident.

3. There was, however, a political aspect to the question which might explain the denial of that principle in the election of the President of the General Assembly. The principle of equitable geographical distribution had been applied in that respect in recent years among regional groups, except the Eastern European group, which had so far been excluded from the rotation. That was clearly a case of discrimination against one geographical area which proved that the application of the principle of equitable geographical representation was not consistent in the election of the President of the General Assembly.

4. The criterion of personal competence which had been mentioned in the debate was undeniably a very important one, but rule 31 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly concerning the election of Presidents and Vice-Presidents did not contain any provision as to the personal competence of the candidates. Moreover, rule 105 clearly gave priority to equitable geographical distribution over other criteria, since it stated that the Chairmen, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteurs of the Main Committees should be elected on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, experience and personal competence, and in the view of his delegation that same priority should be maintained in regard to the selection of the President. In every geographical region represented in the United Nations there were people of sufficient skill and experience to deserve the honour of election to high functional offices such as that of President, and to assume that any geographical area or country had no such person was the most unjust form of discrimination.

5. With regard to the League of Nations practice which had been quoted as a precedent during the debate, he would like to point out that there was no actual provision for equitable geographical distribution in the Covenant of the League, although the practice of the League had tended constantly towards the fair distribution of seats and offices among the member countries. The Charter of the United Nations, on the other hand, contained direct references to the principle of equitable geographical distribution and the important point was that the rules of procedure governing elections should implement that principle and prevent any form of discrimination.

6. He would appeal to the Committee in its search for a solution to the problem to see that any resolutions adopted were clear and precise in their wording, so as to avoid any further conflict and confusion on the particular issue involved.

7. In his delegation's view, the rules for the election of the President of the General Assembly should be based on the principle of equitable geographical representation in the first place, and secondly on a system of appropriate rotation couched in very clear words and enumerating the regional groups represented in the United Nations and participating in that rotation. The adoption of such unequivocal rules would improve the atmosphere of the debates of the Assembly, and leave more time and energy for the problems of peace and international security for which the United Nations had been primarily established.

8. Mr. SMITH (Canada) regretted that the delegations of Czechoslovakia and Romania had thought it necessary to make formal proposals on the subject at all, let alone the rigid proposals embodied in the draft resolution before the Committee (A/SPC/L.39). He did not think that the election of the President of the General Assembly should be predetermined by decisions

of any single session, or that the office should be passed round on a mechanical rotation basis between various regional groupings. The important point was that a President should be elected who by virtue of his wisdom and impartiality could command the respect and confidence of the great majority of the Members of the Assembly. His delegation was prepared to support a candidate for his high personal qualifications, irrespective of the particular area of the world in which his homeland was located. In the past the Assembly had, in fact, chosen its Presidents from countries widely scattered over the face of the globe.

9. His delegation had not voted in favour of resolution 1192 (XII) which provided for the distribution of the vice-presidencies of the Assembly on a regional basis, but in any case that resolution was irrelevant to the issue under discussion. There was some advantage in making provision for representation of various regions or groupings of the world in multiple bodies, to enable them to arrive at decisions likely to be endorsed or applied universally, but the principle could not apply to an office to which only one person could be elected each year.

10. Moreover, the draft resolution before the Committee could have little practical effect, since each session of the Assembly was master of its own decisions, including the decision as to the person who would preside over its meetings. It was very unlikely that such a recommendation, made at one session, would be accepted as binding by the Assembly at any subsequent session; in the interval a candidate from quite a different area might have become available whose qualifications were markedly superior to those of any known candidate from the pre-recommended area. The Assembly would not be able to exercise any freedom of choice, since it would be bound to accept the selected candidate decided upon by the nations within a particular area.

11. The draft resolution involved such a serious change in the established practice as to constitute something very close to Charter amendment, since Article 21 of the Charter provided that the General Assembly should elect its President for each session. In fact, it was too serious a step to undertake without the concurrence and approval of the proposed Charter revision conference. His delegation did not approve of the principle of automatic rotation of the Presidency of the Assembly at all, still less could it accept the particular rotation formula proposed in the draft resolution. If the term "Eastern European States" meant countries with a socialist system—as had been indicated by the representative of Czechoslovakia (163rd meeting)—it included some ten States, which would have twice the number of opportunities of holding the Presidency as a member of the Latin American group for instance. It was not desirable that a United Nations resolution should sanction and perpetuate the unhappy division of the European Continent into "Eastern" and "Western" States, apparently on the basis of differing ideological systems.

12. With regard to his own country, he had the impression that Canada was included in the "other States" loosely appended to Western Europe in the division advocated in the draft resolution. For purposes of election to United Nations organs, Canada had usually been placed in a different type of grouping—the Commonwealth—rather than in a regional one, and the draft resolution made no provision for a Common-

wealth grouping. That sort of organized regionalism made no sense to Canada and to a number of other States. His delegation therefore could not vote in favour of the draft resolution.

13. Mr. GARCIA ROBLES (Mexico) said that the amendments submitted by eleven Latin American States (A/SPC/L.40), of which Mexico was one, were the result of a genuine effort to produce a constructive proposal. The aim had been to find a common denominator which would make it possible for a resolution to be adopted unanimously. It had been clear from the start that, as it stood, the draft resolution (A/SPC/L.39) was unacceptable to many delegations, including the delegation of Mexico.

14. Mexico had always supported the principle of equitable geographical distribution, as set forth in Article 23 of the Charter in connexion with the composition of the Security Council, and in Article 101 in connexion with the appointment of the Secretariat staff. The stand adopted by the Mexican delegation at the twelfth session of the General Assembly was an example of its devotion to that principle. It had played an active part in the efforts leading to the adoption of resolution 1192 (XII), on the composition of the General Committee.

15. Despite that well-known and clearly defined attitude, however, many of the points in the draft resolution were not acceptable to his delegation. The resolution related to the election of the President of an organ which included the entire membership of the United Nations, unlike resolution 1192 (XII) which related to the composition of a subsidiary organ, the General Committee, which was restricted in character. It was impossible to apply a strictly geographical criterion to the election of the President or to try to decide in advance for a specific number of years upon a rigid, mandatory system of rotation. In the case both of the Security Council and of the Secretariat—that is, in connexion with both the election of States and the choice of persons—the Charter established other criteria besides that of geographical representation. Article 23 required that due regard should be paid in the first instance to the contribution of the State concerned to the maintenance of international peace and security and to the other purposes of the Organization. Article 101 provided that the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff should be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity. Similarly, in electing the President of the General Assembly, his important and delicate functions must be borne in mind and care must be taken to ensure that the person chosen possessed the necessary personal qualifications. In expressing that view, the Mexican delegation regarded itself as abiding fully by the provisions of Article 8 of the Charter, to which the Romanian representative had referred at the previous meeting. When there was only one post to be filled, geographical representation presupposed an appropriate rotation. However, the fact that such rotation was desirable, and that there should be no restriction on the eligibility of men and women to participate under conditions of equality in the principal and subsidiary organs of the United Nations, should not prevent special attention being given in the first place to the personal qualifications of any candidate for the Presidency of the General Assembly.

16. Apart from the need for the General Assembly to be satisfied regarding the personal qualities of a



candidate, there were other factors which made it undesirable to fix a rigid pattern of geographical rotation. In the case of an international conflict within a particular geographical region, which the General Assembly might be called upon to deal with, it would not be advisable for the Assembly to have as President a national of a State in that region. Moreover, if the General Assembly were to meet in a country which was not a permanent member of the Security Council, it would be unfortunate if the traditional diplomatic practice whereby the Presidency went to the Foreign Minister of the host country had to be sacrificed to an inflexible pattern of rotation.

17. The proposed amendments were self-explanatory. He hoped they would be regarded as a proof of the determination of their sponsors to work towards mutual understanding. They represented a sincere attempt to reconcile the different views which had been encountered in the course of many consultations with delegations from all regions and groups. Although they could not reflect all the divergent views in their entirety, he felt that they contained enough to be regarded as the highest common denominator in the circumstances.

18. Mr. BEELEY (United Kingdom) said that his delegation, like that of Canada, was somewhat doubtful of the need for the present debate. The existing practice governing the election of Presidents of the General Assembly was satisfactory, and at the same time capable of adaptation to changing circumstances. It was based primarily on the general acceptance of the view that the personal qualifications of the candidate should be the overriding consideration. The office of President of the General Assembly was unique in character and status. It had been occupied hitherto by eminent persons who had been elected not merely as faithful representatives of their country or the group to which their country belonged, but for their personal contribution to the life and work of the United Nations. In practice, account had been taken of the need for balanced geographical representation. However, there had been no regular rotation, and the establishment of such a rotation on the basis of sharply defined geographical groups would inevitably diminish the prestige of the office. In such circumstances, the General Assembly could not be sure that the President chosen was the best man available or that he had been put forward with due regard to his acceptability to the General Assembly as a whole. During his term of office, the President was detached from his delegation and he must therefore command the confidence of the General Assembly as an individual and be chosen as such.

19. A number of references had been made to General Assembly resolution 1192 (XII). In his view, that resolution was an argument against rather than in favour of the proposal under consideration. It had been drafted in order to provide that no matter from what region the President was elected, the composition of the General Committee should always be in accordance with the same formula set forth in the annex to the resolution. Thus, only two years previously, on the initiative of the delegation of Czechoslovakia, the General Assembly had confirmed the practice of a free vote on the Presidency.

20. Reference had also been made to rule 105 of the rules of procedure. However, the reference to equitable geographical distribution in connexion with the election

of committee officers obviously applied to the totality of those offices and not to the individuals. Attention had been drawn by a number of representatives to the practice of the League of Nations. It had been noted that Czechoslovakia and Romania had provided Presidents for the Assembly of the League on five occasions, the same two individuals holding the Presidency. The convention seemed to be growing up in the United Nations that a President of the General Assembly should be elected only once but there was not as yet a convention that a country which had provided a President could not do so again until all the other Members had had their turn. One of the dangers of the draft resolution was that it might establish a rotation not only between but within geographical groups. Although it was true that, as the Ukrainian representative had said, genius knew no frontiers, genius might appear twice in one country before visiting the other eighty-one.

21. The rotation prescribed in the last paragraph of the draft resolution meant that Europe would have equal representation with the whole of the rest of the membership of the United Nations, at least in the first four-year period, which could hardly be acceptable to the great majority of delegations. The paragraph was also ambiguous; although the resolution was drafted in geographical terms, many of the speeches made in support of it had been made in political terms. However, if the resolution was discussed on a geographical basis, it could be argued that so far the whole of Europe had been unrepresented save for the Benelux countries. There had of course been four Presidents from the Commonwealth. However, he liked to think that that was due to the nature of the relationship between the member States of the Commonwealth, which provided excellent opportunities for developing the qualities desirable in a President of the General Assembly.

22. He agreed that personal qualifications should not be the only factor; the importance of political circumstances was undeniable. The nature of the actual rotation of the office had been determined to some extent by the background of political circumstances. Geographical representation was, of course, another important factor. It was desirable that over a period of years there should be a rotation between the principal regional groups, but it should not be laid down in such a way as to destroy the flexibility necessary for the proper conduct of the elections. He assured the Eastern European delegations that, subject to the considerations he had outlined, the United Kingdom had no desire to exclude them from the Presidency of the General Assembly.

23. For the reasons he had given, he would be obliged to oppose the draft resolution. He would comment on the amendments at a later stage.

24. Mr. PAPAGOS (Greece) said that the election of the President of the General Assembly was a question of particular importance to the Organization. The geographical origin of the candidates for the Presidency constituted one important factor in the Assembly's choice. There was no provision in the Charter which extended the principle of equitable geographical representation laid down in connexion with the election of non-permanent members of the Security Council to the election of the President. However, from the start that principle had, in practice, been taken into account. Nevertheless, the personal qualifications of the candidate were equally important. A great deal was expected of him, both by the representatives of Member States

working under his guidance and by public opinion in the world at large. Moreover, since the General Assembly was primarily a political body, the President to some extent assumed a political role. In that respect, he must be in a position to co-ordinate the various currents of opinion and see that each was given its proper expression. Therefore, the political conditions which prevailed in each instance could not be disregarded. Thus there were three important conditions: geographical representation, the personal qualifications of the candidate, and the prevailing political situation. Greece had always approached the question of electing the President of the General Assembly in that light and would continue to do so in future.

25. The Greek delegation had been advised that Mr. Jiří Nosek of Czechoslovakia, whose personal qualifications undoubtedly commanded respect, was a candidate for the Presidency of the next General Assembly session. In examining his and any other candidate's qualifications, the Greek delegation would be guided by the considerations previously outlined.

26. Mr. MALILE (Albania) pointed out that the United Nations was based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members and that unless duties were equitably borne by all States, irrespective of their régime, the Organization could not operate effectively. The principle of equitable geographical distribution was enshrined in the Charter and the General Assembly's rules of procedure and was applied in all United Nations bodies and agencies. It had been reaffirmed in resolution 1192 (XII), whereby rules 31 and 38 of the Assembly's rules of procedure had been amended to ensure more equitable representation in the General Committee.

27. His delegation believed that the principle of equitable geographical representation should also be strictly applied to the election of the President of the Assembly. That principle had hitherto been violated inasmuch as not one President had been chosen from the Eastern European group of States, which nevertheless played an important part in the Organization. Such discrimination was unlawful and undermined the principle of the sovereign equality of States. He agreed that personal qualities should be borne in mind in the election of the President, but he did not share the view that all previous Presidents had been elected on the basis of that criterion alone. Through their successes and achievements in various fields of knowledge the socialist countries had proved that wisdom was not the monopoly of any one group of States, and the fact that those countries had a socialist régime should not disqualify them from playing a full role in the Organization. The present discrimination against Eastern European States derived from the "cold war" and, in view of the recent improvement in international relations, should be abolished by a General Assembly measure establishing definite criteria for the election of its President.

28. The draft resolution submitted by Czechoslovakia and Romania offered a reasonable and fair solution to the problem and his delegation would support it.

29. Mr. PLAJA (Italy) said that, in practice, the election of Presidents of the Assembly had undeniably followed in recent years a pattern of equitable geographical distribution and there appeared to be no need for that practice to be endorsed by a General Assembly resolution. The present practice maintained a proper

balance between the various factors involved, and the Assembly should not have its action prescribed in detail on such an important matter.

30. The principal criterion in the election of a President was, and should remain, the personal qualities of the candidate. That criterion had been in the mind of those who had drafted the Charter and the Assembly's rules of procedure, which made no reference to the principle of equitable geographical distribution in connexion with the election of Presidents of the Assembly.

31. His delegation always maintained an open mind in the choice of a President and would not hesitate to support a candidate endowed with the qualities that the high position required, irrespective of the geographical region to which he belonged, provided the choice gave full guarantees as to his fairness and impartiality.

32. His delegation could therefore not support the draft resolution (A/SPC/L.39). It was, however, in favour of the amendments contained in document A/SPC/L.40, which endorsed the present practice.

33. Mr. FOURIE (Union of South Africa) said that his delegation firmly believed in the principle of equitable geographical distribution in the major organs of the United Nations; the duty and right to play a full part in its work could not be limited to a few Members. The principle could only be put into practice by means of conventions relating to elections, and resolution 1192 (XII) had been a move in the right direction. He emphasized that in order to make that agreement possible it had been necessary, among other things, to increase the membership of the General Committee. It was difficult to apply the principle in a small body, and especially difficult in the case of the Presidency—a high office to which only one person could be elected annually and where personal qualities were of paramount importance.

34. His delegation would have preferred the Committee to confine itself to an exchange of views, but if a resolution was to be adopted it should be limited to a statement of generally acceptable principles. He would study the Latin American amendments (A/SPC/L.40) in that light.

35. Mr. MOD (Hungary) said that the election of the President of the Assembly was a matter of great political importance, in regard to which the principle of equitable geographical representation should undoubtedly be strictly applied. That had not been done in the past, since no representative of an Eastern European country had ever been elected. The principle was proclaimed in the Charter and stemmed from the principle of the equality of States and the universality of the United Nations, and any violation of it jeopardized the very foundations of the Organization. At the twelfth session, in the discussion preceding the adoption of General Assembly resolution 1192 (XII), the Irish representative had rightly stated in the Special Political Committee (80th meeting) that the concept of regions had been evolved in the United Nations for practical reasons connected with elections and had proved acceptable to most delegations. The distribution of seats in all United Nations bodies was based on the principle of equitable geographical representation, with due regard to such regional divisions. Failure to observe that principle, as in the recent elections for a Security Council seat, had led to a deadlock.

36. The importance of personal qualities and ability in the election of a President of the Assembly did not justify the violation of the principle of equitable geographical distribution, since it could not seriously be claimed that any geographical region was incapable of producing candidates with all the necessary qualifications for that eminent post. No delegation had denied the importance of the principle, yet some were evidently satisfied with the present situation resulting from the violation of one of the Organization's main principles. That situation could only be remedied by specific practical measures, and the draft resolution submitted by Czechoslovakia and Romania provided for precisely such measures and was based on a generally accepted principle. The proposed amendments would rob it of all that was specific and concrete. His delegation would therefore support the draft resolution and would vote against the amendments.

37. Mr. STEYAERT (Belgium) recalled that in resolution 1192 (XII) the General Assembly had laid down very precise rules for the application of the principle of equitable geographical distribution in the composition of the General Committee, which was to be made

up of representatives of four arbitrarily constituted groups of States, as well as the permanent members of the Security Council, and had taken into account the nationality of the President of the Assembly in the distribution of vice-presidencies. However, it had refrained from adopting any rigid criteria governing the election of the President. His delegation believed that the Assembly had acted wisely and that, in the election of the President of the Assembly, primary consideration should be given to the personal qualities of the candidate and his suitability in the light of existing circumstances. Hence it did not seem desirable to restrict the freedom of choice of future sessions of the Assembly, particularly in view of the assured equitable composition of the General Committee. Excessively detailed regulations might deprive the United Nations of that flexibility which was often essential for efficiency. His delegation was not, however, opposed to the idea of taking equitable geographical distribution into account as far as possible, in addition to the criteria he had mentioned, and would vote accordingly.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.