

UNITED NATIONS
General Assembly
FORTY-FOURTH SESSION
Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
41st meeting
held on
Thursday, 16 November 1989
at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 41st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. AL-MASRI (Syrian Arab Republic)

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

CONTENTS

AGENDA ITEM 130: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued)

This record is subject to correction.
Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned
within one week of the date of publication to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, Room DC2 750,
2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

Distr. GENERAL
A/C.5/44/SR.41
21 November 1989

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

89-57213 2037S (E)

/...

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 130: PERSONNEL QUESTIONS (continued) (A/44/604; A/C.5/44/2, 9, 11, 17 and 21)

1. Mr. MORCZYNSKI (Poland) said that personnel questions were of special importance for the proper functioning of the United Nations, since the implementation of resolutions and decisions depended not only on money but also on the competence of the staff. His delegation favoured the arrangement whereby personnel questions were considered every other year since it saved conference-servicing resources and gave the organs concerned sufficient time to implement the resolutions adopted.
2. Poland appreciated the efforts of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management to achieve equitable geographical distribution in staff recruitment, but not all countries and regional groups were yet equitably represented. Poland itself had been for many years at the lower end of its desirable range, despite the excellent performance of its nationals employed in the United Nations system. His Government had expressed its concern about the situation to the Secretary-General in a special memorandum.
3. The proper ratio of permanent to fixed-term contracts was 1:1 but it should apply to the Secretariat as a whole, not to individual countries. A proper balance must be maintained between internal promotions and external recruitment; the external recruitment plan would secure an influx of talented new staff.
4. Implementation of General Assembly resolutions on personnel questions was not a matter for the Office of Human Resources Management alone, but that Office had a leading role to play, accepting advice from other departments but exercising unquestionable authority in recruitment decisions.
5. His delegation shared the concern of the Assistant Secretary-General about the underrepresentation of women and the problems connected with training activities. It re-emphasized its readiness to co-operate fully in the implementation of the resolutions on personnel questions.
6. Mr. KPOTSRA (Togo) said that the traditional interest in personnel questions had been heightened both by the programme of administrative reforms and by the improvement in the Organization's prestige. The staff had a very important role to play in coping with the new challenges and the increased work-load, and the restructuring and the reactivation of the Organization could not succeed unless constant attention was given to personnel questions. The Organization's effectiveness also depended to a large extent on its staff, a point emphasized by the Secretary-General during the consideration of the report of the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts to Review the Efficiency of the Administrative and Financial Functioning of the United Nations (Group of 18).
7. His delegation welcomed the improved presentation and content of the Secretary-General's report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/44/604). It

/...

(Mr. Kpotsra, Togo)

noted with satisfaction the efforts made to carry out the relevant General Assembly resolutions, but noted that table D of annex I indicated a continuing imbalance in the representation of States at the higher levels. Candidates from all States must be given an equal opportunity in accordance with the principles of rotation and equitable geographical distribution. In the year ended 30 June 1989 only 39 of the 134 persons appointed to posts subject to geographical distribution had been nationals of underrepresented Member States. Such distortion could not but frustrate the attainment of the desired goal. Furthermore, the unusual classification of countries into four groups in table C did not give a clear picture of the situation with regard to the representation of developing countries at the higher levels.

8. His country attached great importance to the integration of women in economic and social development and to the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women. The Secretary-General's report on improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/C.5/44/17) indicated a slight improvement in the number of women employed in the Secretariat, despite the retrenchment programme. The Secretary-General had also appointed three women to high-level posts. The Togo delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts in that area and hoped that the 1990 target of 30 per cent representation could be achieved.

9. It was encouraging to note from the report of the Secretary-General on the administration of justice in the Secretariat (A/C.5/44/9) that progress had been made in eliminating the backlog of cases before the Joint Appeals Board and that a revised set of disciplinary rules had been drafted to replace chapter X of the Staff Rules. His delegation agreed that the operation of the revised rules would have to be monitored closely.

10. The question of the security of the staff of the United Nations system must certainly receive due attention, and the staff in turn must fulfil its obligation to the host countries. It was regrettable to note the increasing number of cases in which the safety of staff was threatened. The Secretary-General's report on the subject (A/C.5/44/11) indicated that, while the Middle East remained an area of deep concern, violations of the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations system were also occurring in other parts of the world. His delegation reiterated its appreciation of the efforts of the Secretary-General and his colleagues to improve the situation. The increase in the Organization's peace-keeping operations and responsibilities made respect for the privileges and immunities of staff members even more important.

11. In the context of the restructuring of the United Nations system and the restoration of the Organization's prestige, no discussion of personnel questions could ignore the deterioration in the staff's conditions of employment. The delegation of Togo therefore welcomed the recommendations made by the International Civil Service Commission and the proposals for the restoration of the actuarial balance of the Joint Staff Pension Fund. It should also be noted that the decisions taken by the Fifth Committee would help to determine staff members'

/...

(Mr. Kpotara, Togo)

confidence in the Organization and its capacity to perform effectively the tasks entrusted to it.

12. Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that at a time when the United Nations was being entrusted with greater responsibilities, there was a need to ensure greater efficiency, competence and integrity in the Secretariat. His delegation had supported the relevant recommendations of the Group of 18, which had been endorsed by the General Assembly. However, little progress had been made in reducing posts, particularly at the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General levels. The number of posts subject to equitable geographical distribution was also extremely low and should be the subject of a review.

13. The fact that the number of unrepresented Member States had increased was a matter of concern to his delegation, which hoped that prompt measures would be taken to correct that trend. Meanwhile, the continued practice of appointing nationals of overrepresented States was evidence of disrespect for both the provisions of the Charter and resolutions of the General Assembly. His delegation requested that the Secretariat state its reasons for maintaining that practice.

14. A series of General Assembly resolutions concerning equitable geographical distribution had urged that posts be rotated in the upper echelons of the Secretariat and affirmed that no post should be considered the exclusive preserve of any Member State or group of States. His delegation was therefore astonished by the information provided in paragraph 2 of document A/44/604. It requested an explanation from the Secretariat, together with details of the Secretariat's plans to implement the pertinent resolutions of the General Assembly. A system should be devised to ensure proper rotation and the recruitment of nationals of States which had never been represented in senior-level posts. His country was concerned that its level of representation was below the mid-point of its desirable range and that it had never been represented in a senior-level post. The Secretariat's recruitment policy, which remained obscure and arbitrary, must be revised.

15. While welcoming the increase in the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution, his delegation sought an assurance that there would be no consequent prejudice to the principle of equitable geographical distribution. In conclusion, it urged all States to respect the privileges and immunities of international officials and regretted the cases of arrest and detention, and of restrictions imposed on staff members of certain nationalities, referred to in document A/C.5/44/11.

16. Mr. BOUR (France), speaking on behalf of the 12 States members of the European Community, said that the Twelve appreciated the efforts made by the Assistant Secretary-General to improve the functioning and efficiency of the Organization's services. They stressed the importance of a personnel management policy which ensured genuine independence and competence in the Secretariat and they applauded the staff's dedicated approach to its new tasks and mandates in the current period of restructuring and financial difficulties.

(Mr. Hour, France)

17. The Twelve welcomed the clarity of the report on the composition of the Secretariat. The Secretary-General quoted in paragraph 6 the text of Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter, which stressed that the staff must have the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, considerations which must be kept constantly in mind in matters of recruitment and promotion. The first step must be rigorous selection of staff members, and the Twelve agreed with the Group of 18 that selection by competitive examination was one of the most appropriate methods for recruitment to posts at the P-1 to P-3 levels. It was especially important to hold such examinations in unrepresented or underrepresented countries.
18. Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter also called for recruitment on as wide a geographical basis as possible. Table 4 of annex II to the report on the composition of the Secretariat indicated that the Twelve were below the mid-point in their desirable ranges and that some of them were underrepresented. They hoped that the Secretary-General would take that point into account in the recruitment process.
19. The number of women employed in the Secretariat had increased slightly, despite the retrenchment programme, but there were still not enough of them in higher-level posts. The Secretariat should continue its efforts to recruit and promote more women. Furthermore, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat, Governments should encourage more women candidates to sit for the national examinations. The Action Programme for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat must continue, but without prejudice to the principles stated in Articles 8 and 101 of the Charter or to other aspects of personnel policy, such as vacancy management and mobility.
20. The vacancy-management efforts described in paragraph 28 of the report on the composition of the Secretariat were welcome, but little had been done with respect to the redeployment of permanent staff members. The Twelve hoped that the problem would shortly be solved and requested further information on the situation from the Secretariat.
21. It must never be forgotten that recruitment was not the only means of guaranteeing the quality of the Organization's staff; proper distribution of human resources and staff mobility were also important. Increased use of short-term contracts and effective application of the rotation plan were effective means of securing greater mobility. Mobility must in fact be one of the criteria governing career development and promotion.
22. The assignment of staff in the light of work-loads was another important requirement, especially during the period of retrenchment and when the recruitment freeze had not affected all services equally. There was therefore an even greater need than before for effective work measurement and planning, considerations underlying recommendations 48 and 49 of the Group of 18 and indeed recommendation 56, which indicated that a post should not be filled merely because

(Mr. Bour, France)

it was vacant. The Twelve hoped that the Secretary-General would give an account of the implementation of those recommendations in his future reports.

23. The management of the Organization's staff was a complex and indeed a costly task. The Twelve therefore reaffirmed their support for the Secretary-General in his efforts to improve the management of human resources, which were the life force of the Organization.

24. Mr. ZACHMANN (German Democratic Republic) pointed out that his country's basic position on personnel questions was reflected in the joint statement of the socialist States of 15 November. The report on the composition of the Secretariat was welcome, but Member States must be given a clearer picture of the specific efforts to implement the resolutions on personnel questions. Some of the substantive issues in the report prompted serious questions in his delegation.

25. One major issue was the application of the principle of equitable geographical representation. The German Democratic Republic, in fact, had always been seriously underrepresented, and the situation had not improved since the adoption of resolution 43/224 A. On the contrary, the number of citizens of his country working in the Secretariat had declined even further below the mid-point in its desirable range. Since there had been little improvement in the general situation it was difficult to see why 75 per cent of the persons recruited in the year to 30 June 1989 should be nationals of Member States that were within range or overrepresented.

26. The policy of recruiting an external candidate only when no suitable candidate could be found in the Secretariat had exacerbated the situation still further. His delegation understood the difficulties resulting from the personnel cuts but they must be resolved by application of the basic principles, so that the interests of individual States or groups of States were not adversely affected. Efforts must be redoubled to satisfy the legitimate concern of the unrepresented and underrepresented countries. In that context his delegation requested more information about the preparation of the medium-term recruitment plan for 1990-1991.

27. Qualitative representation was also important to Member States, and further measures were required to implement decisions concerning proper representation in senior-level posts. With regard to the representation of women, his country would make every effort to facilitate attainment of the established target by promoting women candidates, on the assumption that the principle of equitable geographical distribution would meanwhile be maintained.

28. His delegation advocated compliance with the provisions on replacement of staff members on fixed-term contracts contained in General Assembly resolution 35/210 and believed that the competitive examinations due to be held in 1990 would help to reduce its serious underrepresentation in the German Democratic Republic.

29. Mr. NIKIFOROV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the major changes that were occurring in international relations called for a reassessment of

(Mr. Nikiforov, USSR)

the role of the United Nations and of the prospects for its activities. His delegation attached growing importance to its participation in the Organization, which it viewed as an essential instrument for the promotion of the demilitarization, democratization and humanization of international relations. In line with its fundamental approach to the United Nations, his country supported new and improved methods of work and was endeavouring to fulfil its financial obligations to the Organization in a timely fashion, despite economic and financial hardship.

30. As the role of the United Nations was enhanced, the Secretariat, as one of its main organs, must also be enhanced. Since the inception of the Organization, it had been recognized that the Secretariat could not function effectively unless it enjoyed the trust of all Member States, which depended on adherence in good faith to the principles laid down in the Charter governing the recruitment and placement of staff. The efficiency of the Secretariat had improved with recent administrative, personnel and budgetary reforms, but greater initiative must be shown in adapting the Organization's activities to a changing world, particularly with respect to new programmes; the settlement of regional conflicts; and the development of promotion of social, economic, scientific and technological co-operation. To that end, the Secretariat would need flexible machinery that would afford some latitude in the utilization of financial resources and personnel. That would require staff of the highest calibre, recruited on an ever-broader geographical basis.

31. Progress had been made in implementing recommendation 15 of the Group of 18, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat (A/44/604), although reform was a long-term and ongoing process. The position of certain underrepresented States had improved, and a greater number of developing countries were represented in the upper echelons. However, 12 Member States were unrepresented and 26 remained underrepresented. In addition, the progress in improving the representation of States in upper-echelon geographical posts had been inadequate. Over the past four years, the Soviet Union's representation at that level had decreased by four posts and another post had been lost in mid-1989. An essential condition for enhancing the effectiveness of the Organization was the implementation of resolutions adopted by United Nations bodies, including General Assembly resolution 35/210 on personnel questions.

32. The Secretariat had had success in its efforts to fill posts at the junior Professional level through competitive examinations - a measure which had also helped to improve the position of unrepresented or underrepresented States. However, his delegation had serious reservations concerning the decision to offer permanent contracts to successful candidates from the competitive examinations. A proper balance between permanent and fixed-term contracts was desirable as a means of encouraging staff mobility and simplifying the personnel management process. However, according to the Secretary-General's report, the number of permanent contracts had increased in recent years and currently stood at 71.7 per cent, while the number of fixed-term contracts had declined to 28.4 per cent.

(Mr. Nikiforov, USSR)

33. His delegation favoured the recruitment of staff on the basis of secondment. Experience had shown that a preponderance of permanent staff members, who, in many cases, specialized in narrow fields, was not conducive to the redeployment of personnel resources within the Secretariat. The widespread use of permanent contracts also made it difficult to dismiss unsatisfactory staff members and, in general, diminished Member States' trust in Secretariat activities.

34. His delegation supported the measures taken to increase the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution, although the 30-per-cent target set in General Assembly resolution 40/258 B had not yet been met. On a recent mission to Moscow, officials of the Office of Human Resources Management had had an opportunity to meet with a large group of Soviet women experts, some of whom were likely to be candidates for posts in the Organization. Recruitment of those women would help to promote the objectives set forth in the General Assembly resolution.

35. Stronger legal guarantees of the security and safety of staff were needed. His delegation supported the appeal by the Secretary-General and the efforts by the staff associations to promote respect for the privileges and immunities of staff members. Lastly, certain restrictive measures imposed by the host country in respect of United Nations staff from a number of countries were not in keeping with the more open spirit of the times.

36. Mr. KOCATURK (Turkey) expressed his delegation's concern at the fact that 23.3 per cent of Member States were still unrepresented or underrepresented in the Secretariat and that there was still a tendency to recruit nationals of States that were within range. It was unfortunate that imbalances in senior-level posts had not been corrected, as called for in General Assembly resolution 43/224 A. His delegation urged the Secretary-General to pursue his efforts to redress those imbalances. It welcomed the fact that the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had risen to 26.9 per cent and shared the concerns of other delegations regarding recruitment to posts subject to geographical distribution.

37. Mrs. ARCHINI (Italy) said that Italy continued to be underrepresented in the Secretariat. Indeed, over the past two years, while Italy's contribution to the regular budget had steadily increased the number of Italian nationals in the Secretariat had decreased, despite efforts by the Italian Government to train personnel for international organizations. A measure of progress had been achieved as a result of the most recent national competitive examination, raising the total number of Italian staff members at the P-1/P-2 level to seven. None the less, Italy remained well below its desirable range and the weighted average of Italian staff members recruited to higher-level posts remained essentially unchanged. The Organization's difficulties in implementing recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 were understandable, but Italy had been severely underrepresented every year since the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

38. If Member States were to respond to the invitation by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management to facilitate the recruitment of

(Mrs. Archini, Italy)

well-qualified candidates, they must have a clear idea of the Organization's future requirements in various fields. Her delegation was prepared to make every effort to implement an effective recruitment method which would take into account the Organization's needs and at the same time, the qualifications of Italian candidates. In conclusion, her delegation hoped that another national competitive examination would be organized in Italy in the biennium 1990-1991.

39. Mr. HAAS (Federal Republic of Germany) noted with appreciation the competitive examinations held in his country in 1988, and the pledge to hold further examinations in 1990, which should help to offset his country's continued underrepresentation. His delegation also trusted that at least the most qualified of its Junior Professional Officers, who included a number of women, would be offered permanent appointments. It noted, in that connection, that General Assembly resolution 43/224 A expressly urged the Secretary-General to ensure that all unrepresented and underrepresented Member States were brought closer to the mid-point of their desirable ranges. It was regrettable that the percentage of appointments of nationals of unrepresented or underrepresented States to posts subject to geographical distribution had declined during the reporting period, and his delegation hoped to see that percentage increase during the coming year, with recruitment from States which were either overrepresented or at the upper end of their desirable range limited to exceptions. Meanwhile, his country was thoroughly dissatisfied with the fact that, as the fourth largest contributor to the Organization, it was represented in only two higher-level posts. It urgently required a level of representation which was adequate from both the quantitative and the qualitative points of view.

40. In conclusion, he paid a tribute to the excellent work of the Office of Human Resources Management, which had recently had to cope, apart from its normal heavy work-load, with a profusion of additional tasks, especially in connection with the secondment of personnel for peace-keeping operations.

41. Mr. BISTA (Nepal) said that his delegation had noted with interest the efforts to improve the functioning of the United Nations system and enhance the Organization's image. Unfortunately, although it was generally recognized that financial stability was an important factor in the reform process, certain Member States had yet to fulfil their financial obligations under the Charter. If the required funds were lacking, not only would implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213 be slowed, but the existing system would also be harmed. Reform programmes must not be abandoned in midstream for financial reasons.

42. The solution of other problems which were weakening the Organization, including an inadequate career development programme, an imbalance in the participation of women and less harmonious staff-management relations, did not require substantial financial resources and should be addressed by the Administration without delay.

43. Despite financial constraints, some progress had been achieved in implementing the reform process. The former Office of Personnel Services had been reorganized

/...

(Mr. Bista, Nepal)

and renamed the Office of Human Resources Management; the personnel manual which had been issued would make for improved personnel administration; and competitive examinations had been conducted to recruit staff for entry-level posts. While the status of women in the Secretariat had improved considerably as a result of special measures implemented in pursuance of the recommendations of the Steering Committee much remained to be done in order to meet the 30-per-cent target by 1990. His delegation fully supported Vacancy Management and the Staff Redeployment Programme, which provided a sound basis for promotion of staff. Revised staffing tables, based on a review of the work-loads in organizational units and job-related training were excellent means of improving efficiency and avoiding overstaffing.

44. Although definite progress had been made, the implementation of other recommendations had been postponed or completely disregarded. Those recommendations were related to equitable geographical representation; the representation of developing countries, particularly the least developed countries; and an improvement in the status of women. His delegation was confident that the Secretary-General could spare no effort to achieve the goals which the international community had set for the Organization.

45. Mr. SOTO (Colombia) said that the absence of any proposal in relation to a subject so important as that of training and career development, other than a statement that resources were scarce, was disappointing. His delegation requested information as to the level of resources, in percentage terms over the past five years, which had been allocated for training programmes. While recognizing the efforts made by the Secretariat to implement General Assembly resolutions relating to the representation of women and posts subject to equitable geographical distribution, it felt that more could be done to ensure appropriate rotation in the upper echelons. His delegation was also greatly concerned at the cases of arrest, detention and abduction of officials mentioned in document A/C.5/44/11, for both legal and basic humanitarian reasons. In conclusion, it paid a tribute to those staff members whose privileges and immunities had been violated and condemned actions such as the apparent murder of Lieutenant-Colonel Higgins.

46. Mr. DA COSTA PEREIRA (Portugal) expressed concern at the continuing decline in the level of his country's representation in posts subject to geographical distribution, which had now reached the lowest point of its desirable range. His country had, moreover, never been represented in a decision-making post. It believed that national competitive examinations constituted a valuable tool for correcting some of the more obvious injustices and bringing fresh blood into the Organization, and expressed its satisfaction that examinations would be held in Portugal in 1990. It also hoped that such examinations would shortly be extended to the P-3 level. Competitive examinations would not, however, affect the distribution of senior-level posts, in which context he noted with regret the information provided in paragraph 22 of document A/44/604. His country had consistently defended the need to recruit staff meeting the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity but believed that such qualities were not the exclusive preserve of a select few.

(Mr. Da Costa Pereira, Portugal)

47. In conclusion, he commended the spirit of dedication of the staff as highlighted, in particular, by the large numbers who had volunteered to serve with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group, where the level of participation by women had been greatly in excess of the target established in General Assembly resolutions.

48. Mr. KERSTEIN (Yugoslavia) said that the consideration of changes arising from the current reform process required particular delicacy in view of the continuing financial crisis. In supporting measures to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Secretariat, his delegation attached particular importance to the implementation of recommendation 15 of the Group of 18 and commended the Secretariat for progress achieved thus far. It was, however, particularly concerned that the recommendation should be implemented without any prejudice to the main principles underlying the policy for recruitment and appointment of United Nations staff. It reiterated its full commitment to those principles, as derived from Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter and, in particular, to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.

49. In adhering to those principles, special attention should be paid to the establishment of an appropriate balance in senior-level posts. In that context, the limitation of appointments at the Assistant Secretary-General level and above to a maximum period of 10 years would make it easier to apply the principle of rotation in the upper echelons. The current situation with respect to geographical distribution of posts was a cause of concern, and greater attention must be paid to the General Assembly's call for every effort to be made to recruit nationals of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States and candidates successful in the national competitive examinations. His delegation was not convinced that the provisions of General Assembly resolution 43/224 A relating to equitable geographical distribution had been fully observed in respect of recruitment during the reporting period. It was difficult to understand why only nationals of States with more than adequate levels of representation could be recruited for the four upper-echelon posts.

50. Noting that the level of his country's representation had been at the lower end of its desirable range for some years, he expressed satisfaction that four candidates who had passed national competitive examinations were now to be recruited. Examinations provided one means of solving problems of inadequate representation. There was, however, also an urgent need for direct appointments to senior-level posts.

51. The number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution had, despite the provisions of General Assembly resolution 43/224 C, increased only slightly, and it was a matter of concern that the rate of recruitment of women against such posts had actually fallen. There was clearly a need for more high-level appointments, and it was to be hoped that further measures would be taken to facilitate attainment of the target established by the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.