



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Resumed Forty-eighth Session
OFFICIAL RECORDS

Thursday, 21 May 1970,
at 4.15 p.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. J. B. P. MARAMIS (Indonesia).

AGENDA ITEM 12

Work programme of the United Nations in the economic, social and human rights fields (*continued*) (E/4787, E/4793 and Corr.1-4, E/4793 (annex), E/4837 and Corr.1 and Add.1; E/4846 and Add.1 and 2, Add.3 and Corr.1, Add.4-15; E/L.1312, E/L.1318)

1. Mr. SEN (Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination), speaking at the President's invitation, introduced the Committee's report on its fifth session (E/4846 and Add.1 and 2, Add.3 and Corr.1, Add.4-15). As the Committee had concluded its work the day after the Council had resumed its forty-eighth session, the report had been issued in parts to facilitate the Council's work. A very considerable volume of improved documentation had been submitted by the Secretariat to the Committee which had been unable to examine all of it in detail. There was considerable misunderstanding as to the way in which the Committee worked; it arrived at decisions by consensus so that any member could, in effect, exercise a veto. The Committee thus worked on the principle of the lowest common denominator and adventurous innovations could not be expected. It might, admittedly, take decisions by majority vote, but he wondered whether that would facilitate the Council's work; delegations disagreeing with decisions so achieved could regard them as not binding. Another imponderable factor was that the United Nations, having reached its twenty-fifth anniversary, was carefully scrutinizing all aspects of its activities, with the result that there were many problems under consideration which CPC could not prejudge. Nevertheless, the Committee had accomplished a not inconsiderable amount of work at its latest session, particularly with regard to defining problems. Over the years, the Council, the specialized agencies and CPC had tended to work piecemeal, although there was common ground with regard to the avoidance of duplication, the need to preserve the independence of the specialized agencies, provided no question of inefficiency arose, and the adjustment of all programmes to the strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. Nevertheless, the Committee faced difficulties in that area, too, in that no final strategy for the Development Decade had been defined.

2. Of the large number of developing countries some were more developed than others and the United Nations work programme should be concentrated on the least developed. The Secretary-General had said that it was not proposed to give the same priority to all areas of activity. The work programmes prepared by bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights had, however, not listed activities in order of priority, as indicated by the Council. A further difficulty was the definition of priorities in unrelated areas; for

example, should a study on containerization take priority over an information programme for the advancement of women?

3. The work programme was essentially an attempt to enumerate priorities within the limits he had described. The Committee's views on the matter were set forth in paragraphs 20 to 23, 31, 39 and 40 of document E/4846/Add.11. Advance budget fascicles and draft budget submissions from divisions had been circulated informally to the Committee, which had found them extremely useful. He suggested that the Second and Fifth Committees would also find the material valuable.

4. Within CPC itself, there were two groups of countries—one which believed that all programmes should be related to available resources and the other which considered that, if a programme was useful and practicable, there was no reason why the United Nations should not find for it at least some of the funds required.

5. Given all those limitations, the Committee had endeavoured to indicate its views on the orientation of the work programme. Obviously, it could not make cut and dried recommendations on every aspect of the programme while it worked by consensus and while other factors which he had described remained unclear.

6. Mr. DE SEYNES (Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs) said that the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination faced considerable difficulties on account of the ill-defined nature of the Committee's work. With regard to programming, he wondered whether the word "programme" was appropriate; a more articulate and structural approach was needed. A number of uncertainties existed, which programming in the United Nations should aim at reducing. For one thing, programming and budgeting should be better matched, and a suggestion in favour of programme budgeting had been made in the Fifth Committee.

7. The report on programming and budgets in the United Nations family of organizations¹ would, in his view, prove to be a useful document, and should be given the earliest possible consideration by the Council, perhaps at a special session. The principal drawback was that the Secretary-General was not allowed sufficient powers of initiative to submit proposals based on a more articulate and coherent programming. The present programme situation derived from the fact that there were numerous bodies, each trying to establish its own programme, but no established order of priorities; many bodies did not even trouble to put forward their projects in the light of the planning framework as a whole. The Secretary-General was therefore placed in a

¹ Document A/7822, annex.

difficult position since he was bound by the rules applying to the various bodies but had no clear mandate to establish priorities among them.

8. It would be better if subsidiary organs of the various legislative bodies were to confine themselves to defining objectives and to leave it to the Secretary-General to propose the means. If legislative bodies simply outlined the major goals, and if the Secretary-General submitted proposals on ways of attaining these goals, the work of CPC would be easier. Such a procedure would not increase the Secretary-General's powers; on the contrary, the legislative bodies would be given more specific powers of control. At the present time, the lack of resources often led to the taking of decisions outside the body concerned. In his view, Governments should assume responsibility for any budgetary cuts which the Secretariat had to make.

9. The adoption of programme budgeting would be an improvement in that direction. The specialized agencies appeared to be moving towards such a procedure. The multiplicity of tasks had rendered existing procedures, which were in any case not based on any immutable system but on custom, obsolete. He hoped that CPC would be able to consider that matter at a future session.

10. In considering the programmes and performances, many parameters, for example, personnel policies—were often overlooked; it was sometimes a lack of staff, not of facilities and funds, which prevented work from being done. CPC should therefore take a broad view of the context in which the work had to be done. The programme budgeting would also encourage longer-term programming. The experience of recent years had shown that basing on project needs, with the attendant time-limit factor, had its limitations. Intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations should, however, take such long-term views. In the Second Development Decade, the major trends and consequent needs for new or additional work by the Secretariat would become clear.

11. At a recent meeting of CPC, consideration had been given to the establishment of interdisciplinary services in Africa, Latin America and possibly in Asia, on similar lines to the United Nations Economic and Social Office in Beirut. There was also a need to step up activities relating to natural resources and transport; work begun a decade ago in those fields was now yielding results and would probably lead to appropriate government investments, and requests for more work.

12. The Secretariat's activities in the field of transport, at present confined to technical assistance, should be extended. A great deal of data would have to be collected if the Secretariat, particularly the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, was to discharge its role adequately during the Second Development Decade. The Department could expect a considerable increase in the amount of research it would have to undertake despite the data supplied by the specialized agencies; the need for additional manpower must therefore be borne in mind. The need had also been stressed for more research on social questions—for example, unemployment and urbanization—which lagged several decades behind purely economic research. In certain more strictly economic areas, such as taxation, fiscal

reform, public finance, no new work had been done which would be of use to the developing countries.

13. There was much still to be done in those major areas of research, a matter which CPC would have the opportunity to consider at future sessions. There would also probably be new areas, for example, environmental control, in which the Council would be involved for the purpose of defining, if not actually drawing up, regulations. The specialized agencies also would be involved in such questions. Therefore, budget forecasts must in future take account of the heavier workload that the Secretariat would be called upon to assume in those fields. The establishment of priorities would be virtually impossible without a budgetary hypothesis, or a series of hypotheses, on which to base an initial approach.

14. Enhanced powers of initiative would enable CPC to act more effectively in carrying out its mandate.

15. Mr. GUPTA (India) said that, although there had been criticism because the report of CPC had been received late, it should be borne in mind that CPC had not concluded its session until after the opening of the Council's session. The report contained a summary of the conclusions of CPC and had been prepared for the convenience of the Council at its request. The basic document relevant to the item under consideration was document E/4793 and Corr.1-4, which had been issued well in advance.

16. With regard to the criticism that the report did not make clear-cut suggestions or recommendations but merely reflected majority and minority views, he pointed out that CPC had not resorted to voting but had always sought to reach a consensus. It could, of course, change that procedure, although he did not think that such a change would serve any useful purpose.

17. Document E/4846/Add.11 did, in fact, contain specific recommendations, in particular in paragraphs 20 to 23, 31, 39 and 40. The Committee's report on the United Nations work programme was a great improvement over its predecessors, largely because better documentation had been provided by the Secretariat and a certain amount of experience in handling that very complex problem had been gained over the years. His delegation commended CPC on its valuable efforts. The presentation of the work programme in document E/4793 and Corr.1-4 was also an improvement over the past years.

18. His delegation was fully aware of the difficulties faced by CPC in discharging its responsibilities with regard to reviewing the work programme and assigning priorities. Better documentation was one way of assisting CPC in overcoming those difficulties. In particular, there should be greater correspondence between the work programme document and the budget performance document.

19. With regard to the proposed interdisciplinary planning advisory teams, his delegation was still not clear about the financing or staffing arrangements contemplated. It had felt considerable concern at the statement in paragraph 40 of document E/4793 that the establishment of the teams would affect a number of the substantive programmes at Headquarters as well as those of the regional economic

commissions and the programmes of UNCTAD and UNIDO and, accordingly, welcomed the Secretariat's assurance that substantive programmes would not, in fact, be affected by the establishment and operation of the teams.

20. He attached great importance to the report on programming and budgets in the United Nations family of organizations.² CPC had been unable to discuss it at its fifth session because the comments of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had not been available. He supported the recommendation, in paragraphs 31 and 39 of document E/4846/Add.11, that CPC should meet to consider the report and the Secretary-General's revised budget estimates for 1971 before the next session of the General Assembly.

21. His delegation endorsed the work programme presented by the Secretary-General in document E/4793 and Corr.1-4, although it had made some detailed comments regarding specific sectors and hoped that the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee would take them into account. With regard to the programme projections for 1972, he agreed with CPC that the Secretary-General should be requested to review them in the light of the objectives to be set for the Second Development Decade.

22. From the documentation available to CPC, it had been clear that some United Nations programmes had not been implemented, even though they had been duly approved by intergovernmental bodies. For example, as pointed out in paragraph 11 of document E/4846, the number of posts envisaged for the Centre for Housing, Building and Planning in 1964 had still not been reached. That general situation must be remedied, and CPC must be kept informed of developments and be told why approved programmes had not been executed. The plea of lack of funds, so often given, was an insufficient explanation.

23. His delegation was preparing a draft resolution on the item and hoped to submit it to the Council shortly.

24. Mr. SKATARETIKO (Yugoslavia) said that the item was extremely complex and important. The Council must decide on an orderly procedure for considering it. It might begin, for example, by taking up the work programme or by discussing the general subject of the future role of CPC as a co-ordinating body, or again it might start by commenting on documentation. Unless some clear procedure was set, the Council might become bogged down in an unnecessary and artificial confrontation. The Committee was a subordinate organ of the Council, and it was not in the latter's interest to embark on a controversial discussion on its value. Since a number of representatives were members of both CPC and the Council, an impossible situation would arise if that approach were adopted.

25. The PRESIDENT said that it was for delegations to adopt the approach which they saw fit.

26. Mr. PIÑERA (Chile) commended the Chairman of CPC on his excellent introduction of the Committee's report. The Council was facing a large-scale problem with

far-reaching implications. The United Nations had a considerable number of co-ordinating bodies of various types, all established in the past four or five years. It was clear that a problem existed, but it lacked definition. Co-ordination served no purpose unless there were definite objectives which it was intended to achieve. Conditions had changed radically during the twenty-five years' life of the United Nations and such bodies as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank had found it necessary to make structural changes to meet the new situation. A process of restructuring had been initiated in the United Nations, but had not yet reached maturity.

27. It would be advisable for CPC to change its procedure and to adopt the practice of voting, rather than always seeking a consensus, so that the major trends of opinion would be more clearly reflected. That would not necessarily lead to a confrontation between developed and developing countries in CPC, for both groups might hold common views on some topic.

28. The points of agreement reached in CPC were negative rather than positive. For example, it generally agreed that there should be no duplication. The point was important but hardly new or decisive. It was also agreed that the independence of the specialized agencies should be respected. While that was a sound general principle, in the United Nations family of organizations overscrupulous respect for the independence of individual agencies could have serious consequences. That was a delicate question which must be very carefully approached. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that most States Members of the United Nations were also members of the specialized agencies.

29. It had been said that the difficulties of CPC in analysing the progress made in the work programme of the United Nations were in many cases due to a lack of information. What was needed was not so much information as decision. While he agreed with the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs that it was extremely difficult to set an order of priorities among such widely different topics as containerization and the status of women, the United Nations could not continue to accord high priority to practically every subject; a more realistic approach was needed. It should be recognized that some questions, although important, did not merit priority, although they should eventually be dealt with. Difficult as the task was, a distinction must be made if any real progress was to be achieved.

30. The matter of budgetary resources should be considered only after objectives had been identified and the structures whereby they were to be achieved determined. It was difficult for the Secretariat to prepare a work programme in view of the restrictions on any expansion in its budget. The assessment of the largest contributor was equivalent to some twenty cents *per capita per annum* and the situation with regard to the assessments of other countries, including his own, was much the same. How could the United Nations undertake to plan for the Second Development Decade when such a ceiling was imposed on the largest contributor? The Organization was operating on the basis of principles which were obsolete even in the developing countries.

² *Ibid.*

31. The statement by the Under-Secretary-General was of fundamental importance. It was clear that ideas regarding programming and budgeting within the United Nations must be revised; the programme should be prepared before the budget. While States could not abdicate their responsibilities for final decisions in that area, greater flexibility must be introduced. It was for United Nations bodies, particularly those active in the Council's sphere of interest, to decide on objectives, after which the Secretariat could indicate how they might be attained. Apart from the problem of programming and budgeting, there were factors, such as the parameters, to which the Under-Secretary-General had referred. His delegation had consistently defended the principle of equitable geographical distribution, but that principle should not preclude recruitment geared to the needs of particular programmes. He agreed on the need for long-term budgetary planning; a two-year period was obsolete—in some countries the period was five or even ten years. He was also in favour of the concept of interdisciplinary teams, as expressed in document E/4846/Add.11. Another parameter was the fact that the social sciences were lagging far behind technological progress and the question of their development was comparatively neglected. The impetus which had led to United Nations action in the field of tax and land reform had petered out; such action should be considered once more. Much attention was being focused on ecology and pollution, but the development of the human environment as a whole must not be overlooked. Included in that broader context were issues such as housing, employment, economic and social development and the distribution of the benefits of progress. Progress in, for example, air travel could lead to bitterness and still deeper division between countries. Therein lay the real problem.

32. The current debate was of the utmost importance for, among others, the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination. As the Chairman of CPC had pointed out, fundamental problems remained unresolved and, if there was to be co-ordination, sectoral objectives and priorities must be established. A revision of structures was essential. His delegation had the impression that some specialized agencies had been defending their own bailiwicks rather than participating in a discussion with the Council. He proposed that a small working group should be established to review the work of CPC and submit a provisional report thereon to the Council.

33. Mr. OLDS (United States of America) suggested that, in the light of the remarks of the Under-Secretary-General and the Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Co-ordination, the Council should proceed to deal with the work programme of the United Nations on the basis of document E/4846/Add.11. The rich and complex issues before the Council deserved the fullest possible consideration in the short time which remained.

34. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should conclude consideration of item 12 at its next meeting and then resume consideration of items 9 and 10.

35. Mr. LISOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that he had no objection to the suggestions of the President and the United States representative.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.