



Eighth session  
Agenda item 52

QUESTION OF A CHANGE IN THE OPENING DATE OF REGULAR  
SESSIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Report of the Fifth Committee

Rapporteur: Mr. H.M. AHSON (Pakistan)

1. By resolution 692 (VII) adopted on 18 December 1952, the General Assembly decided (a) to instruct the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the practical consequences of a change in the opening date of regular sessions of the General Assembly from the third Tuesday in September to another date earlier or later in the year; and (b) to include in the provisional agenda of its eighth session an item entitled "Question of a change in the opening date of regular sessions of the General Assembly".
2. The General Assembly decided at its 435th plenary meeting on 17 September 1953 to allocate the item to the Fifth Committee for consideration and report. As a basis for its review of the question, the Fifth Committee had before it a report of the Secretary-General (A/2436), together with the observations and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as contained in its twentieth report to the eighth session of the General Assembly (A/2553). These reports were considered by the Fifth Committee at its 405th meeting on 16 November 1953.
3. At the outset of its deliberations, the Committee took note of the fact that the Secretary-General had made no proposal for a change in the opening date, nor had any delegation presented any such proposal or suggestion during the current year. It noted also that, for the reasons stated in its report, the Advisory Committee recommended that the existing provision concerning the opening date of

regular sessions of the Assembly should be maintained. The Advisory Committee, however, suggested in its report, although without making a firm recommendation, that a deferment of the opening date, possibly for two weeks, until the first Tuesday in October might be considered, in order to afford more time for preparatory work for the session and, in particular, for the drafting and printing of the annual report of the Economic and Social Council.

4. In the course of the discussion of this matter in the Fifth Committee, a number of delegations expressed support of the Advisory Committee's suggestion that regular sessions of the General Assembly should not open until the first Tuesday in October on the understanding, however, that this would be on an experimental basis for 1954 and that it would not involve a change, at least for the time being, in the existing rules of procedure. Other delegations, while recognizing the advantages of affording rather more time for completion of preparatory work, considered that these would be outweighed by the risk of a split session. The desirability of completing the session in time to allow delegations to return home for Christmas was particularly stressed.

5. It was the opinion of some delegations that it should not be unduly difficult for the General Assembly to complete its work between the first Tuesday in October and the middle of December, thus allowing for a session of ten weeks. This would be especially so if delegations were to be furnished with better documentation and furnished with such documentation in good time. It was suggested, moreover, that deferment of the opening date by two weeks would tend to facilitate the attendance of important government leaders. In the view of these delegations, there was no valid reason for assuming that sessions of the Assembly should necessarily last three months; if delegations exercised adequate self-discipline it should be feasible to begin sessions early in October and to adjourn in sufficient time to enable representatives to return home before Christmas. Indeed, a slightly later opening date might prove in itself an effective means of ensuring that the duration of ordinary sessions was not unnecessarily prolonged.

6. Still other delegations argued that, even if regular sessions were to open at a somewhat later date, delegations would not necessarily be in possession of all relevant documentation, nor were there valid grounds for believing that

Main Committees would begin their work immediately or that they would work more efficiently and expeditiously. No valid conclusions, moreover, could be drawn from an experiment which would be based on the experience of one session only. Indeed, the Assembly had experimented frequently in the past and should now make a serious effort to adhere strictly to its own rules of procedure.

7. The representatives of New Zealand and Australia stated that a session commencing in April would have many advantages from the point of view of their respective Governments and would make it possible for those countries to pay their contributions earlier in the financial year. They would not, however, wish to press the point although desiring to emphasize that the difficulties mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General and of the Advisory Committee were by no means insurmountable.

8. The representative of Iraq proposed that the opening date of the ninth session should be deferred until the fourth Tuesday in September.

9. The representative of Cuba, having formally proposed that the opening date of the ninth session should be deferred until the first Tuesday in October on an experimental basis, this proposal was put to the vote first and was rejected by 25 votes to 14, with 8 abstentions. The proposal of Iraq was also rejected by 24 votes to 19, with 4 abstentions. The recommendation of the Advisory Committee that the existing provision concerning the opening date of the General Assembly should be maintained was then approved by 47 votes to none, with one abstention.

10. In consequence of the foregoing decisions, the Fifth Committee recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following resolution:

QUESTION OF A CHANGE IN THE OPENING DATE OF REGULAR SESSIONS OF  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly,

Noting the report of the Secretary-General concerning the question of a change in the opening date of regular sessions of the General Assembly (A/2436);

Noting also the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions as contained in its twentieth report to the eighth session of the General Assembly (A/2553);

Concurs in the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions that the existing provision in the rules of procedure concerning the opening date of the General Assembly sessions should be maintained.