



General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
21 March 2002

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 44th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 6 March 2002 at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Effah-Apenteng (Ghana)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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02-27433 (E)

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Agenda item 132: Financing of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994
(*continued*)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Organization of work

1. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), speaking as coordinator of the Group of 77 and China for Fifth Committee matters, said that the proposed programme of work seemed to indicate a change in the procedure for discussion of reports. She would like to know why the reports of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), which had been requested at the previous session, were not being considered and when their consideration would be scheduled.

2. **The Chairman** said that the changes in the proposed programme of work were exceptions because of the short time available at the current part of the Assembly's fifty-sixth session and were not meant to set a precedent.

3. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) noted that no discussion had been scheduled on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). He wished to express his delegation's dissatisfaction with the late issuance of reports, which in some cases appeared to be premeditated.

4. **The Chairman** said that he took it that the Committee approved the proposed programme of work for the first part of the resumed session, on the understanding that adjustments would be made, as necessary, during the course of the session.

5. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 122: Programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 (continued)

Integrated Management Information System project (continued) (A/56/602 and Add.1 and A/56/684)

6. **The Chairman** drew attention to the thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the Integrated Management Information System project contained in documents A/56/602 and Add.1 and A/56/684 and proposed that the item be referred to the informal consultations.

7. *It was so decided.*

Construction of additional office facilities at Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa (continued) (A/56/672 and A/56/711)

8. **The Chairman**, in the absence of any statements, proposed that consideration of the item be taken up in informal consultations.

9. *It was so decided.*

Standards of accommodation for air travel (continued) (A/54/382, A/55/488, A/56/7, A/56/426 and A/56/630)

10. **Ms. Ferrena-Mahmud** (Chief of the Oversight Support Unit, Department of Management), responding to earlier questions from the representative of Pakistan regarding exceptions to the standards of accommodation for air travel, said that the number of exceptions and their cost had decreased over the years, mainly as a result of controls and administrative oversight. However, it was not possible to predict the need for exceptions on medical grounds or for eminent persons, which varied from year to year according to circumstances. The practice had been to omit from the report the names of individuals who had been granted exceptions on medical grounds out of concern for their privacy.

11. **Mr. Bronner** (Chief of the Travel and Transportation Service, Office of Central Support Services), in answer to earlier questions regarding reimbursement, said that the Office of Central Support Services (OCSS) tried to identify the lowest airfares available from Headquarters. If a lower fare was available locally, the traveller could purchase the ticket and be reimbursed, usually during the stay at Headquarters if all documentation was available. While the time needed to process a claim had recently been reduced, some delays still occurred in receiving the necessary authorizations. Further details on procedures could be provided on request. The Office would also be grateful if lower local airfares were brought to its attention.

12. **The Chairman** said that the item would be taken up in informal consultations the following day.

Agenda item 123: Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (continued)

Simultaneous availability of parliamentary documentation in electronic form in the six official languages on the United Nations web site (A/C.5/56/12)

Review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information (A/C.5/56/17)

Languages used for preparation of documents and publications of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (A/C.5/56/19)

13. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) asked why parliamentary documentation in the six official languages was not simultaneously available on the United Nations web site, despite assurances that it would be.

14. **Mr. Chandra** (India) said that his delegation concurred with the Advisory Committee's recommendation that public information activities in the Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information should be included in the comprehensive review of such activities to take place at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

15. **Mr. Blinder** (Director of the Information Technology Services Division, Office of Central Support Services) said that the Official Document System (ODS) had the capability to store and provide access to documents in all six official languages simultaneously. The availability of documents on the web site, however, was a different matter. Public access to the ODS, which was governed by General Assembly resolution 51/211 F, was on a fee-for-service basis. In his report (A/C.5/56/12), the Secretary-General proposed that the restriction on access should be lifted to allow links from the web sites to ODS. All documents stored would then be available through the United Nations web site.

16. **Mr. Oduyemi** (Executive Officer, Department of Public Information) said that the comments regarding information activities outside the Department and the concerns of ACABQ would be taken into account in the preparation of the comprehensive review of public information activities that was currently under way under the coordination of the Deputy Secretary-General.

17. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic), noting that General Assembly resolution 56/242 called for distribution of documents simultaneously in all six official languages, asked whether the Administration had taken the necessary measures to comply with that requirement. The report on the review of public information activities in the United Nations Secretariat outside the Department of Public Information (A/C.5/56/17) should have provided more details of the language-related aspects of those activities. For example, most of the information on the web site of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) was in English, even though the Commission's target groups were mainly Arabic-speaking.

18. **Mr. Chandra** (India), acknowledging the efforts of the Department of Public Information to streamline the Organization's publications, requested that the Department inform the Committee on Information when its review was ready so that the Committee on Information could consider it. The Fifth Committee would act in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee on Information.

19. **Mr. Blinder** (Director of the Information Technology Services Division, Office of Central Support Services) said that the full multilingual version of the Official Document System (ODS) had been in operation since 4 February 2002 and that documents should be available in the system simultaneously in all six official languages. However, he would find out whether there had been problems regarding availability in any particular language.

20. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), speaking as coordinator of the Group of 77 and China for Fifth Committee matters, expressed deep concern about the information circular on budget constraints and support service reductions (ST/IC/2002/13). Some of the measures outlined in the circular were in contravention of General Assembly resolutions 56/254 on the programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 and 56/242 on pattern of conferences, as well as of other relevant resolutions, rules and regulations. The General Assembly had rejected proposals to cut back services, particularly conference services, which directly affected Member States and regional groups and which were necessary if the increasing demands of the Organization's work were to be met. The service reductions outlined in the circular were an inappropriate reaction to the cuts in the budget, yet the

budget decision of the General Assembly was being cited to justify the reductions.

21. No distinction should be drawn between the General Assembly and the Main Committees in terms of conference services. Reductions in services for the Main Committees would compromise the work of the General Assembly and weaken the Assembly in relation to the other principal organs of the United Nations. The measures outlined in the circular, which disregarded the validity of current practice for the provision of conference services and had been put in place without the approval of the General Assembly, had already resulted in the cancellation of several meetings of the Group of 77 and China.

22. Even though it had supported the proposals of the Secretary-General in the budget negotiations, the Group of 77 and China remained concerned about the negative impact of arbitrary cutbacks on the Organization's mandated activities resulting from the policies of zero nominal growth and zero real growth. The current situation was not justified, despite the fact that it was partly a result of the budget cuts, and, should it continue, it would hamper the ability of the Group of 77 and China and other regional groups to contribute effectively to forthcoming summits and meetings of United Nations bodies. Given the international and multilateral character of the Organization and the equal rights of all Member States, such a situation would be unacceptable. A representative of the Secretariat should urgently clarify the situation and those service reductions already in place which directly affected Member States should be reversed immediately. The issue should also be discussed further in informal consultations.

23. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic), endorsing the statement made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the service reductions had resulted in a lower level of heating in the building, which could put people at risk of illness. Both Secretariat staff and Member States were concerned about the situation. The information circular detailing the reductions was unacceptable and infringed upon the authority of the General Assembly. Indeed, the language it employed was much stronger than that agreed upon by the General Assembly after its lengthy discussions on resolution 56/242. His delegation would not accept the continuation of the service reductions or any other cutbacks, particularly

those which affected the Integrated Management System (IMIS), ODS or electronic mail.

24. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that, in introducing his proposed total budget of some \$2.7 billion some months previously, the Secretary-General had made it clear that further cuts in the budget would compromise the Secretariat's ability to deliver the services expected of it. However, following the Advisory Committee's review of the Secretary-General's proposals and the unanimous recommendation of the Fifth Committee, the General Assembly had approved a budget of \$2.625 billion and had stipulated cuts in specific operational areas which seemed to have no programmatic or analytical justification. The Secretariat was obliged to work within the limits of that budget and, since the General Assembly had also reaffirmed that there should be no deliberate management decisions to keep posts vacant in order to achieve budgetary savings, the Secretariat had been unable to identify any areas where savings could be made other than those outlined in the information circular.

25. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba), speaking as coordinator of the Group of 77 and China for Fifth Committee matters, agreed with the Controller that the impact on the budget of decisions made by Member States needed to be given some thought. Nonetheless, the measures which had been put in place were not justified. Even though the General Assembly had indicated clearly that there should be no cuts in areas such as conference services that directly affected Member States, there seemed to be a deliberate intention to make cuts in those very areas. The negative impact on the functioning of the General Assembly and the work of regional groups was not a technical but a political matter. Given that the biennium 2002-2003 was only just beginning, it was difficult to understand why cuts in services were already being made. A more detailed explanation was required and, in the meantime, those services that directly affected the work of Member States should be restored immediately.

26. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that Member States had drawn on the Secretariat's expertise in their discussions on the budget and the Secretariat had joined in the consensus. The Secretariat should have informed Member States during the discussions that the proposed budget cuts would result in the specific service reductions outlined in the information circular. Those service reductions were selective and

imbalanced. Moreover, it had been agreed that the same level of cuts would be applied to every department. To his knowledge, the budget of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the current biennium was not significantly lower than for the previous biennium. The Controller should provide the Committee with the relevant figures so that a comparison could be made in informal consultations.

Agenda item 131: Financing of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991 *(continued)*

Agenda item 132: Financing of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994 *(continued)*

Revised estimates resulting from the strengthening of the role of internal oversight services at the International Tribunals for the biennium 2002-2003 (continued) (A/C.5/56/30/Add.1)

27. **The Chairman** said that, in the absence of any comments, he would take it that the Committee wished to conclude its general discussion of the revised estimates resulting from the strengthening of the role of internal oversight services at the International Tribunals for the biennium 2002-2003 contained in document A/C.5/56/30/Add.1.

28. *It was so decided.*

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.