



International Atomic Energy Agency

GENERAL CONFERENCE

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THIRTY-SECOND (1988) REGULAR SESSION

GENERAL COMMITTEE

RECORD OF THE FIFTY-THIRD MEETING

Held at the Austria Center Vienna
on Thursday, 22 September 1988, at 9.35 a.m.

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[*] GC(XXXII)/856.

ATTENDANCE AT THE MEETING

Chairman

Mr. HALIM (Malaysia), President of the General Conference

Members

Mr. AAMODT (Norway), Vice-President of the General Conference

Mr. AL NUWAISER (Saudi Arabia), Vice-President of the General Conference

Mr. ZANNAD (Tunisia), Vice-President of the General Conference

Mr. ZOBOV, representing Mr. PROTSENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Vice-President of the General Conference

Mr. STOIBER, representing Mr. SALGADO (United States of America), Vice-President of the General Conference

Mr. LAVIÑA (Philippines), Chairman of the Committee of the Whole

Mr. NANIOV, representing Mr. PANDEV (Bulgaria), Additional Member

Mr. SHENSTONE (Canada), Additional Member

Mr. VILLARREAL SILVA, representing Mr. LASERNA-PINZON (Colombia), Additional Member

Mr. CASTILLO CONTOUX (Guatemala), Additional Member

Mr. SMALL, representing Mr. FITZGERALD (Ireland), Additional Member

Mr. HOOP (Liechtenstein), Additional Member

Mr. OLUMOKO, representing Mr. CHIKELU (Nigeria), Additional Member

Mr. LOOSCH (Federal Republic of Germany), Chairman of the Board of Governors

Mr. HADDAD (Syrian Arab Republic)

Secretariat

Mr. SANMUGANATHAN, Secretary of the Committee

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONFERENCE

(c) TIMING OF CONFERENCE SESSIONS (GC(XXXII)/GEN/73) (resumed), and

(d) REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE'S WORKING PRACTICES (GC(XXXII)/GEN/74)

1. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that an initial exchange of views had taken place the previous day on the Syrian proposal relating to the timing of Conference sessions; however, no conclusion had been reached, since it had swiftly become apparent that the proposal also touched upon the question of reviewing the Conference's working practices, which was the subject of agenda item 4(d). He therefore proposed that the two items be discussed together.

2. He added that his short experience as President of the General Conference had clearly demonstrated to him the need for a concerted effort on the part of Member States to arrive at a solution which would facilitate the work of the General Conference. The inability of certain groups to agree early enough on their nominees for the General Committee and the increasingly frequent occasions on which it had been necessary to suspend the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference in order to constitute that body, were only two examples showing the need to review working practices. Since the General Conference was to close the following evening, it was unlikely that the General Committee would be able to examine the question thoroughly and submit specific recommendations to the current session. While the Secretariat was ready to lend assistance, it was ultimately the responsibility of Member States to agree on any revised working practices. One might envisage, as the Secretariat had suggested in paragraph 5 of document GC(XXXII)/GEN/74, the creation of a working group to examine such questions, taking into account the fact that many interested countries, such as the Syrian Arab Republic, did not have a Permanent Mission in Vienna but nevertheless wished to contribute to the streamlining of the working practices of the General Conference.

3. Mr. STOIBER (United States of America) said he had examined the Syrian proposal carefully and appreciated such an initiative aimed at streamlining the work of the General Conference. However, his Government could not endorse it for several reasons.

4. Essentially, the proposal would involve prolonging the annual sessions of the General Conference by at least two days. Delegations would thus have to spend more time in Vienna to examine the various problems which would be laid before them. The United States Government was not absolutely convinced of the usefulness and desirability of such a solution. The General Conference had to date always succeeded in keeping to the strict time-limits that it had been forced at times to set itself, by submitting to the requisite discipline; and in that way it had achieved very positive results within the time allotted to it. It had always taken pride in its ability to complete all its work while meeting for only one week a year, and it was thanks to that self-discipline on the part of its policy-making organs that the Agency enjoyed the reputation of being one of the best managed and most efficient organizations in the United Nations system.

5. With regard to the economic implications of the proposal, the financial repercussions as calculated by the Secretariat did not seem excessive at first sight, but that did not alter the fact that his country was not prepared to take on the costs which would be incurred by prolonging the stay of a relatively large delegation in Vienna. Certain regional groups had declared that they had encountered difficulties in choosing their nominees for various offices in good time, and that they therefore needed more time at the beginning of the session to solve those various problems. However, those groups might meet on the Friday or the weekend before the session of the General Conference. He saw no reason for awaiting the decision of certain regional groups which were unable to keep to the same discipline as others. It was up to those groups themselves, and not to the General Conference, to solve that problem.

6. With regard to the difficulties encountered by small delegations in attending parallel sessions, his delegation viewed them with sympathy; however, technical and scientific meetings were not aimed at the same audience as meetings on general policy, such as the plenary meetings and the meetings of the Committee of the Whole, and it was up to Governments to choose carefully the type and number of participants they would send to the General Conference, if they wanted to make full use of the opportunity given them to contribute to international nuclear co-operation. Those were the solutions

which would allow resources and available time during the sessions to be turned to the maximum advantage. Improvements often being more trouble than they were worth, he would advise against making significant changes in the functioning of the General Conference which might risk diverting it from its proper objectives. Consequently, he was unable to support the proposal before the Committee.

7. Mr. SHENSTONE (Canada) said that the General Committee did not have enough time to discuss in detail the question of streamlining the working practices of the General Conference. He therefore supported the idea that a working group be set up to examine the various solutions, some of which undoubtedly would contribute to improving the work of the General Conference. However, with regard to the timing and duration of sessions of the General Conference, his own reaction was very similar to that of the representative of the United States, namely that it did not seem desirable to make the envisaged changes.

8. Mr. ZANNAD (Tunisia) recalled that the developing countries, which were neither in the same position nor guided by the same motivations as the developed countries, did not all have representatives in Vienna and could therefore not follow Agency activities on a regular basis and arrange consultations on the various agenda items for the General Conference. When delegations arrived in Vienna, it was therefore necessary to bring them up to date with developments which had occurred during their absence and, consequently, to organize meetings of the various regional groups to discuss, amongst other things, draft resolutions to be submitted to the General Conference. The developing countries had also to consider the nominations to be presented for elections to the Board of Governors, a difficult task in view of the very limited number of seats allotted to those countries which did not, in contrast with the developed countries, have permanent seats. Those deliberations were long and sensitive and often required many hours of consultations. All such meetings were in the interest of the General Conference and constituted an integral and promotive aspect of its work. Indeed, plenary meetings or meetings of the Committee of the Whole had often been suspended or held up because certain countries had not been able to agree upon the draft resolutions or the choice of nominees to be put forward on

behalf of the regional groups. Such consultations represented no additional cost, since the General Conference had to finish its work in any event, even if one or two supplementary days or night sessions should be necessary.

9. Nevertheless, he did appreciate the arguments advanced by certain delegations with regard to the financing of the proposed solutions. He thought it was quite feasible, with a little imagination, to find an immediate solution which would avoid the sessions of the General Conference having to be extended over more than five days. A consensus might emerge fairly soon, since many delegations were already convinced of the need to give the maximum number of countries the chance to express their views and contribute as effectively as possible to the work of the General Conference. It was not at all in the interest of the Agency to have two categories of delegations working at different speeds, with one constantly trying to catch up with the other without ever being able to do so.

10. Mr. OLUMOKO (Nigeria) pointed out that the Agency had been established to be of service to Member States, and that it was therefore quite in order for the latter to give their opinions on its functioning. It was possible that the working practices of the General Conference were no longer suited to the current situation. Since it seemed apparent that the General Committee did not have the time to deal with the question during the current session, he supported the idea that a working group be set up to examine the problem during the coming year and report to the General Conference at its thirty-third regular session.

11. Mr. AAMODT (Norway) thanked the Secretariat for the document it had prepared, which contained some interesting ideas of which Norway approved, and others which required clarification or further work. For that reason he supported the idea that a working group be established, whose composition would be fixed in consultations held by the President of the General Conference, to examine ideas on streamlining working practices before the thirty-third regular session of the General Conference. In any event, the prolonging of General Conference sessions was not at all desirable.

12. Mr. ZOBOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he understood and sympathized with the ideas which lay behind the proposal that the working practices and timing of General Conference sessions be reviewed. Given that

the proposal might not come into effect until the 1990 session, it was not urgent that a decision be taken on it. Interested delegations should have sufficient time to study the problems involved, and to engage in consultations amongst themselves and with the Secretariat. He endorsed in large part the proposals that the Secretariat had submitted in document GC(XXXII)/GEN/74. With regard to the idea of setting up a working group to examine the matter, he thought there was no point in taking a decision on the constitution of such a group as long as the General Conference had not approved even the principle of holding consultations.

13. Mr. VILLARREAL SILVA (Colombia), as the representative of a small country, felt that the sessions of the General Conference should be kept as short as possible. Nevertheless, he had taken note of all the arguments put forward in support of the proposal to extend the length of General Conference sessions. It was true that if a country wished to attend all the meetings and sessions it had to send a fairly large delegation. Such a solution naturally involved additional costs which many small countries could not afford. For that reason, he supported the establishment of a working group which would submit its recommendations to the next regular session of the General Conference.

14. The CHAIRMAN invited the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic who was attending the meeting, under Rule 43 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Conference, to take the floor.

15. Mr. HADDAD (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he wished to make a few comments in support of his proposal. First of all, a number of Member States which took part in all the work of the General Conference were only represented in Vienna during the General Conference, and some delegations comprised only two or three persons. The number of Agency Member States had, moreover, increased considerably since the time when the General Conference could easily complete its work in five days, and the General Conference had been obliged more than once to prolong its session by one or two days. The number of items on the agenda continued to increase year by year, and the numerous meetings and density of events created a tense atmosphere for all participants. A more normal work rhythm would help achieve consensus on many questions.

16. With regard to the general debate, and the often repetitive nature of the statements made in it, he proposed that only half the Member States should actually speak each year, but all Members being given the opportunity to submit written statements describing their activities in the nuclear field. The statements in plenary sessions should, moreover, contain only evaluations and proposals relating to the activities of the Agency. If, in spite of those measures, the timetable of the General Conference remained too full, it might be best to arrange night meetings for the last two days of the session to avoid it being extended.

17. In conclusion, he thanked the Chairman for having given him the floor, particularly since he was not sure whether he would be able to participate in the meetings of a possible working group.

18. Mr. Al NUWAISER (Saudi Arabia) lent his full support to the important proposal by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, laying particular emphasis on the difficulties of countries which had no Permanent Mission in Vienna. He was in favour of setting up a working group, to include representatives of all the geographical groups, which would be entrusted with the task of examining ideas relating to the streamlining of the working practices of the General Conference.

19. Mr. SMALL (Ireland) said that, though the General Conference was right to review its working practices periodically, it must not lose sight of the fact that the Syrian proposal would involve significant expenditure for the Austrian Government, the Agency and delegations themselves. For that reason, he supported the establishment of a working group, made up of people who had a broad experience of the Agency, to review ideas relating to the streamlining of the working practices of the General Conference.

20. Mr. LAVIÑA (Chairman of the Committee of the Whole), speaking in his capacity as the representative of the Philippines, supported the proposal that an open-ended working group be set up to examine ideas relating to the streamlining of the working practices of the General Conference.

21. The CHAIRMAN noted that a consensus appeared to be emerging in favour of establishing a working group to continue discussion of the problem, and to report to the General Conference in 1989. With regard to the group's

composition, he proposed that the General Committee authorize him to hold consultations with members of the various regional groups with a view to setting up a small but representative group, open to all those who would wish to participate, whether in person or in writing.

22. It was so decided.

ISSUE OF SUMMARY RECORDS

23. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the fact that, during the lengthy consultations which had preceded the preparation of the Agency's programme and budget for 1989 and 1990, it had become apparent that major savings could be made if the summary records of the meetings of all the Agency's policy-making organs, including of course the General Conference, were issued only once, any corrections being issued separately in a single corrigendum. The Agency's budget for 1989 had already been drawn up on that basis. Rule 89 of the General Conference's Rules of Procedure would need to be modified accordingly. Nevertheless, he suggested that the General Committee recommend to the General Conference that it adopt forthwith the proposed practice regarding the issue of summary records.

24. It was so decided.

NEXT MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

25. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that, under the provisions of Rule 28 of the Rules of Procedure, the General Committee had to meet again as a credentials committee. He suggested that that meeting should take place the same day, at 5.30 p.m.

26. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.