



General Assembly

Sixty-seventh session

First Committee

1st meeting

Friday, 5 October 2012, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

Chair: Mr. Percaya (Indonesia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

It was so decided.

Statement by the Chair

The Chair: Let me begin by extending a very warm welcome to all delegations participating in the work of the First Committee this year. I look forward to working closely with each and every one of them in the weeks ahead. As in previous years we have a full agenda, and I am convinced that we also have the necessary will and commitment to conduct our work in a cooperative, efficient and expeditious manner.

Agenda item 5

Election of the Officers of the Main Committees

Election of one Vice-Chair

The Chair: I should like to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that we have one more Vice-Chair position to fill. As members will recall, we received no nomination from the African Group for that position on 4 September, when other members of the Bureau were elected. I am delighted to report to the Committee that the Chair of the African Group, in a letter to the Secretary-General dated 21 September 2012, confirmed that the Group has endorsed Mr. Salim Mohamed Salim of Kenya to fill the remaining position of Vice-Chair of the First Committee this year. Since this candidate has been endorsed by the African Group unanimously, may I take it that the Committee wishes to elect him by acclamation as Vice-Chair of the First Committee at its sixty-seventh session?

The Chair: I warmly congratulate Mr. Salim Mohamed Salim on his election as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

In fulfilling my responsibility to guide the work of the First Committee to a successful conclusion this year, I count on the usual cooperation and goodwill of all delegations. I am also confident that I can rely on the support of all members of the Bureau, namely, the three Vice-Chairs, Mr. Dovydas Špokauskas of Lithuania, Mr. Alexis Aquino of Peru and Mr. Salim Mohamed Salim of Kenya, as well as the Rapporteur, my dear friend Mr. Knut Langeland of Norway. I have no doubt whatsoever that the Committee will benefit tremendously from their collective wisdom. Indeed, I am certain that the Committee will continue to receive the full support of the Office for Disarmament Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, headed by High Representative Angela Kane and Under-Secretary-General Jean-Jacques Graise, respectively.

Organization of work

The Chair: I wish to draw the Committee's attention to document A/C.1/67/1, containing a letter from the President of the General Assembly dated 21 September 2012 and addressed to me. The letter highlights the decisions pertaining to the allocation of items to the First Committee taken by the General Assembly at its 2nd plenary meeting, held the same day. At that meeting, the Assembly decided to allocate

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21 agenda items to the First Committee for consideration during the session, of which 17, namely, items 86 to 102, relate to disarmament and international security issues.

I will now highlight the details of the Committee's programme of work as outlined in document A/66/421.

As will be recalled, the Committee adopted this programme of work on 31 October last year in the context of its consideration of the item on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Subsequently, the Assembly, by its decision 66/519 of 2 December 2011, adopted the programme of work. In keeping with the Committee's working methods, it has now been issued as a document of the First Committee under the symbol number A/C.1/67/CRP.1 and is now before the Committee. Members will note that documents A/66/421 and A/C.1/67/CRP.1 contain the same information on the programme of work, except for a slight difference in the number of days allocated to the second and third phases of our work. I will explain that shortly.

The programme of work and the timetable itself were prepared in keeping with the Committee's established practice, taking into account a number of initiatives proposed over the past several years, including General Assembly decision 52/416 B, on the rationalization of the work of First Committee. Also taken into account in this regard was paragraph 36 of the annex to Assembly resolution 51/241, which reads as follows:

"The First Committee and the Fourth Committee shall not meet simultaneously and may consider meeting in a sequential manner during the regular session of the General Assembly."

Accordingly, the meetings of the First Committee this year, as in previous years, have been scheduled either in the morning or in the afternoon except on Monday 22 October, where both morning and afternoon meetings are scheduled, as members may have noticed from the provisional programme of work and timetable before the Committee. I wish to clarify that this was done with the agreement of the Chairs of both the First and the Fourth Committees.

The First Committee will commence its substantive work next week, on Monday, 8 October. It will hold a total of 24 meetings to consider the agenda items allocated to it and will conclude its work by 7 November, in accordance with the recommendations of the General Committee set out in paragraph 12 of document A/67/250.

The First Committee will also consider and take action on its tentative programme of work for the 2013 session in accordance with agenda item 116, concerning the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

As members know, item 131, on programme planning, has been allocated to all the Main Committees, as well as the Assembly plenary, in a continuing effort to enhance the discussion of evaluation, planning, budgeting and monitoring reports. The First Committee will take up this item if the Assembly assigns any report to it.

In accordance with the First Committee's established practice, and as currently reflected in the provisional programme of work for this session, the Committee will conduct its work this year in three phases, namely, the general debate on all items, thematic discussion on specific subjects and action on all draft resolutions. I shall comment briefly on what we should expect under each of these segments.

The first phase, the general debate on all items, will run from 8 to 16 October for a total of seven meetings. Please note that during this phase of our work the exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament is scheduled to take place during our morning meeting on 15 or 16 October, right after we have exhausted the list of speakers from Member States.

The exchange with the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs on follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at its previous sessions and presentation of reports will be held on Tuesday, 16 October. In this regard, I would ask the Secretariat to make the necessary arrangements for the high-level officials to come to New York and take part in our meeting, which we expect will take place around 15 or 16 October.

As members will recall, the Committee previously held the exchange with the High Commissioner and other high-level officials in the field of arms control and disarmament at the beginning of the second phase of its work on thematic discussions.

The decision to reschedule this exchange to the beginning of the general debate this year was made by the Committee during its sixty-sixth session in 2011 and was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly in its decision 66/519 of 2 December.

To maximize the time available to us during the general debate phase, I propose that we maintain the practice of using a rolling list of speakers, which is currently open to all delegations wishing to take the floor. I am aware that a considerable number of delegations have already inscribed their names on the list, and I invite those intending to speak who have not yet inscribed their names to do so as soon as possible. It is my intention, with the concurrence of members, to close the list of speakers for the general debate on Tuesday, 9 October, at 6 p.m. I repeat, it is my intention, with the concurrence of members, to close the list of speakers for the general debate on Tuesday, 9 October, at 6 p.m.

I should also like to remind all delegations inscribing their names on the list to keep in mind that a rolling list implies that they should be prepared to intervene at any time, possibly even one meeting sooner than they had planned. To make the most efficient use of the resources allocated to us, I wish to urge all delegations taking the floor to adhere to the Committee's usual practice of limiting statements to a maximum of 10 minutes when speaking in a national capacity and 15 minutes when speaking on behalf of groups of delegations.

In this regard, I invite all delegations with relatively long statements to deliver a concise summary of their text and submit the full statement in written form for posting on the First Committee web portal QuickFirst. I hope all delegations are familiar with the procedure for accessing the web portal. For those who need assistance in that regard, kindly contact the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Sergei Cherniavsky, on my left, or the Deputy Secretary, Ms. Sonia Elliot, who is behind me.

As I mentioned earlier, and in accordance with the Committee's established practice, the second phase of the Committee's work will focus on a structured thematic discussion of specific subjects relating to the disarmament and international security agenda items allocated to it, as well as on the introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions and decisions submitted under those items. This segment will run from 17 to 30 October, for a total of 10 meetings.

Members will notice that it was allocated 10 days in document A/C.1/67/CRP.1, as opposed to nine days in the initial programme of work in A/66/421. The extra day is deemed necessary because experience has shown that at this stage of the Committee's work there is usually a considerable number of delegations waiting to introduce draft resolutions. It is therefore important

to reserve ample time to accommodate all such requests before moving on to the action phase. However, should the Committee complete the general debate segment ahead of schedule — before the end of Tuesday, 16 October — we will decide at that time whether to start the thematic discussion segment immediately or stick to the original schedule.

In line with the Committee's established practice, an indicative timetable for our thematic discussion contained in document A/C.1/67/CRP.2 has been circulated to all delegations and has also been posted on Quickfirst. As in previous years, the Committee's meetings during the thematic segment will be divided into two parts. The first will begin in formal mode with a panel or guest speaker, as applicable, followed by an informal question-and-answer session. The second part will be in formal mode and will consist of interventions by delegations on the items under consideration and the introduction of draft resolutions.

Also in line with established practice, the Committee will deliberate in an informal mode when considering the following topics: panel discussion on regional disarmament and security on 24 October, panel discussion on disarmament machinery on 25 October, meeting with non-governmental-organization participation on 29 October, and follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Committee at its past session and the presentation of reports on 24 October.

I have been informed that the President of the General Assembly has expressed interest in addressing the First Committee at some point during our thematic segment. I shall duly inform the Committee once we have confirmation of the day and time for his statement.

This year, we will continue with the electronic submission of draft resolutions introduced at the sixty-third session. The Secretariat will provide further details concerning the submission process in the technical briefing directly following this meeting, and I encourage all delegations to remain in the room for this essential briefing.

To facilitate the Committee's work, especially in terms of providing sufficient time to delegations for consultations and also to ensure that the Secretariat has the requisite time frame for processing draft resolutions in all languages, I should like to propose, following consultations with the Bureau, that the deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and decisions be Thursday, 18 October, at noon. That submission deadline

is also necessary in order to allow time to produce, as early as possible and in all official languages, all other draft documents usually issued under the “L” symbol series for the consideration of delegations.

I therefore appeal to all delegations to adhere strictly to the submissions deadline of noon on Thursday, 18 October. I would even encourage delegations to submit draft resolutions and decisions before the stipulated deadline, if possible, to allow enough time for all delegations to seek instructions from their capitals when necessary, so that the texts finally adopted will reflect the highest possible degree of agreement.

It is especially important that delegations submit as early as possible all draft resolutions that might entail programme budget implications so as to enable the Secretariat to prepare in a timely manner the necessary statements reflecting those implications.

Furthermore, I would like to remind all delegations that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee require time to review the programme budget implications of any draft resolution before it can be acted upon by the General Assembly. In this connection, I draw the attention of delegations to the guidance of the General Committee contained in its report to the General Assembly (A/67/250). In paragraphs 43 and 44 of that report, the General Committee reaffirms that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters. It also reaffirms the role of ACABQ in that context.

In paragraph 44 of its report, the General Committee further draws the attention of the General Assembly to the views expressed by the ACABQ on the use of the phrase “within available resources”, as set out in document A/54/7. Accordingly, I kindly request delegations to avoid using the phrase “within existing resources” in draft resolutions or decisions of the First Committee.

The third and last phase of the work of the Committee — action on all draft resolutions and decisions — will cover the period from Wednesday, 31 October, to Wednesday, 7 November, with a total of six meetings scheduled for this purpose, as indicated in the programme of work contained in document A/C.1/67/CRP.1. As members will notice once more, the time frame allocated to this phase in the earlier programme

of work in document A/66/421 was slightly different. This discrepancy, as I explained earlier, resulted from the one-day increase in the number of days allocated to the second phase of our work, the thematic discussion.

With regard to voting, I propose that the Committee retain the procedure we have followed in previous years, by which draft resolutions are grouped in clusters based on the seven agreed clusters outlined in the 5 November 2004 letter from the First Committee Chair to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, pursuant to paragraph 3 of annex C to resolution 58/316, on further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Those clusters are: nuclear weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, outer space (disarmament aspects), conventional weapons, regional disarmament and security, other disarmament measures and international security, and disarmament machinery. I will provide the Committee with further information on this final phase of our work closer to its beginning.

Allow me to observe at this point that last year the Committee concluded the final phase of its work in five meetings, adopting 48 resolutions and five decisions. This year we have six meetings allocated for that purpose. With your full and active support and cooperation, I am confident that we will also be able to take action expeditiously on all draft resolutions and decisions that will come before the Committee this year in order to conclude our work within the time available to us, or even earlier.

May I take it that the Committee wishes to proceed in accordance with the proposed programme of work and timetable contained in documents A/66/421 and A/C.1/67/CRP.1 and A/C.1/67/CRP.2?

It was so decided.

The Chair: At this point, I draw members' attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly relating to the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in decision 34/401, especially the provisions dealing with explanations of vote, the right of reply and budgetary and financial questions, which I intend to apply, with the cooperation of all members of the First Committee.

In order to make full use of the time and facilities allocated to the Committee, I intend — and will give it my best try — to begin our meetings promptly at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. and to end at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m.,

respectively. I am sure that I can count on everyone's support and cooperation in that regard.

I should also like to draw attention to agenda item 5 in document A/67/250, entitled "Election of the officers of the Main Committees", and to rule 99 (a) of the rules of procedure, as amended by resolution 56/509 of 10 July 2002, which reads as follows:

"All the Main Committees shall, at least three months before the opening of the session, elect a Chairman. Elections of the other officers provided for in rule 103 shall be held at the latest by the end of the first week of the session."

In the light of that provision, I propose that the First Committee consider that item sometime in May or June 2013, about three months before the opening of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. May I take it that the Committee wishes to proceed accordingly?

It was so decided.

The Chair: Before I conclude, I should like to reflect briefly on the trend regarding the distribution of documents. As members are well aware, we are witnessing a remarkable shift away from the distribution of United Nations documents on paper, as these documents are increasingly being issued in electronic form, making them more accessible to representatives through the Internet at their respective Permanent Missions and in conference rooms here. Taking advantage of the convenience, quick accessibility and cost-effectiveness offered by this trend, a number of

United Nations committees have already switched to a paperless operation.

Although we are still far from attaining a completely paperless status, I urge the Committee to try to work in paperless mode whenever possible. Delegations can help tremendously by not requesting the Secretariat to pile up all documents in the Conference Room in all languages but instead to request copies of the necessary documentation in a specific language on an individual basis. The Secretariat will maintain the print-on-demand service for delegations in need of specific documents.

Another dependable source is the First Committee web portal QuickFirst, where all documents can be easily and quickly accessed in English through onsite search engines. In this way we are contributing to the greening of the United Nations and saving resources for the Organization. All questions in this regard should be directed to the Secretary of the Committee, Mr. Sergei Cherniavsky, or the Deputy Secretary, Ms. Sonia Elliot.

May I take it that the Committee wishes to proceed accordingly?

It was so decided.

The Chair: In accordance with the proposed programme of work and timetable contained in documents A/66/421 and A/C.1/67/CRP.1, the Committee will begin its substantive work on Monday, 8 October, at 10 a.m. sharp in this Conference Room. I look forward to working closely with all members in the coming weeks.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.