



Agenda item 25: Report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly*

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* For the discussion of this item, see *Official Records of the General Assembly, Eighteenth Session, Plenary Meetings*, 1256th and 1278th meetings; and *ibid.*, *Fifth Committee*, 1043rd and 1044th meetings.

DOCUMENT A/5423

Report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly

[Original text: French]
[28 May 1963]

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Letter of transmittal

27 May 1963

Sir,

I have the honour to refer to resolution 1845 (XVII) of 19 December 1962 by which the General Assembly decided to continue the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly and requested the Committee to transmit to the Secretary-General, by 31 May 1963, a report with recommendations or suggestions for circulation to Member States.

The *Ad Hoc* Committee has now completed its work and I have the honour to transmit to you herewith its report which includes a draft resolution for consideration by the General Assembly at the eighteenth regular session, and several annexes.

Accept, Sir, etc.

(Signed) Muhammad ZAFRULLA KHAN
Chairman of the *Ad Hoc* Committee
on the Improvement
of the Methods of Work of
the General Assembly

His Excellency
U Thant,
Secretary-General of
the United Nations,
New York

I. Introduction

1. By resolution 1845 (XVII), adopted at its 1198th plenary meeting on 19 December 1962 (see annex I), the General Assembly decided to continue the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly with the same membership and terms of reference as those decided on at the 1162nd plenary meeting, and requested the Committee to transmit to the Secretary-General by 31 May 1963 a report, with recommendations or suggestions, for circulation to Member States.

2. The question of a review of the methods of work of the General Assembly was originally raised by Mr. Mongi Slim, President of the Assembly at the sixteenth regular session, who, in his memorandum of 26 April 1962 (A/5123), stressed the need to bring the Assembly's methods of work into line with recent developments in the Organization.

3. It was on the initiative of the Tunisian delegation (A/5165) that the question was placed on the agenda of the seventeenth session. The membership of the *Ad Hoc* Committee to which the Assembly entrusted the problem was as follows: Mr. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (Pakistan), President of the General Assembly at its seventeenth session and Chairman of the Committee the thirteen Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly at its seventeenth session: namely, the heads of the delegations of Australia, Belgium, China, Colombia, France, Guinea, Haiti, Jordan, Madagascar, Romania

the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, the three former Presidents of the General Assembly who were members of the delegations of their countries at the seventeenth session, Mr. Padilla Nervo (Mexico), Mr. Belaúnde (Peru) and Mr. Boland (Ireland) and the head of the delegation of Tunisia (Mr. Mongi Slim). Mr. Boland (Ireland) and Mr. Taieb Slim (Tunisia) were elected Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, respectively.

4. The *Ad Hoc* Committee held its first three meetings during the seventeenth session of the General Assembly. It submitted a preliminary report (A/5370), in which it gave an account of the work done at those meetings and asked the Assembly to authorize it to continue its work after the close of the seventeenth session. That request was approved by the Assembly, which, in its resolution 1845 (XVII), prolonged the Committee's mandate. The Committee held nine meetings between 4 February and 1 March 1963, at which it considered all the suggestions that had been submitted to it. The Committee held eight more meetings from 30 April to 27 May 1963 in order to consider its draft report.

5. Before suspending its work in December 1962, the Committee had agreed that members of the Committee who were unable to attend certain meetings should be entitled to appoint alternates from among the members of their delegation. The following representatives attended meetings of the Committee when it resumed its work:

Australia: Sir James Plimsoll, Mr. Hay, Mr. Curtis.

Belgium: Mr. Loridan, Mr. Forthomme, Mr. Turine, Mr. Bal.

China: Mr. Liu Chieh, Mr. Hsueh, Mr. Loon.

Colombia: Mr. Zea.

France: Mr. Seydoux, Mr. Arnaud, Mr. Plihon, Mr. Combal.

Guinea: Mr. Diallo Telli, Mr. Achkar Marot.

Haiti: Mr. Auguste.

Ireland: Mr. Boland, Mr. O'Sullivan.

Jordan: Mr. Abdul Rifa'i, Mr. Tuqan.

Madagascar: Mr. Andriamaharo, Mr. Ramaholimihaso.

Mexico: Mr. Cuevas Cancino, Mr. Calvillo Treviño, Mr. Carranco Avila.

Pakistan: Mr. Zafrulla Khan, Mr. Hamdani, Mr. Ataullah, Mr. Akhund.

Peru: Mr. Mackehenie, Mr. Fernandini, Mr. Morales.

Romania: Mr. Haseganu, Mr. Jucu.

Tunisia: Mr. Taieb Slim, Mr. Ayari, Mr. Gherib.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: Mr. Morozov, Mr. Fedoseev, Mr. Ostrovsky.

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Sir Patrick Dean, Mr. Crowe, Miss Gutteridge, Mr. Campbell, Mr. Cambridge.

United States of America: Mr. Yost, Mr. Noyes, Mr. Bartlett.

6. In the absence of Mr. Zafrulla Khan, Mr. Boland presided. At certain meetings, Mr. Taieb Slim or Sir James Plimsoll took the Chair.

7. The Secretary-General was represented by Mr. Stavropoulos, the Legal Counsel, Mr. Schreiber, Deputy

Director of the General Legal Division, acted as Secretary of the Committee.

8. The Committee systematically considered all the suggestions which had been submitted at its invitation by Member States. These suggestions came from the following Member States: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Ceylon, China, Congo (Leopoldville), Denmark, France, Greece, India, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Japan, Laos, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, Togo, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Upper Volta. Other suggestions were put forward either in writing or orally by the Chairmen of the Main Committees: Mr. Benites, Mr. Lewandowski, Mr. Kasliwal, Mr. Bannier and Mr. Eustathiades, Chairmen at the seventeenth session of the Special Political Committee and the Second, Third, Fifth and Sixth Committees respectively, and Miss Brooks and Mr. Lannung, Chairmen at the sixteenth session of the Fourth and Fifth Committees respectively. The Committee also had before it a number of working papers prepared by the Secretariat and containing, *inter alia*, statistical data and other information on General Assembly practice (see annex II).

9. The Special Committee was gratified to note the great harmony which prevailed at its meetings. The members of the Committee endeavoured, above all, to approach the study of the methods of work of the General Assembly from a technical angle and to take into account what they believed to be the facts of the situation and the needs of the Assembly at the present stage of the development of the United Nations.

II. Improvement of the methods of work of the General Assembly

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

10. In his memorandum of 26 April 1962 on the work of the General Assembly Mr. Mongi Slim, President of the sixteenth session, had stressed that the two factors which in his view called for a new study of the methods of work of the Assembly were, on the one hand, the substantial increase in the number of Member States in recent years and, on the other, the increase in the number and complexity of the problems regularly brought before the Assembly. Mr. Slim was of the opinion that the organization of sessions and the procedures followed could be adapted to the requirements of the new situation, without entailing any major changes in the rules of procedure. He expressed his conviction that useful reforms could be introduced without "...restricting the opportunities for fruitful discussion likely to produce the thoroughly considered and agreed solutions which are required" (A/5123, para. 3).

11. In studying the methods of work of the General Assembly in accordance with its terms of reference the *Ad Hoc* Committee adopted the same approach. From the many suggestions received in writing by the Committee from Member States and from the oral statements heard by it, it was clear that the issue was not that of a revision of the rules of procedure. The present rules provide an adequate framework for the Assembly's work; they have stood the test of time; they have the great advantage that delegations are

familiar with them; most of the other United Nations organs and many other international agencies have adapted them to their own needs; gaps in them have been filled by practice; and it does not seem necessary at this stage to correct the few flaws of drafting that may have survived the meticulous study made by the organs which preceded this Committee.¹

12. The *Ad Hoc* Committee noted, however, that in many cases sufficient use is not made of the opportunities which are offered by the present rules of procedure if they are applied correctly. In the recommendations that follow the Committee draws the attention of the General Assembly to some of the measures already provided for in the texts which might be resorted to more often with a view to the improvement and better organization of the proceedings at the sessions. Generally speaking, the Committee is of the opinion that the Assembly would gain in efficiency if the possibilities offered by its rules of procedure were better known by those responsible for their application—the presiding officers, the members of delegations and the Secretariat—and if these rules were applied regularly in letter and in spirit.

13. The Committee would like to point out that in the course of its work it refrained from recommending any measures which might have reduced the opportunities for action available to the General Assembly under the Charter. The development of the United Nations has made clear the role which can be played and the influence which must be exercised by the only principal organ of the United Nations having wide powers in which all Member States are represented on an equal footing. The work of the General Assembly is accomplished through the public statements made on behalf of Members, through debates and through the multiple consultations which lead up to the submission of draft resolutions and culminate in their adoption. There should be no question of hampering this diplomatic process of negotiation and decision by imposing unduly rigid limitations. Full account must also be

¹ The provisional rules of procedure of the General Assembly were submitted by the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations in 1945. They were approved by the General Assembly at its first regular session in 1946. That same year, the General Assembly, wishing to save time, appointed by resolution 102 (I) a Committee on Procedures and Organization. In its report (A/388), the Committee proposed many amendments to the text of the rules of procedure. These amendments were approved by the Assembly after detailed consideration by a sub-committee of the Sixth Committee. In 1949 the Assembly, by resolution 271 (III), created a Special Committee on Methods and Procedures of the General Assembly. On the basis of that Committee's report the Assembly adopted a number of amendments to the rules of procedure; it also approved several recommendations and suggestions which now appear as Annex I of the rules of procedure. In 1952 the General Assembly, by resolution 689 A (VII), established a Special Committee on measures to limit the duration of regular sessions of the General Assembly. Some of the Committee's suggestions were accepted by the Assembly, which amended its rules of procedure accordingly.

It should also be noted that in 1951 the General Assembly, by resolution 597 (VI), established a Special Committee for the consideration of the methods and procedures of the General Assembly for dealing with legal and drafting questions. Although its work did not lead to an amendment of the rules of procedure, this Committee submitted certain recommendations in the form of rules to be followed where a question submitted to the Assembly by one of its Main Committees had legal aspects (A/2174). These recommendations, which the Assembly adopted, are embodied in Annex II of the rules of procedure. Lastly, it may be noted that the General Assembly adopted other amendments to its rules of procedure at its second, third, fifth, ninth, eleventh, twelfth and sixteenth sessions.

taken of the need to respect the freedom of expression of delegations which may find themselves in the minority on certain questions while, at the same time, safeguarding the right of majorities to obtain, in conformity with the Charter, the decisions they desire.

14. The Committee nevertheless believes that it is in the interests of both the United Nations and the Member States that the business of the General Assembly should be dispatched as expeditiously as these general considerations permit, that loss of time, from whatever cause it may arise, should be avoided and that, save in exceptional cases, when the international situation so requires, the sessions should not exceed the period of time which is now regarded as normal and which at the seventeenth session amounted to thirteen weeks.

15. Accordingly, the Committee preferred not to accept the suggestions whereby the activities of the General Assembly would be spread over the whole year, or to propose the establishment of new subsidiary organs which might carry on the work of the General Assembly between the regular sessions. It favours the present system of intensive meetings during sessions of a limited duration which enable members of Government, members of Parliament and other authorized spokesmen for national public opinion, diplomats, experts and technicians to come together and exchange views both at meetings and outside the conference rooms.

16. It is in the light of the foregoing considerations that the Committee examined the suggestions made to it by many Member States and a number of Chairmen of Main Committees and that it submits certain observations and recommendations to the General Assembly. The Committee believes that the adoption and consistent application of these recommendations would increase the effectiveness of the present methods of work.

A. ORGANIZATION OF SESSIONS

1. THE GENERAL DEBATE

17. The *Ad Hoc* Committee carefully examined the manner in which what is known as the general debate is conducted at the beginning of each regular session. The debate in fact consists of a series of statements made by most Chairmen of delegations on world problems and the role of the United Nations, in the light of the annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization and reports of other United Nations organs. With the increase in the number of Members, the length of the debate has appreciably increased, from thirteen meetings at the tenth session to twenty-nine meetings at the seventeenth session (see annex III). Because of its enhanced importance and the prominence of the speakers taking part in it, it has had the effect of delaying considerably the start of the work of the Main Committees and of somewhat slowing down that work.

18. The Committee recognizes the value of the general debate, which enables Governments to focus the attention of Member States on important international issues. It also realizes that, in view of the shortness of the time which Heads of Government or Ministers for Foreign Affairs can spend in New York, the general debate must be organized with considerably more flexibility than would otherwise be the case. It was

observed that, if four statements could be made at each meeting and ten meetings could be held each week for the general debate at the opening of the session, it would be possible for the General Assembly to hear 120 statements in three weeks, a figure higher than the present membership of the Organization. The Committee does not recommend three weeks or any other specified period as the absolute limit for the completion of the general debate. It wishes, however, to stress the importance of ensuring that the debate proceeds as speedily as possible in an organized and regular manner and that as little time as possible remains unused during the meetings devoted to it.

19. The Committee noted with approval in that connexion the Secretary-General's practice of inquiring of delegations, by means of a circular letter sent before the opening of the session as to the dates on which they would like to speak. On the basis of the replies, the Secretariat prepares a provisional list of speakers which is submitted to the President of the Assembly for that session soon after he is elected. In the Committee's view it would be desirable that delegations should abstain from reserving more than one date for their statements.

20. In the opinion of the *Ad Hoc* Committee, the President of the Assembly should ensure the successful completion of the general debate in the shortest possible time; thus, if it proves difficult to some delegations to take the floor at a date previously selected by them, the President should use the discretionary powers granted to him under the rules of procedure to determine, in a final manner, the order of speakers. The Committee recommends that, with the consent of the General Assembly, as provided in rule 75 of the rules of procedure, the President should close the list of speakers in the general debate earlier than is done at present, and as soon as he deems it feasible. It is for the President to approach delegations to ascertain whether they are prepared to make their statements earlier or later in order to prevent loss of time at meetings. As soon as the list of speakers is closed, the delegations concerned could be notified of the dates fixed for their interventions, and they should ask the President to make changes only in exceptional circumstances or when they can themselves arrange to change places on the list with other delegations.

21. Delegations should give the President all possible co-operation. They might, for example, try to complete the preparation of their speeches one or two days before the days set for their interventions and thus enable the President to advance that date, with their consent, if there is a gap to be filled in the list of speakers.

2. ORGANIZATION OF WORK OF THE MAIN COMMITTEES

(a) Commencement of work of the Committees

22. The *Ad Hoc* Committee felt that if sessions were not to exceed the normal length of about thirteen weeks, and in order to prevent an accumulation of meetings in December, it was important to avoid, as much as possible, the loss of time early in the sessions (see annex IV). The Committee therefore considers that the Main Committees should begin their work promptly, as soon as the General Assembly has adopted its agenda and the items have been allocated to them for consideration. Thus all the Main Committees,

except the First Committee, should begin work at the latest two working days after they have been notified of their agenda.

23. As regards the First Committee, the *Ad Hoc* Committee recognizes that, as a general rule, that Committee should not meet simultaneously with the plenary when the latter considers political questions. It is, however, important that the First Committee should meet as soon as possible, to organize its work, determine the order of discussion of the items allocated to it and start the systematic consideration of its agenda. At the beginning of the session, such meetings might be held when there is an interruption in the general debate; later, meetings of the plenary might be held during one part of the day, the other part being allocated to the First Committee. The aim should be to enable the First Committee to proceed with its regular work as soon as possible after the opening of the session.

(b) Establishment of work schedules

24. The *Ad Hoc* Committee considers it useful to recommend that each Main Committee should, as soon as possible after the beginning of its discussions, prepare a work schedule which would indicate the approximate dates when the various items allocated to it would be discussed. Schedules of this kind, based on information supplied by the Secretariat, are now submitted to some committees (see annex V). They have the special advantage of informing delegations when the presence of experts on certain questions will be required in New York.

25. The Committee recommends that such schedules should be transmitted to the General Committee as soon as they have been approved by the Main Committees, in order to provide that Committee with an over-all view of the schedule of work for the session, and if necessary to enable it to make appropriate recommendations to the Committees through the plenary Assembly. The General Committee should also, when it seems appropriate, put forward for the approval of the General Assembly a closing date for the work of each Committee.

(c) Grouping of related agenda items

26. The *Ad Hoc* Committee noted the practice in some cases of grouping together all provisional agenda items referring to a single problem. In the past, such groupings have been decided upon by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the General Committee following the adoption of a proposal initiated by the Secretary-General or one of its members; in other instances the Committee concerned took the initiative of regrouping items when adopting its schedule of work. The advantage of this procedure is that there is only one general debate on the question although several draft resolutions, relating to its different aspects, may be submitted. The Committee considered that the Secretary-General, in making his suggestions on the provisional agenda, the General Committee when it makes recommendations on it, and the individual committees when they adopt their work schedules, should bear this possibility in mind, it being understood that the authors of proposals aimed at grouping agenda items should whenever possible consult beforehand the delegations which have proposed those items for inclusion in the General Assembly's agenda, with a view to securing their agreement. The delegation of the Soviet Union pointed out that it considered that the agreement of the delegation or delegations which have proposed the

relevant items for inclusion in the General Assembly's agenda should be required in every particular case before grouping agenda items and holding a single general debate on the question to which the items refer.

(d) *Concurrent consideration of more than one agenda item*

27. The *Ad Hoc* Committee thought that in certain cases where time might be wasted, owing to lack of speakers or the absence of draft resolutions, Committees might well decide to suspend the consideration of an item and take up the next one. That could be done, for instance, when the consideration of any item had to be interrupted to enable delegations to negotiate, or when some delegations were awaiting instructions from their Governments before taking a position.

28. On other occasions, where prolonged negotiations may be expected before agreement can be reached on a draft resolution, it should be possible so to organize the work of the Committee that one meeting a day would be devoted to the examination of one of the Committee's agenda items and another meeting to another item.

(e) *Greater use of sub-committees and working groups*

29. The increase in the number of Members of the United Nations has created a situation in which it frequently happens that more than 100 delegations are present and most of them participate in the debates in the Main Committees. Although the presence of such a large number of delegations involves no practical difficulties when statements of the positions of Governments are being made, it makes it more difficult to discuss concrete points, to have a rapid exchange of views on subjects where ideas differ or to draft and modify texts. The Committee is of the opinion that in many cases the examination of agenda items by the committees would be greatly facilitated if, as soon as possible and especially when the main points of view have been expressed, the committee decided, on the initiative of its Chairman or of one or more of its members, to set up a sub-committee or working group, in conformity with rule 104 of the rules of procedure (98 in the case of the plenary Assembly). This procedure might be particularly helpful when there is general agreement on the question under discussion but disagreement on points of detail.

30. The *Ad Hoc* Committee would recall in this connexion that in the course of the first sessions of the General Assembly frequent use was made of sub-committees and working groups and that they were of great assistance to the General Assembly in the preparation of texts which to this day govern the structures of the United Nations in the formulation of important international instruments and in the solution of difficult political problems (one example is the sub-committee which dealt with the future status of the former Italian colonies). As far back as 1947, the report of the Committee on Procedures and Organization expressed itself on this subject as follows:

"The Main Committees should consider carefully at an early stage in their work how their programmes might be expedited by the establishment of sub-committees. It is, of course, impossible to adopt fixed rules on this matter. If the debate in full committee showed that there was general agreement on the question under discussion but disagreement on points of detail, it would clearly be desirable to set up a

small drafting committee to prepare a resolution for submission to the Main Committee. Technical questions on which there is no substantial disagreement should be referred to sub-committees as quickly as possible. In some cases the work of sub-committees would be facilitated by working informally, and on occasion, in private." (A/388, para. 21.)

31. The sub-committees or working groups could, in most cases, consist of representatives of the delegations with the closest interest in the agenda item, representatives who are especially competent to deal with the problem under discussion and others chosen in such a way as to ensure that the sub-committee or working group will be broadly representative, geographically and politically.

32. These bodies could meet either in public or in private, according to the circumstances, and could either follow formal procedures or discuss matters informally. Their function would be to make it possible for those primarily interested in an item to exchange views, thus facilitating subsequent agreement and compromise solutions; they could prepare draft resolutions or at least formulate alternative solutions; they could appoint rapporteurs to present their conclusions and to give the necessary explanations to the committee which established them. The committee itself would be entirely free to take final decisions but, since all aspects of the problem would have been given minute examination, it would undoubtedly find its own work greatly facilitated both with regard to substance and to the time thus saved. It would also often be possible for the committee to consider other items on its agenda while the sub-committee or working group was carrying out its assignment.

(f) *Items peculiar to certain of the Main Committees*

(i) *Referral of items to the Economic and Social Council*

33. The *Ad Hoc* Committee had before it proposals that economic and social items included in the agenda, which had not been examined previously by the Economic and Social Council, should be referred to the latter before being considered by the Second or Third Committee. It was suggested in that connexion that in urgent cases the Council could examine such items during its resumed second session which is customarily held in November or December.

34. The Committee did not feel that it ought to make any specific recommendation on this subject and confines itself to remarking that the Economic and Social Council might in many cases, by decision of the General Assembly, usefully consider beforehand questions within its competence which are then to be allocated to the Second or Third Committee.

(ii) *Hearing of petitioners*

35. The Committee examined a table showing the amount of time spent by the Fourth Committee during the last three regular sessions in hearing persons who had made statements and replied to questions asked by members on conditions in the territories of concern to the Fourth Committee (see annex VI). Some of those persons had already been heard by subsidiary bodies of the Assembly before the session; some have addressed the Committee on more than one occasion.

36. The Committee was unwilling to accept suggestions which would have the effect of imposing restrictions on the Fourth Committee's freedom to make use of these sources of information. It considers, however,

that time could be saved if the Secretariat notified persons invited by the Committee as early as possible of the dates on which they would be called upon to make their statements. That procedure would be facilitated if, as the Committee has proposed, the Fourth Committee could decide on its programme of work at the beginning of the session, including the dates on which the agenda items assigned to it would be examined.

3. ROLE OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE

37. The *Ad Hoc* Committee considers that the General Committee of the Assembly should actively fulfil the important role assigned to it under the rules of procedure. In addition to the functions which it already exercises in connexion with the agenda of the session (rule 40) and those relating to the fixing of the closing date of the session (rule 41), the General Committee should try in particular to ensure better co-ordination of the proceedings of all committees of the General Assembly and of the work of the committees with that of the plenary Assembly (rules 41 and 42). As specified in rule 42, the General Committee should not hesitate to make practical recommendations with a view to furthering the progress of the work of the General Assembly and of its committees so that all appropriate action may be taken to complete the examination of agenda items by the date fixed for the closure of the session.

38. The *Ad Hoc* Committee considers that, for this purpose, the periodic meetings of the General Committee, provided for in rule 42 of the rules of procedure, should be spaced not more than three weeks apart in a normal period and should be held even more frequently at the beginning and towards the end of sessions.

B. CONDUCT OF THE DEBATES

1. ROLE OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS

39. The *Ad Hoc* Committee feels that it need hardly stress the importance of the role of the presiding officers and the authority which they should be able to exercise in discharging their functions under the rules of procedure. The smooth progress of the work of the organs over which they preside depends largely upon their skill, their familiarity with the Assembly's procedures and their impartiality. The President of the Assembly and the Chairmen of the Main Committees should be able to rely on the co-operation of all delegations and the full assistance of the Secretariat.

40. The Committee considers that, due regard being given to the principle of equitable geographical distribution and to the requirement under the rules of procedure that the General Committee should be so constituted as to ensure its representative character of the General Assembly as a whole, special importance should be attributed in the selection of presiding officers to such elements as the previous experience of candidates of the technique of chairmanship or familiarity with the work of the Assembly or of other United Nations bodies.

2. POWER OF INITIATIVE OF THE PRESIDING OFFICERS

41. While not wishing to restrict the free course of debates in the General Assembly and its committees, the *Ad Hoc* Committee considers that, under the rules of procedure, the presiding officers can, with skill, find in the provisions of the rules of procedure many ways

of speeding up the work of the Assembly. Rules 35 and 108 confirm that they are responsible for directing the discussions and that their role is by no means a passive one or confined to calling upon speakers requesting the floor. Those provisions reaffirm, for example, that the presiding officers may propose the limitation of the time to be allowed to speakers and the limitation of the number of times each representative may speak on any question, the closure of the list of speakers or the closure of the debate. In the opinion of the Committee, the presiding officers, while maintaining the impartiality that their functions require of them, should not hesitate to exercise those prerogatives when they feel that this would contribute to the good progress of the Assembly's work.

3. BEGINNING MEETINGS AT THE SCHEDULED TIME

42. The Committee examined statistical information relating to the last two regular sessions of the General Assembly with respect to the actual time of the opening and closing of meetings of the plenary Assembly and Main Committees. It was impressed by the considerable loss of time due to meetings beginning late or closing early (see annex VII).

43. With regard to the actual time when meetings start, the Committee noted the time gained by the President of the seventeenth session, who made it a practice to open the plenary meetings of the Assembly at the time scheduled in the *Journal of the United Nations*, or at most a few minutes later. Most delegations willingly submitted to that discipline and appreciated its advantages. The Committee therefore advises that in future the Presidents of the Assembly as well as the Chairmen of the committees should follow that precedent and begin the meetings at the scheduled time.

44. The presiding officers, assisted by the other officers and by the Secretariat, should keep in constant touch with delegations so that no valuable time is lost because no speakers are available. In order to avoid the adjournment of meetings before the normal hour, speakers who have expressed the wish to take the floor should hold themselves in readiness to make their statements when they are called upon to do so.

45. The Committee believes that this effort to make the fullest use of the time available for meetings might be encouraged if the Secretariat were to prepare a weekly chart of the delays incurred by each committee in starting meetings and the time lost by their premature closing. The chart might take the form of a document, to be submitted to the general Committee for consideration during its periodic meetings, and that Committee might make whatever recommendations or comments it considered appropriate.

4. TIME-LIMIT ON SPEECHES

46. With regard to a time-limit on speeches, the *Ad Hoc* Committee had before it a number of proposals to limit, under the rules of procedure, the time allowed for statements made in the General Assembly or its committees during general debates, during the discussion of draft resolutions, in connexion with explanations of vote, or the right of reply, or when procedural motions are being discussed. In view of the complexity and variety of the situations which may arise in the General Assembly and the special importance of certain debates to some delegations, the Committee does not

think it would be wise to make any general decisions which might have the effect of unduly limiting the right of representatives to express fully their views. It recalls, however, that not only are the presiding officers empowered under rules 35 and 108 to propose the limitation of the time to be allowed to speakers but that under rules 74 and 115 any representative may make such proposals. Thus, depending on the circumstances, the General Assembly and its Committees can decide to limit under rules 74 and 115 of the rules of procedure the time allowed to speakers on certain questions or for certain types of statements. The General Committee of the Assembly, taking into account the progress made by the General Assembly in its work, may also make pertinent recommendations in accordance with rule 42 of the rules of procedure.

47. The Committee noted that the Assembly has almost never exercised its prerogative with regard to limiting the number of times representatives may speak. The Committee wishes to recall, however, the practice whereby representatives speak not only on behalf of their own delegations but also on behalf of other delegations sharing their views on the matter under discussion. The Committee notes that this practice has already helped the General Assembly to save time.

5. LIST OF SPEAKERS

48. Apart from the above comments on making good use of meeting time and the reference to the power of presiding officers under rules 35 and 108 of the rules of procedure to propose the closure of the list of speakers, a power specifically provided for in rules 75 and 116, the *Ad Hoc* Committee recommends that the name of a representative who is not prepared to speak when his turn comes should automatically be transferred to the bottom of the list of speakers unless, by agreement with the presiding officer, it can be arranged for that representative to speak earlier. However, it is the opinion of the Committee that the established practice whereby representatives are allowed to exchange places on the list of speakers should be maintained.

6. RIGHT OF REPLY

49. The *Ad Hoc* Committee considered the circumstances in which representatives take the floor to exercise the "right of reply". It may be observed that a strict application of rules 75 and 116 would imply that the right of reply can only be exercised if the presiding officer feels that "a speech delivered after the list of speakers has been closed makes this desirable". The Committee is of the opinion that any delegation which has been attacked or criticized either by direct reference or by imputation is entitled, if it so desires, to exercise the "right of reply". The Committee also recognizes that there are other occasions when a representative may legitimately feel he should make a clarifying statement because of comments made with respect to the attitude or policy of his country before the closing of the list of speakers.

50. It is solely within those limits however that the Committee feels that "the right of reply" should be recognized by presiding officers. The Committee considers that the presiding officer is entitled under the rules of procedure to remind the representative who wishes to avail himself of the "right of reply" of the limits to which the exercise of that right is subject.

7. EXPLANATIONS OF VOTE

51. In accordance with rules 90 and 129 of the rules of procedure, an explanation of vote may be permitted by the presiding officer either before or after the voting, except when the vote is taken by secret ballot; the presiding officer may limit the time to be allowed for such explanations. The Committee believes that it is the responsibility of the presiding officers to see to it that explanations of votes are used solely for their basic purpose, namely, to explain the reasons why a delegation wishes to cast an affirmative or negative vote or to abstain. The explanation of a vote should, therefore, not be an occasion for resuming discussions with other delegations.

8. POINTS OF ORDER

52. The Committee feels that it is useful to recall the correct procedure in connexion with points of order. The provisions of rules 73 and 114 of the rules of procedure are very clear in that respect. When a debate is interrupted by a representative's raising a point of order, the presiding officer, after the representative has been heard, must give a ruling immediately. He may not allow a discussion to be started on the subject. No other point of order should be discussed before the presiding officer has decided upon the previous one. The responsibility for deciding is his alone and the rules do not provide that he may request the Assembly or committee to make a ruling for him; a representative who is not satisfied with the presiding officer's decision is entirely free to appeal to the Assembly or the committee and such an appeal should be regarded as a simple difference of opinion concerning the application of the rules and not in any way as a reflection on the prestige of the Chair. The appeal "shall be immediately put to the vote"; in other words no statement may be made except for the explanation by the representative making the appeal and that of the presiding officer concerning what he considers to be the correct application of the rules. The vote of the Assembly or committee on the appeal, as provided in rules 73 and 114, is final. Once the question is settled, the Assembly or committee reverts to the consideration of the agenda item. The delegation of the Soviet Union considered that an analysis of rules 73 and 114 of the rules of procedure, together with rules 36 and 109, would lead to the conclusion that in some complicated cases, when the presiding officer did not consider it possible to make a ruling, he might ask the Assembly or the committee to make a decision on the question to which the point of order referred.

53. The rules themselves are not very explicit as regards the type of intervention which the presiding officer can accept as a point of order, although rules 73 and 114 stipulate that "a representative rising to a point of order may not speak on the substance of the matter under discussion". In this connexion the Committee recalls that the committees which preceded it have already submitted to the General Assembly definitions or explanations of the matters which a point of order may cover. The Special Committee on Methods and Procedures of the General Assembly stated in 1949 that:

"It is the opinion of the Special Committee that a valid point of order may relate to the manner in which the debate is conducted, to the maintenance of order, to the observance of the rules of procedure, or to the manner in which the Chairmen exercise the

powers conferred upon them by the rules. Thus, within the scope of the General Assembly's rules of procedure, representatives are enabled to direct the attention of the presiding officer to violations or misapplications of the rules of procedure by other representatives or by the presiding officer himself. Points of order may also refer to legitimate requests for information, to material arrangements (temperature of the room, seating, interpretation system), to documents, translations and so on. On the other hand, no representative, when rising to a point of order, should be permitted to speak on the substance of the matter under discussion." (A/937, para. 37.)

9. ASSISTANCE TO PRESIDING OFFICERS

54. As the Committee has already pointed out, every possible assistance should be given to the presiding officers in order to facilitate the exercise of their functions in accordance with the rules of procedure. In this connexion the Committee recalls that, in addition to the constant help they receive from the committee secretaries, presiding officers may seek assistance from the Office of Legal Affairs whenever they need special advice with regard to the application of the rules of procedure or when difficult procedural questions are likely to arise. Advantages may also be derived from consultations between chairmen of main committees and the President of the General Assembly and between chairmen of main committees on any complex procedural difficulties which may arise in their committees.

55. The Committee considers that it would be useful if the Secretariat were asked from now on to keep systematic note of the various questions of procedure which arise in the General Assembly and its committees and to assemble this information in a form accessible to presiding officers and any representatives who might wish to consult them. In this connexion, the Committee considers that the summary records of meetings should contain fairly detailed accounts of debates on procedural questions.

56. The Committee also discussed the usefulness of the preparation by the Secretariat of a repertory of past practice and of a manual of procedure containing notes on the various rules and examples of decisions illustrating their application. While considering the subject worthy of further study, the Committee does not find itself in a position to make definite recommendations on the matter.

C. INTRODUCTION OF MECHANICAL MEANS OF VOTING

57. The Committee studied with care the question of advantages to be derived from the introduction in the General Assembly of mechanical equipment which would facilitate the counting and the recording of votes. Its members examined the working of such equipment during a visit to the General Assembly of the State of New Jersey. In addition to data annexed to the present report, i.e., a description of the manner in which mechanical means of voting could be used in the General Assembly, relevant financial implications (see annex VIII) and data as to the number of votes taken in the General Assembly during the last three sessions (see annex IX), the Committee wishes to report as follows on the conclusions it has reached.

58. There was general agreement that an electric system for registering votes would have the advantage

of speed and its use would result in a sizable saving of time which would, in turn, reduce the expenses of the Organization and of Member States. The new system would have the further advantage of being fully accurate, especially in the procedure corresponding to a vote by show of hands in connexion with which the Secretariat has met with increasing difficulty in recent years. The system of electric voting would also have the advantage of convenience since the results would be indicated for sufficient length of time on mural panels, thus preventing confusion. It was acknowledged that the new system would not be applicable to secret ballots. Some questions were raised as to the financial implications of the installation of the electric system of voting and the effects on the budget of the Organization at a time when the Organization is facing financial difficulties. It was, however, the understanding of the Committee that the question would be considered by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions before the General Assembly reaches a final decision on the matter. Subject to further examination of the financial considerations involved, it was the view of the Committee that the Secretary-General should explore this possibility in order that the electric system of voting should be tried experimentally for one or two years in one or more conference rooms.^{2, 3}

D. CLARIFICATION OF CERTAIN PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS

59. In the course of its work, the *Ad Hoc* Committee examined certain questions which did not, strictly speaking, relate to the improvement of methods of work of the General Assembly but rather to certain procedural situations which might arise in the Assembly. The Committee wishes to draw the Assembly's attention to its views on two of these questions.

1. CO-SPONSORS OF DRAFT RESOLUTIONS OR AMENDMENTS

60. The Committee considered a situation which has occurred in recent years where a large number of delegations wish to be designated as sponsors of certain draft resolutions or draft amendments submitted for the Assembly's approval. The Committee did not agree to suggestions that a limit should be placed on the number of delegations which might be so designated. It wishes, however, to make it clear that, in its view, it is for the authors of a proposal which has already been submitted to the Assembly or to a committee to decide whether other delegations should also become sponsors of it. Delegations wishing to become co-sponsors ought therefore to approach the original sponsors if they wish their names to be added to the list already published.

2. VOTING BY SECRET BALLOT

61. The Committee considered certain difficulties which may arise when one of the Main Committees proceeds to a vote by secret ballot, in accordance with rule 105 of the rules of procedure, and all representatives are not in their places when the conference officer

² The representative of the United States was of the opinion that, in view of the financial difficulties facing the United Nations, the equipment should be installed in a single conference room during the first year.

³ The representative of the USSR considered that no supplementary estimates should be involved and that the installation should be financed out of savings in the regular budget.

collects the ballot papers. The Committee recommends that in such cases committees should follow the practice of the General Assembly and that the balloting should be done by roll-call, representatives being allowed to vote up to the moment when the Chairman declares the voting closed.

E. CERTAIN OTHER SUGGESTIONS CONSIDERED BY THE *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

1. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AGENDA COMMITTEE

62. The *Ad Hoc* Committee had before it a suggestion that an agenda committee should be established to consider the provisional agenda and the supplementary list of items proposed for inclusion in the agenda. This committee, which would carry out the work of the General Committee on the agenda before the opening of the regular session, would be automatically dissolved once the General Committee for the session was set up. The Committee did not consider it necessary to make a recommendation to the General Assembly on this matter.

2. DESIGNATION OF SPECIAL RAPORTEURS

63. The *Ad Hoc* Committee also considered the possibility of speeding up the work of the Main Committees by the designation, where appropriate, of special rapporteurs. It was said in this connexion that, in the case of questions already discussed by the General Assembly, the special rapporteurs might, for example, summarize the main issues on which there had already been discussion, prepare a brief and objective account of the history of the question and sometimes bring out the main points in dispute. If this procedure were to be followed, delegations taking the floor would not need to go over the same ground, and could confine themselves to stating the positions of their countries. The Committee decided not to make any proposal to the Assembly on this matter.

3. PRACTICE OF EXTENDED REMARKS

64. The *Ad Hoc* Committee considered the possibility of introducing in the General Assembly the practice of certain national Parliaments which allow representatives to submit written statements to supplement or replace oral statements. The delegations which advocated this method pointed out that it would be particularly appropriate for explanations of votes, lengthy or technical statements and statements made in exercise of the right of reply. The majority of the Committee, however, did not support these suggestions, the effect of which would be to alter the nature of the Assembly's debates considerably and to raise a certain number of practical problems which would be difficult to solve.

4. CHANGE IN THE OPENING DATE OF THE REGULAR SESSION

65. The Committee also considered the suggestions made to it concerning a possible change in the opening date of the regular session of the General Assembly. Two suggestions in particular were considered, one to bring the opening date of the session forward to the beginning of September, and the other to hold the regular session from March to June. These suggestions were mainly prompted by a desire to avoid the holding of resumed sessions after the end-of-year holidays, as

has frequently happened in the past, when such sessions have proved long and costly.

66. The Committee did not accept the suggestion that the regular session of the General Assembly should be brought forward to the beginning of September, considering, in particular, that the first two weeks of September should be free for delegations to hold private consultations. Nor did the Committee accept the proposal that the regular session of the General Assembly should be held in the spring rather than in the autumn, as it wished to take into account the fact that many national Parliaments have busy sessions in that part of the year. The Committee noted with satisfaction that the Assembly had succeeded in ending its seventeenth regular session before the end-of-year holidays and it hopes that through the improvement of its methods of work it will be able in future in the normal way to end its sessions by the third week of December.

III. Draft resolution

67. The *Ad Hoc* Committee therefore recommends to the General Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution:

[Text adopted by the General Assembly without change. See "Action taken by the General Assembly", below.]

*
* * *

The present report was adopted unanimously on 27 May 1963.

ANNEXES

Annex I

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS 1198TH PLENARY MEETING ON 19 DECEMBER 1962

1845 (XVII). *Improvement of the methods of work of the General Assembly*

The General Assembly,

Having established on 30 October 1962 an Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of Methods of Work of the General Assembly,

Having received from the Ad Hoc Committee a report (A/5370) in which the Committee stated that it would not submit a final report to the General Assembly at its present session,

1. *Decides to continue the Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly, with its present membership and terms of reference, and requests the Committee to transmit to the Secretary-General by 31 May 1963 a report, with recommendations or suggestions, for circulation to Member States;*

2. *Decides to include in the provisional agenda of its eighteenth session an item entitled "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly", and recommends that priority should be given to the consideration of this item.*

*1198th plenary meeting,
19 December 1962.*

Annex II

LIST OF WORKING PAPERS PREPARED BY THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE USE OF THE *AD HOC* COMMITTEE

1. Compilation of suggestions received from delegations.
2. Compilation of suggestions received from Chairmen of Main Committees.
3. Duration of sessions.

4. Data relating to the maximum utilization by the plenary and the Main Committees of the available working time (see annex VII).
5. Number of speakers in the general debate at regular sessions of the Assembly (see annex III).
6. Question of a change in the opening date of regular sessions of the General Assembly.
7. Introduction of mechanical means of voting (see annex VIII).
8. Commencement of work of the Main Committee (see annex IV).
9. Notes on the right of reply in the United States House of Representatives, the British Houses of Parliament and the French National Assembly.
10. Notes on explanations of vote in the British Houses of Parliament, the United States House of Representatives, the French National Assembly and the Council of Nationalities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
11. Summary of suggestions submitted by delegations and Chairmen of Committees regarding the improvement of methods of work of the General Assembly.
12. Number of votes taken in the plenary and in the Main Committees (see annex IX).
13. Sub-committees and working groups established by the General Assembly and its committees from the first to the sixth regular session.
14. Establishment of schedules for the consideration of items in the Main Committees (see annex V).
15. Summary of suggestions concerning reduction of the length of statements.
16. Hearing of petitioners during General Assembly sessions (see annex VI).
17. Practice of extended remarks.
18. Establishment of an agenda committee.
19. Possible change in the opening date of regular sessions of the General Assembly: effects of a change in the opening date on the programme of other organs.
20. Publication of a handbook on General Assembly procedure: specimen concerning the interruption and the termination of the debate.
21. Publication of a handbook on General Assembly procedure: specimen on rule 96 of the rules of procedure.

Annex III

NUMBER OF SPEAKERS IN THE GENERAL DEBATE AT
PLENARY MEETINGS

<i>Session</i>	<i>No. of Members</i>	<i>No. of speakers</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>No. of meetings</i>
Tenth	60	45	22 September- 4 October 1955	13
Eleventh	76	68	16 November- 6 December 1956	14
Twelfth	80	71	19 September- 8 October 1957	21
Thirteenth	81	72	18 September- 7 October 1958	23
Fourteenth	82	79	17 September- 7 October 1959	24
Fifteenth	99	79	22 September- 17 October 1960	30
Sixteenth	104	80	22 September- 18 October 1961	29
Seventeenth	110	91	20 September- 18 October 1962	29

Annex IV

COMMENCEMENT OF WORK OF THE MAIN COMMITTEES
A. DATES ON WHICH THE COMMITTEES COMMENCED THEIR WORK

	<i>Opening of the session</i>	<i>Election of Chairmen</i>	<i>First organisational meeting</i>	<i>Commencement of actual work</i>
<i>Fifteenth session</i>				
First Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	18 Oct.	19 Oct.
Special Political Committee....	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	17 Oct.	18 Oct.
Second Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	6 Oct.	12 Oct.
Third Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	5 Oct.	6 Oct.
Fourth Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	3 Oct.	6 Oct.
Fifth Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	4 Oct.	6 Oct.
Sixth Committee	20 Sept.	21 Sept.	5 Oct.	11 Oct.
<i>Sixteenth session</i>				
First Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	6 Oct.	20 Oct.
Special Political Committee....	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	6 Oct.	16 Oct.
Second Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	3 Oct.	5 Oct.
Third Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	2 Oct.	3 Oct.
Fourth Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	2 Oct.	3 Oct.
Fifth Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	2 Oct.	4 Oct.
Sixth Committee	19 Sept.	20 Sept.	3 Oct.	4 Oct.
<i>Seventeenth session</i>				
First Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	5 Oct.	10 Oct.
Special Political Committee....	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	3 Oct.	8 Oct.
Second Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	26 Sept.	3 Oct.
Third Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	27 Sept.	2 Oct.
Fourth Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	2 Oct.	3 Oct.
Fifth Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	1 Oct.	3 Oct.
Sixth Committee	18 Sept.	19 Sept.	27 Sept.	1 Oct.

B. NUMBER OF DAYS BETWEEN THE OPENING OF THE SESSION AND THE INITIAL CONSIDERATION OF AGENDA ITEMS

	<i>Fifteenth session</i>	<i>Sixteenth session</i>	<i>Seventeenth session</i>
First Committee	29	31	22
Special Political Committee	28	27	20
Second Committee	22	16	15
Third Committee	16	14	14
Fourth Committee	16	14	15
Fifth Committee	16	15	15
Sixth Committee	21	15	13

Annex V

ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHEDULES FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS IN THE MAIN COMMITTEES

First Committee

At the beginning of its work, the First Committee establishes an order of priority for the discussion of the items referred to it. This order of priority is given in a document of the Committee. The document does not, however, mention specific dates by which consideration of the different items is to be completed.

At the seventeenth session, the Committee decided on the order of priority for four of its items on 5 October 1962 (A/C.1/872).^a It took the corresponding decision with respect to the remaining items on 21 November 1962 (A/C.1/872/Add.1).

Special Political Committee

The comments made about the First Committee apply also to the Special Political Committee.

At the seventeenth session, the Committee decided on the order of priority for three of its items on 3 October 1962 (A/SPC.68). It took the corresponding decision with respect to the remaining items on 12 November 1962 (A/SPC.68/Add.1).

Second Committee

At the beginning of the session, the Chairman of the Second Committee draws up, for the benefit of the members of the Committee, a note containing:

1. A list of the items allocated to the Committee;
2. A certain number of specific suggestions on ways of expediting the Committee's work;
3. A list of basic documents and background documents. Although, strictly speaking, this document does not include a time-table, it contains fairly detailed comments on the time which should be allotted to this or that question and on the order of priority for discussion of the items.

At the seventeenth session, the Chairman's note (A/C.2/L.643) was approved by the Committee on 1 October 1962.

Third Committee

At the beginning of the session, the Chairman of the Third Committee circulates a note similar to that prepared by the Chairman of the Second Committee. This note also informs the Committee of the number of meetings devoted to each item at the last two sessions.

After considering the Chairman's note, the Third Committee approves a programme of work which, in addition to

establishing the order of priority, states how many meetings the Committee thinks it should devote to each item.

At the seventeenth session, the Committee, after considering the note circulated by the Chairman (A/C.3/L.977 and Add.1), approved its programme of work on 28 September 1962 (A/C.3/L.980).

Fourth Committee

At the beginning of its work, the Fourth Committee establishes an order of priority for the items allocated to it. This order of priority is given in a document of the Committee.

At the seventeenth session, the Committee decided on the order of priority for its items on 2 October 1962 (A/C.4/556/Rev.1).

The Committee also draws up a provisional time-table for its debates on the different questions. This is distributed to the members of the Committee as a conference room paper.

Fifth Committee

At the beginning of the session, the Chairman of the Fifth Committee draws up a document containing suggestions for a provisional programme of work. Although it does not include a time-table, this document lists, for the various items to be considered, the following:

1. The documents before the Committee;
2. The documents to be issued, with the approximate date of publication.

At the seventeenth session, the programme of work suggested by the Chairman (A/C.5/L.725) was approved by the Committee on 1 October 1962.

Sixth Committee

The Sixth Committee does not publish any special document on the order of priority of the items referred to it or on the time to be allowed for their consideration. But the letter from the President of the Assembly to the Chairman of the Committee listing the items allocated to that body is published as a document of the Committee.

At the seventeenth session, the Committee, after considering this document (A/C.6/365), established the order of priority of its items on 27 September 1962.

Annex VI

HEARING OF PETITIONERS DURING GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSIONS

	<i>Fifteenth session</i>	<i>Sixteenth session</i>	<i>Seventeenth session</i>
Total number of meetings held by the Fourth Committee...	153	173	104
Number of meetings of the Fourth Committee devoted wholly or partly to hearing petitioners	41	38	48
Percentage of meetings devoted wholly or partly to hearing petitioners	26.8	22.0	46.2
Number of petitioners heard.	50	50	37

Annex VII

DATA RELATING TO THE MAXIMUM UTILIZATION BY THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY AND THE MAIN COMMITTEES OF THE AVAILABLE MEETING TIME

Under existing arrangements, two and a half hours are available in the morning and three in the afternoon for meetings of the plenary and/or Committees. The following figures show the time available which was not utilized by the bodies concerned during the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions.

^a The documents mentioned in annex V are mimeographed.

	Average duration of meetings		Late starting (average)	Early ending (average)	Average time lost per meeting	Total time lost for session	
	Hours	Minutes	Minutes	Minutes	Minutes	Hours	Minutes
Sixteenth session							
Plenary	2	9	33	23	56	107	19
First Committee	2	6	28	13	41	56	40
Special Political Committee.....	1	55	23	31	54	58	45
Second Committee	2	17	38	13	51	67	10
Third Committee	2	8	31	8	39	49	45
Fourth Committee	1	58	31	22	53	152	5
Fifth Committee	2	6	23	16	39	43	35
Sixth Committee	1	37	28	25	53	40	10
Seventeenth session							
Plenary	2	34	7	12	19	25	30
First Committee	1	5	22	29	50	52	40
Special Political Committee.....	1	51	23	36	59	51	35
Second Committee	2	26	18	14	32	45	35
Third Committee	2	1	18	21	39	49	5
Fourth Committee	2	10	23	15	38	65	25
Fifth Committee	2	5	22	15	37	43	50
Sixth Committee	1	55	19	32	51	38	55

Annex VIII

Rental of equipment

INTRODUCTION OF MECHANICAL MEANS OF VOTING

Operation of the system

In order to respect the established voting tradition, the mechanical process would have to be as close as possible to the present system. Since elections would continue to be held by secret ballot, so that in this case there would be no question of giving up the practice of using voting papers, the mechanical voting system would have to reproduce as faithfully as possible the operations of voting by roll-call and by show of hands.

In the case of the operation corresponding to a vote by roll-call the system would function as follows. First of all, the chairman would announce that the vote was about to be taken, and would turn on the apparatus so that representatives could cast their votes. Each representative would have before him a switch with three positions, marked "yes", "no", and "abstention" respectively. The representative would move the switch to the desired position, and would be completely free to alter his vote until the close of voting. Votes would be indicated by lights of different colours on a wall panel installed in the chamber, and on a corresponding panel of smaller size on the chairman's table. At the end of a period fixed in advance—say, one minute—the chairman would declare the voting finally closed. In order to assist delegations, a clock beside the wall panel would indicate the number of seconds remaining before the close of the vote. The number of votes in favour, votes against and abstentions would be counted automatically and would appear in luminous figures on the wall panel and the panel on the chairman's table. In addition, a recording device beside the chairman's table would reproduce the individual votes and the totals, in as many copies as necessary, and would identify the proposal or amendment voted on by means of a symbol. This recording process is done by perforation.

In the case of the operation corresponding to a vote by show of hands, the procedure would be as follows. At the invitation of the chairman, representatives desiring to vote in favour would turn the switch to the "yes" position; the name of their country and the total number of affirmative votes would then appear on the wall panel and the panel on the chairman's table. The same would apply to negative votes and abstentions. After the vote, the names of the countries would disappear; only the number of votes would be indicated by the panel. The results would then be announced by the chairman.

The estimated costs for the rental, installation and maintenance of voting machines in one, two or three rooms are provided in table 1 below. The installation costs, estimated at \$40,700 per room, provide for the basic wiring as well as modification of furniture and provision of other special features which would be required by virtue of the established voting system in the United Nations.

For the first year, the rental and maintenance charge by the supplier would amount to \$38,000 for one room, \$60,000 for two rooms and \$75,000 if three rooms were equipped with voting machines. The charge during the first year includes the initial installation of the equipment as well as normal rental and maintenance. In succeeding years, the rental and maintenance charges, including major replacement parts, would be \$16,000 for one machine, \$26,000 for two machines and \$30,000 if three machines were utilized. The equipment would be provided by the company on a yearly renewable contract which could be cancelled at any time with due notice and without penalty.

Purchase of equipment

The estimated costs for the purchase, installation and maintenance of voting machines are provided in table 2 below. The installation costs remain the same as in the case of rental of the equipment, i.e., \$40,700 per room. Purchase of voting machines, as opposed to rental, would cost \$228,000 if one room were equipped, \$360,000 for two rooms and \$450,000 for three rooms. The purchase price would include the initial installation of the equipment by the vendor. In addition, were the equipment purchased, it would be desirable for the United Nations to contract with the supplier for maintenance at an annual cost per room of \$6,000. This figure would not include major replacement parts.

It should be noted that the estimates of rental, purchase and maintenance of voting equipment provided in this paper are based on those currently quoted by one company and may be considered firm as at this date. These prices would possibly be subject to some fluctuation should a decision on this question be postponed to subsequent years, or should installations be made room by room over a period of time. The Secretariat also does not preclude the possibility that additional suppliers might be located; however, in view of its experience to date, this eventuality is not likely.

As regards installation costs, the estimates are based on the present price structure and the assumption that certain basic

work could be accomplished within the framework of current planning for the modification of the conference rooms and plenary hall. The estimates of installation costs at this stage constitute a general guide as to anticipated costs; however, should the project be adopted, they would, of course, be subject to refinement based on detailed drawings and contractors' quotations.

Table 1

ESTIMATED COST OF RENTAL, INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE OF VOTING MACHINES

	One room	Two rooms	Three rooms
(United States dollars)			
I. Installation and rental costs—first year:			
A. Installation costs			
1. Modification and addition of conduit	5,000	10,000	15,000
2. Purchase and installation of cables and wire.....	25,000	50,000	75,000
3. Design, construction and installation of indicator boards, and modification of furniture to house voting control units.....	7,000	14,000	21,000
4. Contingency allowance on above items, 10 per cent..	3,700	7,400	11,100
	40,000	81,400	122,100
B. Rental and maintenance.....	38,000	60,000	75,000
TOTAL	78,700	141,400	197,100
II. Rental and maintenance costs—succeeding years	16,000	26,000	30,000

Table 2

ESTIMATED COST OF PURCHASE, INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE OF VOTING MACHINES

	One room	Two rooms	Three rooms
(United States dollars)			
I. Purchase price of equipment..	228,000	360,000	450,000

Table 2 (continued)

	One room	Two rooms	Three rooms
(United States dollars)			
II. Installation costs (for details see table 1).....	40,700	81,400	122,100
TOTAL	268,700	441,400	572,100
III. Annual maintenance cost (exclusive of replacement parts)	6,000	12,000	18,000

Annex IX

NUMBER OF VOTES TAKEN IN THE PLENARY ASSEMBLY AND THE MAIN COMMITTEES

	Fifteenth session	Sixteenth session	Seventeenth session
<i>Plenary meetings</i>			
Roll-call votes	146	74	38
Votes by show of hands....	99	84	83
<i>First Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	36	32	15
Votes by show of hands....	18	27	22
<i>Special Political Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	24	19	18
Votes by show of hands....	34	23	17
<i>Second Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	12	22	25
Votes by show of hands....	34	19	40
<i>Third Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	18	13	5
Votes by show of hands....	34	62	90
<i>Fourth Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	54	11	8
Votes by show of hands....	77	13	21
<i>Fifth Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	8	8	13
Votes by show of hands....	54	54	128
<i>Sixth Committee</i>			
Roll-call votes	0	1	0
Votes by show of hands....	4	4	4

DOCUMENT A/5442

Seventh report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

[Original text: English]
[18 July 1963]

1. Under cover of a letter dated 31 May 1963, the Secretary-General transmitted to the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions a copy of the report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly (A/5423). In that letter, the Secretary-General drew attention to paragraphs 57 and 58 of the report, which dealt with the question of the introduction of mechanical voting in the General Assembly, and to annexes VIII and IX relating to the same question. In view of the importance which he attached to the matter, the Secretary-General asked the Advisory Committee to examine this particular question so as to make it possible for the General Assembly to consider the problem in all its implications at its eighteenth session.

2. In its consideration of the question, the Advisory Committee first noted that there had been general agreement in the *Ad Hoc* Committee that an electric system for registering votes would have the advantage of speed and that its use would result in a considerable saving of time which would, in turn, reduce the expenses of the Organization and of Member States. The Advisory Committee inquired further into this aspect of the problem and was informed that, whereas roll-call votes require an average of eight and a half minutes and votes by show of hands at least five minutes, no more than one minute would be spent for either type of vote if an electric system were adopted.

3. As an illustration, it was pointed out that, at the seventeenth session, 141 votes were taken in the Fifth Committee. If all those votes had been taken by show