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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 17 September 1985, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. de PINIES (Spain)
Temporary President: Mr. LUSAKA (Zambia)

- Opening of the fortieth session by the Temporary President, Chairman of the delegation of Zambia
- Minute of silent prayer or meditation
- Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations
- Credentials of representatives to the fortieth session of the General Assembly
 - (a) Appointment of the members of the Credentials Committee
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- Election of the President of the General Assembly
- Address by Mr. Jaime de Pinies, President of the fortieth session of the General Assembly
- Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

ITEM 1 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

OPENING OF THE FORTIETH SESSION BY THE TEMPORARY PRESIDENT, CHAIRMAN OF THE DELEGATION OF ZAMBIA

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: I declare open the fortieth session of the General Assembly.

ITEM 2 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

MINUTE OF SILENT PRAYER OR MEDITATION

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: Before calling on representatives to observe a minute of silent prayer or meditation in accordance with rule 62 of the rules of procedure, I propose that as we do so we also observe the International Day of Peace, on this third Tuesday of September, as proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 36/67, of 30 November 1981, to be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

Peace is the primary objective of the United Nations. However, it remains an elusive objective rather than an accomplishment to be preserved.

As the threat of a nuclear war and several armed conflicts keep reminding us, the eradication of warlike actions and the maintenance of international peace and security become each day the most timely and pressing of all our concerns. The peoples of the world rightly expect us to rededicate ourselves to the constant search for peace among nations and peoples envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. The observance of the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations and the proclamation of 1986 as the International Year of Peace will contribute to this end.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

ITEM 115 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: Before turning to the next item on our agenda, I should like, in keeping with the established practice, to invite the attention of the General Assembly to document A/40/645, which contains a letter addressed to me by the Secretary-General in which he informs the Assembly that six Member States are in arrears in the payment of their financial contributions to the United Nations within the terms of Article 19 of the Charter.

I would like to remind delegations that, under Article 19 of the Charter, "A member of the United Nations which is in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years."

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

ITEM 3 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

CREDENTIALS OF REPRESENTATIVES TO THE FORTIETH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

(a) APPOINTMENT OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: Rule 28 of the rules of procedure provides that at the beginning of each session the General Assembly shall appoint, on the proposal of the President, a Credentials Committee consisting of nine members.

Accordingly, it is proposed that, for the fortieth session, the Credentials Committee should consist of the following Member States: Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, China, Papua New Guinea, Suriname, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America.

(The Temporary President)

May I take it that the States I have mentioned are hereby appointed members of the Credentials Committee?

It was so decided.

ADDRESS BY THE TEMPORARY PRESIDENT

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: Every year of the General Assembly is an important milestone in the life of this Organization. However, there are certain years to which we attach a special significance. One such year is 1985 - the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations.

I was privileged during the term of my presidency of the General Assembly also to serve as Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Fortieth Anniversary of the United Nations. From the work of that Committee, from my official visits to several countries and in private talks with their Heads of State or Government, and from the many contacts and discussions I have had with members of the media and private individuals, I have realized more than ever before that the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary is significant and appropriate.

This indeed is an appropriate time for serious reflection on where the United Nations stands today, on what it has done or has been unable to do, and on what is expected of it in the years ahead. The commemoration is unlikely to be a culmination or an end. It will, in my view, be the beginning of a period of a change of attitude and of greater commitment. If all Member States represented in this Assembly put their minds and hearts into it, this commemoration could assure humanity adequate prosperity - at least by the end of this century.

The unprecedented interest in this commemoration, as will be reflected in reports to this session of the General Assembly, can only have one explanation, which is that the peoples of the world are scared; they are concerned and are

(The Temporary President)

anxiously waiting for realistic assurances and renewed hopes. Their consciousness of the state of the world has increased considerably during the last few decades thanks to science, technology and modern communication facilities. Never has the number of people who want to raise their voices and participate in the shaping of a better world been so great. Although many voices are often drowned in the din of unfair and sometimes destructive criticism of this universal but human institution, we can still hear other views and perceptions about the United Nations.

(The Temporary President)

To many people the United Nations does not appear to be as bad as they had thought. We do hear profound statements such as: "the world would be worse off without the United Nations"; "if the United Nations were to be abolished, another would be created in its place".

Upon reflection, one would even discover that the United Nations has not done badly after all, especially given the unprecedented new global problems which have arisen during the past 40 years, and also given the incredible distances which animosity and open conflict have created between East and West, between North and South, between geographical neighbours, between kith and kin, between religions, ways of life and systems of government.

In the course of this commemoration and stock-taking exercise, we have heard and shall still hear many voices. We should be aware of what we have been unable to do. Some may refer to that inability as a failure. We should not be deaf to the voice of reason and to that of criticism. We have heard and we shall continue to hear that the United Nations has been unable to prevent many conflicts. The figure often cited is 140 conflicts since 1945 which have cost the lives of some 20 million human beings. Many of the unresolved conflicts are over a dozen years old.

Let us listen to the voices that say that the United Nations has dismally failed in the field of disarmament, that there are definitely more frightening weapons on this planet today than there have been since the United Nations was founded 40 years ago; that human rights have been defined but not implemented world-wide; that the 12 million refugees in this world are considered an intolerable blemish; that the United Nations has been unable to make a real and deep impact on the economic and social conditions of the poor, especially through the North-South dialogue and on-going negotiations on a new international economic order; that there is much unfinished business - which can only

(The Temporary President)

on the agenda of the various organs of the United Nations, such as the questions of Palestine, Namibia, apartheid, the Middle East, terrorism and so on.

We should also be aware of other voices, relatively muted though they are. If we listen carefully we can hear many people say that this first universal organization in human history has opened its doors not only to the new States of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, but also to the countries defeated in the Second World War; that the United Nations is here to stay and that no Member State can afford to abandon it; that the United Nations has proven that it is indeed a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations, a meeting place and a channel of communication between nations which do not have diplomatic relations with each other; that the United Nations is a safety valve in times of tension and political crises, and that it provides a time for the cooling of tempers; that the United Nations has in fact solved a large number of conflicts during the last 40 years, some of which could have easily led to world war.

Let us also listen to the voices which say that the United Nations has provided States which cannot afford to maintain diplomatic missions in 158 other capitals with a cost-efficient, unique multilateral instrument, namely United Nations Headquarters; that the United Nations has written a philosophy of human life in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Human Rights Covenants; that the United Nations has provided the world, for the first time in history, with the necessary data, statistics and information on every aspect of the human condition and habitat; and that the United Nations has created a system of specialized agencies and world programmes which facilitate the identification and assessment of world problems, as well as international action to help resolve them.

Let us pause and listen to those who say that the United Nations has saved lives and property by issuing warnings on global problems such as population growth, the environment, energy, water, habitat, the climate and desertification,

(The Temporary President)

among others; that the United Nations has rendered immense service to children, women, the elderly and the handicapped, and that its world conferences on international years have promoted action for these social groups; and, finally, that the United Nations has created new regimes for two commons of humanity: outer space and the seas and oceans.

I have heard other views and perceptions of our Organization. Of course they vary from country to country, from social group to social group, but they all reflect the immense complexity of human complaints and aspirations. This Organization is perhaps the largest mirror nations and peoples have ever had through which to look at themselves.

On this fortieth anniversary we are receiving a world-wide evaluation, a vast balance-sheet, with its positive and not so positive sides. There have been and there will be many suggestions on how we can improve on the record of our Organization. A sizeable number of ideas, proposals and plans from various sources has been advocated. Many have already been submitted to the Organization. All of them are worth considering. It will be the task of this session of the Assembly to evaluate all the various proposals. Incidentally, the recent meeting of past Presidents of the General Assembly which was organized by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research has already forwarded, through the Secretary-General, a set of conclusions as its contribution to the debate on how to improve the impact of the United Nations.

Allow me to single out one simple but important suggestion, namely, the need for better knowledge and information about the United Nations. I share fully the hope of the Secretary-General expressed in his statement of 31 May 1984 that

"1985 will witness the beginning of a serious educative effort to foster world-wide information about the United Nations and that Governments, the media and educators will play an important role in this endeavour".

(The Temporary President)

The fact is that much of the misconception about the activities of the United Nations and its role in the pursuit of world peace can be attributed to misinformation and lack of information.

The gathering of Heads of State and Government during this session of the Assembly should be applauded. It is my hope that it will be fruitful and that it will lead to many bilateral encounters, friendship, business transactions, recommitment and new ideas for enhancing international understanding and co-operation in the years ahead. It is also my hope that the leaders will return home with an inner satisfaction that they did a good job. Perhaps, as has been suggested, they may wish to hold such encounters annually during future sessions of the General Assembly.

And speaking of summit gatherings, we note that this commemorative session of the General Assembly coincides with what we all pray and hope will be a constructive summit meeting between President Reagan of the United States of America and General-Secretary Gorbachev of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This could well be a prelude to an entirely new era in international relations.

(The Temporary President)

We who are assembled here will in the next few days begin to argue, to agree and disagree, to debate and deliberate, to diverge and coalesce and to vote and resolve. All that is part of the process of peace-building. That process will not be complete until we make our consensus operational, until we implement our resolutions and decisions when we leave this building at the end of the session.

As a former President of the General Assembly, as a delegate and as a human being, I have many hopes for this fortieth session. One of them is that whatever we do will be done in the spirit of the theme: "United Nations for a better world."

ITEM 4 OF THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA

ELECTION OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The TEMPORARY PRESIDENT: I now invite members of the General Assembly to proceed to the election of the President of the fortieth session of the General Assembly.

In accordance with paragraph 1 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138, the President should be elected from a State member of the Group of Western European and other States.

In this connection, I have been informed by the Chairman of that Group that the Group has endorsed the candidacy of His Excellency Mr. Jaime de Pinies for the Presidency of the General Assembly.

Taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure, I therefore declare His Excellency Mr. Jaime de Pinies elected President of the fortieth session of the General Assembly by acclamation.

I extend my sincere congratulations to Mr. de Pinies and I invite him to assume the presidency.

I request the Chief of Protocol to escort the President to the podium.

Mr. de Pinies took the Chair.

ADDRESS BY MR. JAIME DE PINIES, PRESIDENT OF THE FORTIETH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): I should like to congratulate most warmly my distinguished predecessor, Ambassador Paul Firmino Lusaka, President of the thirty-ninth session. His outstanding performance, marked by objectivity and impartiality, will be remembered by us all for a long time to come.

I am deeply grateful to this Assembly for the confidence it has reposed in me by choosing me to serve as its President this year, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. This is a great honour and represents the pinnacle of my long career, nearly 30 years of which have been spent in the United Nations. On the strength of these many years, I should like to make a number of remarks.

The United Nations has reached maturity. At 40, it is old enough to have the good judgement and prudence which are necessary to turn its attention and project itself towards the future. But such maturity is not enough.

It should be recalled that when this kind of international organization first appeared the world, weary of all the fighting, of so much war and destruction, was seeking peace, economic recovery and stability. And so the suspicion and the distrust which marked the period before the war gave way to trust and hope. The world made a spectacular economic recovery, but at the same time suspicion and distrust returned.

It is hardly a secret that the United Nations is going through a crisis of prestige. The Organization has apparently not lived up to the hopes which the world placed in it when it was founded and indeed we ought to reflect on the reasons why the Organization has been such a disappointment to those who placed their trust in it. The main reason is perhaps the widespread ignorance about what the United Nations is, what it represents and what it can do.

(The President)

Drawing on my own experience, I can recall the great prestige which the United Nations enjoyed in the 1960s, when it captured the interest of the media in this country and throughout the world, in large measure as a result of the news generated by the international Organization, which was involved in a great many positive activities. However, by the late 1960s it seemed that the media were no longer as interested in what was going on in the United Nations or were more critical of it, and not because it was doing less.

It is unlikely that all the decisions of the United Nations are supported by all Governments or, of course, by all segments of world public opinion, but there can be no denying that they reflect the general view of the international community, which considers that the appropriate steps have been taken to remedy the situation. But while those undoubtedly reflect the feeling of the majority in the General Assembly, the position is not the same in one of the other main organs. I am referring, of course, to the Security Council.

What does the United Nations do when a crisis occurs? That is what everyone asks. Well, the United Nations does neither more nor less than its Member States want it to do. Let us not forget, moreover, that the United Nations has no executive power to enforce its decisions and that, if a conflict is referred to the Security Council and the Council fails to take a decision, either because the necessary votes are lacking or because someone exercises the veto, the Organization should not be faulted for ineffectiveness or impotence. The Organization was created that way and that is how it must be accepted, at least as long as its structure is not changed - something which would be neither easy nor, perhaps, advisable at the present time. We must face the fact that either we take the United Nations as it is or it will disappear. It must also be recognized that the major Powers, particularly the super-Powers, although they have used the Organization as a forum in the past and may even do so today, do not seem to regard

(The President)

it as essential for the defence of their interests, whereas it is plain that the rest of us do need it.

Despite the Organization's shortcomings, substantial progress has been made in many areas. The list of its achievements is endless; there are the United Nations emergency forces and its activities in the social, economic, legal, administrative and other spheres. I would cite the example of decolonization, the liberation of peoples and the reaffirmation of the principle of self-determination or territorial integrity, as the case may be. This year we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of resolution 1514 (XV), accepted as the basis for decolonization.

(The President)

Moreover, the United Nations is extremely valuable. It has channelled some conflicts and ended others, but has become bogged down in many. Yet it cannot be that bad - far from it - when the commemoration of its fortieth anniversary this year coincides with that of two other events which occurred the same number of years ago: the dawning of the atomic age, with its attendant horrors, and the end of the Second World War - 40 years without a global conflagration.

Does this mean that we have enjoyed peace during these 40 years? Can we feel complacent because we have avoided a third world war? Absolutely not.

So many major or minor conflicts have arisen since the Second World War that there are absolutely no grounds for complacency. Even in periods of calm, when conflicts have been reduced to a minimum, we cannot say that peace has prevailed. For those who die or are wounded or disabled at the hands of their enemy or adversary, not to mention the victims of terrorism and apartheid, the scale of the conflict or the reasons invoked to justify it are not important. For those who suffer, including those who have been forced to abandon their homes, the extent of the conflict is irrelevant.

In fact, these have been frustrating years because periods of calm have not been used to resolve conflicts or, at least, initiate mediation that might resolve them. Attempts have been made but, thus far, efforts have failed.

The world is living in a state of perpetual uncertainty brought about by the lack of security. In order to be able to enjoy peace, we need to have security, which means that we must always have the means to guarantee it this security. This has led to a conventional and nuclear arms race of such alarming proportions that weapon stockpiles continue to grow and no one knows when they will stop. We are already spending over \$1,000 billion, i.e. one million million dollars, a year on an arms race which is truly terrifying. And to think that if even part of these resources were released, we could put an end to all the hunger and misery in the world.

(The President)

Is it that the United Nations is unable to rise to events? I do not think that the United Nations is unequipped for the job. On the contrary, I believe that the Charter remains a valid instrument today. The truth is that the United Nations ought to return to the idea that prevailed in its early years. The opening paragraph of the preamble to the Charter reads:

"We the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, ...".

The next paragraph reaffirms fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small and a subsequent paragraph calls for respect for the obligations arising from treaties.

Again, when the Charter refers specifically to the "purposes and principles of the Organization", the first reference it makes is to the maintenance of international peace and security and to "collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace".

Here then we have the essence of the United Nations and, if we do not return to it, that is, to the maintenance of peace and security and to the adoption of measures to prevent and remove threats to peace and security, we shall be frustrating the aims of the Charter and the objectives that we pursue through it. Thus, if instead of waiting for events to happen we were to take steps to prevent them from happening, we would be strengthening this Organization and, of course, fulfilling our obligations under the Charter.

I remember how, on a past occasion when one of the conflicts which have remained with us the longest first arose, at the most critical moment someone highly placed in the Organization said to me:

(The President)

this incipient conflict may have to get worse before it can begin to get better.

And so it was and so it continues to be. What a tragedy!

So let us return to the origins of our Charter and let us respect it. But let us do more preventive work before conflicts develop. As long as we fail to achieve those objectives and to seek means of preventing conflicts, we will always be doomed to poverty, hunger and misery.

The Charter is not a bad document, though it could not have been anticipated that the Organization's original membership of 51 States would in time grow to today's membership of 159 - and there are still some more to be admitted.

The sad thing is that the Charter is often not adhered to.

How many periodic meetings have been held by the Security Council? Only one, with Spain as President, incidentally. Now another one has been convened at the ministerial level.

Could there not be some high-level meeting of the Economic and Social Council to solve various economic and social problems?

How many conferences have been held to review the Charter? Not one, even though the Charter is clear on that point.

Has full use been made of Chapter VII of the Charter?

Nevertheless, when the Members of this Organization understood, for example, the incongruity of Article 27, under which the affirmative vote of all the permanent members is required for decisions of the Security Council, they realized that this was a double veto, which the authors of the Charter had not intended to grant. In other words, the Charter was being reviewed because the letter was not in keeping with the spirit. Would it not be possible also to control not the use, but the abuse of the veto?

Let us abide by the provisions and let us remember, above all, the position of the Secretary-General within the framework of the Charter, for his role is

(The President)

extremely valuable. And if, as is now the case, we are fortunate enough to have the ability, expertise, skill and tact of a Pérez de Cuéllar, let us make good use of him and of the Secretariat in the interest of international peace and security and in the interest of the Organization.

"United Nations for a better world" is the theme of our fortieth anniversary. Let us indeed hope that the year 1985 will mark the beginning of an era of durable and global peace and justice.

This entire session will be considered to be in commemoration of the fortieth anniversary, and specifically, we hope that 24 October 1985 will also coincide with the proclamation of the International Year of Peace. But we must not merely proclaim it; let us put an end to existing conflicts. Let us use this important anniversary to restore to the United Nations the prestige it needs in order to be viewed not with irritation or with suspicion, but rather as an organization primarily committed to maintaining peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations, and achieving international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, as an organization which serves as a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of those common ends. In short, let us commit ourselves to multilateralism.

If Member States stopped giving free rein to their self-interest in certain situations and made an effort to subordinate it to the common good of mankind, we would be on the way to finding solutions to many conflicts. To try to make might right or to make self-interest take precedence over the interests of others would mark a major step backwards in the ongoing quest for peace.

Let us put aside self-interest for the good of all and let us seek a better world through the United Nations. Let us be stinting in our efforts. Present and future generations will thank us for it.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): As announced in the Journal, immediately following this plenary meeting we shall hold consecutive meetings of the Main Committees for the purpose of electing their Chairmen and, thereafter, the second plenary meeting will be convened for the election of the Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly.

At this point and before adjourning the first plenary meeting, I should like to draw the attention of representative to the fact that no candidate has been nominated for the chairmanship of the Special Political Committee. Hence I propose that the other Main Committees of the Assembly proceed first to the election of their respective Chairmen after which the first meeting of the Special Political Committee will be convened for the purpose of electing the Chairman of that Committee.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.

