



General Assembly

Sixty-ninth session

Official Records

91st plenary meeting
Thursday, 28 May 2015, 10.30 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Kutesa (Uganda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mendonça e Moura (Portugal), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Agenda item 136 (continued)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations

Note by the Secretary-General (A/69/722/Add.7)

The Acting President: Before proceeding to the items on our agenda, I should like, in keeping with established practice, to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/69/722/Add.7, in which the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communication contained in document A/69/722/Add.6, Tonga has made the payment necessary to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of the information contained in that document?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 7 (continued)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

Request for the inclusion of an additional item submitted by the Secretary-General (A/69/231)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now take up a request submitted by the Secretary-

General in document A/69/231 relating to the election of members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law.

In his note, the Secretary-General requests, pursuant to rule 15 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the inclusion in the agenda of the sixty-ninth session, under agenda item 112, entitled "Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections", of an additional sub-item entitled "Election of members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law".

Owing to the nature of the sub-item, unless there is an objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees to waive the relevant provision of rule 40 of the rules of procedure, which would require a meeting of the General Committee on the question of the inclusion of this additional sub-item in the agenda?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I take it that the General Assembly, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, wishes to include in the agenda of its current session, under agenda item 112, entitled "Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections", an additional sub-item entitled "Election of members of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law", under heading I, "Organizational, administrative and other matters"?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Owing to the nature of the sub-item, the Secretary-General also requests that it be

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considered directly in plenary meeting. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to consider the sub-item directly in plenary meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I should like to inform members that this additional sub-item becomes sub-item (e) of agenda item 112 in the agenda of the current session.

Agenda item 112 (continued)

Elections to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other elections

(a) Election of twenty members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

Note by the Secretary-General (A/69/291/Add.3)

The Acting President: Pursuant to General Assembly decision 42/450 of 17 December 1987, and upon nomination by the Economic and Social Council, the Assembly elects the members of the Committee for Programme and Coordination.

Members will recall that, at its 32nd plenary meeting, held on 29 October 2014, the General Assembly elected 13 members to the Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2015. Members will also recall that, at its 68th plenary meeting, held on 10 December 2014, the Assembly elected three members to the Committee for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 January 2015. Members will further recall that, at its 85th plenary meeting, held on 16 April 2015, the Assembly elected Portugal to the Committee for a term of office beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017.

Members will recall that by its decision 2015/201 B of 8 April 2015, the Economic and Social Council postponed the nomination of three members from the Western European and other States for election by the General Assembly, one member for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2015, and two members for terms beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017. By the same decision, the Council also postponed the nomination of one member from the Asia-Pacific States for election by the General Assembly for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017.

In this connection, the Assembly has before it a note by the Secretary-General contained in document

A/69/291/Add.3. As indicated in that document, by its decision 2015/201 D of 15 May 2015, the Economic and Social Council nominated the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for election by the General Assembly for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017.

In accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, all elections should be held by secret ballot and there shall be no nominations. However, I should like to recall paragraph 16 of General Assembly decision 34/401, whereby the practice of dispensing with the secret ballot for elections to subsidiary organs when the number of candidates corresponds to the number of seats to be filled should become standard, unless a delegation specifically requests a vote on a given election.

In the absence of such a request, may I take it that the Assembly decides to proceed to the election on the basis of dispensing with the secret ballot?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: May I therefore take it that the Assembly wishes to declare the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland elected as a member of the Committee for Programme and Coordination for a term beginning on 28 May 2015 and expiring on 31 December 2017?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: Members are reminded that the Economic and Social Council decided to further postpone the nomination of three members from the Western European and other States for election by the General Assembly; one member for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2015, one member for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017, and one member for a term beginning on 1 January 2016 and expiring on 31 December 2018. The Council also decided to postpone the nomination of one member from the Asia-Pacific States for a term beginning on the date of election and expiring on 31 December 2017.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of sub-item (a) of agenda item 112.

Agenda item 14 (continued)

Culture of peace

Draft resolution (A/69/L.71)

The Acting President: The General Assembly will now resume its consideration of agenda item 14 to take

action on a draft resolution entitled “Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq”, issued as document A/69/L.71. Members will recall that the Assembly held a debate on agenda item 14 and adopted resolutions 69/139 and 69/140 at its 72nd plenary meeting on 15 December 2014.

I will now read out a statement on behalf of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Sam Kutesa.

“In April, we gathered here at the United Nations as I convened a high-level thematic debate on promoting tolerance and reconciliation. The debate brought together political and religious leaders representing diverse nations, geographies and faith communities in an expression of their support for dialogue and mutual understanding in the face of the disquieting rise of extremism and violence worldwide. Over the course of two days, speakers emphasized the importance of enhancing respect for religious and cultural diversity. Many also stressed the urgent need to protect artifacts of cultural heritage from destructive attacks at the hands of violent extremists. As was highlighted during that debate, we must collectively uphold the principles of tolerance and respect, while promoting diversity and fostering inclusiveness. We must also work together to uphold respect for human rights and freedom of thought, belief and expression.

“It is deeply concerning to witness the destruction of irreplaceable artifacts of humankind’s shared cultural heritage. Such barbaric and senseless attacks are taking place with alarming frequency not only in Iraq, but also in Afghanistan, Syria, Mali and elsewhere. By destroying invaluable cultural icons found in museums, libraries, archives, archaeological sites and places of worship, extremists are exacerbating conflicts, instigating violence and perpetuating fear among societies. Such attempts to obliterate humankind’s collective history must be stopped immediately, by all necessary means, in accordance with applicable international law. I would also add that those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.

“Cultural heritage is of exceptional value and interest to all peoples of the world and must be preserved. In that context, it is essential that the international community work together to protect elements of cultural heritage in Iraq and elsewhere. I thank UNESCO for its contribution and in

particular for its work in conserving heritage and taking measures to protect cultural property at risk. I welcome the draft resolution (A/69/L.71) before us today as an important step forward in saving our shared histories, and I would like to thank the delegations of Germany and Iraq for taking this initiative.”

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am honoured to speak at today’s discussion on the culture of peace and the very serious topic of the draft resolution before us today, “Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq” (A/69/L.71). I would like to thank the Governments and delegations of Iraq and Germany for this initiative. The number of sponsors of the draft resolution is truly heartening and impressive.

We stand here today, I know, with a deep sense of serious and historic responsibility. There is something at stake in this venerable Hall that relates to the core values of the United Nations and to our duties with respect both to history and to the challenges ahead of us. The destruction of cultural heritage bears witness to a senseless form of violent extremism that seeks to destroy the past, the present and the future of human civilization. That it is taking place today in Iraq, the cradle of Mesopotamian civilization, represents a loss not only for the Iraqi people, but for all of humankind. The international community must do everything in its power, as the President just said, to halt the destruction of Iraq’s cultural heritage and to hold the perpetrators to account.

Tragically, this type of cultural destruction does not stop with the case of Iraq. Other countries in the region and beyond have seen similar serious crimes. In recent years we have seen them committed in Afghanistan, in Syria, in Mali, but rarely — let us think about this — in times before that. It is sad testimony about the state of affairs in the world today. The destruction of cultural heritage worldwide has reached an unprecedented scale. It is being used as a tactic of war or conflict in order to terrify populations, finance criminal activities and spread hatred, creating polarization and divisions among people. To respond, we need coordinated action, improved information-sharing and strengthened legal foundations, in both affected countries and neighbouring States, and throughout the international community.

We should also today commend the work of UNESCO and its partners for their work, both by themselves and in assisting Member States in dealing with this new global problem. I particularly want to commend Ms. Irina Bokova for her personal commitment to the issue. The fact that she has come today from Paris for this meeting is a testimony to her commitment and that of UNESCO.

I particularly urge all Member States, in cooperation with other relevant authorities, not least INTERPOL, to prevent the trade in items of cultural, scientific and religious importance illegally removed from Iraq and other countries. Through today's draft resolution, the General Assembly is sending a strong message of worldwide support for the people and the Government of Iraq on a question of their national identity. I wish to reaffirm the determination of the United Nations system, the General Assembly and all Member States in their support for these endeavours.

Let today be a moment of deep reflection on our common humanity and on our shared responsibility to defend values and principles that are under attack but which must be upheld by all of us with firm and principled determination.

The Acting President: I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for his statement.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Maria Böhmer, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, to introduce draft resolution A/69/L.71.

Ms. Böhmer (Germany): It is a privilege for Germany to introduce the draft resolution A/69/L.71, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq", which we drafted together with our Iraqi partners.

I would like to thank Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson for his vivid description of the situation, and I offer my heartfelt thanks for the welcome I have received.

All of us have been profoundly shocked by the barbaric attacks on Iraq's cultural heritage perpetrated by the terrorist organization the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. We all remember our feelings of anger and impotence at the videos showing militants destroying the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hatra and ravaging Mosul's museums or the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud, using sledgehammers and Caterpillars to put an abrupt and violent end to thousands of years of history. Their objective is clear. By obliterating the visible traces of history and civilization, these terrorists

want to destroy the foundations of a peaceful civil society and a unified country. They want to erase the soul and the identity of the people of Iraq. What they do not destroy, they loot and sell abroad in order to finance their terrorism from the spoils.

The attacks on the cultural heritage of Iraq are a test case for all of us. Iraq is a cradle of our common civilization. We cannot leave it to face this challenge alone; its heritage has been entrusted to the care of all of humankind. The international community must do all it can to put an end to these war crimes. And this is what these attacks are and what they should be called, with all the consequences this entails — war crimes that need to be prosecuted.

We are alarmed that these terrible crimes may be only part of a worrying trend to use intentional attacks on unique cultural heritage as a tactic of war. From Hatra to Bamiyan or Timbuktu, the cultural heritage of thousands of years has been attacked and destroyed, and we are watching with concern the current escalation near the world heritage site of Palmyra.

Together with our Iraqi partners, Germany is therefore introducing draft resolution A/69/L.71 to save the cultural heritage of Iraq, as we did when the Taliban were destroying the Buddha statues of Bamiyan (see resolution 55/243). With the support of the General Assembly, the draft resolution we introduce today will deliver a resounding and united message. The draft resolution condemns these barbaric acts of destruction and looting of the cultural heritage of Iraq. The draft resolution expresses outrage that attacks on cultural heritage are being used as a tactic of war. It calls for an immediate halt to the wanton destruction of Iraq's cultural heritage, affirms that such attacks may amount to war crimes and calls upon all States to hold the perpetrators of such attacks accountable.

The draft resolution affirms the General Assembly's support for the Iraqi Government in protecting the heritage of Iraq. It calls upon all States to assist Iraq in fighting against trafficking in cultural property and in repairing, restoring and conserving damaged or destroyed cultural heritage. The draft resolution urges all States to counter the trafficking of cultural property through better national and international regulations. Specifically, it urges the adoption of measures to ensure that all traders in cultural property are required to provide verifiable documentation of provenance and export certificates.

The draft resolution also calls on States to enhance the protection, preservation and documentation of cultural heritage endangered by armed conflicts. It calls upon community leaders to stand up and unambiguously reaffirm that there is no justification for the destruction of humankind's cultural heritage.

In conclusion, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the President of the General Assembly, to the Secretariat, to UNESCO — in particular to UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova — to the over 90 sponsors, to all the delegations that participated in the informal consultations and especially to Ambassador Alhakim and his team for their dedication and close cooperation.

Let us stand together against such barbarism and speak with one single voice for the preservation of the culture and diversity that we have inherited from the past, because without them we have no future.

The Acting President: I thank the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office of Germany for having travelled all the way to New York to underline the importance of the matter addressed by the draft resolution.

The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution A/69/L.71, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq".

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. Pollard (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I would like to announce that Guatemala is not a sponsor of the draft resolution. I should also like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution and in addition to those delegations listed on the document, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/69/L.71: Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Costa Rica, Eritrea, Mali, Mongolia, Nigeria, Palau, the Republic of Moldova, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan.

The Acting President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/69/L.71?

Draft resolution A/69/L.71 was adopted (resolution 69/281).

The Acting President: I now call on representatives who wish to make statements following the adoption.

Mr. Alhakim (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of my delegation, I welcome the adoption today of resolution 69/281, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq". I thank the German Minister of State, Ms. Maria Böhmer, for her support. Our thanks and appreciation also go to the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations as our partner in this initiative. We thank the Director-General of UNESCO for her presence at this historic meeting. We also thank and express our appreciation to all the sponsors for their valuable input during the negotiations on the resolution, which was adopted by consensus. Their support provides further impetus for this important resolution, which is of great significance to all humankind and particularly for Iraq.

The destruction of the cultural heritage of Iraq, the cradle of civilization, is no less barbaric and serious than the killing of Iraqis, because it threatens to erase the multicultural history of Iraq, which has been the hallmark of our country for millennia. In order to confront this challenge, Iraq has undertaken, with the assistance of our friends among the United Nations membership, serious and timely measures to protect Iraqi artefacts from the smuggling and illegal trafficking that fund terrorist activities.

The resolution adopted today falls within that framework. Its adoption is a testament to the international community's determination and commitment to stand by the State of Iraq and its people in defiance of criminals and to bring to justice those whose goal is to destroy our past, present and future. It serves as an important step in strengthening the legal commitments of Member States to preventing the sale and smuggling of our heritage by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and other terrorist groups associated with Al-Qaida. It also underscores the importance of putting an end to the smuggling, selling and acquisition of artefacts, and requires the restitution of those artefacts to Iraq or, for that matter, to any other country that faces such a problem.

The resolution highlights the importance of the United Nations in developing international instruments that enhance the capacity of Member States to protect the human cultural heritage, and it is aligned with the stated position that we have repeatedly reaffirmed before United Nations bodies as being among our priorities. Those include, in addition to the protection

of our heritage, the fight against ISIL, the return of internally displaced persons and the restitution of security and stability to our country.

The resolution is timely, given the increasing frequency of terrorist attacks on cultural heritage in various parts of the world. The situation in Palmyra, Syria, is another case in point. The challenge that we face requires global support in order to retrieve the stolen Iraqi artefacts. Iraq continues to strive to protect its cultural heritage, including by planning future projects to that end.

I thank Member States that sponsored and supported the resolution. I reiterate our thanks and appreciation to Germany for its valuable partnership and to UNESCO and its representative for their valuable support for Iraq. I also thank the United Nations, the Secretary-General and the Deputy Secretary-General, as well as the President and Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and the President's team, for their valuable efforts.

Mr. Winid (Poland): On behalf of Chile, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Italy and Poland, I would like to express our profound appreciation to the Permanent Missions of Germany and Iraq for their efforts in the preparation of resolution 69/281, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq", which we co-sponsored.

Long known as the cradle of civilization, Iraq is home to a great number of cultural heritage sites that are a precious testament to its history. However, Iraq's cultural legacy remains at great risk as disastrous losses have already occurred. Any further damage or destruction of its cultural heritage must be immediately put to an end. We believe the resolution to be a necessary step in that direction and would like to assure everyone gathered in the Hall of our commitment to that very end.

Just two months ago, during the twenty-eighth regular session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, we delivered a statement on behalf of Chile, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Italy and Poland in which we expressed our deepest concern about the growing number of acts of intentional destruction of cultural heritage, as well as the organized looting and illicit trafficking of cultural property, which are occurring today on an unprecedented scale. The statement was supported by 137 countries, which underscored the urgent nature of the problem.

It is not only Iraqi heritage that has been put in danger; it is our collective heritage that might be diminished. The international community must learn about the importance of protecting the records of human history; therefore, we must take all necessary actions to ensure that its uniqueness is preserved. It is our responsibility to respect and protect the cultural heritage of our societies. For that reason, we join the many sponsors of the resolution in strongly condemning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage wherever it occurs and whoever the perpetrator.

Mr. Aldahhak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation welcomes the adoption of resolution 69/281, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq". I thank the sponsors for having submitted the text. The delegation of my country, the Syrian Arab Republic, joined the sponsors of the resolution, thereby underlining our support for the efforts of the Government and the people of Iraq to safeguard and protect their civilizational and cultural heritage from acts of barbaric terrorism.

We hope that our efforts to safeguard the cultural and human heritage will be commensurate with the threats posed to cultural and historical sites in Iraq and my own country, Syria, by the Daesh terrorist organization, which is now occupying the city of Palmyra, and other extremist terrorist groups linked to Al-Qaida. We also hope that the resolution will allow us to speak with one voice; send a unified message to the Governments of countries supporting terrorism, demanding that they desist from supporting takfiri terrorist groups and inciting violence, terrorism and hatred; and prevent the destruction of priceless antiquities by the ignorant and the enemies of civilization and the trafficking of those antiquities to finance terrorism.

The artefacts stolen from Syria and Iraq and smuggled to countries worldwide, which are often huge and cannot be trafficked easily, could not have reached those countries without the support of Governments, organized criminal gangs and corrupt networks helping to finance terrorism. This is a very immediate challenge and requires a response that proves that we are truly a United Nations and not merely an Organization in name only.

The Syrian Arab people will continue to offer assistance to INTERPOL and the United Nations and its specialized agencies, including those combating terrorism, to prevent the trafficking of Syrian and

Iraqi artefacts and their transformation from pieces of incalculable human value into mere objects to be used to finance inhumane criminal terrorism that has nothing in common with any religion or civilization.

I reiterate my country's support for the resolution that we have just adopted by consensus. The cultural heritage of Iraq is a source of pride for us all, and I therefore reiterate my thanks to the sponsors and to all countries that supported the draft resolution.

The Acting President: I should now like to consult with Member States with a view to giving the floor to Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. If there is no objection, may I take it that the General Assembly wishes, without setting a precedent, to invite Ms. Bokova to make a statement at this meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, I now give the floor to Ms. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO.

Ms. Bokova (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization): The adoption of resolution 69/281, entitled "Saving the cultural heritage of Iraq", is a turning point in the mobilization of the international community against the destruction of cultural heritage, the looting of antiquities and the persecution of minorities that have led to the destruction of the cultural diversity of Iraq. It marks a turning point in the fight against cultural cleansing in Iraq.

Never before in recent history have we seen such brutal and systematic destruction of cultural heritage used as a tactic of war to intimidate populations and to disseminate hatred. This is a war crime. Such destruction of heritage has also taken place in Mali, Syria and Afghanistan. All of us believe and feel that

such attacks are not just against specific communities, specific religions or a specific world heritage. These are attacks against the very notion of a civilized order, against the humanity we share, and against the values that bind us together as a single human family.

The resolution resonates deeply with the mandate of UNESCO, as is indicated in many of its paragraphs. This is a test for the United Nations that calls on all of us to review the means by which we seek to defeat violent extremism.

(spoke in French)

The resolution sends the resounding message that cultural heritage is not merely collateral damage, but that its deliberate destruction is a war crime and an integral part of the humanitarian and security crisis. The resolution is evidence of our strong resolve to take action, with strong recommendations to stop the financing of terrorism, counter the ideology of hatred and stop illicit trafficking. The resolution complements Security Council resolution 2199 (2015), on the financing of terrorism. I believe that it sets forth a new strategy for the fight against violent extremism. I am already convinced that the resolution will have an impact, and I congratulate Germany and Iraq, as well as its more than 80 sponsors, for this initiative.

UNESCO will remain fully engaged with all the sponsors, particularly Germany, which will host the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Bonn next month. Again, we will use that opportunity to mobilize States to save the exceptional cultural heritage that belongs to all of humankind.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 14.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.