



General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

First Committee

2nd meeting

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New York

Official Records

Chair: Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia (Plurinational State of))

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

were informed that the members of the Host Country Committee were currently engaged in negotiations on the recommendations and conclusions.

Organization of work

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I warmly welcome all representatives to this meeting, particularly those joining us for the first time from other United Nations duty stations.

The report of the Host Country Committee will be considered by the Sixth Committee at a meeting tentatively scheduled for 11 November. The Sixth Committee will also consider a draft resolution on the report of the Host Country Committee. I understand that this is also a matter of ongoing engagement by the Secretariat, which will continue to engage with the host country and affected missions. I understand that this situation affects not only one or more delegations, but also the work of the First Committee as a whole.

Before proceeding any further, I would like to provide the Committee with an update on the concerns raised by some delegations at our organizational meeting, held last week, Thursday, 3 October, with regard to the issue of visas (see A/C.1/74/PV.1).

Having said that and informed the Committee of the arrangements made since Thursday, I now open the floor for comments.

Since that meeting, the Bureau conducted extensive consultations with the delegations concerned, the Chair of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, also commonly known as the Host Country Committee, as well as with the relevant offices within the Secretariat, including the Office of Legal Affairs. I have spoken to the Chair of the Host Country Committee, who informed me that he had raised the matter with the United States and had requested that the issue be resolved as soon as possible.

Mr. Belousov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the Russian Federation, I would again like to express our concerns about the situation that has arisen due to the position of the United States of America, which, regrettably, is ignoring its obligations under the 1947 Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. I have taken the floor because we are forced to note that, over the past four days, the situation has remained unchanged. The American authorities remain deaf to our requests to change the situation and to take concrete steps to redress it.

The Bureau was informed by the Office of Legal Affairs, which provides secretariat services to the Host Country Committee, that the Host Country Committee held its latest substantive meeting on 2 October, during which the issue of delays in the issuance of visas had been raised. The Host Country Committee is scheduled to hold its next meeting on 29 October, at which it is expected to adopt its report, which will contain recommendations and conclusions. We

I fully agree with your conclusions, Mr. Chair, about the fact that the context of the situation is very

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broad and that it pertains to more than just the issuance or the non-issuance of United States visas to specific members of specific delegations. It is a broader issue of the failure by the host country of the United Nations Headquarters to honour its obligations, one of which is to ensure unhindered access to United Nations Headquarters for the delegations of Member States so that they can participate in the various events held under the auspices of our universal Organization.

In that connection, it would appear that we need to ask our United States colleagues to inform the First Committee of the efforts their authorities are making to change and improve the situation. Furthermore, we reiterate our call on our United States colleagues to hold meetings with the delegations of those countries that have fallen victim to that short-sighted policy. We also again request that they listen to and take under advisement the requests and communications they have received from delegations, as well as from the various United Nations entities and structures involved in considering this complex issue.

We do not see any concrete steps being taken by the United States authorities to change the situation. We have discussed this. Change could take the form of issuing visas or some other form — whatever way the United States deems to be appropriate — but until we see concrete steps, I believe that starting the substantive part of the work of the First Committee would be premature.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): As the records indicate, the United States has been using the issue of visa issuance as leverage against various countries. This is not a new phenomenon and there are no prospects of correcting it on the horizon. It is obvious that the United States intends to disturb the smooth and efficient functioning of targeted countries of the United Nations. The attempts of the United States to put pressure on those countries are contrary to the principles and regulations of international law. Such attempts, which are tantamount to censoring delegations and meddling with the sovereign right of the States Members of the United Nations to decide on the composition of the delegations representing them at the various organs of the United Nations, have no place in international law, in general, or under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, in particular.

When applied, the Headquarters Agreement obliges the host country to issue visas, as promptly as possible. However, the behaviour of the United States has proved to be the opposite. Iran is one of the countries that have struggled with the problem for a long time. On many occasions, either visas have not been issued to any Iranian representatives or there have been long delays, without there being any credible justification for disrupting Iran's representation at the United Nations. It is a clear abuse of the host country's position and no one can justify or accept that kind of irresponsible behaviour.

As I mentioned at our first meeting of the Committee this year (see A/C.1/74/PV.1), none of the Iranian representatives, who are supposed to participate in the meetings of the Main Committees of the General Assembly and who applied on time for United States visas, has been issued visas. Visa appointments for three of them were cancelled by the Consular Section of the United States Embassy in Vienna. As a result, Iran's representation in the Organization is in jeopardy.

I would like to thank the Russian representative for raising the issue before the Committee, as the host country has not heard nor provided a proper response to the calls made by our delegations. It may be only five or six countries that are currently subject to such leverage, but there is no guarantee that the list of countries will not expand in the years to come. We are sure that the international community recognizes our situation and we remain hopeful that it will assist us in making the United States behave responsibly.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): As we have said many times, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country is the appropriate mechanism in which to resolve visa matters. We evaluate each visa application on a case-by-case basis, consistent with existing laws and obligations. We take our obligations under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations seriously.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): Before proceeding, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on assuming the chairmanship of the First Committee.

We have listened very carefully to the exchange this morning, as we did last week. I have also had the opportunity to have an informal exchange with my colleague who chairs the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. It is our view that the responsibilities of

the host country are clearly defined under international law. I think that that has been acknowledged by those on opposing sides of the conversation. We believe that it is very important that those responsibilities be taken seriously and that matters are handled in such a way that the United Nations can do its work.

We are concerned about the delay in the proceedings of the Committee. This morning, Sir, you welcomed those who have come to New York to participate in the work of the First Committee. We join in welcoming them. Our Ambassador will arrive from Geneva next week. We believe that it is very important that we be able to proceed with the work of the Committee, in particular in the light of the fact that discussions on disarmament and non-proliferation are more urgently needed than ever before. In the spirit of promoting multilateralism and the effective work of the United Nations, we urge a very expeditious solution to the issue.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): We understand that we are in a complex situation, even before beginning the formal work of the First Committee. While there are many opportunities for voting during the meetings of the First Committee, it would be unprecedented for us to proceed without a programme of work that has been adopted by consensus by all delegations.

As I have informed members, the Bureau of the First Committee has conducted extensive consultations and worked in a responsible manner to find a solution to the issue. We will pursue those efforts. We understand that delegations dearly wish to start the formal work of the Committee, in line with the programme of work to be adopted. However, at the same time, I believe that efforts are needed to start our work with, at the very least, a programme of work that has been adopted by consensus. In today's meeting and in the previous meeting, some delegations have raised concerns about issues that, while being addressed in another Committee, have a direct impact on our work. That is absolutely clear.

With the Committee's indulgence, I suggest that we take a short break so that the Bureau can continue to engage to ensure that we can proceed with a programme of work that is adopted by consensus. To that end, I would like to suspend the meeting in order to allow the Bureau to hold informal consultations on the way forward. We will, in due course, inform members of the action taken by the Bureau and when we will

resume our work. We will suspend the meeting, hold consultations and report back to the Committee.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to thank all members for their patience. Of course, we understand that the work of the Committee is vital, not only for the Organization but for multilateralism. I would like to inform members that during the break, the Bureau met and consulted with some delegations. We would have liked to held consultations with other delegations, but we tried to engage with representatives from the various regions.

There is a common understanding that if we make an effort and take more time to hold consultations, we can hope to achieve the goal of formally beginning the work of the Committee. There are concerns about the fact that we did not meet that goal today but rest assured that the members of the Bureau will continue working assiduously in the coming hours to attempt to find a solution to the situation so that we can begin the general debate as soon as possible.

Having said that, the Bureau has taken the decision to suspend today's meeting until tomorrow at 10 a.m. Meanwhile, I reiterate that the Bureau will pursue its efforts to meet with the various parties in an attempt to find a solution to the situation.

The meeting was suspended at 12.25 p.m. and resumed at 10.20 a.m. on Tuesday, 8 October.

The Chair: Before proceeding to the adoption of the programme of work and the indicative timetable of the Committee, I would first like to provide members with a brief update on the situation faced by the Committee and the concerns raised by some delegations regarding the issue of visas.

Since the organizational meeting held on Thursday, 3 October (see A/C.1/74/PV.1), the Bureau has conducted extensive consultations with the delegations concerned, representatives of regional groups, as well as with the relevant offices within the Secretariat. I have just finished meeting with the President of the General Assembly, which is why I was late for this meeting and I would like to apologize for that. He, too, expressed his concerns on the matter.

For the past five days, the Bureau has done its utmost possible, within its remit and the competence of

the Committee, to address the important issue before us. As I have expressed before, it is an issue that does not affect just one particular delegation; it affects the work of the entire Committee. That is why we took time to address the issue and try to contact the most relevant actors in order to find a solution. As members all know, the issue has not been resolved. I believe it is an issue that the relevant authorities of the Organization will continue to address.

Mr. Yermakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for us to be able to meet here with everyone, but, regrettably, our extremely important forum remains unable to begin its substantive work, as we have done for many long years together. Therefore, the Russian Federation again proposes a balanced, impartial and unbiased consideration of the situation that has emerged, as a result of Washington's systematic non-compliance with its obligations as host country under the 1947 Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations.

It would perhaps be useful for all of us to recall the principles upon which we founded the Organization and based on which it should work. One such principle is the equality of all States Members of the United Nations. That principle presupposes, *inter alia*, equal working conditions in the Main Committees of the General Assembly for everyone and equal conditions at events organized under the auspices of the United Nations. By hindering the participation of the representatives of other States and their arrival at United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United States is preventing them from enjoying equal access to the United Nations and essentially practicing discrimination on the basis of nationality. This is all taking place today, in the twenty-first century.

We are not seeing an appropriate reaction from the United States or from the Secretariat and the Secretary-General, as they are supposed to ensure that the United States responds to the basic matter of that ensuring that a Member of our Organization upholds its responsibility. There has been no response to the simple and fundamental question of principle. How long will we tolerate subversive activity on the part of one of our Members, not only with respect to constructive undertakings on the agenda of the First Committee, but also to the very basic question of access for delegations to the Headquarters of our shared Organization. Incidentally, based on the invitation of the United States

itself for the United Nations to be based here in New York, Washington took upon itself a clear and precise obligation to ensure the best possible conditions for the hosting of United Nations activities and events here in New York. For many years now, it has disregarded those obligations and blocked the work of many delegations within our Organization. Such actions are now well beyond the bounds of proper behaviour.

We can all see that, by using its biased policy to influence the composition of delegations of other States, the United States also scores additional bonuses for itself. The United States is at home, and so can bring into its delegation as many representatives as it wants from any department and can bring to bear any additional expert capacity, while all other countries are deprived of that possibility. From the very outset, there can be no talk of equality here. The United States has substantial advantages as it pertains to imposing its agenda on the international community. In such a situation, we can only be stunned by the cynicism of the United States, when it goes so far as to delay or, increasingly, deny the issuance of visas to the representatives of Member States participating in United Nations events. Based on the reaction we have seen over the past few days, we have the impression that the United States does not plan to resolve the matter.

We are of the view that, given the artificially created imbalance in favour of one delegation, it would not be right to begin the work of the First Committee. The representatives of the United States are surprisingly cunning when they say that they take a highly responsible approach to their obligations under the 1947 Agreement. We all bear witness to the opposite — that is to say, the irresponsible behaviour on the part of the United States, being done before our eyes and against the backdrop of the fact that the unfair visa policy of the United States against other States has been in place for a long time now. There are no guarantees that the policy will be discontinued. Let us decide: are we all ready to agree to any of us being able to openly create a privileged set of conditions for themselves in order to participate in United Nations events, while others are brazenly deprived of their inalienable national right to participate in United Nations activities?

We know that the visa problem was created in Washington, D.C. — not yesterday or a year ago. Many countries suffer the arbitrary behaviour of the authorities of the United States, and have suffered it for many decades. All communications and appeals to

United Nations entities and structures that could help resolve the matter have led to virtually no positive results. The Secretary-General has not been moved by our communications either. We would be grateful for a reaction from the Secretariat and from the Secretary-General. We need to know the real state of affairs. When will the problems be resolved?

We were forced to resort to unusual measures here in the First Committee, as we spend the third day of the plenary discussing procedural issues. That has never happened before. Our goal is to work together to discuss the most important problems with regard to international security: arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. We have not come here to discuss organizational matters from one day to the next. All of these matters are issues that the Secretariat should have resolved prior to the meeting. I would again like to underscore that these were measures we have been forced to take. They are not being taken on a whim, all the more so because we are seeing a deterioration of the situation, given that the American authorities are completely ignoring our concerns. This state of affairs is a warning. We cannot rule out the fact that the United States anticipated our reaction to a visa war and purposely imposed those measures upon us. The indifference demonstrated by the host country cannot be interpreted in any other way. It would be logical to wonder whether or not it is being done so that the United States can block the work of the First Committee as it pertains to discussions on the most important problems related to international security — but blame it on someone else. Those are all issues on which the United States, for many years, has been unable to propose a single positive solution.

We face a very complicated discussion on a complicated agenda, part of which will be devoted to the destructive policy adopted by the United States, which probably bears the primary responsibility for the collapse of the system of legally binding arms control agreements and for the weakening of the entire international security architecture. I believe that we have a right to demand a response from our American colleagues to that question. In particular, I would like to underscore that Russia, along with all other States that have sent delegations to participate in the work of the First Committee, has an interest in beginning the usual work of this body as quickly as possible. Our delegation would like to constructively and openly discuss the full disarmament agenda.

We never raised the issue of blocking the work of First Committee. We raised the visa issue only because leaving that matter unresolved prevents us from conducting our work and undermines the fundamental principles of the United Nations. Therefore, I would like to reiterate that, as soon as measures or any genuine actions are taken by Washington to improve the situation, first and foremost to issue visas to the experts of those countries that have still not received them, we will then be ready to actively support the intention of all delegations, and again express our own desire, to begin the substantive work of the Committee.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): In line with the position of the Russian Federation, Iran looks forward to continuing to engage in a constructive and pragmatic way with other States Members of the United Nations in order to strengthen the work of the First Committee. I would like to put on record that Iran attaches great importance to the work of the Committee, as it is one of the significant bodies of the international disarmament machinery. Iran and other members of the like-minded group have no problem with the programme of work that was circulated under your guidance, Sir. For us, it is not a matter of any bilateral issue with the United States, although the intention of the United States to extend bilateral issues to the multilateral domain is clear.

We prefer to adopt a programme of work based on consensus. However, what caused turbulence in its adoption is the policy of the United States that attempts to manipulate the representation of various countries. So far, the United States has not taken any action to resolve that problem, and that inaction proves its intention to weaken the status of the First Committee. That is a real threat that puts multilateralism at risk. It should make the international community, and in particular the United Nations, more alert.

The United Nations hierarchy and all of its officials, including the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the Chair of the First Committee, have a special duty in that regard. We expect them to exert their power, as stipulated in various United Nations documents, including the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, to prevent the United States from further abusing the privilege of hosting the United Nations Headquarters. In fact, privilege follows responsibility.

The United States should be held accountable and give up the unacceptable and illegal policy of abusing its obligation to issue visas in a timely manner to all representatives sent by their respective Governments to represent their countries in the various United Nations bodies. Otherwise, it will continue to cause greater damage to multilateralism. Nevertheless, my delegation appreciates the efforts of the Acting Chair to reach out to the President of the General Assembly, the Office of Legal Affairs and other relevant United Nations departments.

I believe that it is now the appropriate time to give a chance to other available options to resolve the problem — the most important one is reaching out to the Secretary-General directly, on behalf of the Committee. My delegation proposes to adjourn the meeting and that you, Sir, kindly raise the issue with the Secretary-General and return to us with the feedback.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): My delegation objects to the request for adjournment. The Committee should proceed to adopt a programme of work, preferably by consensus.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has requested that the meeting be adjourned, and there is opposition to that request from the representative of the United States of America.

If the request is based on rule 118 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure, until when would the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran like to request the suspension?

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): My request is based on rule 118 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure. We can wait until you, Mr. Chair, discuss the matter directly with the Secretary-General and then provide us with the feedback. I do not know how long it will take, but I do not think that it will take more than a day. We can adjourn the meeting and await your discussion with the Secretary-General, until the next meeting of the Committee.

The Chair: Allow me to read out rule 118 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure.

“During the discussion of any matter, a representative may move the suspension or the adjournment of the meeting. Such motions shall not be debated but shall be immediately put to the vote. The Chairman may limit the time to be allowed to

the speaker moving the suspension or adjournment of the meeting.”

The representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran has moved within the terms of rule 118 of the rules of procedure that the meeting be adjourned. Since there is an objection from the representative of the United States on the motion by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, I shall put to the vote the motion submitted by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the meeting be adjourned.

Mr. Yermakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to second the motion for a temporary — and I underscore the word temporary — break in the work of our meeting so that the matter can be reported directly to the Secretary-General, who bears personal responsibility for all delegations having equal and unfettered access to our event at United Nations Headquarters, which, by will and by chance, has ended up taking place on American soil. The reaction of our American colleagues to again hit the brakes on resolving a very serious organizational problem, which they themselves have created, is baffling. I reiterate the irresponsible behaviour of the American side in not wanting to resolve the problem. It must be resolved, and the proposal for a temporary disruption of our meeting, in my view, is entirely understandable and constructive. We must find a solution to the problem, which has been created by the United States. We must do that rather than ignoring the problem, kicking it down the road or hiding it under the table. It exists and needs to be resolved. It is not that serious — issue the visas. Allow access to the Organization for all delegations, as they have been selected at the national level to discuss the most important problems of international security here. If that is done, we can promptly return to our work.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 118 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure, we will now put to the vote the proposal made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to adjourn the meeting.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Belarus, Belize, Burundi, China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Niger,

Russian Federation, Serbia, Syrian Arab Republic, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)

Against:

Albania, Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Congo, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Zambia

Abstaining:

Algeria, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kuwait, Mali, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yemen

The proposal was rejected by 16 votes to 78, with 31 abstentions.

[Subsequently, the delegations of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Colombia informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote against.]

Mr. De la Fuente Ramírez (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. Chair, for your efforts to find a solution to the regrettable circumstances that have delayed the start of the work of the First Committee. I take the floor to express Mexico's concerns and to highlight the consequences that not starting the work of the Committee on time could have on the United Nations. Allowing blocked situations to continue is tantamount to acquiesce to disrupting the order of the already damaged disarmament machinery established by the General Assembly at the first special session

of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, which provided a mandate for the various forums that constitute it, as a platform for the necessary discussions on the subject. Employing the rules of procedure of the Conference on Disarmament in the First Committee in New York would not be a positive endeavour.

As we all know, in particular those who have travelled from Geneva to take part in the work of the First Committee, the rule governing consensus, which is always desirable, should not be misinterpreted. That led to paralysis in the Conference on Disarmament. I wonder if that is what we want, if it is productive or makes sense. I wonder if it helps strengthen multilateralism, which we often defend in our statements, or if, on the contrary, it weakens it. In that regard, Mexico believes that we must take advantage of the rules of procedure provided by the General Assembly, such as the rule concerning our vote just now, and ensure that consensus constitutes the legitimate aspiration of cooperation and a beacon of success of our multilateral efforts, but not a straitjacket that is used to hinder important substantive discussions and decisions taken by the United Nations.

Ms. Benítez Lima (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to explain its vote in favour of the proposal made by the representatives of Iran and Russia to temporarily adjourn the meeting in order for us to continue our efforts to find a negotiated solution. We voted in favour so that we could continue our efforts, until all options had been exhausted, to find a consensus-based solution. Uruguay would like the First Committee to be able to continue its work during the seventy-fourth session of the General Assembly and deplores the fact that the Committee is facing a situation similar to that at the Conference on Disarmament months ago, as it prevents Member States from focusing their efforts and attention on the substantive items before the First Committee. We believe that the Committee's work should be conducted based on a programme of work and agenda adopted by consensus and that an adoption by vote sets an undesirable precedent that should be avoided. Uruguay also believes that, for the First Committee to conduct its work normally, all members of delegations must be able to fully participate in its discussions.

Mr. Fu Cong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China wishes to express its understanding and sympathy to the countries facing visa difficulties. We voted in favour of the proposal made by Iran and Russia. China is of the view that relevant countries should faithfully

fulfil their obligations under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and ensure that the representatives of other countries can participate in meetings.

Apart from Russia and Iran, there are other countries facing similar problems, to varying degrees, which is cause for concern. We urge the relevant countries to take effective measures to properly address that concern. In the meantime, we also hope that the Secretariat will continue to work on the issue in an effort to resolve it.

Mr. Castañeda Solares (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to sincerely congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your good offices and efforts to resolve the regrettable situation before us.

I would like to clearly share our concerns, which are similar to those expressed by some delegations on Thursday, 3 October (see A/C.1/74/PV.1), during the organizational meeting of the First Committee. We deeply deplore the fact that some delegations are being denied visas. We call on the Committee on Relations with the Host Country to find a lasting solution to the situation. Nonetheless, my delegation would like to make it clear that our primary interest is the start of substantive meetings of the Committee, without any further delay, so that we can complete the Committee's work and take decisions in the area of disarmament on time, in a multilateral forum.

The challenges facing humankind in the area of disarmament are undoubtedly very complex. Nonetheless, the political will required to resolve them is, at times, almost non-existent, and the few efforts that are made are merely repeated verbal commitments, which, very often, produce no tangible results. We find it strange that, as we address important but not substantive issues, we cannot even agree on the programme of work so that we can begin the work of the First Committee.

We believe that it would set a bad precedent to postpone or cancel the work of the First Committee, as was done in the Conference on Disarmament, merely for a procedural issue, as that would demonstrate not only a lack of will to pursue our work but also a waste of the resources already allocated for the start of the Committee's work.

We again thank you, Mr. Chair, for your good offices and leadership of the Committee. We believe that, in very short order, we will be able to proceed normally with our work.

Mr. Kapambwe (Zambia): On behalf of the Group of African States, we very much regret this turn of events, which has required that we proceed to a vote on a matter on which we always agree by consensus. Members will notice that many of the representatives of the African Group either did not participate in the voting or voted against the motion to adjourn the meeting.

We have a saying in my country: he who chooses to become a leopard cannot then refuse to wear the leopard's spots. We believe that the foundational documents of the Organization, including the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations, the Charter of the United Nations and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, among others, are important documents whose obligations must be implemented by all of us. In that respect, we urge the host country to consider the issues that have been raised in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country, not just this year but in the preceding three years.

We understand that appropriate recommendations are made in the Host Country Committee on how best to address the issues that we have before us. Unfortunately, there does not seem to have been the follow-through that is needed in order to implement those recommendations. We appeal to the host country to please proceed with implementation. The African Group wishes to ensure that the work of the First Committee, and indeed the work of all other Committees, proceeds. That is not necessarily against our colleagues who have raised pertinent issues with respect to the strictures that are imposed on them, which we know and consider to be in breach of the foundational documents of the Organization and the basis of multilateralism.

Mr. Hallak (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We will have an opportunity later to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, and the other members of the Bureau.

Our work in the First Committee is extremely important. The Committee is responsible for disarmament and international security. We are in favour of beginning the work of the Committee, but we are faced with a dilemma. That is because the

host country does not respect the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. That is a problem that must be resolved. A lasting solution must be found. Sections 11 and 12 of the Agreement call for delegations of the various Member States to be afforded access to United Nations Headquarters.

It is unfortunate that we have begun our work in the Committee with a vote on a purely procedural issue. However, we believe that your skill, Mr. Chair, will enable us to resolve the problem. We agree with the representatives of Russia and Iran. As Chair of the Committee, you must contact the Secretary-General directly, as he is the guarantor of the Agreement between the United Nations and the host country.

We respect the efforts that you have made, Mr. Chair, by contacting the President of the General Assembly and the Secretariat. However, we would like to hear the opinion of the Secretary-General himself to determine how to proceed. It is not a new issue; my country, the Syrian Arab Republic, along with others, has been a victim of the problem.

We defer to your wisdom, Mr. Chair, and ask that you keep us informed of the outcome of your contact with the Secretary-General to determine what options are available to enable us to begin our work in the Committee. As the representative of the Russian Federation so eloquently said, this is not a problem that cannot be resolved. The delegations that wish to participate in the work of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, quite simply, must be allowed to do so. How do you intend to proceed with the work of the Committee, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Pandey (India): India requested the floor to explain its vote on the matter under consideration.

We attach great importance to the start of the work of the First Committee as soon as possible. However, we regret that the matter, which has held up the work of the Committee so far, has not been resolved through consultations. It is our sincere hope that, through consultations at all levels, the issue will soon be resolved to the satisfaction of all the countries concerned.

Mr. Mohd Nasir (Malaysia): I thank you, Mr. Chair, for the work undertaken thus far. My delegation has followed the discussion very closely since last week. We take note of the important concerns raised by delegations in the room. We would certainly prefer that

the delegations concerned continue close consultations and for the matter to be resolved. As the previous speaker so eloquently said, the voting results before us clearly indicate that countries hold varying positions on the matter because of the many important considerations. Some of us were perhaps caught off guard.

Similar to the point raised previously, my delegation would very much hope that the First Committee could begin its substantive work, given the pressing challenges faced by our world today, not to mention the presence of delegations from respective capitals around the world. Nonetheless, we would very much hope for the delegations concerned to continue consultations and for the matter to be resolved.

Mr. Tozik (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me to greet you as Chair of the First Committee, Sir, and to wish you every success in this difficult task. I would like to assure you that the delegation of Belarus stands ready to cooperate with you.

We note with regret the fact that the First Committee has been forced to resort to a vote on the matter of the temporary postponement of the organizational meeting. We understand that such matters have always been resolved by consensus. That has always been the practice of the First Committee, and is indeed the fundamental basis of the work of the bodies of the General Assembly.

Members will agree that, given the conditions under which some States Members of the United Nations express their concerns about the organization of work in the Committee, a vote is not the best way to resolve problems. Those concerns were not expressed by one delegation alone. The question of representatives' access to meetings of the First Committee has been raised by the representatives of several States. We have always been in favour of a multilateral, consensus-based approach to resolving such matters. In this instance, resorting to a vote would not have made sense until all possible opportunities to find a solution to the situation had been exhausted. We call for a prompt solution to the problem. We encourage further consultations with the parties involved and interested in the matter to ensure unfettered access to the host country to all representatives who have been appointed by States to work in the First Committee.

Ms. Korteniemi (Finland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its member States. We would like to express our strong support and

respect for you, Mr. Chair, and for your colleagues in the Bureau.

We express our disappointment about the fact that, despite the efforts of the Chair and the Bureau, we have come to the point at which procedural matters, usually adopted by consensus, have to be resolved by voting. The disarmament and non-proliferation machinery has a vital role to play in handling the many challenges to global security we face today. They should be addressed through multilateralism, which provides opportunities to come together and work constructively to improve transparency and build trust.

We urge States with issues related to the issuance of visas to raise them in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. Our mandate in the First Committee is focused on disarmament and international security, and it deserves our full attention. We are therefore of the opinion that the First Committee should launch its formal official deliberations as envisaged in the documents presented by you, Mr. Chair, and the Secretariat, including the adoption of the 2019 programme of work and timetable of the First Committee. We would like to see the First Committee launch its work today.

Mr. Yeleukenov (Kazakhstan) (*spoke in Russian*): In the voting on the temporary suspension of today's meeting we were guided by the same motivations and reasons as the delegations of Uruguay and Belarus. There are problems that need to be resolved, and time is needed in order to do that. For that reason, we supported the proposal to adjourn the meeting. I hope that we find a solution.

Ms. Rodríguez Martínez (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow us to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chair, on your election to chair the First Committee. We also congratulate the other members of the Bureau. It is an honour for us that you, as a representative of Latin America and the Caribbean, are presiding over the work of the Committee. You and the Bureau have our full support and cooperation throughout this session.

Among other principles, the United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of States, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations.

In fully exercising that right, all States Member States of the Organization also have the right to define the composition of their respective delegations as they best see fit.

Venezuela wishes to express its deep concern about the obstacles and delays in the issuance of visas to members of delegations who come from their respective capitals to participate in the work of the Committee, since such actions are at variance with the spirit and goals of multilateralism, in that they prevent country delegations from participating equally in the discussions.

The responsibilities assigned to the host country cannot be used for political purposes to affect the participation of some delegations because their actions are not in line with the host country's interests. It is important to recall that the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations stipulates that, regardless of the relations between the Governments of Member States and the Government of the United States of America, the host country must fully comply with the Agreement's provisions.

In conclusion, Venezuela voted in favour of the temporary suspension of the meeting because it believes that the requisite time should be given to allow the situation to be resolved through consultations, with a view to adopting the programme of work by consensus.

Ms. Sánchez Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we would like to again congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election to chair the work of the First Committee. Secondly, we thank you for all your efforts to find a solution on the issue of visa delays and denials.

We would like to briefly explain our vote on the proposal made by the delegation of Iran and seconded by the Russian Federation. The delegation of Cuba voted in favour of the temporary suspension of the meeting to allow for a consensus-based solution to be found to the adoption of the programme of work and the agenda of the First Committee. We believe that a consensus-based solution would have been possible had we temporarily suspended the meeting. We would have preferred the decision to be taken by consensus, which is the habitual practice of the Committee. We regret that a vote was forced and that sufficient time was not given to find an effective response to the situation faced by delegations that have been deprived of the right to participate fully and under equal terms in the work of the First Committee.

We are deeply concerned about the repeated non-compliance by the host country with its obligations under the Agreement between the United Nations and

the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations — in particular sections 11, 12, 13 and 27, concerning the issuance of visas and facilitating access to United Nations Headquarters in New York — and the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. On several occasions, the affected Member States have expressed their concerns in the relevant forums about the adverse delays in the issuing of visas by the host country — with no solution having been found to date. Deliberately affecting the ability of Member States to be fully represented in meetings of the United Nations is an affront to multilateralism and undermines the full and effective functioning of the Organization and its Main Committees. It is every Member State's exclusive sovereign decision and prerogative to determine the composition of its official delegation to the meetings of the Organization. The United States should cease interfering in that and stop abusing its own prerogatives. We cannot accept the violation of the legitimate right of every State Member of the United Nations to participate under equal conditions and without discrimination in the work of the United Nations, including in the First Committee and its subsidiary bodies.

Cuba rejects the selective and arbitrary use of the Host Country Agreement by the United States with a view to hindering or limiting the participation of certain delegations. Our country has in no way changed its principled position on the issues of disarmament, or its full support for the work of the First Committee, which is the body for considering international security and disarmament issues. We want the Committee's work to begin as soon as possible. As an illustration of our commitment, Cuba will actively and constructively participate in the work of the First Committee. We urge all other delegations to proceed likewise.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): Before proceeding with the list of speakers, I apologize for not having welcomed the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mrs. Izumi Nakamitsu, who has been waiting very patiently to take part in our work.

Mr. Baumann (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): Switzerland voted against the suspension of the meeting because we believe that it is important that the First Committee be able to begin its work as quickly as possible. Along those lines, Switzerland supports the adoption of the programme of work, by consensus if possible. Switzerland has taken note of the concerns expressed and calls upon the delegations concerned to

resolve the issue promptly. We welcome the constructive cooperation of all delegations in the context of the work of the First Committee.

Mr. Callis Giragossian (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election to chair the work of the First Committee, as well as to express my gratitude for the efforts by you and the Bureau to find a solution to the problem we face.

We voted against the suspension of the meeting because we believe that, while discussing the problem we are experiencing, the First Committee should begin its work as quickly as possible. Although we regret the situation affecting several countries, we believe that, as an organization based on the rule of law, the United Nations has at its disposal the necessary mechanisms for considering and resolving such issues. It is not the responsibility of the First Committee or the Bureau to find a solution to the visa issue. Neither is it good for the health of the Organization that substantive discussions be delayed for procedural issues, regardless of the validity of those issues. In that connection, we make an appeal that the First Committee be able to start its work as quickly as possible and in line with the time frame proposed.

Mr. Yermakov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would like to underscore that we fully support the wish of all States to start our substantive discussions as quickly as possible. That is why we are all here. The fact that States want to emerge from the deadlock created by the United States as quickly as possible is fully understandable.

We have heard the opinion of the representatives of several States who say the visa issue should be considered in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country. I would like to highlight that, for decades, that subject has been considered in the Host Country Committee and today's crisis is precisely due to the fact that in that, in that Committee, the United States does not seek to resolve the issues that it has direct responsibility to resolve. The United States takes advantage of the fact that its most glaring lack of respect for its obligations is embodied in that Committee, without it having to take any action.

I would therefore like to turn to the Secretariat and the Secretary-General and request that they look at the way in which extremely serious matters are considered. As we can see, such matters are now blocking the

substantive work of the First Committee — one of the most important Committees, called upon to resolve matters of global security. Instead, we are now focused on organizational matters. Let us not give the illusion that, at some point, the matter will be resolved in the Committee on Relations with the Host Country because that will not happen. The United States simply needs to return to respecting and complying with its obligations. If it is unable to do so, let it say so precisely and clearly and, in that case, we can look at when and where we could meet without any hindrances or problems so that we can resolve pressing contemporary problems.

Mr. Sparber (Liechtenstein): I take the floor to explain Liechtenstein's position on the procedural vote that has just taken place. Yesterday, Liechtenstein expressed the view that the Committee should begin its work without delay and by making the best use of its resources. In these times of heightened geopolitical tensions, the escalation of rhetoric and military build-up, the international community should rightfully expect a fully functional First Committee as the central venue for multilateral disarmament policy. Liechtenstein therefore supports the prompt adoption of the programme of work of the First Committee, in line with its general support for inclusive multilateralism at the United Nations.

That being said, Liechtenstein takes very seriously the concerns pertaining to visa-issuance practices and the obligations of the host country, under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. The frequency and nature of recent discussions in that respect, which are not limited to the disarmament work of the United Nations, point to a worrisome trend. The obligations of the host country are clearly reflected in the Host Country Agreement and other relevant agreements. The full implementation of those obligations is essential to the effective functioning of the United Nations. It is therefore in our common interest and our common responsibility to solve challenges concerning respect for relevant international law.

Mr. Balouji (Islamic Republic of Iran): We have been forced to raise the procedural issue here, regardless of the result of the voting. It should be very important to all delegations that each delegation at the United Nations be able to participate equally in and have equal access to all events at United Nations Headquarters. As

our Russian colleague mentioned, the Committee on Relations with the Host Country has been unsuccessful in resolving that issue for decades. The only reason for that is because the host country, the United States of America, is not responsive.

As members can see, I am participating in today's meeting of the Committee alone. Our colleague back in our capital has applied for a visa but his application has not even been acknowledged. For us, it is obvious that the United States does not wish to accommodate or give access to Iranian diplomats to attend events at the United Nations. Is it not important to the international community that all members be treated equally? That is why we wanted to explore other options available to Member States, in line with the Charter of the United Nations and the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. That is why I would like to reiterate my request that you, Mr. Chair, speak directly with the Secretary-General, seek his views and ask him to intervene to find a solution to the issue.

Lastly, I am sure that all delegations know how important the work of the Committee is for us. We have been the victim of chemical weapons given to Saddam Hussein by the supporters of some Western countries, including the United States of America. We have been very active in all international forums on the issue of disarmament. Indeed, we look forward to working constructively to start the substantive work of the Committee as soon as possible. However, our concerns also need to be taken on board. We expect colleagues to pay attention to the matter. Otherwise, we will be unable to make a proper contribution to the work of the Committee.

The Chair (*spoke in Spanish*): The Committee has taken the decision to continue its consideration of its programme of work. We will have to make a few oral adjustments. I request that members allow the Chair to make one last effort to ensure that the programme of work is adopted by consensus. We will suspend the meeting for 20 minutes while we adjust the text, which will then be submitted to members for consideration.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

The Chair: I thank members for their patience. We have spoken with several members in an attempt to reach an agreement as we have to try to start the

work of the Committee on the basis of consensus. I believe that everyone acknowledges that we have issues that must be resolved. Those issues are relevant and must be addressed properly but, at the same time, everyone acknowledges the importance of the issues the Committee has to deal with.

As I said, I have spoken with many representatives. There is a proposal that the Chair would like to make to the Committee. First of all, I do not think that adopting the programme of work by a vote is the right way to start our work. At the same time, several delegations requested that the visa issue be raised in the Committee. We have found a way in which we could move forward. The Chair proposes that the Committee proceed with the adoption of the section concerning the general debate of our programme of work. Once the general debate is over, we can return to the various issues that have been raised by several delegations and then the Committee will decide what to do with the rest of our programme of work. I think that this proposal will allow us to start working, without disregarding the issues that have been raised by some delegations.

With that being said, the President of the General Assembly has expressed interest in taking part in the opening segment of the general debate of the Committee. He has been closely following the issue. The High Representative for Disarmament Affairs has been kind enough to join us while we deliberate on organizational matters. It is almost 12.30 p.m. The Chair suggests that we start the general debate on Thursday, 10 October, at 10 a.m. sharp. That is the proposal I have shared with several heads of delegations.

May I take it that the Committee wishes to proceed with the general debate, as referred to in document A/C.1/74/CRP.1/Rev.1, starting on Thursday, 10 October, and ending on Wednesday, 16 October?

It was so decided.

The Chair: I would like to thank all delegations for their constructive engagement on the matter. I know that it has been difficult, but at least we can start our work. We will report to the President of the General Assembly and the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and make the proper arrangements to be able to start the general debate on Thursday at 10 a.m. sharp.

We will continue our engagement with the relevant authorities of the Organization. As I said, the President of the General Assembly is well aware of what is

happening. We will also contact the Secretary-General and continue our efforts to resolve the matter.

Mr. Jadoon (Pakistan): Mr. Chair, we deeply appreciate your leadership and deft handling of the regrettable situation that has emerged in the Committee, which is preventing the start of its routine annual session. You have made sincere efforts to avoid having to resort to the voting, which are very much appreciated by my delegation. We attach great importance to the United Nations disarmament machinery, of which the Committee is an integral part, and fully support all endeavours aimed at working by consensus.

We view with great concern the issues raised by certain fellow member States regarding the issuance of visas by the host country to their official representatives. Preventing official representatives from participating in meetings organized at United Nations Headquarters is not an acceptable practice and should be avoided at all costs. It is a matter that should be immediately resolved through the appropriate channels and bodies, and not allowed to negatively affect the Committee. While we completely understand the consternation about the regrettable practice of visa denials to official representatives, we believe that it should not hamper the routine and smooth functioning of the Committee's work.

Our vote against the procedural adjournment motion earlier should not in any way be seen as condoning the practice of the non-fulfilment of obligations under the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations. Our vote symbolized our support for the start of the Committee's work. Like you, Mr. Chair, we encourage all concerned to continue efforts in parallel to resolve problematic issues to their mutual satisfaction as soon as possible and not allow the recurrence of such a situation in the future, in the First Committee or in other bodies of the United Nations disarmament machinery.

We look forward to a fruitful meeting of the Committee, in accordance with the plan outlined by you, Mr. Chair, over the next five weeks, under your able leadership. You can count on our full support and constructive engagement.

Mr. Hassan (Egypt): As this is first time my delegation is taking the floor, I wish to congratulate you, Mr. Chair, on your election to preside over the First Committee at this session. We are confident that with

your experience and wisdom, you will be able to guide our work in the coming weeks in the most professional and efficient manner.

Egypt attaches great importance to the work of the United Nations, especially the First Committee. The Committee is the main United Nations body concerned with disarmament and international security, which is one of the core functions of the United Nations and the *raison d'être* of the Organization. We wish to recall that the very first resolution of the General Assembly in 1947 (resolution 1 (I)) concerned disarmament. To reiterate, the current geopolitical developments at the global level make its work even more relevant and pressing.

Egypt, in its national capacity, and together with other partners and like-minded geographical and political groups, submits and co-sponsors more than 25 important resolutions on an annual basis in the Committee. Our vote today on the adjournment of the meeting should not in any way be interpreted as a sign that we do not fully sympathize with the important concerns expressed by a number of delegations regarding their inability to obtain entry visas for representatives. On the contrary, we strongly call for the full and faithful implementation of the Agreement between the United Nations and the United States of America regarding the

Headquarters of the United Nations and for a resolution to the underlying impediments to this important issue through the relevant channels. Nonetheless, we have a duty not to allow the United Nations disarmament machinery to succumb to complete paralysis and to support the timely adoption of the programme of work, which we find balanced and comprehensive.

We fully support your proposal, Mr. Chair, to try to move forward, bearing in mind that we have a duty to assure our capitals that the Committee will be able, in a timely manner, to consider and adopt its draft resolutions in a formal mode. With that understanding, we accept the compromise that you proposed and are willing to move forward under your leadership.

Ms. Quintero Correa (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We hope that we can promptly begin the work of the First Committee and that our efforts will be successful.

Mr. León Peñaranda (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you, Mr. Chair, for your efforts to ensure that the work of the Committee can proceed.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.