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Chairman: Mr. Omar LOUTFI (Egypt).

AGENDA ITEM 52

System of travel and subsistence allowances to members of organs of the United Nations (A/3130, A/3161) (*continued*)

REIMBURSEMENT OF TRAVELLING EXPENSES

1. Mr. TURNER (Controller) recalled that it was General Assembly resolution 14 D (I) which governed the reimbursement of the travelling expenses of representatives or their alternates to and from meetings of the General Assembly. The United Nations reimbursed the actual travelling expenses of not more than five representatives or alternates for each Member State. As the resolution had not gone into detail with regard to the method of reimbursement, difficulties had arisen in practice. For example, when a Member State designated a member of its permanent mission as representative to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General had as a rule decided that no reimbursement was called for. It had, however, been necessary to exercise a certain amount of flexibility and the Secretary-General now accepted the principle that the travelling expenses of a permanent representative to and from the capital of his country should be reimbursed if he left New York prior to the opening of a session for the purpose of obtaining instructions from his Government, and that one-way travelling expenses should be reimbursed if he returned to his capital for the purpose of reporting to his Government within a reasonable period following the conclusion of a session (A/3130, paragraph 26). In authorizing those exceptional arrangements, the Secretary-General had in mind the stated purpose of the General Assembly when it adopted resolution 14 D (I), namely that the opportunities for Member States to participate in the activities of the United Nations should be equalized as far as possible, provided that the total number of representatives whose travelling expenses to and from meetings were reimbursed did not exceed five for each country; in the absence of any specific instructions, however, he had deemed it his duty to interpret the General Assembly resolution in a rather restrictive sense. From the discussion that had so far taken place, it seemed to him (Mr. Turner) that the question to be decided concerned the extent to which existing practices relating to General Assembly travel of members of permanent missions should be liberalized and, specifically, whether a round-trip journey between New York and the home country

should be paid if undertaken not only before the opening of the session but equally, if undertaken either during or after the session in question. A decision was also necessary as to the extent of the Organization's liability for reimbursement in the case of attendance at special or emergency sessions.

2. Mr. PAREJA Y PAZ SOLDAN (Peru) pointed out that it was sometimes very important for a Member State's representative to the General Assembly, whether or not he was a member of the permanent mission, to be able to consult his Government during a session. It would be both useful and fair if the practice adopted by the Secretary-General were amended to cover that, provided that the total number of journeys to be reimbursed did not exceed five.

3. Mr. SOLANO LOPEZ (Paraguay) supported the suggestion.

4. Mr. ZARUBIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) asked whether the provision whereby the number of reimbursable journeys to and from was limited to five applied in the case of one-way travel by a permanent representative to the capital of his country for the purpose of reporting after the close of a session.

5. Mr. TURNER (Controller) explained that such travel would be counted with the other journeys and reimbursement would not in any case be made for more than a total of five journeys to and from the capital.

6. Mr. VENKATARAMAN (India) proposed some amendments to the statement of principles in the draft resolution in annex I of the Secretary-General's report (A/3130).

7. In paragraph 3 (a) the words "representatives or alternate representatives to the General Assembly" should be replaced by the words "representatives or alternate representatives to regular sessions of the General Assembly", and the following words should be added at the end of the sub-paragraph:

"it being understood, however, that in respect of any other session of the General Assembly travelling expenses to be paid should be limited to one representative or alternate representative for each Member State; it being further understood that if a permanent representative or a member of the permanent mission is designated as a representative or alternate representative by a Member State, his travel expenses shall be paid if a journey to his capital and back to the Headquarters of the United Nations is undertaken before or after the session of the General Assembly, provided that such travel is within the limit of five for each Member State".

8. The words "any other session of the General Assembly" should be understood to cover not only emergency special sessions but such exceptional cases as the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations at San Francisco. Furthermore, the United Nations should not reimburse expenses for

travel and return unless the representative had actually made the return journey for purposes connected with the General Assembly. Lastly, unlike some of the representatives, he was not sure that the United Nations should consider the reimbursement of the cost of journeys made during a session, since consultations between representatives and their governments took place, of necessity, before the beginning of each session.

9. Mr. GANEM (France) reviewed the circumstances in which the General Assembly had adopted the resolution providing for the reimbursement of the travelling expenses of five representatives for each Member State. It had been concerned over the possibility that the choice of New York as Headquarters of the United Nations might make it difficult for many States which were far from New York and lacking in means to send a representative delegation; it had therefore wished to help such States to avoid the necessity of designating some of their diplomatic or consular representatives at Washington, Ottawa or New York, for it had felt that it was desirable that legislators, leaders of trade unions and senior civil servants should be able to take part in sessions of the General Assembly. That had been a wise decision and the Secretary-General had interpreted it in an increasingly liberal manner. While he did not object to a still more liberal interpretation, it was open to question whether the Committee should go much further, and it seemed to him that before such proposals as those of the representative of India were adopted it would be wise to ask the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee to give their views on the financial implications.

10. Mr. AZIZ (Afghanistan) attached special importance to the reimbursement of expenses for travel during a session for, in view of the very rapid changes in political situations, it was essential that representatives should be able to have direct contact with their Governments if the need arose. Moreover, the practice hitherto followed by the Secretary-General in the case of a journey by a permanent representative to the capital of his country after the close of a General Assembly session was too restrictive. If such a representative continued to be a member of his country's permanent mission at New York and returned to New York, there was no reason why the expenses of his return journey should not be reimbursed.

11. In reply to a question from Mr. EL-MESSIRI (Egypt), Mr. TURNER (Controller) said that the number of representatives or alternate representatives for whom the United Nations paid travel expenses had been fixed at five in the light of rule 25 of the General Assembly's rules of procedure and Article 9 of the Charter of the United Nations.

12. Mr. MENDEZ (Philippines) felt that, as it was understood that each Member State was entitled to reimbursement of the travelling expenses of not more than five representatives or alternate representatives, it was unnecessary to specify when the journeys in question were to be made. Circumstances might dictate the need for journeys before, during or after a session of the General Assembly. There was no reason to exclude travel during the General Assembly, as did the Indian representative's proposal. Provision should also be made for cases like that of the eleventh session, which was to have a recess.

13. Mr. POLLOCK (Canada) said that the Committee was called upon to take a careful and judicious

decision. He fully agreed with the Secretary-General's interpretation of resolution 14 D (I). Each and every Member State, however, should have an opportunity to participate without difficulty in the activities of the United Nations within the established limits. It was to be assumed that in exercising their rights Governments would be mindful of their responsibilities and would be guided by strict necessity in determining when their representatives should travel. It was essential that reasonable time-limits should be established, and the Secretary-General's suggestion of a period of one month after the close of a General Assembly session seemed well founded.

14. He saw no objection to the first of the Indian amendments. The other two dealt primarily with extremely complex questions of administrative practice, and it would be better to leave it to the Rapporteur to state in his report what methods the Committee would like the Secretary-General to adopt. As the Afghan representative had pointed out at the preceding meeting, the payment of travel expenses for a maximum of five journeys did not represent a theoretical right of Governments but followed from the obligation of representatives of Governments to make certain journeys essential to the performance of their duties.

15. He proposed that the Committee should accept the Secretary-General's recommendations, bearing in mind the observations of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the views expressed by members of the Committee.

16. In reply to a question by Mr. VAN ASCH VAN WIJCK (Netherlands), Mr. POWERS (Secretary of the Committee) stated that by September 1956 the number of claims for reimbursement received and settled in respect of the tenth session of the General Assembly had amounted to 232, as against the 300 to which Governments had been theoretically entitled. With regard to previous sessions, all the known claims of Member States save ten in the case of the ninth session, and eight in the case of the eighth session, had been reimbursed in full.

17. Mr. LARREA (Ecuador) pointed out that the purpose of resolution 14 D (I) had been to enable Governments to send representatives other than their permanent representatives to the General Assembly and thus to be able to participate in the activities of the United Nations under the best possible conditions. In view of the prestige which the United Nations now enjoyed and the important interests at stake, there could be no doubt that Governments would take pains to ensure the quality of their representation. To clarify the situation, he proposed that a working party should be set up to reduce to a written text the opinions expressed by the members of the Committee.

18. Mr. DIEGUEZ (Guatemala) pointed out that the reimbursement of travelling expenses was a question of particular concern to small countries, including his own. The rules governing the matter should be applied with all possible flexibility. All the members of the Committee agreed that the reimbursement of travelling expenses should be restricted to five representatives or alternates. It would be well, however, to include journeys made during the General Assembly, as the Peruvian representative had proposed. With regard to journeys made after the close of the session, the formula proposed in document A/3130 paragraph 26 (b) was illogical and the reasons given at

the end of paragraph 27 were not convincing, especially since the Government concerned would probably not have exceeded the established maximum of five journeys. He suggested that paragraph 26 (b) should be amended to cover the reimbursement of a round trip.

19. Mr. VENKATARAMAN (India) supported the Peruvian proposal concerning journeys made during sessions.

20. Mr. LIVERAN (Israel) pointed out that the general rule was that travelling expenses of government representatives were not reimbursed at all but that, for the reasons stated by the French representative, it had been thought advisable to make an exception. Nevertheless, the underlying principles should be borne in mind: it was not a matter of reimbursing the expenses incurred by an individual, but of reimbursing those which a government was fully entitled to incur in order to participate in the activities of the United Nations, so that it might have no difficulty in sending the people of its choice to represent it. Hence there were three elements to be taken into account: first, the maximum number of five representatives entitled to reimbursement; secondly, the requirement that the people in question should travel as representatives of the Government concerned to the General Assembly; thirdly, the requirement that the journey should be made within a reasonable period of time for the best accomplishment of the work connected with the session. Details such as the time of the journey, whether or not the representative belonged to the permanent delegation and the like were not the concern of the United Nations.

21. Paragraph 3 of the draft resolution did not clearly define the criteria governing the payment of travelling expenses between the capital city of a Member State or the normal residence of an individual and the place of meeting; the expression "as the case may be" did not help, for what it was necessary to determine was who was travelling and whether the traveller was attending the meeting in his individual personal capacity or as a government representative. Nor was that distinction mentioned in paragraph 5 of the statement of principles annexed to the draft resolution; similarly, paragraph 4 did not indicate what expenses would actually be paid in the case of those serving in their individual personal capacity and those serving as Government representatives. The text should be amended to make those points clear.

22. Mr. RANSHOFEN-WERTHEIMER (Austria) pointed out that paragraphs 22 to 26 (a) of the Secretary-General's report (A/3130) referred in every case to journeys to and from the place of meeting; he did not understand, therefore, why paragraph 26 (b) provided for the payment of one-way travel only. He shared the views of the French representative on the substance of the matter.

23. Mr. DAVIN (New Zealand) considered that the practice adopted by the Secretary-General was justifiable but that it might also be advisable for the United Nations to pay the cost both ways of a journey made by a representative during an ordinary session of the General Assembly to obtain instructions or after the close of a session to report to his Government, provided that the expenses of no more than five return journeys were reimbursed for each Member State. He shared the Secretary-General's view that the practice should

not be applied to other bodies and that delegations should submit claims only for journeys made at the time of General Assembly sessions. It might also be well to provide, as the Indian representative had suggested, for the reimbursement of the travelling expenses, both ways, of one representative or alternate of each Member State for each extraordinary session of the General Assembly, even if that representative or alternate was a member of a permanent delegation.

24. Mr. TURNER (Controller) explained that, in the case of special sessions, the Secretary-General had followed the practice of reimbursing travelling expenses both ways for one representative or alternate. On that point the Secretary-General was merely asking the Fifth Committee to give its approval.

25. There was one further point which, in view of some of the statements made, including, in particular, the observations of the representative of Israel, he felt needed clarification. The Secretary-General had hitherto proceeded on the assumption that not more than one round-trip could be reimbursed in respect of any one individual for any one session. It would be helpful if that understanding could be confirmed.

26. Mr. LIVERAN (Israel) endorsed the Secretary-General's interpretation. The United Nations should not reimburse the expense of five journeys, both ways, unless those journeys had been made by five different representatives or alternates.

27. In reply to questions from Mr. DAVIN (New Zealand), Mr. TURNER (Controller) explained that the journey both ways authorized for a special session of the General Assembly was in addition to the five journeys allowed for each regular session.

28. Mr. LIVERAN (Israel) said that the same practice should be adopted for regular and special sessions, except with regard to the number of persons whose journeys would be reimbursable.

29. Mr. AGHNIDES (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) pointed out that in the particular case of the first and second emergency special sessions of the General Assembly and the eleventh regular session, the United Nations would pay the expenses of only five journeys, and not six, when one and the same individual had represented his country at the emergency special sessions and then remained for the regular session.

30. Mr. LIVERAN (Israel) did not dispute that interpretation, but pointed out that it was correct only because the individual in question would have made only one journey both ways for all three sessions. If, however, the same representative had been obliged to make the journey first for the special sessions and then again for the regular session, it would be necessary to apply the principles as stated and to reimburse the cost of two journeys both ways.

31. Mr. KHALAF (Iraq) did not think that the period of one month suggested in paragraph 26 (b) of the Secretary-General's report was enough.

32. Mr. TURNER (Controller) explained that it was not intended that any time limitation should be rigidly applied. Circumstances would necessarily vary and it would be wise, therefore, simply to state that the journey be undertaken within a reasonable period after the close of the session.

33. The CHAIRMAN said that the draft resolution in document A/3130, annex I, would be amended but he thought that the Committee should decide forthwith on certain principles.

34. He suggested that it should first adopt the principle put forward by the representative of India to the effect that the United Nations should reimburse the expense of the journey, both ways, of one representative or alternate in respect of a special session of the General Assembly.

It was so decided.

35. In reply to a question from Mr. CHECHYOTKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), Mr. TURNER (Controller) said that in that particular case, as in all others, only the actual expenditure was reimbursed.

36. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee should next adopt the principle formulated by the representatives of Afghanistan, Peru, and Paraguay, to the effect that the United Nations should pay the cost of the journey, both ways, of one permanent representative or one member of a permanent delegation, designated as representative or alternate representative of his country, made before the opening of the session or during the session for the purpose of consultation with his Government, or after the close of the session for the purpose of reporting to the Government, provided, of course, that the number of people for whom

the delegation claimed reimbursement of travelling expenses did not exceed five.

It was so decided.

37. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to paragraphs 13 and 14 of the Advisory Committee's report (A/3161) concerning time-limit within which claims for reimbursement of travel expenses should be submitted. He asked the Committee to take a decision on the Advisory Committee's proposal for the establishment of a time-limit, possibly of one or two years after the close of the relevant session.

38. Mr. AZIZ (Afghanistan), Mr. DAVIN (New Zealand) and Mr. POLLOCK (Canada) thought that in order to avoid the administrative difficulties that long delays entailed, and to ensure the efficient management of the United Nations finances, it would be advisable to stipulate that all claims for reimbursement of expenses should be submitted within one year of the close of the relevant session.

39. Mr. TURNER (Controller) said that it would be helpful if the Committee would approve the Advisory Committee's recommendation. He suggested that an appropriate arrangement would be to require all claims for reimbursement to be presented for payment before 31 December of the year following that of the close of the relevant session. In the particular case of the eleventh session, claims would thus have to be presented before 31 December 1958.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.