General Assembly

Fifteenth special session

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE NINTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 24 June 1988, at 6 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. AHMAD (Pakistan)

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The meeting was called to order at 6.45 p.m.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN: This meeting has been convened to enable me to inform members of the present status of the consultations on the draft text that I circulated on Wednesday morning.

It will be recalled that this text was prepared on the basis of the meetings that had taken place in the three Working Groups responsible for dealing with the substantive items on the agenda of the special session of the General Assembly, and on the basis of consultations with groups that I had undertaken at the beginning of the week.

Since the circulation of this draft text, I have been engaged in continuous consultations. While there has been some progress in arriving at agreed formulations, there are still important, indeed fundamental, divergences on a number of subjects. It has been possible to go over this paper twice. We shall go over it for a third, and final, time tomorrow.

Tomorrow morning, when we meet to give the paper this third and final reading, I hope to provide delegations with a tidied-up copy - tidied up in the sense of the document's including those suggestions made in the course of the second reading which were generally acceptable. It will not be possible, as I have indicated on earlier occasions, to include suggestions which were followed by counter-suggestions or which were found unacceptable by other delegations.

My attempt remains to establish the middle ground, to build upon that middle ground, in the hope that those who are at the moment outside it will be attracted to it.

Given the time schedule that we have, we shall need to say "yes" or "no" to the document very quickly; for our informal meeting tomorrow will have to be followed by a formal meeting at which the paper, if it is found to be acceptable,
will have to be adopted - and adopted in time for the closing meeting of the special session of the General Assembly that has been scheduled for 6 p.m.

So this is the programme I have for tomorrow - and, given the fact that tomorrow is a Saturday, I am a little reluctant to spell it out because it will take care of the whole day, and possibly part of the night: We shall meet informally at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning, when we shall have a third and final reading of the draft text. The Committee of the Whole will meet first informally at 2 p.m., when any outstanding issues pertaining to the text can be taken up. It will meet formally at 5 p.m., when I hope the text can be adopted formally. As I indicated earlier, the closing plenary meeting of the General Assembly has been scheduled for 6 p.m.

I would merely add this: Where, in the course of the second reading of the paper, important and fundamental differences of approach have emerged, I plead very strongly with delegations that are involved in these differences of approach to meet between now and 10 a.m. tomorrow to resolve the differences so that our informal meeting can be presented with an agreed text.
(The Chairman)

I think that is extremely important if we are to adhere to the schedule the President has given us for tomorrow.

I can adjourn the meeting now, if there are no comments from any delegations, with a plea, once again, that they use the time between now and 10 o'clock tomorrow morning to resolve the basic, fundamental differences which drafting cannot resolve, and which can be resolved only through flexibility and understanding on the part of delegations.

Mr. KAZEMBE (Zambia): I should like to have some clarification with regard to tomorrow's meetings. It is my understanding that the documents you have mentioned have only been seen by the Friends of the Chairman. Sometimes, Sir, the rooms chosen have not enabled all of us to be your friends and therefore some of us have not had an opportunity to look at the documents to which you have referred. Is the meeting tomorrow at 10 o'clock also going to be a meeting of the Friends of the Chairman or is it going to be an informal meeting for all us?

The CHAIRMAN: At no stage have I excluded anyone from these consultations. When more and more people appeared, we changed the room. I began with a small room and ended up in Conference Room 1. All members, all delegations, are entitled to come to these consultations. I do not think that there has been any kind of restriction on these papers. They have been available to everybody and I gather that these papers have been discussed in regional groups and elsewhere and therefore they have been circulated everywhere.

So far as tomorrow's meeting is concerned - as in the consultations today and yesterday - whoever wishes to come is most welcome.
Mr. BIFFOT (Gabon) (interpretation from French): I should like to ask a number of questions which will help you, Sir, to understand the position of those in this assembly who do not use English as an official language of their country. You speak English perfectly, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps you speak two or three other languages as well, but if you participated in a meeting of the kind you organized yesterday and today and if only one language were used at that meeting - a language that you did not understand - imagine what your position would be.

You have said that you excluded no one from those consultations, but forgive me if I say that there are psychological and linguistic exclusions which are just as forceful. If I put you into an environment in which you were completely unable to understand the language spoken, then, Sir, you would be entitled to say to me that I had excluded you. Let me say that I do not understand English. I can work perfectly well in French or in Spanish and therefore I have two of the six languages of the Organization and although the rules of procedure and the Charter say that there are two working languages, you have turned me into a passive spectator of the meetings yesterday and today. If I were to place you in that situation, Sir, you would, from the psychological, intellectual and moral point of view, be entitled to say that I had put you in a restricted situation, that I had hampered you intellectually. Therefore I cannot agree with you that those meetings were open to everyone. Those meetings were open to those who can work in English, but completely closed to any who, like myself, are ignorant of that language.

We all understand each other here, but I cannot accept your view that those were open meetings.
Mr. AL-MASRI (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): I believe that what you have just said, Mr. Chairman, gives a true picture of the situation with respect to this document. We appreciate the efforts you have made to prepare a document that would gain widespread support. However, during the consultations, the exchanges of views and the discussions which took place during the informal meetings, a number of fundamental differences of view arose with respect to several issues covered in the document that you prepared and circulated on Wednesday morning. In this situation, my delegation believes that the holding of more informal meetings to consider this document would not in any way be a useful contribution to the work. As you have just said, Sir, delegations might make good use of the time between now and tomorrow morning in an attempt to find a solution to the differences of view among them.

My delegation therefore believes that in view of the short time we have left, we should hold a formal meeting tomorrow in order to have a third reading of the document. If there is agreement on certain points they can be confirmed and if there are differences of view, the informal meeting would not in any event enable us to resolve those differences. So it is necessary to have a formal meeting tomorrow morning in order to put the finishing touches to this document. In this way we can make use of the time we have left and the Assembly could hold its plenary meeting in the afternoon and enable us to take a decision - whether or not we adopt the document - following agreement on this matter in the formal meeting in the morning.
The CHAIRMAN: The formal decision on a draft text will have to be taken at a formal meeting and it will have to be some time tomorrow.

Mr. BUTLER (Australia): I see that this conference room is filled to capacity and, if I may say so, so it should be. This is a special session of the General Assembly devoted to a subject that we all agree is of irreducible importance. Your task, Mr. Chairman, has been a very difficult one. We have imposed on you the task of producing a consensus document on burning issues. Most of us would understand that for you to find your way towards a consensus on those issues, it has been necessary for you to consult widely, sometimes in large groups, sometimes in smaller groups and sometimes with individuals. My delegation's impression is that this work has been fruitful and that we are now moving towards the very real possibility of a consensus conclusion of this special session. But, as I have already observed, the very fact that in a formal meeting of the Committee of the Whole, this room is filled to capacity, shows that this has been the correct time to call such a meeting.

The schedule of work for tomorrow that you have outlined seems to me to be sound. Correct me if I am wrong, but I understood that you have made it clear that henceforth these meetings, whether informal or formal, will be absolutely open to all, as I have understood they have been in the past. Certainly, however, any ambiguity about that has now been removed. As we move now towards a consensus decision, whether in informal or formal meetings, the Committee of the Whole will have open doors. The time-frame that you have set for tomorrow clearly is tight and a lot of work will have to be done if we are to reach the desired consensus.

I conclude by saying again that we accept and support the schedule that you have outlined and we hope and expect that by working hard under that schedule we will reach the required consensus.
Mr. ENGO (Cameroon): I have asked to speak to lend support to the statements that have been made by my brother from the Syrian Arab Republic and also my good friend from Australia.

My delegation has had the privilege of attending all the consultations since the special session began. At one stage we had the select privilege of presiding over some of the efforts involved and therefore we join in the concern that we must bring our labours to a fruitful conclusion. We should at this time give a waiting international community the results of our efforts.

I am little worried by the fact that we are dogmatically following procedures and practices adopted by other conferences and other less concerned, less important forums. You, Mr. Chairman, mentioned here first, second and third readings, and perhaps more. Those practices came as responses to specific problems that were faced by negotiators at different times. The experience of this afternoon was that undertaking a second reading led us in many ways to repeat what had happened the first time. My delegation believes that if we undertake dogmatically a repeat performance, or if we provide an opportunity for a so-called third reading in the traditional sense, we might not only be wasting time but would be opening the door to new forms of amendment which reflect the same syncopated rhythms that we had before. You, Sir, have undertaken consultations. Nothing formal has taken place so far. You have done thorough work in trying to consult with delegations. You have definitely I am sure, like many others, drawn the inevitable conclusion that certain suggestions that were made to satisfy national positions have not met with the type of acceptance that one might hope would result in consensus - and I am being as polite as I can. If the purpose of our meeting tomorrow morning is merely to have a repeat performance in public, then I would say, having regard to the little time available, that the time could be better used
for other things. I believe at this stage that you would be in a position at least
to improve your excellent text by incorporating only material that you feel has
some basis for consensus and not to include material that would cause a reopening
of rather difficult subjects. In those circumstances it would be possible then for
us to select areas where we feel we can go along with you and not reopen issues.

My suggestion is that if tomorrow morning you feel you must ask us to have a
formal reading, let us have an updated paper produced by you, honestly produced by
you, because your dedication has been not to reflect any particular trend but to
put a series of ideas that you think could command consensus. If you do find
anything that you think cannot, you should feel free, before you formalize the
text, to cut it out. I do not think we should have too many of these informal
meetings tomorrow. I do not think these informal meetings should be left open to a
paragraph-by-paragraph approach which would in fact take the whole day.

Mr. CLERCKX (Belgium) (interpretation from French): I should like to
support the statements made by some delegations about the problems we have had in
fully participating in the procedures you have chosen. My delegation has been one
of those delegations. We voluntarily decided to abide by the rule you imposed on
us, that of undertaking limited consultations with a limited number of delegations,
friends of the Chairman. We agreed with that but then we noted that the rule got
out of hand during the course of events. What originally had been merely an
exercise aimed at achieving consensus turned into a kind of general assembly in
which we began, to a certain extent, to repeat the exercise we had already carried
out over the preceding three weeks.
(Mr. Clerckx, Belgium)

However, I think that in the final analysis this was a very useful exercise, to read and consult on the excellent document you had drawn up. Now we have to bring matters to a conclusion. My delegation advocates that we choose the clearest and most official procedures possible - to halt consultations of Friends of the Chairman, whether in an extended or not extended sense, and have the Committee of the Whole meet as soon as possible. All the work should now be done in the Committee of the Whole, and no longer in informal consultations. We sincerely believe that that is the only way successfully to conclude matters.

I suggest that we take the text tomorrow at 10 a.m., not in an informal meeting, but in a formal meeting, and that where there are remaining problems the delegations directly concerned about those problems be encouraged, in parallel with the work we are doing in the Committee of the Whole, to try to agree. Believe me, these are political difficulties, not questions of drafting. We should try to achieve agreement while we are making progress in our work in the Committee of the Whole, trying to achieve a consensus text in the allotted time, as we had foreseen. I think we are very close to it. I think we can achieve this if we now do without all the facilities that make it possible for various parties to put forward their points of view, without really being obliged to shoulder their responsibilities. That is why my delegation suggests that, with the agreement of all, we proceed tomorrow morning or even tonight - why not? - and continue the meetings of the Committee of the Whole and put an end to the consultations, which have served their purpose up to now.
Mr. BLANC (France) (interpretation from French): I know that you have a difficult job, Mr. Chairman. I know that the time constraints are very strong. I assure you that we shall spare no effort to help you. But I must recall that, in accordance with a constant rule, my delegation cannot formally approve a document that has not been translated into French.

Mr. AL-KETAL (Iraq) (interpretation from Arabic): I support what previous speakers have said. It is difficult for us at this stage to gain any benefit from informal meetings, such as we have held for several days. Therefore, we support the holding of a formal meeting of the Committee of the Whole at 10 a.m. tomorrow, when we can proceed to the third reading of the document that you are to submit to us, Sir. We hope that the Committee at that meeting will be able to reach a consensus on the document. If there is a need to hold informal meetings, we would prefer that they take place tonight - now, after an hour, or at any time you wish, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ROSE (German Democratic Republic): My delegation supports the approach that you have indicated to us for our further work, Mr. Chairman. Bearing in mind the experience of recent days, we consider that it is the most rational way to bring the session to a successful end.

Mr. BELLINA (Peru) (interpretation from Spanish): I can tell you very sincerely, Mr. Chairman, that I had not intended to speak, given our long hours of work over the past several days, in which I was able to participate more or less by chance. I support the suggestion of the representative of Belgium and other representatives. Consultations have been conducted since the beginning by the Friends of the Chairman. Later others took part. I think it is now time for the Committee of the Whole to meet tomorrow officially to take account of the document you have prepared with so much devotion and care - above all, so that some
delegations, including mine, may have an opportunity to express themselves in their own language and thus make it possible for them constructively to contribute to the document, even though we are now close to the conclusion of the session. As you know, Sir, you have my delegation's entire support for the purpose of achieving a positive outcome of your work.

Mr. NAZARKIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (interpretation from Russian): Under your leadership, Mr. Chairman, we have done a great deal of work, and now we are in the final, most responsible, stage of it. We have no doubt that you, having heard all the views put forward here, will take the correct decision and structure our work in a positive way in this final stage, in such a way as to lead us to a fruitful, successful conclusion. The Soviet delegation assures you of its full support.

Mr. MASHHADI (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation extends its heartfelt thanks for, and appreciation of, the hard work you have already done, Mr. Chairman, and we wholeheartedly support the programme you have proposed to us.

Mr. DJOKIC (Yugoslavia): I think we all have to do some homework tonight; we have to reflect and try to find a basis for the consensus that hopefully, we shall achieve tomorrow, and help you, Mr. Chairman, do what you have promised us - prepare a new text. I support your suggestion. I think you have made the wisest possible suggestion at this time, which is not to lose too much time this evening, but to adjourn and give you a chance to prepare your text, and then meet tomorrow, as you have suggested, at 10 a.m.
If it is the wish of the members of the Committee of the Whole to meet in a formal sitting, then certainly my delegation will not object. My delegation agrees with you, Mr. Chairman, that probably the best course of action would be to meet at 10 a.m. tomorrow, when we shall have your text, in a more informal sitting. That would give us all more time for reflection.

Mr. FRIEDERSDORF (United States of America): Mr. Chairman, I do not know of any individual who could have exhibited the patience, objectivity and fairness that you have exhibited this week in this difficult endeavour, and my delegation certainly is prepared to follow your recommendations and leadership as we continue our efforts to conclude our work.

Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen) (interpretation from Arabic): My delegation, like all of the delegations that have spoken before concerning the usefulness of informal meetings of the Committee of the Whole, supports the idea that we should hold a formal meeting. We share the sentiments expressed by the representative of France with regard to the languages. My delegation cannot agree to any document that is not translated into Arabic and into the other official languages of the United Nations.

Mr. RODRIGO (Sri Lanka): Mr. Chairman, you have carried very much of the work on your shoulders. We have gone through several drafts of the proposed text in this Committee. I think that perhaps it is best that we give you a little more time to go ahead with the preparation of what would perhaps be the final working draft in our activities.

I accept the suggestions that you have made with regard to the programme for tomorrow. I also understand the difficulties of those who have not been able to
participate to the fullest extent because of the lack of documentation and so on in the languages to which they are usually accustomed. I am certain that, when it comes to the final draft, it will be available in the languages of the United Nations, which will enable all countries to participate. In brief, I should like to extend to you my delegation's full support in these final stages of the session and to say that we agree with the programme that you have outlined.

Mr. BIPFOT (Gabon) (interpretation from French): The linguistic muteness to which I have been reduced up to now has prevented me from putting forward three proposals that I submitted yesterday. Since everything was done in English, I was unable to present these proposals in the regular form, but I am not in the least to blame for this. As I have said, I could work in two of the six languages that our Organization uses. One that I cannot use and of which I am completely ignorant is the one that was imposed on me. Mr. Chairman, since I am not in the least responsible for the way in which the proposals of Gabon were submitted, I hope you will be so good as to take these proposals into account and as far as possible include them in the final document. I would stress again that I am in no way responsible for anything that happened, in view of the fact that I do not speak English. As I have said, I speak two of the languages of this Organization.

The CHAIRMAN: I am not so fortunate as the representative of Gabon. I speak only one, and even that is not my mother tongue. I wish to inform him that the amendments he has proposed were circulated to all those who were present. It is not up to me to include them in the final document. It is up to the 159 delegations that are present to agree to their inclusion in the final document.

Mr. VRAALSEN (Norway): Mr. Chairman, I have a feeling that we should try to bring this discussion to an end. I think we could probably make better use of the time than by sitting here and continuing this discussion. We appreciate the
work you have done and we also appreciate the work plan you have laid out for us for tomorrow. As I understand it, the question is now whether or not we shall have interpretations tomorrow at the 10 a.m. meeting. If it takes converting it into a formal meeting to provide interpretation, then let us do so. I can readily understand that a number of delegations at this stage would prefer to have interpretations as we proceed. As I say, if in order to provide that we need to have a formal meeting, then let us have a formal meeting. If we can have an informal meeting and still have interpretations, my delegation would strongly prefer to do it informally with the necessary services, and I suppose that could be done, but here I think the Secretariat could give us the necessary guidance.

The CHAIRMAN: Interpretation can be available at the 10 a.m. meeting. However, the translated version of the non-paper will not be available until the 2 p.m. meeting. That is the situation.

Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen) (interpretation from Arabic): Mr. Chairman, since you have stated that this document will not be ready until 2 p.m., my delegation proposes that we hold a meeting on Monday so that the document will be translated into the six languages of the United Nations.

The CHAIRMAN: The proposal by the representative of Yemen is to suspend the meetings connected with the special session until Monday. I am informed that this proposal can be made only in the General Assembly, which is holding a plenary meeting at 3 p.m. tomorrow. So perhaps the representative of Yemen could make his proposal at that point.
Mr. FAHY (Egypt): Mr. Chairman, I recognize the difficulty that some delegations feel they have because of the fact that most of the work has been done in one language. As you have said, there will be interpretations for the 10 a.m. meeting, but the document will be in only one language. So, as we go through the document, if there are particular paragraphs which are not understandable to the various delegations, we could read them in the translation and the interpreters could simultaneously interpret them, and then we could move on. Of course they would not be officially accepted until the 2 p.m. meeting, when the text would be precisely translated and would be before all the representatives.

The CHAIRMAN: If there are no further comments we can adjourn. I hope that delegations will use the time between now and tomorrow to discuss and consult with one another in order to resolve the differences that exist.

The meeting rose at 7.30 p.m.