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GENERAL COMMITTEE

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRTEENTH MEETING

held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 8 May 1975, at 9.55 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. AMERASINGHE

Sri Lanka

Rapporteur-General:

Mr. RATTRAY

Jamaica

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DATE, PLACE AND DURATION OF NEXT SESSION

To expedite the work, the Chairman proposed that speakers should be limited to five minutes, in accordance with rule 26 of the rules of procedure.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN invited the chairmen of the five regional groups to present the views of their respective groups on the date, place and duration of the next session; the debate would then be open to all members of the General Committee. Some delegations which were not members of the Committee had also been invited to participate.

Mr. AMARA (Ivory Coast), Chairman of the Group of African Countries, said that his Group maintained that the Conference should not begin before April 1976, since, apart from considerations of climate, delegations must be allowed enough time to hold consultations at all levels. With regard to the place, the African Group could agree to New York or Geneva, if no developing country offered to accommodate the Conference. The majority, however, favoured New York. The Group had also agreed, by a very broad consensus, that the next session should not last more than eight weeks, at the end of which, depending on the results, it would be prepared to consider any other proposal.

Mr. SAID-VAZIRI (Iran), Chairman of the Group of Asian Countries, said that his Group had not changed its views since the General Committee's last meeting; it agreed to the next session being held either in New York or Geneva if no developing country in Africa or Asia offered to act as host to the Conference. There was general agreement in the Group that the next session should begin on 1 April 1976, and after consultation it seemed that most members favoured a session of seven to eight weeks duration.

Mr. PISK (Czechoslovakia), Chairman of the Group of Eastern European Socialist States, said that his Group would willingly agree to the next session being held in a developing country; but if that proved impossible for technical or financial reasons, it saw no objection to the session being held at Geneva or New York, preferably Geneva. The Group hoped that the session would begin early in 1976, but it was prepared to accede to the wishes of the African and Asian countries in that respect. The duration of the session should not exceed eight weeks.

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Mr. ZEA (Colombia), Chairman of the Group of Latin American States, said that in view of the difficulties of holding the next session in a developing country, his Group would agree to Geneva or New York, though there was no consensus in favour of either city. However, as the African and Asian countries preferred New York, his Group was prepared to support that choice. As to the duration of the session, it seemed that ten or twelve weeks would be needed to complete the work, and the feeling in the Group was that the time should be divided between two sessions, one at the beginning of 1976 and the other in the summer of the same year. The first session could be held in New York early in the year, as the Secretariat had suggested.

Mr. TEMPLETON (New Zealand), Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States, said that there were two main schools of thought in that Group regarding the duration and place of the next session. The majority considered that the session should not last more than eight weeks, since it was difficult to release specialists for a longer period and experience at Caracas had shown that a longer conference was not proportionately more productive. Those who favoured a maximum of eight weeks acknowledged that a further session might be required to complete the Treaty. A number of other representatives favoured a longer period, which might be up to twelve weeks, with an interval of a week or ten days at some point during the session; they thought that should enable the Conference to complete its work. In general, most representatives who favoured a shorter session considered that it should be held at Geneva. Some of those who had expressed a preference for New York or Geneva had also indicated that they could accept a majority decision in favour of either city. As to the date, some representatives thought the session should begin as early as possible in the New Year, but the Group recognized that the preferences of members of other groups who wished to avoid the severe winter should also be taken into consideration.

The CHAIRMAN, summing up the statements made by the chairmen of the regional groups, said there seemed to be general agreement that the next session should not exceed eight weeks and that, if circumstances so required, a further session should be held. With regard to the place, there seemed to be no objection to New York or Geneva, the final choice depending on the capacity of one or other city to accommodate the Conference. The date would depend on the place chosen. As to the idea, put forward

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by the Group of Latin American countries, of holding a further session, he indicated that the fourth session might be devoted to negotiations and the fifth to decision-making. In that connexion, he pointed out that under its rules of procedure, the Conference was required to make every effort to reach general agreement and could not proceed to a vote until all efforts to do so had been exhausted. If decisions had to be taken by a vote, the session devoted to decisions should be held at a place where electronic voting equipment was available, that was to say New York.

Lastly, he noted that the African and Asian countries were in agreement that the next session should begin on 1 April 1976

Mr. ZULETA (Special Representative of the Secretary-General) said that the place for the next session did not appear to raise any difficulties because, both in New York and at Geneva, the Secretariat would be able to provide services and meeting rooms. Nevertheless, the standard of those services might differ according to the date chosen. Presumably all delegations would wish for services similar to those which had been provided so far, both for official committee meetings and for consultations and informal negotiations. But in New York, during the session of the Economic and Social Council, which would last from 13 April to 14 May, it would be difficult to guarantee the same standard of services. As all delegations were aware, the Economic and Social Council occupied many meeting rooms and required comprehensive services; that did not mean that a session of the Conference could not be held at the same time as that of the Council, but it was obvious that the facilities could not be the same as those provided during the current session.

Mr. ENGO (United Republic of Cameroon), said he deduced from the comments previously made that if New York was to be used for the session at which decisions requiring a vote were taken, the negotiating session would have to be held at Geneva.

The CHAIRMAN observed that if it was decided to hold the next session in New York, the subsequent session could also be held there if voting was necessary.

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Mr. ENGO (United Republic of Cameroon) said that a session at Geneva in January and February was unacceptable to his delegation because of the rigours of the climate, which reduced its working capacity. It appeared that the African, Asian and Latin American Groups all preferred New York; his delegation considered that a session could not be held there before the month of April. In his opinion, it was time all members of the international community were made to understand the overriding importance of the Conference on the Law of the Sea. Perhaps the session of the Economic and Social Council could be deferred, if necessary. It was for the General Assembly to decide the question of priority.

Mr. ZEA (Colombia) said he wished to amplify the views expressed on behalf of the Group of Latin American countries by adding that a period of eight to twelve weeks would certainly be needed to make progress in the work of the Conference, which was extremely urgent, and that that period might well be divided into two sessions, the first devoted to negotiations, and the second to taking decisions. There was no reason why both sessions should not be held in New York, if necessary, and the date of 1 April for the start of the next session was acceptable.

Mr. STEVENSON (United States of America) said that his delegation had already explained its position on the question at the General Committee's last meeting. It believed that the time factor was the most important element, and that it was also necessary to maintain the momentum gained. A single session might not suffice for drawing up the final text of a treaty. A further session might therefore be planned at once, so that the necessary arrangements could be made for the facilities and services required. The decision-making stage was important, but it need not necessarily involve voting article by article; according to the rules of procedure, decisions could be taken in many ways. His delegation had no fixed ideas about the date and place of the forthcoming sessions; it considered the question of their duration more important. The General Assembly would have to adopt a resolution giving the Conference priority.

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Mr. JAYAKUMAR (Singapore) said that at the time when his delegation had endorsed the decision of the Group of Asian countries favouring the convening of the next session in New York in April 1976 - by which decision it considered itself bound - the possibility of holding a further session had not yet been considered. He therefore wished to explain his delegation's views on that question. It was essential that a treaty be concluded as soon as possible, at the latest in 1976, if only to avoid being overtaken by unilateral action. The idea of holding two more sessions was wise, it being clearly understood that at the second of them decisions would have to be taken, if necessary by voting. In his delegation's view, a single session in 1976 would not be sufficient, as the unified texts would attract many comments and amendments and would have to be negotiated. If it was desired to hold two more sessions, there were three possibilities. First, the General Assembly might decide categorically in favour of two more sessions, leaving the Conference no choice; his delegation was opposed to that procedure. It was similarly opposed to the second possibility, which was that the General Assembly might authorize one more session, but give the Conference discretionary power to decide to hold another, for in that situation neither the Secretariat nor delegations would have any clear idea of what facilities and services would be required. The formula preferred by Singapore was that the General Assembly should decide that there could be two more sessions, but leave it to the Conference to decide whether or not to hold the second. With regard to the place, his country supported the majority view, which was in favour of New York. Lastly, if there was only one more session, it should begin on 1 April; if there were two, it would be necessary to leave a reasonable interval between them, to give delegations time for reflection.

The CHAIRMAN emphasized that it was understood that the Conference could avail itself, if it wished, of the possibility of holding two more sessions offered by the General Assembly.

Mr. ZEGERS (Chile) said that the main thing was to make sure of having a period of twelve weeks, which could be divided into two parts, one for negotiation and one for decision-making. In that way, provision would be made for two sessions,

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but the second would be held at the Conference's discretion. It was desirable that the General Assembly should give priority over all other meetings to the Conference on the Law of the Sea; the Fifth Committee would then act in accordance with the General Assembly's decision. The programme should also include a session of one week for signing the Convention at Caracas, as planned, which should also be held in 1976. The session devoted to negotiations could be held in New York or Geneva, and it should not be forgotten that, at Geneva, it was possible to hold up to fifteen meetings simultaneously.

Mr. KOZYREV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he was surprised that some representatives should have mentioned the possibility of holding several sessions in 1976, since the question under discussion was the date, place and duration of the next session. He was also surprised by the statements to the effect that the Convention should be signed in 1976. True, all delegations wished the Conference to finish its work as soon as possible; it should do so, however, not by votes cast with the aid of an electronic device, but by taking, and then applying, decisions which had been adopted by consensus. In his opinion, the fourth session of the Conference should be held between April and June, either at Geneva or in New York, depending on the services which the Secretariat could provide. It would be for the fourth session to take the necessary decisions concerning a further session; the Conference would be exceeding its powers if it decided at that stage on the date, place and agenda for a fifth session.

The CHAIRMAN pointed out that the rules of procedure made provision for voting.

Mr. MEDJAD (Algeria) subscribed to the statement made by the Chairman of the African Group regarding the date and place of the next session. The proposal by the Latin American Group to hold two sessions in 1976 had been submitted to the Conference too late. To speak of two sessions was tantamount to prejudging the results of the next session. If the implication was that positive results were expected by the end of the fourth session and that the fifth would be reserved for decision-making, Algeria would have no objection. But if that was not the case, and delegations were not given time to study the problems that would arise at the fourth session and to hold regional and inter-regional consultations, the fifth session would be a repetition of the fourth. Such a result would be contrary to the wishes of delegations; it might weary governments and interrupt the rhythm of the meetings. Algeria hoped, therefore, that any decision concerning a fifth session would be taken at the end of the fourth session, in the light of the results obtained. It was then, and only then, that it would be possible to assess the usefulness of a further session.

The CHAIRMAN said it was only a matter of ensuring that the General Assembly provided for the possibility of a further session, which would not necessarily take place.

Mr. EVENSEN (Norway) said he strongly supported the proposal of the Latin American Group that the Conference should sit for a period of ten to twelve weeks, divided into two sessions. It was important to ensure that the deliberations of 1976 would culminate in the adoption of a convention. Sufficient time should therefore be allowed for negotiation and for taking decisions, possibly by voting. It was true that under its "gentlemen's agreement" the Conference should not vote until all efforts to reach a consensus had been exhausted; but it would be unrealistic to believe that it would not be necessary to take many votes. And it would not be desirable for the Conference to have to start voting at its next session, in 1976. There should be a fairly long interval between the next two sessions, so as to leave delegations time for reflexion and to enable the Drafting Committee to meet.

Mr. LUKABU-K'HABOUJI (Zaire) said that the Chairman of the Group of African Countries had clearly explained the position of that Group, which wished a session to be held in or after April 1976; a movement seemed to be developing, however, in favour of holding two more sessions. He wished to draw the attention of members of the General Committee to another point, namely, that in any event a separate session was to be held at Caracas for the signing of the Convention. The Chilean representative had said that that session should be held in 1976, so there would be three sessions in 1976, not two. The Conference on the Law of the Sea was becoming more and more expensive, especially for the countries of the Third World. His delegation was willing to agree to a session being held in New York in or after April 1976, and he hoped that if there had to be a further session to take decisions, it could be held at the same time as that scheduled for Caracas.

The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee that the Venezuelan Government had clearly stated that a separate session would be needed for signing the Convention.

Mr. OGOLA (Uganda) endorsed the statement made by the Chairman of the African Group. His delegation strongly hoped that the Conference would conclude its work in 1976, but it could not support the suggestion that it should hold two more sessions. One session a year was already a heavy enough burden for the small countries. The Conference could certainly afford to wait another year before finishing its work. He hoped that his reservations would be taken into account.

Mr. OGUNDERE (Nigeria) said he thought that mid-March would be a suitable time for the opening of the next session. First, the Conference would thus precede the Economic and Social Council by several weeks. Secondly, the idea of holding two sessions in 1976 seemed to be gaining ground, and an eight-week session from mid-March to mid-May would allow time for an interval of two months before the next session, which could start in mid-July and run for at least six weeks. That would enable the Conference to complete its work before the opening of the General Assembly. Even if the main object of the fourth session was to seek a consensus, it would be impossible to avoid all recourse to the process of decision-making.

Mr. de LACHARRIERE (France) said that a broad consensus had seemed to be emerging at the beginning of the meeting in favour of a session that would not begin until April and would last eight weeks. As most representatives were willing to meet either at Geneva or in New York, it only remained to find out if one of those cities could accommodate the Conference at the desired time. Some complications had been introduced by the Latin American proposal for a further session. A simple way of solving the problem would be to leave it to the fourth session to decide whether a fifth was necessary. The French delegation agreed with that idea, because a session was competent to take such a decision. On the other hand, it had serious objections to a division of functions between the fourth and fifth sessions, whereby the fourth session would be devoted to negotiation and the fifth to decision-making. His delegation was opposed to such compulsory planning being imposed when representatives had not yet even received the single texts that were supposed to serve as a basis for discussion. It was possible, and in any case it was desirable, that the fourth session should be able to take decisions on many points; but as the representatives of the United States, the Soviet Union and Algeria had pointed out, it could not be stated that the fifth session would be reserved for decision-making. It was true that the possibility of voting was provided for in the rules of procedure, but the time when a vote would be taken could never be determined in advance. That would be contrary to the spirit of the work and to the rules of procedure themselves, since any vote depended on a determination whether all efforts to reach general agreement had been exhausted, and it was impossible to decide that question now. If a fifth session took place, it was to be hoped that it would comprise all the elements necessary for applying the rules of procedure and adopting a satisfactory convention. To sum up, he thought that provision should be made for an eight-week session, to be held at

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Geneva or New York as the Secretariat advised, and for the possibility of holding a further session; but there should certainly be no division of functions between the two sessions.

Mr. KNOKE (Federal Republic of Germany) stressed that the Economic and Social Council should concede priority to the Conference on the Law of the Sea, so that it could have all the necessary services and facilities.

The CHAIRMAN said he thought the General Assembly would be strongly recommended to give priority to the Conference on the Law of the Sea.

Mr. SCHREIBER (Peru) said he wondered how the idealist view that the Conference should hold two more sessions, in order to finish its work in 1976 and adopt a convention, could be reconciled with the realist view that that would cause difficulties for many countries. The most reasonable course would be to follow the French representative's suggestion. The Conference should now decide to hold its fourth session and, if possible, to finish its work in 1976; it should be left to the fourth session to decide, if necessary, to arrange for the Conference to finish its work either in 1976 or in 1977. The fourth session should therefore be held in New York some time after the beginning of April, for a period of not more than eight weeks, and the General Assembly should be asked to provide the necessary services if the Conference decided to hold a further session in 1976. It was also possible that at the end of its fourth session, the Conference might decide, in view of the results obtained, to continue its work in 1977. For the time being, it was impossible to settle that question.

Mr. RAMBANTIA (Madagascar) reminded the Committee that he had strongly opposed compulsory negotiations at the previous meeting. He had very serious reservations regarding an unduly rigid time-table which reflected the political views of those who had proposed it and disregarded the difficulties of the developing countries. Consultations would be required after the fourth session, whether the negotiations had succeeded or not, and the proposed time-table might make such consultations impossible. On that point he supported the views of the representatives of Uganda, Guinea and Peru. With regard to the options put forward by the representative of Singapore, he feared that if the General Assembly adopted the principle of two sessions in 1976, administrative or pragmatic reasons would be advanced to counsel the Conference to hold its fifth session that year. The General Assembly should simply settle on a fourth session of the Conference and leave it to the latter to decide about a fifth. He himself hoped that a fifth session would be held, not in 1976 but in 1977.

The CHAIRMAN said there was a clear consensus in favour of a fourth session of the Conference, to be held on or after 1 April, for a period of eight weeks, all other decisions being taken later. He pointed out that the General Assembly was not competent to decide on the date and place of sessions of the Conference, and would merely be asked to provide it with the means of holding its sessions.

Mr. RODRIGUES (Brazil) thought that if the Conference was to hold two sessions in 1976, it would be preferable to advance the opening date for the first session to mid-March, so as to leave time for an adequate interval between the two sessions and to avoid holding the second in August.

Mr. SHEHAB (Egypt) said he thought the fourth session should begin at the end of March or on 1 April, since there was a consensus on that period. That would meet the wishes of Egypt, which hoped that sufficient time would be allowed for governments to study the single texts and for the regional groups to meet between the third and fourth sessions. The fourth session could be held either in New York or at Geneva, depending on the services available and the changes that would be required in the calendar of other international meetings. Past experience suggested that six to eight weeks would be enough, especially if sufficient preparatory work had been done. On the question whether the Conference should hold two sessions in 1976, he agreed with a number of previous speakers that the matter should be decided by the Conference at its next session.

Mr. YOLGA (Turkey) said experience had shown that the Conference could not complete its work in a short time. It was desirable, however, that it should do so in 1976, in order not to become a provisional conference on a permanent basis. Nor should it lose the impetus it had acquired. Consequently, it seemed necessary to provide for a period of ten to twelve weeks, interrupted by a fairly long interval. The Conference could decide at the end of its fourth session whether it was advisable to hold a fifth. The date of 1 April, which had been proposed, was quite acceptable to him. He would prefer the session to be held at Geneva, but would have no difficulty in conforming to the wish of the majority. With regard to voting, he thought that decisions by consensus could probably be reached on the broad lines, but that some questions would be difficult to settle by agreement and would inevitably have to be put to a vote. It would always be possible to reach a consensus after the voting. As to the session for signing the Convention at Caracas, he pointed out that only a few members of each delegation would have to go there, and then only for a short time; hence it would be possible to hold a third session for signature in 1976.

Mr. ENGO (United Republic of Cameroon) observed that as 1 April 1976 fell on a Thursday, it would be better to convene the fourth session of the Conference on Monday 5 April 1976.

Mr. STEVENSON (United States of America) said that his delegation's position was flexible in regard to the dates and places proposed for the next session of the Conference; nevertheless, it firmly believed that the possibility of holding a further session in 1976 should be left open and supported the third solution suggested by the representative of Singapore. It had no objection to the next session opening on 1 April 1976, provided that would not prevent the Conference from holding a further session the same year. Another point was that if the Conference ruled out the possibility of meeting in New York in August, it might not be able to hold a further session in 1976; it should take a decision on both those questions at the same time.

The CHAIRMAN suggested that the next session of the Conference should rather be held from 29 March until the end of May and that a further session should be scheduled from 21 June until the end of August, in New York.

Sir Roger JACKLING (United Kingdom) welcomed the suggestion by the representative of Nigeria that the next session should begin on 15 March 1976. Moreover, he was glad to learn that there would be enough time in 1976 to hold a second session, and he fully supported the proposal which the representative of Singapore had submitted to the General Committee as a third possibility.

Mr. ZEA (Colombia), noting that a consensus seemed to have been reached on the idea put forward by the Latin American countries of holding two sessions in 1976, said that, in deciding on priorities for the various meetings due to be held, the General Assembly should take that possibility into account.

Mr. KNOCKE (Federal Republic of Germany) said that it would be preferable for the next session to begin on a Wednesday, say on 16 or 31 March 1976, as that would enable delegations to hold consultations for two days before the opening of the Conference. Although it was not opposed to the idea that the General Assembly should provide for a further session of the Conference in 1976, his delegation shared the view expressed by the representatives of France and the Soviet Union, that it was for the Conference itself, at its fourth session, to decide whether it should hold a fifth session in 1976. In that connexion, he urged the members of the General Committee not to adopt too rigid an attitude. He agreed with the representative of France that it should not be decided to devote the fourth session to negotiations and the fifth to voting: indeed, he hoped that the Conference would

be able to adopt important decisions at its fourth session. Finally, if a further session was to be held in New York in 1976, his delegation would prefer it to be convened in the autumn rather than in July and August, for reasons of climate.

Mr. ZEGERS (Chile) said that if the Conference, in its recommendation to the General Assembly, and the General Assembly, in the resolution it would adopt, did not provide for the possibility of a further session in 1976, the Conference would not be able to meet again. In the past, the preparatory work for the Conference had lasted twelve weeks each year, spread over several sessions, so the idea put forward by the Latin American countries was not original.

Mr. ZULETA (Special Representative of the Secretary-General) observed that, if the Conference decided to recommend the General Assembly to convene a session in 1976 and to provide for the possibility of a further session during the same year, the Assembly would have to adopt a resolution authorizing the Secretariat to make the necessary arrangements for that further session to be held if the Conference so decided. On the other hand, if the Conference decided at its current session to recommend the General Assembly to convene two sessions in 1976, on the understanding that it would decide at the fourth session whether or not it was necessary to hold a fifth, there would be no budgeting problems. In any case, he wished to make it clear that if a fifth session was to be held in New York, the Secretariat would be able to provide the necessary services for the Conference only for the period from 20 June to 30 August 1976.

Mr. EL FAOUK HASSAN (Sudan) said he did not think that the countries of the African Group would have any objection to the next session of the Conference opening in mid-March in New York, but they had agreed on 1 April. Moreover, since the single texts which were to be made available to delegations would facilitate the work of the next session, it should not last more than seven to eight weeks. As to holding another session in 1976, that was for the Conference to decide.

Mr. KOSYREV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) drew the attention to the fact that the Chairman had already announced the decision of the General Committee of the Conference to hold the fourth session in New York in April and May 1976. It seemed, however, that that communication had not been heard by all the members of the General Committee, since the question was still being discussed. In case his delegation had misunderstood, he wished to make it clear that it supported the proposal made by the Group of African countries and by France, that the fourth session should be held in New York for eight weeks in April and May 1976, on the understanding that the Conference itself would decide whether to hold a fifth session.

Mr. HAMOUD (Iraq) supported the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Asian countries. The next session should be held either at Geneva or in New York, and his delegation would have no objection to its beginning on 5 March 1976. Moreover, it was the Conference itself which should decide, at its fourth session, whether or not to hold a fifth. It should not take that decision at the present stage, but wait until its next session in order to take account of developments in the situation. If the Conference did hold a fifth session in 1976, it would be necessary to provide for a sufficiently long interval between the sessions to enable delegations to negotiate and hold consultations; the fifth session should not be held too soon after the fourth.

Mr. ESSY AMARA (Ivory Coast) speaking on behalf of the African countries, said that the date of 29 March was acceptable to them and that the next session could be held in New York for eight weeks. The Group of African countries could not take a decision on whether a fifth session should be held in 1976 and thought the Conference should settle that question at its next session. The Group was aware that the calendar of conferences was heavy, but considered that, in view of the importance of the Conference on the Law of the Sea, the Secretariat should make the necessary arrangements for the Conference to meet at the dates and in the places suggested.

Mr. ENGO (United Republic of Cameroon) supported the observations made by the representative of the Ivory Coast and expressed his concern at the suggestion that the next session of the Conference should open in mid-March 1976. It had been agreed in the Group of African countries that the next session should be held in April, and the suggestion of the representative of Singapore seemed to have wide support among the members of the General Committee. In order that the Secretariat might be in a position to make the necessary financial arrangements, it should be decided that the next session would open on 29 March in New York and last eight weeks; and in case the Conference decided to hold a fifth session in 1976, the General Assembly should be requested to take the necessary steps to cover that possibility.

The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the General Committee recommended to the Plenary Conference that it should hold its fourth session starting on 29 March, in New York, for eight weeks.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the General Committee recommended to the Plenary Conference that it should wait until its fourth session to decide whether or not to hold a further session.

It was so decided.

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The CHAIRMAN said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the General Committee recommended to the Plenary Conference that it should request the General Assembly to authorize the Secretary-General to provide the necessary services for a fifth session, which the fourth session of the Conference might consider it necessary to hold.

Sir Roger JACKLING (United Kingdom) suggested that it should be made clear that budgetary provision should be made for a fifth session in 1976.

It was so decided.

Mr. STEVENSON (United States of America) pointed out that several delegations, in particular, delegations of Latin American countries, had suggested that the General Assembly should be asked to give priority to the sessions of the Conference on the Law of the Sea, and that that suggestion had not been opposed. He therefore proposed that the words "with a view to completing its work in 1976" should be added to the last recommendation of the General Committee to the Plenary Conference.

Mr. HAMOUD (Iraq) said that it was too early to consider the question of a possible fifth session in 1976; hence he could not agree to a reference to that question being made in the recommendations of the Conference to the General Assembly.

Mr. YANKOV (Bulgaria) said it was rather difficult to foresee at the present stage, when the Conference would complete its work. His delegation therefore asked the United States representative not to press his amendment. It was understood that the Conference must try to complete its work in 1976, but it would be premature to say so in the recommendations to the General Assembly.

Mr. OGOLA (Uganda), referring to the suggestion of the United Kingdom representative concerning the third recommendation of the Conference to the General Assembly, said that no decision should be taken at present on the possibility of holding a fifth session of the Conference in 1976.

The CHAIRMAN said that if he had understood the United Kingdom representative correctly, his suggestion related to budgetary considerations.

Mr. STEVENSON (United States of America) said that, in view of the comments which had just been made, he withdrew his amendment.

QUESTION OF INTER-SESSIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS AND NEGOTIATIONS

The CHAIRMAN reminded the members of the General Committee that he had suggested, at the previous meeting, that they should inform the Secretariat whether they wished to make use of its services to hold informal inter-sessional consultations and negotiations. In that connexion, he announced that the single negotiating texts would be available the following day and could serve as a basis for such negotiations.

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Mr. ZULETA (Special Representative of the Secretary-General) said that, as a result of the suggestion made by the Chairman at the last meeting of the General Committee, the Secretariat had received from the Chairman of the Group of Eastern European socialist countries a letter concerning informal open consultations which were to be held in the summer of 1975 and at the end of the thirtieth session of the General Assembly. The Group of African countries had also asked the Secretariat to service informal meetings, either at Geneva or in New York during the General Assembly, or in another city at a date to be specified later.

The CHAIRMAN informed the General Committee that another Group had also requested the Secretariat to provide services.

Mr. ZULETA (Special Representative of the Secretary-General) said that, if the services of the Secretariat were requested in a city other than those in which the official offices of the Organization were located, it would be necessary to conclude financial arrangements with the host country, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

Mr. JAYAKUMAR (Singapore) said he did not see the purpose of the present discussion, since it had been decided at the last meeting of the General Committee that participants in informal consultations who would need the assistance or services of the Secretariat should so inform the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. It had been agreed that the Secretariat would do everything it could to assist the participants and, although the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had indicated which groups had already requested the Secretariat's assistance, he hoped there would still be time after the closure of the session to request the services of the Secretariat if the need made itself felt in other groups.

The CHAIRMAN, replying to the representative of Singapore, said that the list of informal meetings was not closed and the assistance of the Secretariat could indeed be requested at a later stage.

Mr. YANKOV (Bulgaria) said that, if he had understood correctly, different types of informal consultations would be held between the sessions; consultations within regional groups and consultations between regional groups. He thought the latter were especially important, because they should make it possible to lay the foundations for future compromises. On behalf of the Group of Eastern European socialist countries, he wished to ask the Secretariat to provide its services for the inter-regional meetings which were to be held in the summer and at the end of the autumn in 1975. The location of those meetings would depend on the possibilities offered by the Secretariat.

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Mr. ZEA (Colombia) informed the General Committee that the Group of Latin American countries had not yet taken a decision on that matter.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. RATTRAY (Rapporteur-General), referring to a note recently circulated to all delegations by the International Ocean Institute, in which it was proposed that certain functions should be assigned to the Rapporteur-General between the sessions of the Conference, said that the Jamaican delegation and the Rapporteur-General were in no way associated with the authors of these proposals. In fact, the Institute suggested that the Rapporteur-General, with the assistance of a team of experts, should make an independent and objective assessment of the proposals before the Conference relating to the new international economic order, but he had very serious reservations regarding the advisability of those suggestions, to which he had not agreed. The Conference had taken certain decisions concerning its programme of work and the preparation, by the chairmen of each of the three main committees, of single negotiating texts which should serve as a basis for future negotiations. Until all governments had had an opportunity of studying those texts and of holding the necessary consultations, any assessment of the kind suggested by the Institute would be entirely out of place. He had received his terms of reference from the Conference, whose wishes he would try to meet.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.

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