

Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea

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16th meeting of the General Committee

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16th meeting

Monday, 29 March 1976, at 10.20 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. H. S. AMERASINGHE (Sri Lanka).

Organization of work

1. The CHAIRMAN asked the Chairmen of the Three Main Committees, in reporting on the progress of work thus far, to inform the General Committee about the possibility of working to a time-table so that members of the Conference would know what progress would be likely to be achieved at the current session.

2. Mr. ENGO (United Republic of Cameroon), Chairman of the First Committee, said that the First Committee had continued to hold only informal meetings at various levels and had received the fullest co-operation that could be expected. The First Committee was in the process of studying various problems and had covered a number of key paragraphs and subparagraphs on the conditions for exploitation of the international zone.

3. It was difficult to set a specific time-table. However, if the General Committee decided to set a dead-line of, say, four to six weeks before revision of the single negotiating text, the First Committee would endeavor to meet it.

4. Mr. AGUILAR (Venezuela), Chairman of the Second Committee, said that the Second Committee had continued to follow the procedure previously agreed on. In other words, it had been studying the single negotiating text article by article. It had not, however, been able to achieve its objective of completing articles 14 to 23 during the past week. He expected that the Second Committee would complete the first reading of the articles on innocent passage in the territorial sea during the current week and would then take up the matter of straits used for international navigation. That, of course, would depend on the co-operation of all members; co-operation had so far been excellent, in that most statements had not been repetitive and had dwelt on the matter at hand.

5. Time was limited and the officers of the Second Committee had therefore prepared a tentative time-table which, he wished to emphasize, was in no way rigid. At present, the Second Committee was behind schedule, a situation which he hoped would be corrected during the current week, perhaps by holding meetings in the evenings or on Saturday, 3 April.

6. Mr. RIVAS (Colombia), speaking on behalf of the Chairman of the Third Committee, said that the Third Committee had continued to work along the lines approved by the Conference: the two working groups on the protection and preservation of the marine environment and on marine scientific research and the transfer of technology had continued to meet alternately and to study the single negotiating text article by article. The working group on the protection and preservation of the marine environment had begun studying chapter VI of the text, dealing with standards. It had completed three articles and would now begin discussing the issue of dumping and other vessel-source pollution. The working group on marine scientific research had been discussing the first two chapters of part II of the text and, during the current week, would take up the question of the right of coastal States to regulate research in the economic zone. Both working groups had concentrated on identifying specific problems. It was not yet time to decide when the first reading of the text would be completed. However, the Chairman of the Third Committee expected that the first

phase would be completed by the middle of April, after which he would begin the revision of the text.

7. The CHAIRMAN, referring to the statement by the Chairman of the Second Committee, said that meetings in the evenings or on Saturday, 3 April, could be arranged. He pointed out that several group meetings were being held, so that some agreement on some issues could be expected. Therefore, he would appeal to the various groups that, where there was sufficient agreement, the number of spokesmen on a particular issue in meetings of the Main Committees could be reduced, thus limiting the number of interventions.

8. With respect to the tentative time-table for the work of the Second Committee, he appealed to all delegations to assist the Chairman of that Committee to adhere to it as closely as possible.

9. As had been announced, there would be a general debate in the plenary on 5 and 6 April on the settlement of disputes. The General Committee might therefore wish to forgo meeting on Monday, 5 April, so that the entire time could be devoted to the plenary. He had asked the Secretariat to request delegations wishing to take part in the debate to inscribe their names on the list of speakers. He intended to submit a memorandum to the Conference, with special reference to document A/CONF.62/WP.9, well before 5 April.

10. Perhaps delegations might wish to consider limiting the length of statements in that debate to 10 or 15 minutes. That decision, however, would have to be taken in the plenary with the co-operation of all. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the General Committee agreed that he should raise the matter in the plenary.

It was so decided.

11. Mr. ARIAS SCHREIBER (Peru) asked whether it might not be possible to hold a brief meeting of the General Committee of, say, 5 to 10 minutes, on the morning of Monday, 5 April. That would enable many delegations to be informed of the views of a group of States, as contained in a letter to the President, on items before the three Main Committees.

12. In principle, his delegation would agree that statements in the plenary on the settlement of disputes should be as brief as possible. However, the subject was an important one that was being dealt with for the first time; the imposition of a time-limit on statements should not therefore be too rigid, but should rather be flexible.

13. The CHAIRMAN agreed that there could be a brief meeting of the General Committee on Monday, 5 April; however, he appealed to delegations to assist him in ensuring that the meeting would begin promptly at 10 a.m.

14. He wished to reassure the representative of Peru that his appeal for brevity of statements on the settlement of disputes was only a suggestion. Delegations could certainly take as much time as was needed to state their positions.

15. Mr. MEDJAD (Algeria), referring to the tentative time-table for the work of the Second Committee, said that his delegation was not fully satisfied with the time allocated for the discussion on the régime of islands. The matter was an important one for many delegations and he therefore