ARTICLE 20

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TEXT OF ARTICLE 20

The General Assembly shall meet in regular annual sessions and in such special sessions as occasion may require. Special sessions shall be convoked by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council or of a majority of the Members of the United Nations.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

1. There has been little significant practice in connexion with the application and interpretation of Article 20 during the period under review. The one new question which has arisen concerns the procedure for postponing the opening date of a regular session by consultation of Members between sessions at the initiative of a group of Members.

I. GENERAL SURVEY

2. Regular sessions of the General Assembly were held in accordance with the provisions of Article 20 and of the rules of procedure in 1954 and 1955, at the Headquarters of the Organization.

3. No proposal was made to convene a special session during this time nor, to date, have the provisions of resolution 377 A (V), "Uniting for peace", been invoked. The opening and closing dates of the ninth and tenth sessions are given below:

	Opening date	Closing date	Approximate duration
Ninth session	21 September 1954	17 December 1954	13 weeks
Tenth session	20 September 1955	20 December 1955	13 weeks

II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

A. Regular annual sessions

1. Date of meeting

4. There has been no amendment to rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly 1/ which provides that the Assembly shall meet every year in regular session commencing on the third Tuesday in September.

a. POSTPONEMENT OF OPENING DATE

5. In the corresponding study in volume I of the Repertory 2/ it was pointed out that the rules of procedure of the General Assembly contain no express provision for changing the opening date of regular sessions as fixed by rule 1, but that various methods had been used to do so in the past. An additional procedure of consultation, which is described below, was followed to postpone the opening date of the eleventh session.

By consultation of Members at the initiative of a group of Members

6. By note verbale dated 27 March 1956 the Secretary-General transmitted a copy of a note dated 26 March from the Permanent Representatives of Chile, Cuba and Ecuador to the other Members of the United Nations on the question of the opening date of the eleventh regular session of the General Assembly.

7. Noting that, in accordance with the rules of procedure, the session should normally open on Tuesday, 18 September 1956, and stating that "it is the feeling of a number of delegations that a postponement of the opening of the session would be generally welcomed," the Permanent Representatives, on instructions from their Governments, proposed that the eleventh session be convened at Headquarters on Monday, 12 November 1956. The Secretary-General was requested to transmit the proposal to the other Members of the General Assembly for their consideration.

1/ United Nations Publication, Sales No.: 1956.I.8.
2/ See in the Repertory, vol. I, under Article 20, paras. 10-16.

8. In his note of transmittal, the Secretary-General requested that he be informed before 30 April 1956 of the position of Member Governments on this proposal. On 2 May, in a further note verbale, the Secretary-General reported to the Members of the United Nations that as of the terminal date fifty-five States had replied to his communication. Of these, fifty-two had concurred in the proposal without reservation. Two Members had indicated that, while they would not oppose a postponement generally acceptable to the others, they would have preferred that the session be held at the usual time; one Member had stated that, purely on the point of principle involved, it did not agree to a postponement of the opening date.

9. The communication of the Secretary-General went on to state that since a majority had signified its concurrence in the above-mentioned proposal, and in accordance with rule 5 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the eleventh regular session would open at Headquarters on 12 November 1956.

b. CHANGE IN OPENING DATE

10. No new discussions have taken place on the question of making a formal change in the opening date of regular sessions as presently provided in the rules of procedure.

2. Adjournment and resumption of session

11. The ninth and tenth sessions were convened and closed by the President without any temporary adjournment (see paragraphs 13-16 below).

3. Place of meeting

12. The regular sessions of the General Assembly held in 1954 and 1955 met at Headquarters.

4. Duration of session

Closing date of session

13. Early in the ninth session, when the recommendations of the General Committee on the organization of the work were considered in plenary meeting, the General Assembly decided 3/ that the closing date should be 10 December 1954. Subsequently the General Committee recommended, in its report 4/, the adoption of a resolution by the General Assembly by which it would resolve to amend this decision in order that meetings might be continued beyond 10 December, as necessary, and decide to close the session not later than 18 December 1954.

14. An oral amendment 5/ under which the date would have been changed to 21 December received 27 votes in favour, 24 against with 3 abstentions. The recommendation of the General Committee contained in its report was then adopted by 37 votes to 16. In reply to a point of order which was raised concerning the majority required for the adoption of the amendment, the President stated that, in accordance with rule 86 governing amendments to proposals relating to important questions, a two-thirds majority was required. This ruling was not challenged.

3/ G A (IX), Plen., 478th mtg., para. 114.
4/ A/2846.
5/ G A (IX), Plen., 506th mtg., paras. 1-31.

15. At the tenth session, the General Assembly decided 6/, on the recommendation of the General Committee, to approve 10 December 1955 as the closing date.

16. Later in the session, in its third report on the organization of the work, the General Committee unanimously decided to recommend, and the Assembly approved 7/ without discussion, that the date should be changed to 16 December. On that day, as a result of a deadlock in the election of the third non-permanent member to the Security Council, the Assembly decided 8/ to extend the session until midnight 20 December 1955.

B. Special sessions

1. Procedure for summoning

17. No proposal has been made to convene a special session of the General Assembly during the period covered by the present Supplement.

2. Emergency special sessions

18. No emergency special session has been held to date.

6/ G A (X), Plen., 530th mtg., para. 275.
7/ G A (X), Plen., 552nd mtg., para. 160.
8/ G A (X), Plen., 559th mtg., para. 302.