

ARTICLE 20

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ARTICLE 20

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. During the period under review, the General Assembly held nine regular sessions and five special sessions.

I. GENERAL SURVEY

2. In accordance with the provisions of Article 20 of the Charter and of rules 1 and 3 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly,¹ the Assembly held its twenty-fifth to thirty-third regular sessions, from 1970 to 1979, at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York.

3. The twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh, thirtieth and thirty-second regular sessions were completed before the end of the year in which they began. The twenty-eighth session was adjourned in December 1973 and reconvened in mid-September 1974 for one meeting. The twenty-ninth session was adjourned in December 1974 and was reconvened in

mid-September 1975 for one meeting. The thirty-first session was adjourned in December 1976 and was reconvened in mid-September 1977 for seven days. The thirty-third session was adjourned in December 1978 and resumed in January 1979 for two weeks and again in May for a week.

4. In addition to the regular sessions, the General Assembly held five special sessions, one in 1974, one in 1975 and three in 1978.

5. The following table shows the opening and closing dates and the approximate duration of the sessions held during the period under review:

	<i>Opening date</i>	<i>Closing date</i>	<i>Approximate duration</i>
<i>Regular sessions</i>			
Twenty-fifth	15 September 1970	17 December 1970	13 weeks
Twenty-sixth	21 September 1971	22 December 1971	13 weeks
Twenty-seventh	19 September 1972	19 December 1972	13 weeks
Twenty-eighth	18 September 1973	18 December 1973	13 weeks
Resumed	16 September 1974	16 September 1974	1 day
Twenty-ninth	17 September 1974	18 December 1974	13 weeks
Resumed	16 September 1975	16 September 1975	1 day
Thirtieth	16 September 1975	17 December 1975	13 weeks
Thirty-first	21 September 1976	22 December 1976	13 weeks
Resumed	13 September 1977	19 September 1977	1 week
Thirty-second	20 September 1977	21 December 1977	13 weeks
Thirty-third	19 September 1978	21 December 1978	13 weeks
Resumed	15 January 1979	29 January 1979	2 weeks
Resumed	23 May 1979	31 May 1979	1 week
<i>Special sessions</i>			
Sixth	9 April 1974	2 May 1974	3 weeks
Seventh	1 September 1975	16 September 1975	2½ weeks
Eighth	20 April 1978	21 April 1978	2 days
Ninth	24 April 1978	3 May 1978	1½ weeks
Tenth	23 May 1978	30 June 1978	1 week

II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

A. Regular annual sessions

1. DATE OF MEETING

6. There was no amendment to rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which provides that the Assembly "shall meet every year in regular session commencing on the third Tuesday in September".

****a.** *Postponement of opening date*

****b.** *Change in opening date*

2. ADJOURNMENT AND RESUMPTION OF SESSION

7. At the twenty-eighth session, on 18 December 1973, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,² decided to adjourn the session and to resume it when the President, after consultations with Member States and with the Secretary-General, would believe that conditions were favourable for the consideration of the item remaining on the agenda. The session was resumed and closed on 16 September 1974.

8. At the twenty-ninth session, on 18 December 1974, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,³ took an identical decision. The session was resumed and closed on 16 September 1975.

9. At the thirty-first session, by a letter dated 17 December 1976 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the representative of Pakistan, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of 77, requested that the session be reconvened at a later date in order to consider the item entitled "Development and international economic co-operation: implementation of the decisions adopted by the General Assembly at its seventh special session". The Assembly agreed to the request⁴ and, consequently, the session was resumed on 13 September and closed on 19 September 1977.

10. At the thirty-third session, the General Committee recommended⁵ that the session should be resumed for a period of one week to 10 days exclusively to conclude the consideration of the remaining items on the agenda. The General Assembly adopted the recommendation.⁶ The session was resumed on 15 January 1979. On 29 January, owing to the fact that the Assembly had yet to consider the item entitled "Question of Namibia", the President announced⁷ that members of the Assembly would be informed in due course of the date on which the session would be reconvened. The Assembly reconvened on 23 May and was declared closed on 31 May 1979.

3. PLACE OF MEETING

11. All the sessions held during the period under review met at the Headquarters of the United Nations in accordance with rule 3 of the rules of procedure.

12. At the thirty-second session, in the course of the general debate, the special envoy of the Republic of the Philippines invited the General Assembly to hold its thirty-third session at Manila.⁸ On 6 December 1977, the General Assembly, at the request of several Member States⁹ and on the recommendation of the General Committee,¹⁰ included in the agenda an additional item entitled "Place of meeting of the thirty-third session of the General Assembly".¹¹ The Assembly was seized of a draft resolution whereby it would have decided that the first part of the thirty-third session, which consisted of the ceremonial opening, the organization of work and the general debate and would last for approximately four weeks, should be held at Manila. On 9 December 1977, however, the Assembly took note of a statement by its President in the course of which he announced that the sponsors of the draft resolution had decided not to press for a vote.¹²

4. DURATION OF SESSION

13. In its report to the General Assembly submitted in 1971, the Special Committee on the Rationalization of the Procedures and Organization of the General Assembly recommended that the duration of 13 weeks for regular sessions should not be changed and that, in any case, the session should end before Christmas.¹³ That recommendation was endorsed by the General Assembly when, by resolution 2837 (XXVI), it approved the conclusions of the Special Committee and decided that they should be annexed to the rules of procedure.¹⁴

5. CLOSING DATE OF SESSION

14. The dates for the closing of the session recommended by the General Committee and approved by the General Assembly were observed only at the twenty-seventh session.

15. At the twenty-fifth session the date originally recommended by the General Committee¹⁵ and approved by the General Assembly¹⁶ was 15 December 1970. On 15 Decem-

ber, however, the General Assembly, on the suggestion of its President,¹⁷ decided that the closing date would be postponed until 16 December in order to allow the Main Committees to finish their work. On 16 December, after the President had stated that several reports of the Main Committees were not ready, the General Assembly agreed to meet on 17 December.¹⁸ The session was closed on that day.

16. At the twenty-sixth session the date originally recommended by the General Committee¹⁹ and approved by the General Assembly²⁰ was 21 December 1971. On 20 December, after the President had stated that it would not be possible to adhere to that date, the General Assembly decided to meet on 22 December.²¹ The session closed on that day.

17. At the twenty-eighth session, the decision taken by the General Assembly on the General Committee's recommendation²² to close the session on 18 December 1973 was superseded as a consequence of the Assembly's decision to adjourn the session and resume it.²³ No date was set for the end of the session, which was resumed on 16 September 1974 and closed the same day.

18. At the twenty-ninth session a similar situation occurred²⁴ and no date was set for the end of the session, which was resumed on 16 September 1975 and closed the same day.

19. At the thirtieth session the date originally recommended by the General Committee²⁵ and approved by the General Assembly²⁶ was 16 December 1975. On 15 December, however, the General Assembly, on the suggestion of the President,²⁷ decided that the closing date would be postponed to 17 December in order to allow the Fifth Committee to finish its work. The session was closed on that day.

20. At the thirty-first session the date originally recommended by the General Committee²⁸ was 21 December 1976. On that day, upon the suggestion of the President,²⁹ the General Assembly decided³⁰ to extend the date by one day in order to allow the Assembly to conclude its work. That decision was superseded as a consequence of the Assembly's decision to adjourn the session and resume it.³¹

21. At the thirty-second session the date originally recommended by the General Committee³² and approved by the General Assembly³³ was 20 December 1977. On that day, upon the suggestion of the President, the Assembly decided³⁴ to extend the date by one day in order to allow the Assembly to conclude its work. The session was closed on that day.

22. At the thirty-third session the date originally recommended by the General Committee³⁵ and approved by the General Assembly³⁶ was 19 December 1978. On that day, upon the suggestion of the President, the Assembly decided³⁷ to extend the session by one day in order to allow the Assembly to conclude its work. On 20 December the General Committee³⁸ recommended that the closing date be extended by one additional day. The Assembly adopted the recommendation.³⁹ That decision was superseded as a consequence of the Assembly's decision to adjourn the session and resume it.⁴⁰

B. Special sessions

1. PROCEDURE FOR SUMMONING

23. Article 20 of the Charter provides that 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".

24. Five special sessions, the sixth to the tenth inclusive, were held during the period under review.

a. *By the General Assembly*

25. The seventh special session was summoned by the General Assembly at its twenty-eighth session. By resolution

3172 (XXVIII) of 17 December 1973 it was decided to hold a special session of the General Assembly at a high political level at an appropriate date just before the thirtieth regular session for the purpose of examining the political and other implications of the state of world development and international economic co-operation, expanding the dimensions and concepts of world economic and developmental co-operation and giving the goal of development its rightful place in the United Nations system and on the international stage.

26. By its resolution 3343 (XXIX) of 17 December 1974 the General Assembly decided that the seventh special session should be held from 1 to 12 September 1975.

27. In compliance with the decisions set forth in those resolutions, the Secretary-General, by a *note verbale* dated 15 August 1975, informed the permanent representatives that the seventh special session would open on 1 September 1975.

28. The eighth special session was summoned when the Security Council decided⁴¹ to establish the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and at the same time approved⁴² the report of the Secretary-General which stated that the cost of the Force should be considered as expenses of the Organization to be borne by the Member States. As a result, the Secretary-General was obliged to implement General Assembly resolution 32/214 of 21 December 1977, entitled "Unforeseen and extraordinary expenses for the biennium 1978-1979", paragraph 3 of which read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

" . . .

"3. *Decides* that if, as a result of a decision of the Security Council, commitments relating to the maintenance of peace and security should arise in an estimated total exceeding \$10 million before either the thirty-third or the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, a special session of the Assembly shall be convened by the Secretary-General to consider the matter."

The eighth special session was held on 20 and 21 April 1978.

29. The ninth special session was summoned by the General Assembly at the thirty-second session. By resolution 32/9 H of 4 November 1977 the Assembly decided to hold a special session on the question of Namibia before the thirty-third session, on a date to be determined by the Secretary-General in consultation with the United Nations Council for Namibia. The ninth special session was held from 24 April to 3 May 1978.

30. The tenth special session, devoted to disarmament, was convened under General Assembly resolutions 31/189 B of 21 December 1976 and 32/88 B of 12 December 1977. The session was held from 23 May to 30 June 1978.

**b. *At the request of the Security Council*

c. *At the request of Members*

31. By a letter dated 30 January 1974 addressed to the Secretary-General,⁴³ the Permanent Representative of Algeria transmitted a request by the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria for the convening of a special session of the General Assembly to consider the item entitled "Study of the problems of raw material and development".

32. In accordance with rule 9(a) of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, by a note dated 31 January 1974, communicated the request to all Member States and inquired whether they concurred.

33. By a *note verbale* dated 25 February 1974,⁴⁴ the Secretary-General informed the Member States that on 14 February the required majority of Member States had concurred in the request. However, the opening date was postponed (see paragraph 34 below).

2. DATE OF MEETING

34. Under rules 8 to 10 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, the sixth special session should have been convened not later than 1 March 1974. However, the Secretary-General received a letter dated 14 February from the Permanent Representative of Iran, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of 77, informing him of a general desire among the members of the Group to postpone the opening date of the special session to a later date and requesting him to take appropriate steps to consult the membership about this proposal. The date of 2 April had been suggested by some members of the Group.

35. By 19 February the Secretary-General had been informed by the Chairmen of the regional groups that there was a consensus among the members of the groups in favour of a postponement of the opening date of the special session. The Member States which did not belong to any of the regional groups also informed the Secretary-General that they concurred in the postponement.

36. On 21 February, the Secretary-General received a further letter from the Chairman of the Group of 77 informing him that the Group had unanimously decided in favour of the date of 9 April for the opening of the special session.

37. After consultations, the Chairmen of the five regional groups informed the Secretary-General that the members of their groups had concurred in the date of 9 April. The Member States which did not belong to any regional group also informed the Secretary-General that they had concurred in that date.

38. By a *note verbale* dated 25 February⁴⁵ the Secretary-General informed the Member States that the sixth special session would convene on 9 April.

3. CLOSING DATE OF SESSION

39. At the sixth special session, the closing date originally recommended by the General Committee⁴⁶ and approved by the General Assembly⁴⁷ was 29 April 1974. On 24 April, however, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,⁴⁸ decided that the closing date be postponed to 30 April. On that day, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,⁴⁹ decided that the closing date be postponed to 2 May in order to allow the necessary time to prepare and publish the report of the *Ad Hoc* Committee of the Sixth Special Session. The session was closed on 2 May.

40. At the seventh special session, the closing date established by General Assembly resolution 3343 (XXIX) was 12 September 1975. However, on 11 September, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,⁵⁰ decided that the closing date be postponed to 13 September or at the latest 15 September, in order to allow the *Ad Hoc* Committee of the Seventh Special Session to finish its work. On 16 September, the President stated that it had not been possible to hold a plenary meeting before that date and proposed that the General Assembly decide to close the session on 16 September.⁵¹ The General Assembly adopted the proposal.

C. Emergency special sessions

41. No emergency special session was summoned during the period under review.

NOTES

¹ A/520/Rev.13 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.I.11).

² G A (28), Plen., 2206th mtg., paras. 237 and 238.

³ G A (29), Plen., 2325th mtg.

⁴ G A decision 31/429 A.

- ⁵ G A (33), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/33/250/Add.1, para. 2(b).
⁶ G A decision 33/432, para. (a).
⁷ G A (33), Plen., 96th mtg., para. 90; see also G A resolution 33/182 A, para. 14.
⁸ G A (32), Plen., 15th mtg., para. 186.
⁹ G A (32), a.i. 130, A/32/246/Rev.1.
¹⁰ G A (32), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/32/250/Add.3, para. 1.
¹¹ G A (32), Plen., 93rd mtg., para. 1.
¹² G A decision 32/421.
¹³ G A (26), Suppl. No. 26, A/8426, para. 22.
¹⁴ Rules of procedure, annex V. See United Nations publication, Sales No. E.79.I.11.
¹⁵ G A (25), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/8100, para. 6.
¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Plen., 1843rd mtg., para. 4.
¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1930th mtg., paras. 2-4.
¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1932nd mtg., para. 177.
¹⁹ G A (26), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/8500, para. 6.
²⁰ *Ibid.*, Plen., 1937th mtg., para. 4.
²¹ *Ibid.*, 2028th mtg.
²² G A (28), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/9200, para. 8.
²³ See para. 7.
²⁴ See para. 8.
²⁵ G A (30), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/10250, para. 8.
²⁶ *Ibid.*, Plen., 2353rd mtg.
²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2441st mtg.
- ²⁸ G A (31), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/31/250, para. 8.
²⁹ G A (31), Plen., 4th mtg., para. 7.
³⁰ G A (31), Plen., 106th mtg., para. 140.
³¹ See para. 9.
³² G A (32), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/32/250, para. 8.
³³ G A (32), Plen., 5th mtg., para. 5.
³⁴ G A (32), Plen., 109th mtg., para. 62.
³⁵ G A (33), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/33/250, para. 8.
³⁶ G A (33), Plen., 4th mtg., para. 65.
³⁷ G A (33), Plen., 88th mtg., para. 1.
³⁸ G A (33), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/33/250/Add.1, para. 2(a).
³⁹ G A (33), Plen., 90th mtg., para. 1.
⁴⁰ See para. 10.
⁴¹ S C resolution 425 (1978).
⁴² S C resolution 426 (1978).
⁴³ G A (S-6), Annexes, a.i. 7, A/9541.
⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, a.i. 7, A/9542.
⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
⁴⁶ G A (S-6), Annexes, a.i. 5, A/9549, para. 2.
⁴⁷ G A (S-6), Plen., 2218th mtg., para. 126.
⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2227th mtg., para. 128.
⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2228th mtg., para. 122.
⁵⁰ G A (S-7), Plen., 2348th mtg., para. 104.
⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2349th mtg., paras. 1-3.