ARTICLE 20

CONTENTS

Text of Article 20

Introductory note .......................................................... 1

I. General Survey .......................................................... 2 – 5

II. Analytical summary of practice ................................. 6 – 28

A. Regular annual sessions ............................ 6 - 16

1. Date of meeting ................................................. 6

** a. Postponement of opening date

** b. Change in opening date

2. Adjournment and resumption of session ...... 7

3. Place of meeting ............................................ 8 -10

4. Duration of session ....................................... 11

5. Closing of session .................................... 12 - 16

B. Special sessions ..................................... 17 - 27

1. Procedure for summoning ...................... 17 - 18

a. By the General Assembly .............. 19 – 21

** b. At the request of the Security Council

** c. At the request of Members

2. Date of meeting ...................................... 22 - 24

3. Closing date of session ..................... 25 - 27

C. Emergency special sessions ........................ 28

Notes
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. The general structure of this study follows that of Article 20 in the Repertory Supplements 6.

I. GENERAL SURVEY

2. During the period under review, the General Assembly held five regular sessions and three special sessions. Except for six meetings during the forty-third session, that were held at the Palais des Nations Geneva,1 all other meetings were held at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York.


4. In addition to the regular sessions, and in accordance with the provisions of Article 20, the General Assembly held three special sessions in the period reviewed. The thirtieth and fourteenth special sessions were convened in 1986, and the fifteenth special session was held in 1988.

5. The following table shows the opening and closing dates and the approximate duration of the sessions held during the period reviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular sessions</th>
<th>Opening date/ Resumption date</th>
<th>Closing date/ Suspension date</th>
<th>Approximate duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thirty-ninth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>9 April 1985(^2)</td>
<td>12 April 1985(^3)</td>
<td>4 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>16 September 1985(^4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortyith</td>
<td>17 September 1985(^5)</td>
<td>18 December 1985(^6)</td>
<td>13.5 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>28 April 1986(^7)</td>
<td>2 May 1986 (no suspension)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9 May 1986 (no resumption or suspension)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>20 June 1986(^8) (no resumption)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>15 September 1986(^9)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forty-First</td>
<td>16 September 1986(^10)</td>
<td>11 December 1986 (no suspension or resumption)</td>
<td>13.5 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>14 September 1987(^12)</td>
<td>19 December 1986(^11) (no resumption)</td>
<td>1 Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forty-second</td>
<td>15 September 1987(^13)</td>
<td>21 December 1987(^14)</td>
<td>13 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>29 February 1988(^15)</td>
<td>2 March 1988(^16)</td>
<td>3 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>18 March 1988(^17)</td>
<td>23 March 1988(^18)</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>11 May 1988(^19)</td>
<td>13 May 1988(^20)</td>
<td>3 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>16 August 1988(^21)</td>
<td>17 August 1988(^22)</td>
<td>2 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resumed</td>
<td>19 September 1988(^23)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forty-third</td>
<td>20 September 1988(^24)</td>
<td>22 December 1988(^25)</td>
<td>13.5 Weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Sessions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirteenth</td>
<td>27 May 1986(^26)</td>
<td>1 June 1986(^27)</td>
<td>1 Week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourteenth</td>
<td>17 September 1986(^28)</td>
<td>20 September 1986(^29)</td>
<td>4 Days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifteenth</td>
<td>31 May 1988(^30)</td>
<td>26 June 1988(^31)</td>
<td>3.5 Weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

A. Regular annual sessions

1. DATE OF MEETING

6. 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”, was followed by the General Assembly during the period under review.

**a. Postponement of opening date

**b. Change in opening date

2. ADJOURNMENT AND RESUMPTION OF SESSION

7. There was no amendment to rule 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, which provides that the Assembly “may decide at any session to adjourn temporarily and resume its meetings at a later date”. During the period under review, the General Assembly adjourned its regular sessions in December each year and convened several resumed sessions in the following year. All regular sessions were declared closed on the day preceding the opening of the next session.

3. PLACE OF MEETING

8. Rule 3 to the rules of procedure provides: “The General Assembly shall meet at the headquarters of the United Nations unless convened elsewhere in pursuance of a decision taken at a previous session or at the request of at the majority of the Members of the United Nations”.

9. Except for six meetings during the forty-third session of the General Assembly, which were convened at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 32 all other meetings in the period under review were held at the Headquarters of the United Nations, in New York.

10. The General Assembly decided to change its venue during its forty-third session, due to denial of an entry visa by the United States to Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the
Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, who was invited by the United Nations to address the General Assembly on the “question of Palestine”. The issue was the subject of lengthy discussions in two meetings of the General Assembly, under the item “Relations with the host country”. The Assembly decided in accordance with the resolution it adopted on the subject to convene its plenary meetings in Geneva to continue the consideration of the item.

4. DURATION OF SESSION

11. During the period reviewed, the General Assembly complied with the decision that it had made prior to this period, that the duration of 13 weeks for regular sessions should not be changed and that in any case, the session should end before Christmas. The duration of the sessions remained 13 weeks, from Mid-September until Mid-December. However, the General Assembly continued the practice of resuming its sessions, in the following year.

5. CLOSING DATE OF SESSION

12. At the beginning of the thirty-ninth and fortieth sessions, upon the recommendation of the General Committee, the General Assembly decided to fix 18 December 1984 and 17 December 1985, as closing dates for the sessions, respectively.

13. At the end of the fortieth session, the General Assembly decided to discuss, at the beginning of the forty-first session, the Secretary-General’s proposal concerning the curtailment of the forty-first session by three weeks. However, this issue was not discussed at that session and the General Assembly at the third meeting of the forty-first session approved the General Committee’s recommendation regarding the closing date of the session. Yet, the Committee had not recommended a specific date, and had decided to defer the consideration of a closing date of the forty-first session to a future meeting.

14. At the forty-second and forty-third sessions, the General Assembly approved the General Committee’s recommendation that “in view of the financial problems still being
faced by the United Nations and in the context of the process of renewal and reform under way, no closing date should be decided upon at this time and that every effort should be made to curtail the duration of the… session” 43.

15. The dates for the closing of the sessions recommended by the General Committee and approved by the General Assembly were generally observed during the Thirty-Ninth and Fortieth sessions as for the first part of each session. However, the sessions were not closed at those dates and the General Assembly continued the practice of convening resumed sessions.44

16. It should be noted that despite the efforts to curtail the duration of the forty-first, forty-second and forty-third sessions, they were not shorter than the previous ones in the period under review.

B. Special sessions

1. PROCEDURE FOR SUMMONING

17. 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”.

18. Three special sessions were held during the period under review: the thirteenth special session on the issue of Africa; the fourteenth special session regarding the question of Namibia; the fifteenth special session on disarmament.

a. By the General Assembly

19. The thirteenth special session was summoned by the General Assembly at its fortieth regular session. By resolution 40/40 of 2 December 1985, the General Assembly
decided “to convene a special session of the General Assembly at the ministerial level to consider in depth the critical economic situation in Africa”.45

20. During the fortieth regular session, the General Assembly decided “to hold a special session on the question of Namibia before its forty-first session”.46 The fourteenth special session was held from 17 September to 20 September 1986.

21. The fifteenth special session was the convened in accordance with General Assembly resolution 42/4047 in which the General Assembly reaffirmed its resolution “to convene its third special session on disarmament in 1988”.48 The fifteenth special session which was entitled “the third special session on disarmament” was held from 31 May 1988 to 26 June 1988.

**b. At the request of the Security Council

** c. At the request of Members

2. DATE OF MEETING

22. By resolution 40/40 of 2 December 1985, the General Assembly decided that the thirteenth special session will be “held in New York from 27 to 31 May 1986”.49

23. With regard to the fourteenth special session, the General Assembly decided that the special session will be convened “on a date to be determined by the Secretary-General in consultation with the United Nations Counsel of Namibia”.50 The special session was declared open on 17 September 1986.

24. The fifteenth special session on the issue of disarmament was convened in accordance with resolution 42/40 “from 31 May to 25 June 1988 at United Nations Headquarters in New York”.51
3. CLOSING DATE OF SESSION

25. The thirteenth special session held eight plenary meetings,\textsuperscript{52} and was closed on 31 May 1986.

26. The fourteenth special session was declared closed on 20 September 1986,\textsuperscript{53} after holding seven plenary meetings.

27. The fifteenth special session held 22 plenary meetings,\textsuperscript{54} and was declared closed on Sunday 26 June 1988\textsuperscript{55}.

C. Emergency special sessions

28. No emergency special session was held during the period under review.

---------
NOTES

\textsuperscript{1} A/43/PV.77-A/43/PV.82.
\textsuperscript{2} A/39/PV.106.
\textsuperscript{3} A/39/PV.107.
\textsuperscript{4} A/39/PV.108.
\textsuperscript{5} A/40/PV.1.
\textsuperscript{6} A/40/PV.122.
\textsuperscript{7} A/40/PV.123.
\textsuperscript{8} A/40/PV.133.
\textsuperscript{9} A/40/PV.134.
\textsuperscript{10} A/41/PV.1.
\textsuperscript{11} A/41/PV.102.
\textsuperscript{12} A/41/PV.103.
\textsuperscript{13} A/42/PV.1.
\textsuperscript{14} A/42/PV.99.
\textsuperscript{15} A/42/PV.100.
\textsuperscript{16} A/42/PV.104.
\textsuperscript{17} A/42/PV.105.
\textsuperscript{18} A/42/PV.109.
\textsuperscript{19} A/42/PV.110.
\textsuperscript{20} A/42/PV.113.
\textsuperscript{21} A/42/PV.114.
\textsuperscript{22} A/42/PV.115.
A/42/PV.116.
A/43/PV.1.
A/43/PV.85.
A/S-13/PV.1.
A/S-13/PV.8.
A/S-14/PV.1.
A/S-14/PV.7.
A/S-15/PV.1.
A/S-15/PV.22.
A/43/PV.77-A/43/PV.82.
A/RES/43/49. 154 states voted for the adoption of the resolution, 2 objected (United States and Israel), and one abstention (United Kingdom).
A/RES/2837 (XXVI).
See table, paragraph 9.
First Report of General Committee A/40/250.
See table at paragraph 9.
A/RES/40/40, 2 December 1985, paragraph 2.
A/RES/40/40, 2 December 1985, paragraph 2.
A/S-13/PV.1- A/S- 13/PV.8.
A/S-14/PV.7.
The meetings were held on a daily basis from 31 May to 14 June (meetings 1-21), while the final 22 meeting was held after ten days.
The 22 plenary meeting was held on 25 June 1986, it started at 11.50 p.m. and was closed at 26 June 1986 at 7.25 a.m.