

UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.105/PV.17*
15 April 1963

ENGLISH

32

COMMITTEE ON THE PEACEFUL USES OF OUTER SPACE

170
VERBATIM RECORD OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 25 February 1963, at 10.50 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. MATSCH

(Austria)

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Organization of the work of the Committee in 1963
3. Question of the establishment of an international equatorial sounding rocket facility

* This document replaces the English version of document A/AC.105/SR.17.

63-08257

/...

OPENING OF THE MEETING BY THE CHAIRMAN

The CHAIRMAN: I should like sincerely to welcome the members of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space to the third session of our Committee.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

The CHAIRMAN: At our last two sessions, the Committee agreed to invite representatives of COSPAR, UNESCO, WMO, ITU and the International Atomic Energy Agency as observers, in accordance with the practice of the Committees of the General Assembly. Unless I hear any objections, I shall invite the representatives of the specialized agencies and of COSPAR to take seats at the conference table.

It was so decided.

PROGRAMME AND ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

The CHAIRMAN: Since the last session of this Committee in September 1962, the General Assembly at its seventeenth session discussed the work of our Committee and unanimously adopted resolution 1802 (XVII). It is on the basis of this resolution and of resolution 1721 (XVI) that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space will now continue its work. As the members of the Committee are aware, the General Assembly in this resolution requested our Committee urgently to continue its task on the further elaboration of basic legal principles governing the activities of the States in the exploration of outer space, on liability for space vehicle accidents, and on assistance to a return of astronauts and space vehicles, as well as on other legal problems.

The General Assembly, furthermore, referred to our Committee as a basis for this work a number of draft proposals pertaining to this question which had been submitted by various delegations. The General Assembly further endorsed the recommendation made by our Committee at its last session concerning the exchange of information and the support of international outer space programmes, and particularly endorsed the basic principles suggested by our Committee for the operation of sounding rocket facilities on the geomagnetic equator and the United Nations sponsorship of the International Year of the Quiet Sun.

The members of the Committee will note that the Government of India has already submitted a memorandum concerning the establishment of such international equatorial sounding rocket facilities, and this will be one of the subjects for discussion at our present session.

In opening the third session of our Committee, I should like to recall that at the opening meeting of the first session of the Committee on 19 March last year, it was agreed that it would be the aim of all members of the Committee and its Sub-Committees to conduct the work in such a way that the Committee would be able to reach agreement in its work without need for voting. I trust that the members of the Committee will agree to continue this procedure.

In starting on item 1 of our agenda, the organization of the work of the Committee in 1963, I would say that in conversations I have had in the last week, I received the impression that it is the intention of the members to refer the legal issues to the Legal Sub-Committee, as was done last year, and to invite the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee to continue its work.

Mr. FEDORENKO (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) (interpretation from Russian): In speaking for the first time in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, I would like to say that this Committee is an important organ which has been called upon to seek co-operation in the development of co-operation in the mastering and the harnessing of the cosmos. May I take this opportunity to wish the Committee success in its work and in the fulfilment of the serious tasks which have been placed upon it by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

(Mr. Fedorenko, USSR)

The Soviet Union attributes great importance to the establishment and the strengthening of international co-operation in the exploration of outer space. Such a co-operation upon an equal footing is not only desirable and useful from the point of view of the acceleration of the mastering of outer space by mankind but co-operation in this field is of great significance also because it can play an important role in the development of friendly relations between States in the strengthening of peace on earth.

In certain of the messages of the Head of the Soviet Government, Mr. Khrushchev, to the President of the United States, Mr. Kennedy, on 21 and 23 March of last year, stress was laid upon the fact that the colossal task, in terms and scope, that each new step in the mastering of outer space placed before mankind called for an intensification and strengthening of international co-operation in this field. It is precisely from this point of view that we should be guided in the solution of all questions involving the organization of the work of this Committee for 1963.

By the resolution which it unanimously adopted on 19 December 1962, the General Assembly placed a number of important tasks before the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. In that resolution, stress was laid upon the importance of co-operation between the Members of the United Nations in the further development of the legal principles applicable to outer space.

In this connexion, the General Assembly noted with regret that the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space had so far not adopted any recommendations on legal questions. In this connexion, the Committee is urged to continue its efforts on the further development of basic legal principles concerning the activities of Governments in the exploration and utilization of outer space, on questions dealing with responsibility for any accident or liability brought about by any accident of spacecraft and on the provision of assistance to astronauts and spacecraft, as well as on other legal matters falling within the province.

We shall not now embark upon a recital of the history of legal problems in outer space, but the Soviet delegation has quite clearly in the course of the discussions of this matter in the General Assembly explained why the Legal Sub-Committee reached an impasse and why the development of basic legal principles applicable to outer space reached a deadlock.

(Mr. Fedorenko, USSR)

At the present stage we shall limit ourselves to stressing the importance and necessity of formulating provisions to regulate relations between States in connexion with the peaceful utilization of outer space. The Soviet Union has introduced relevant proposals on these matters for the consideration of the United Nations. Other States have also introduced such proposals. It is now necessary for the Legal Sub-Committee to formulate corresponding legal standards and norms.

The General Assembly has adopted a number of important decisions on the scientific and technical aspects of international co-operation in outer space. The Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee will have to examine methods further to strengthen international co-operation in that area. That Sub-Committee achieved a certain amount of success last year, and this was certainly due to the fact that the parties concerned took due account of neutral interests and attempted to find solutions mutually acceptable. Let us hope that this year again the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee will be able to give us good news in regard to the results of its work.

We shall have to decide on the time and place of the sessions of the Sub-Committees. The Soviet delegation supports the proposal that the Legal Sub-Committee should hold its session at the end of April and the beginning of May and that the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee should hold its session in May. As regards where the Sub-Committees should meet, the Soviet Union considers that it would be appropriate for both to meet in Geneva. As is known, last year the Sub-Committees met in Geneva, and, in our opinion, this good practice should continue this year. From the point of view of practical convenience for the delegations of the various countries concerned, Geneva is unquestionably the most appropriate place. At the beginning of May the International Law Commission will be starting its work in Geneva. In many cases the legal experts participating in the work of the Legal Sub-Committee will also be participating in the work of the International Law Commission. The same is true of many scientists who will be participating in the work of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee: at the beginning of June they will be attending a session of COSPAR in Warsaw. There can be no doubt that, both as regards the jurists and as regards the scientists, it would be most convenient for the Sub-Committees to meet in Geneva.

(Mr. Fedorenko, USSR)

I would express the hope that members of the Committee will take those considerations into account, and that we shall be able to agree that the sessions of the Legal Sub-Committee and the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee should be held in Geneva.

Those were the comments which we wished to make on item 1 of the agenda of this third session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Mr. PLIMPTON (United States of America): I am sure that all delegates here share my pleasure at hearing the remarks of the Soviet Union representative giving his delegation's views on the work of this Committee. We entirely share the view that the more international co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space, the better; and the more of such co-operation there is, the better will be the chances of co-operation between countries in other spheres. I think I need hardly say that the United States has always given evidence of such co-operation. I need not remind the Committee of our work in the field of international telecommunications -- the TELSTAR which we cheerfully make available to all other countries. We are busily engaged in working out with other countries -- we hope with all countries -- the utmost co-operation in the peaceful uses of outer space. For example, the Committee has before it, I believe, a tentative memorandum of understanding between the Government of India and the Government of the United States on a co-operative effort in the launching of sounding vehicles. We have similar arrangements with other countries and are looking forward to having them with many more.

As regards the work programme of our Sub-Committees, the views of the United States delegation are quite simple. We very much hope that this year the Legal Sub-Committee will make progress. As the representative of the Soviet Union has said, in this field the General Assembly has provided four areas of equal importance for the Legal Sub-Committee to study. We hope that progress will be made on them. These are the general areas of general principles, liability, assistance and return and other legal problems. The United States looks forward with interest to the meetings of the Legal Sub-Committee. As this Committee knows, we have presented our ideas on liability and assistance and return and draft general principles, and we look forward to further discussion of these important matters.

(Mr. Plimpton, United States)

As regards the length of the session of the Legal Sub-Committee, we believe it should last at least three weeks, with the possibility of continuing into a fourth week if progress indicated the desirability of doing so. The suggested opening date of 18 April seems to us somewhat late in the light of the schedule that I have mentioned. We do not think that there should be any interruption in the work of the Legal Sub-Committee. We think that it should be free to meet once a day or twice a day, whichever pattern offers the greatest possibility for progress. We think that it is desirable to have as much time as needed. We do not think that meeting twice a day is particularly helpful. Our own experience has been that agreement quite often is reached in these matters through private consultations in the corridors rather than through speeches, sometimes of a contentious character, in meetings. We would hope that time would be given for a quiet exchange of views rather than, necessarily, public exchanges of views. We understand that the second half of April is the most convenient time for other members. As I have said, we think that the Legal Sub-Committee should start its session, if possible, somewhat earlier than 18 April.

With regard to the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee, we understand that there is general agreement that its session should begin in the latter part of May, around 15 May. We understand that this time is convenient for most members. As regards the total period of the Sub-Committee's session, we think that this depends to a considerable extent on the number of meetings it can hold each day. It has been our experience that members of the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee prefer to work at a fast pace, as distinguished, perhaps, from legal gentry -- probably so that they can get back to their technical work with a minimum of delay. I am from the legal gentry myself and do not wish to say anything against my profession, but we do sometimes take longer. It may be desirable to bear in mind the fact that the scientific experts do prefer to work at a faster pace.

(Mr. Plimpton, United States)

As for the place of the meetings, the representative of the Soviet Union has mentioned his delegation's preference for Geneva. Our delegation thinks it would be more convenient to have these Sub-Committee meetings in New York at Headquarters, where Committee and Sub-Committee meetings are ordinarily held. I might first mention the consideration of expense. I believe that last year's Sub-Committee's meetings in Geneva cost the United Nations some \$40,000, an expense which otherwise would not have been involved. I must say that I think we all ought to think these days of the expenses of the United Nations. We all know, its financial condition is not good and I submit that expense is something that should be taken into account.

Another consideration in connexion with thinking of New York as the place for these meetings is that the Secretariat is very much better able to take care of meetings both morning and afternoon and in general is in a position to render better service than can be obtained in Geneva. It is not that the Geneva Secretariat is not equally efficient; there will be many other meetings there at the time we are talking about and it will be difficult for us to organize two meetings a day of the Technical Sub-Committee whereas in New York it could quite easily be done.

In the last analysis, however, we think that this is really a matter of the convenience of the members of the Committee and if the consensus of opinion is that one or both of the Sub-Committees should meet in Geneva rather than in New York we will very cheerfully go to Geneva. On the other hand, if the general consensus of members is that one or both of the Sub-Committees should meet in New York, we hope that it will be agreeable to everybody. We are in the hands of the Committee as far as the location of these meetings is concerned.

The CHAIRMAN: If no other member wishes to speak in regard to item I shall now ask the Committee whether it is prepared to accept the same method of work as last year, namely to refer the legal issues for study by the Legal Sub-Committee, in particular part I of Assembly resolution 1802, which was unanimously adopted and set out clear terms of reference, and to refer the study of scientific issues to the Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee under the terms of reference contained in General Assembly resolution 1721 (XVI).

(The Chairman)

Unless there is objection, the Committee's report will state that the legal issues have been referred to the Legal Sub-Committee and the scientific issues to the Scientific Sub-Committee.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: On the subject of the timing of the Sub-Committee's sessions, the end of April has been suggested for the Legal Sub-Committee and the second half of May for the Scientific Sub-Committee. I have been informed by the Secretariat that the Legal Sub-Committee could start its work on 16 April, two days ahead of the originally scheduled time, so that the Committee could hold twenty-nine meetings until 3 May. This is a lengthy period and a large number of meetings, but whether it meets in Geneva or New York the Legal Sub-Committee could hold two meetings a day from 16 April to 3 May. If there is no objection I shall take it that that is agreed.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: As for the Scientific Sub-Committee, the Secretariat states that it could meet either in New York or in Geneva from 14 May to 31 May, allowing for one meeting a day in Geneva and two meetings a day in New York. If the Committee were to decide on the latter location, the period of meetings could perhaps be shortened since the Scientific Sub-Committee could probably wind up its work in ten days if it were to hold two meetings a day. Is there any objection to the proposal that the Scientific Sub-Committee should meet in the second half of May and that the length of the session will depend on whether it decides to meet in Geneva or New York? I hear no opposition, and it is therefore agreed that the Scientific Sub-Committee will meet in the second half of May, the exact date depending on whether it will meet in New York or Geneva. In the case of Geneva, there would be only one meeting a day beginning on 14 May.

Mr. VAKIL (Iran) (interpretation from French): I would like to make an observation concerning the duration of the Scientific Sub-Committee's session, and ask the Chairman to approach the Secretariat to clarify the position regarding the possibility of meeting in Geneva, and find out whether it would not be possible to organize the meetings there in such a way that the Sub-Committee could meet