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# GENERAL CONFERENCE

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Thirty-second regular session  
GENERAL COMMITTEE

## ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONFERENCE REVIEW OF THE CONFERENCE'S WORKING PRACTICES

### Introduction

1. In paragraph 12 of document GC(XXXII)/INF/255, "Advance information for delegations", it was noted that in recent years the representatives of various Member States had made suggestions for modifying the working practices of the General Conference, with a view to reducing costs and to using the time available during the Conference sessions more efficiently.
2. It was then stated that the Secretariat would, at this year's session of the General Conference, be putting forward some ideas aimed at streamlining the working practices at future Conference sessions, and the hope was expressed that the General Committee would find it possible to make recommendations to the Conference on the basis of those ideas.
3. In raising the question of streamlining the Conference's working practices, the Secretariat was very conscious of the fact that the General Committee, which at present normally meets only twice during a Conference session and does not meet in parallel with the Conference in plenary session or with the Committee of the Whole, would probably find it very difficult at the Conference's forthcoming session to devote much time to this question and agree on recommendations for changes in the Conference's working practices.

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Secretariat proposals

4. Accordingly, the Secretariat proposes that the General Committee set up an open-ended working group, under the chairmanship of a person who has considerable experience of the Agency (for example, a Resident Representative who has been in Vienna for some time), to look into ideas for streamlining the Conference's working practices and that it request the group to report back before the end of the Conference's current session so that the Committee can then report to the Conference.

5. However, if – as seems likely – the General Committee considers that the time available to such a working group would be insufficient, or if the time available to the group in fact proves to be insufficient, the Secretariat proposes that the General Committee recommend to the Conference that it establish a working group of the kind described in paragraph 4 above to look into such ideas in the course of the coming year and that it request the working group to report to it at its thirty-third regular session.

6. Moreover, the Secretariat proposes that the General Committee and/or the Conference request the working group, in the interests of economy, to conduct its deliberations in English and that it request the Director General to provide the working group with such administrative support as will not entail appreciable expense for the Agency.

Ideas

7. In offering the following ideas, the Secretariat would emphasize that it is for Member States themselves to decide how best the General Conference's working practices can be improved.

## The general debate

8. As regards the ideas which the working group might consider, the avoidance of parallel meetings of the General Conference in plenary session and of the Committee of the Whole is one which, in the Secretariat's opinion, deserves thorough study given the difficulties faced by small delegations in trying to follow parallel meetings. After last year's session of the Conference the delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic suggested, in a letter to the Director General, that there be no parallel meetings and the Secretariat in paragraph 6 of document GC(XXXII)/GEN/73 concluded that the avoidance of parallel meetings would probably result in Conference sessions lasting three days longer than at present. However, parallel meetings could perhaps be avoided without Conference sessions having to be extended so much if the duration of the general debate were substantially reduced.

9. In recent years the Secretariat has encouraged delegates to keep the duration of their general debate statements down to 15 minutes by focussing on the main points which they wish to make while providing full texts to serve as a basis for the summary records (see paragraph 9 of document GC(XXXII)/INF/255). Some delegates have responded, and last year, in contrast to what had happened in 1984-86, the general debate (with statements by the representatives of 69 Member States and three organizations) was completed without evening meetings having to be held.

10. An appeal by the General Conference that delegates keep their general debate statements short might be more effective in further reducing the duration of the general debate than encouragement from the Secretariat, especially if the aim were to bring the length of statements down to substantially below 15 minutes.

11. A minor suggestion in this context is that, in their general debate statements, delegates refrain from congratulating the President on his election and assuring him of their delegations' support. Instead, such remarks could be entered into a book of "Messages to the President" kept at the President's Office in the Austria Center.

#### Nomination of the President

12. It is suggested that no more than five delegates take the floor in order to nominate a person for the office of President and to second the nomination – for example, the nomination might be made by a delegate from the area from which that person comes (one of the eight areas referred to in Article VI of the Statute) and seconded by one delegate each from the Group of 77, the West European and Others Group and the Socialist Group and by the delegate of China. In 1987, the nomination was seconded by seven speakers.

#### Tributes to the President

13. It is suggested that only one delegate take the floor at the end of the session in order to pay tribute to the President. Last year, seven speakers paid tribute to the President.

#### Elections to the Board

14. It is suggested that, when the number of seats to be filled for a given area is equal to the number of Member States in that area seeking to fill the vacant seats, no secret ballot be held unless specifically requested by a delegate (this would mean suspension of Rule 79 of the Conference's Rules of Procedure and there would, of course, have to be a secret ballot in cases where there were more "candidates" than vacancies). This is in line with the practice in the United Nations General Assembly regarding elections to subsidiary organs.

#### Speakers list

15. It is suggested that an alternative be sought for the present arrangements for inscribing the names of delegates on the list of speakers in the general debate. Under the present arrangements, Member States wanting a high position on the list (among the first 20 or so) send representatives to queue at the Agency's Headquarters for many hours preceding the opening of the list, and the Secretariat of the Policy-making Organs is frequently criticized by representatives who are disappointed at the position of their country's delegate on the list.