

UNITED NATIONS
ECONOMIC
AND
SOCIAL COUNCIL



Distr.
GENERAL
E/CN.4/1983/SR.58
21 March 1983
ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Thirty-ninth session

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 58th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 11 March 1983, at 3 p.m.

Chairman:

Mr. OTUNNU

(Uganda)

CONTENTS

Question of a convention on the rights of the child (continued)

Draft provisional agenda for the fortieth session of the Commission

Closing statement by the Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Centre for Human Rights, and discussion concerning the future format of the Commission's report

Closure of the session

* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room F.6108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.83-16177

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

The discussion covered in the summary record began at 5.35 p.m.

QUESTION OF A CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (agenda item 13) (continued)
(E/CN.4/1983/L.1 and Add.1)

1. Mr. THWAITES (Australia) thanked the Working Group on the question of a convention on the rights of the child for its report (E/CN.4/1983/L.1 and Add.1), which the Chairman-Rapporteur was unfortunately not able to introduce at the meeting.
2. He had some reservations concerning the way in which the report had been prepared. Firstly, the separate presentation of the summary of the discussions and of the proposals was in practice a source of repetition and confusion, and reduced the report's usefulness. Secondly, the document was unduly brief; it would be preferable to model the next report on the report of the Working Group on a draft convention against torture (E/CN.4/1983/L.2), which was closer to meeting the requirements. He was sure that, at its next session, the Commission would be provided with an even better report on the question concerned.
3. Mr. PACE (Secretary of the Commission) said that some errors had unfortunately crept into the text of the report. In particular, two paragraphs were missing from article 12 in certain languages. The document would be issued in final form at a later date, and the current imperfections would be corrected at that time.
4. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Commission should take note of the report of the Working Group on the question of a convention on the rights of the child (E/CN.4/1983/L.1 and Add.1).
5. It was so decided.

The discussion covered in the summary record was suspended at 5.45 p.m. and resumed at 8.40 p.m.

DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE FORTIETH SESSION OF THE COMMISSION
(agenda item 26)(E/CN.4/1983/L.8)

6. The CHAIRMAN drew attention to the draft provisional agenda for the fortieth session of the Commission (E/CN.4/1983/L.8). Noting that there were no comments, he suggested that the Commission should adopt it.
7. It was so decided.

CLOSING STATEMENT BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL, UNITED NATIONS CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, AND DISCUSSION CONCERNING THE FUTURE FORMAT OF THE COMMISSION'S REPORT

8. Mr. HERMEL (Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Centre for Human Rights) said that, as he had already observed at the opening meeting, the work of the Commission and the United Nations human rights programme were among the Organization's most important areas of endeavour. The Commission had debated issues affecting practically every aspect of international political, economic and social relations and had adopted decisions or resolutions on many of them. The standard-setting work of the Commission had been advanced in various areas. Assistance to Governments in the field of human rights had been given further impetus. Mention should also be made of the renewal of the mandates of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances and of the Special Rapporteur on arbitrary and summary executions.

9. The results of the session could be assessed in various ways by the members of the Commission and by public opinion. What was needed at the present time was to seek ways and means of further improving the organization of the Commission's work and increasing the Secretariat's contribution in that regard. Two working groups and the Commission itself had already formulated and discussed proposals concerning the organization of work, and certain decisions on the rationalization of the agenda had already been adopted. With regard to documentation, he would give personal attention to ensuring that documentation was available as early as possible in the future; however, the finalization of certain documents depended on the schedule of other bodies and Special Rapporteurs.
10. Also on the question of documentation, he wished to raise certain technical questions concerning the Commission's report to the Economic and Social Council. He noted that the preparation, translation and adoption of the draft report consumed a considerable amount of time and made heavy demands on the Secretariat's services. Other United Nations organs, including the main committees of the Assembly, which were provided with summary records like the Commission on Human Rights contented themselves with simplified reports indicating the documentation studied, the meetings at which each item had been considered, proposals concerning the various items, the decisions of the organ concerned and its recommendations to superior organs. The adoption of a similar procedure by the Commission would greatly simplify matters and would also avoid further discussions which might have political overtones at a time when consideration of the various issues had already been completed. The organ which received the Commission's report, namely the Economic and Social Council, had in 1979 adopted revised guidelines for the format and contents of the reports of its functional commissions, from which it was clear that the purpose of such reports was to present clearly and succinctly all the information that the Council needed in order to review the work of its subsidiary bodies and to act on their recommendations.
11. With regard to summaries of proceedings contained in reports of functional commissions submitted to the Economic and Social Council, the Council had requested a concise statement of information that the commission concerned considered essential to transmit to the Council. The Council had adopted those guidelines on the understanding that the functional commissions would be able to introduce specific adjustments in their reporting procedures in the light of their functions and of the questions dealt with by them. It was therefore for the Commission on Human Rights to decide on the format of its report, but shortening and streamlining it in the manner indicated would meet the views of the Economic and Social Council.
12. With regard to the financial aspect, he drew attention to the fact that the cost of one page of report, including printing and translation in six official languages, was roughly \$700. The length of the English version of the Commission's report had been 13 + 315 pages in 1980, 15 + 302 pages in 1981 and 15 + 220 pages in 1982. It was obvious that a shorter report would enable considerable savings to be made. It was to be hoped that, between the current and the next session, there would be some reflection on the matter with a view to arriving at optimal solutions. In conclusion, he said that he had been most touched by delegations' expressions of support for the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and assured the members of the Commission that the Secretariat would continue to do everything in its power to assist them.

13. Mr. SCHIFTER (United States of America) endorsed the Assistant Secretary-General's suggestion that the Commission should reconsider the structure of its report. The entire report might follow the approach taken for the country situations considered under agenda item 12: they were dealt with very briefly and the major emphasis was on resolutions and votes. Moreover, the meetings spent on considering the report did not constitute very useful work. Nor was the report a reliable tool for historians, the summary records being far more satisfactory from that point of view.

14. His remarks concerned the presentation of reports in general and not the work of the Rapporteur for the current session. Nevertheless, certain parts of the discussions at the current session had not been accurately reflected, particularly the statements made by the observer for Israel and other statements concerning the Middle East. It was not an issue of politics or ideology; the question at stake was the need faithfully to reflect what had been said during the meetings. His delegation had regarded as unbalanced the compromises reached on the manner of summarizing the statements, but it had not pressed the point because, in any event, it had questioned the usefulness of the report in general and had not wished to hold up the Commission's work.

15. Mr. McKINNON (Canada) supported the Assistant Secretary-General's comments concerning the format of the Commission's report. Streamlining the report would mean a saving in time and money and would relieve the Rapporteur of the virtually impossible task of condensing such a multitude and variety of statements in order to distil the "mood" of the Commission.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

16. After an exchange of courtesies, the CHAIRMAN declared the thirty-ninth session of the Commission closed.

The meeting rose at 9.20 p.m.