



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement by Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella
on the organization of work for the first part of the resumed sixty-seventh session
Before the Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) Committee of the UN General Assembly
4 March 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The U.S. delegation has no objection to the draft program of work as prepared by the bureau. Despite the heavy workload, which includes many agenda items left incomplete from the main session as well as some new items, my delegation is committed to working with all delegations to complete the work of the first part of the resumed session as scheduled.

In order to do so, however, we are convinced that the Committee must stop a number of practices that have become commonplace and which have contributed to the inability, in recent sessions, of this Committee to conduct its important work in a timely and appropriate fashion. My delegation would like to take this opportunity to comment on several important process-related issues.

Mr. Chairman,

The commitment of the U.S. delegation to completing the work of the Committee on time is not mere lip service. We wish to make clear, especially after the experience of our last session in December, that we fully expect to conclude before the Good Friday holiday, and believe this goal is easily achievable.

We are prepared to take all appropriate steps to achieve this, including working outside of normal working hours and making the necessary arrangements to facilitate parallel meetings as required. If, however, negotiators do not arrive on time for meetings scheduled on nights and weekends, or simply refuse to meet on a specific item in order to run down the clock, we must conclude that they do not share a commitment to negotiating in good faith, and we will respond accordingly. It will be difficult, we know, to tear ourselves away from the North Lawn Building at three in the morning, but we will manage somehow.

As for the conduct of negotiations, we make the modest proposal that the negotiating rooms should in future be an inebriation-free zone. While my government is truly grateful for the strategic opportunities presented by some recent past practices, let's save the champagne for toasting the successful end of the session, and do some credit to the Fifth Committee's reputation in the process.

Mr. Chairman,

As we have often said, the United States remains firmly committed to consensus-based decision-making in the Fifth Committee. We believe that consensus, which in the UN context is commonly defined as the absence of objection, is the best way to ensure that the interests of all parties to a negotiation are met. This assurance has long been and remains fundamental in securing the confidence of major financial contributors such as the United States in the work of the Organization. In the management and financing of the Organization, only those Fifth Committee resolutions agreed by all stakeholders by consensus can be considered legitimate, and as such we caution our colleagues against the major consequences to the UN that would follow from substituting “majority” for “consensus”.

Therefore, my delegation believes the submission of an L-document, or a threat to this effect, before a draft resolution on an agenda item has been adopted informally to be in clear contravention of the principle of consensus-based decision-making.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

The work of the Fifth Committee is, by the nature of its broad remit, inextricably linked to the work of all of the bodies of this Organization. As such, the U.S. delegation approaches its participation in the Fifth Committee in the context of its broader multilateral engagement at the United Nations and in line with the normal conduct of United States foreign policy. In line with this Committee’s oversight role, in the coming session we hope that all delegations will use scheduled formal meetings to request senior Secretariat officials to provide on-the-record clarifications on administrative and budgetary matters of particular interest. As we have said here before, the UN will benefit from more Fifth Committee attention to the larger issues and trends driving UN costs and performance. We intend to do our part toward that goal through our own conduct in these sessions, and hope we will be widely joined in that effort.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation remains fully committed to working constructively with all colleagues under your able leadership to reach decisions on time and by consensus on all of the agenda items scheduled for consideration during the first part of this first part of the resumed sixty-seventh session.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.