

E. ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

1. UN REGULAR BUDGET

Mr. William H. Barton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, delivered a statement in plenary of the General Assembly on January 29, 1979 about the revised estimates of income and expenditure for the biennium 1978/79. He criticized the ability of the General Assembly to control the budget and management of United Nations' programs and expressed the importance Canada places on measures to remedy the financial problems of the Organization. The following is Mr. Barton's statement:

We are about to pass on supplementary budget proposals which will have the effect of increasing our net biennial budget after only one year by almost 39 percent as compared with net expenses for 1976/77. Furthermore, the Secretary-General has indicated that we should expect further demands by the end of 1979. In approving these proposals we are not simply approving some expenditures, we are adopting a testament to the inability of this Assembly to control the budget and management of the programs of the United Nations. This would be a dangerously unhealthy situation in the best of times. But when many member states are experiencing serious economic difficulties at home and have had to apply severe politically difficult restraints to their own programs, it is an intolerable situation.

Both you, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General have repeatedly drawn attention to the need for the Assembly to improve its procedures for the effective conduct of its business, and the Secretary-General informed us just before Christmas that he intends to submit his views to us in time for consideration at the next session. I hope and trust that the question of control over the program and budget will form an important part of the study. I put it to you that we must give urgent attention to this question, including a mechanism for adopting at the outset of each biennium a target figure which must not be exceeded, and a firm decision that every subsequent change in the program must be financed within established budgetary limits, if necessary by deferring lower priority projects. Governments have to do this in the conduct of their own affairs. Failure to do it here is eroding public support for the United Nations and ultimately could jeopardize its very existence.

The Charter imposes on each member government the obligation to pay its share of the costs of the organization as determined by the General Assembly. This is a principle of crucial importance to the integrity of the United Nations, and Canada, for one, would be most reluctant to see any action taken to erode it. But if we persist in demonstrating that we cannot control the budgetary process collectively, then there can be no doubt that some governments will come to the conclusion that they will have to act individually. If that happens the end result will be the emasculation of the Assembly's capacity to manage its own affairs. In this regard, it is surely worthy of note that in the Fifth Committee, member governments whose share of the assessment totals over 50 percent voted against these supplementaries, and if one takes into account those who abstained, the total is over 75 percent. Mr. President, Canada will abstain in the vote on the supplementary estimates.