REPORT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON CONTRIBUTIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OFFICIAL RECORDS: FORTY-SECOND SESSION

SUPPLEMENT No. 11 (A/42/11)

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[Original: English]

[9 July 1987]

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I. ORGANIZATION AND ATTENDANCE

1. The forty-seventh session of the Committee on Contributions was held at United Nations Headquarters from 18 June to 2 July 1987. The following members were present:

Mr. Andrzej ABRASZEWSKI

Syed Amjad ALI

Mr. Adeito Nzengeya BAGBENI

Mr. Ernesto BATTISTI

Mr. Carlos BIVERO

Mr. John D. FOX

Mr. Lance JOSEPH

Mr. Elias M. C. KAZEMBE

Mr. Felix Nikolaevich KOVALEV

Mr. Miquel MARIN-BOSCH

Mr. Atilio Norberto MOLTENI

Mr. Yasuo NOGUCHI

Mr. Dimitri RALLIS

Mr. Omar SIRRY

Mr. Dominique SOUCHET

Mr. WANG Liangsheng

Mr. Adnan YONIS

Mr. Assen Iliev ZLATANOV

2. The Committee elected Syed Amjad Ali as Chairman and Mr. Andrzej Abraszewski as Vice-Chairman.

3. The Committee started its work by considering General Assembly resolution 41/178 of 5 December 1986 and the views expressed by Member States in the Fifth Committee on the report on the work of the Committee at its forty-sixth session. The Committee then continued its work on the methodology for drawing up a scale of assessments for 1989-1991. It first examined statistical information and the issues related to the use of various statistics and their sources. It next reviewed in detail the main elements of the current methodology.

II. CONSIDERATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 41/178 AND VIEWS EXPRESSED BY MEMBER STATES IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FORTY-FIRST SESSION

4. The Committee had before it the text of resolution 41/178, along with the summary records pertaining thereto. The resolution read as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Recalling all its previous relevant resolutions on the scale of assessments,

"Having considered the report of the Committee on Contributions, 1/

"Recognizing that the capacity to pay of Member States is the fundamental criterion for determining the scales of assessments,

"Recognizing the requirement of Member States, under Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations, to bear the expenses of the Organization as apportioned by the General Assembly,

"Taking into account the views expressed in the debate in the Fifth Committee,

"1. Requests the Committee on Contributions to continue, on the basis of its mandate, its work on the methodology for drawing up an equitable scale of assessments, taking into account the views expressed by Member States in the Fifth Committee during the debate on the report of the Committee;

"2. Requests the Committee on Contributions to submit to the General Assembly, at its forty-second session, a progress report on the work referred to above;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to provide the Committee on Contributions with the facilities it requires to carry out the work described in the present resolution.

"1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 11 (A/41/11)."

5. It was noted that at the forty-first session of the General Assembly there had been considerable discussion in the Fifth Committee of the alternative methodologies outlined by the Committee on Contributions in its last report. 1/ In the course of that discussion, some support and interest had been expressed for alternative I (groupings) and less for alternatives II (a combination of three factors), III (additional apportionment to non-permanent members of the Security Council) and IV (core and non-core budgets). However, there was no consensus in the Fifth Committee debate that might have supported the further exploration by the Committee on Contributions at its current session of these alternatives. In that

situation, the Committee, in accordance with resolution 41/178, focused on the existing methodology of calculating assessments as well as adaptations thereof that might better meet the various concerns expressed in the Fifth Committee. Some members of the Committee, however, felt that this decision should not foreclose the option of returning to the issue at a later stage.

III. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

A. Uniform data base

6. It was recalled that at its forty-sixth session the Committee, having considered the desirability and consequences of continuing the practice of sending a separate questionnaire every three years for assessment purposes only, decided to discontinue the special questionnaire and to rely on the data base of the United Nations Statistical Office for its future work. At the same session, it urged that Office to continue its efforts to improve national income estimates. At its forty-seventh session, the Committee reviewed an evaluation of the Statistical Office's data bank, obtained through the annual United Nations Statistical Office Questionnaire on National Accounts, which contained, *inter alia*, gross domestic product/national income and net material product from 1970 to 1985, the latest year for which data are available. For this exercise, attention was focused on the 81 Member States that were assessed above the floor level of 0.01 per cent. A table classifying those countries on the basis of the timeliness and availability of their data appears in the annex to the present report. The Committee was informed that, currently, of those 81 countries, 59 (listed in column 1), or approximately 73 per cent, were regularly reporting national accounts data, which the Statistical Office considered to be consistent, coherent and reliable, regardless of the economic systems to which they belonged. The 16 countries in column 2 submitted data with a one-year lag, owing in part to diverse fiscal year compilations, inadequate technical resources or simply to the national accounting process, which tended to compound delays. Data available for three of the six countries listed in column 3, even though quite outdated, were considered acceptable in terms of reliability. In the case of one country for which the latest data submission, which had been referred to in the Committee's report on the work of its session two years ago, 2/ differed widely from the series previously reported, the Statistical Office was unable to obtain detailed information from that country's statistical office to corroborate the revised estimates. Of the remaining two countries that used the material product system (MPS), no net material product data in current prices in local currency had been obtained through the United Nations Statistical Office Questionnaire on National Accounts. However, since one country had become a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), its national income and exchange rate data could be found in IMF *International Financial Statistics*.

7. In response to a question raised by the Committee regarding statistical techniques for assessing the reliability of available data submitted by Member States, the Committee was informed that, when basic information on various national income aggregates and their component flows was available, some controls and checks could be carried out. For instance, changes in aggregate national income data could be considered acceptable if they were justified by simultaneous changes in related aggregate components. The more detailed the information made available to the Statistical Office, the easier it was for the Office to assess the reliability of national income aggregates. Furthermore, through its technical assistance to individual developing countries, the Statistical Office had been able to assist in improving the quality of data submitted by Member States. An analysis undertaken by the Office some years ago on methods used in national accounts compilation and its current study of basic statistical sources would provide it in the long run with better knowledge for assessing the degree of reliability of information submitted by individual countries.

8. In its report to the General Assembly at its forty-first session, 3/ the Committee had reaffirmed its policy of working from a common date base to the maximum extent possible and had requested the Statistical Office to reconcile with the World Bank those data in national currencies for 18 countries for which discrepancies between the two data sets were observed. At the current session the Committee noted with satisfaction the progress made by the two offices in reconciling their estimates. As a result, the World Bank had revised its data for seven countries in the direction of the United Nations data. Of the remaining 11 countries all were currently assessed at the floor rate of 0.01 per cent. It should be noted that for a number of countries, the apparent discrepancies between the two data bases were due to the manner in which each office used fiscal year data.

9. The Committee, having considered the issue of comparability of data, strongly urged Member States to respond to the annual questionnaire from the Statistical Office seeking accurate and up-to-date information on national income and other national accounts data. In principle, information gleaned from that questionnaire was to be the sole basis for calculating assessable incomes. In this regard, the Committee was of the opinion that the existence of a uniform and homogeneous data base was of maximum importance for the objective use of national income as an indicator of the capacity to pay. Only in the most exceptional case would the Committee resort to statistical information gathered from outside the framework of United Nations statistics. In reaching that position, the Committee recognized the need for a procedure that would avoid, whenever possible, using data from outside the framework of United Nations statistics.

10. In this context and also with reference to the source of data on external debt, which is discussed below, the Committee agreed that, as a rule, international sources of information (e.g. the United Nations Statistical Office data on national income estimates, and World Bank or IMF data on external debt) should be used in preference to private sources. In any event, the Committee agreed that it would be undesirable to resort to non-published data for purposes of establishing a scale of assessments. Any additional data on such matters that Member States would wish the Committee to review should be submitted in due time, say, at least two months prior to its session, through the United Nations Statistical Office, which has the technical competence for analysing such data.

B. Effects of exchange rate differentials on estimates of national income

11. The Committee had before it a paper that highlighted two types of national income conversion using exchange rates. One type, which had been extensively dealt with in the Committee's past reports, was the conversion of national income in local currency into United States dollars. At the current session, the Committee was made aware of another type of conversion, i.e. the conversion into local currency of the proceeds of exports and imports that formed part of the national income estimates.

12. If exports and imports of goods and services were relatively important in relation to national income, the exchange rates used in conversion could have a significant influence on the size of national and per capita income expressed in local currency, particularly when exchange rates varied widely over time or with each type of transaction. Such exchange rate differentials were reflected as gains

or losses incurred by those institutions that purchased and sold foreign currencies. They were, in general, commercial banks and, when the Government controlled foreign currency operations, the central bank or another government authority. The gains and losses could be sizeable, depending on the magnitude of exports plus imports and the differences between the exchange rates used for exports and imports.

13. Had the exchange rates actually used in transactions been applied for converting exports and imports into local currency, those gains and losses in the exchange would not have been incorporated in the national income. In practice, national accountants, instead of using actual exchange rates, generally applied average rates, either because of conceptual considerations or data limitations. By applying averages instead of actual rates of exchange, the production values of exporters and importers were adjusted to include the gains and/or losses referred to above, thus increasing or decreasing national income estimates accordingly.

14. The Committee noted with interest that that practice by national accountants paralleled its own procedure of using, in general, average market rates for the conversion of national income from local currency into United States dollars. It was informed that to do otherwise could lead to double counting of the gains and losses on exchange rates already incorporated in national income estimates.

C. Price-adjusted rate of exchange

15. In recent years, the Committee had considered the price-adjusted rate of exchange (PARE) methodology, which had been developed to correct distortions in national income and per capita income expressed in United States dollars when changes in price levels were not proportionately reflected in the exchange rate. Essentially, the process involved analysing price changes in individual countries and comparing them to movements of exchange rates starting from a selected base period. The Committee had noted some deficiencies in the PARE method presented to it at its previous session 4/ and had requested that a new study incorporate the terms-of-trade effect and experiment with varying base periods.

16. The Committee had before it a study describing a revised PARE methodology that incorporated the terms-of-trade effect and an analysis of unadjusted and adjusted national income data for 66 countries, with the latter reflecting the incorporation of the terms-of-trade effect. Adjustments were not made for the remaining countries for which data were not available on imports and exports in current and constant prices. The study indicated that the quantitative impact of the terms-of-trade adjustment was relatively small, not exceeding ± 5 per cent for most of the countries. Thus, incorporating or not incorporating the terms-of-trade effect into the PARE method would have little impact on the scale of assessments.

17. The study presented adjusted national income data according to three selected base periods, 1975, 1980 and the 1974-1983 average. The choice of the latter would result in PARE-adjusted average national income data consistent with the average of unadjusted national income data used in the establishment of the current scale for 1986-1988. When using 1975 or 1980 as the base year, the discrepancies between adjusted and unadjusted national income data were much more extensive.

18. The Committee noted the improvements made in the PARE methodology regarding the terms-of-trade effect and the base period conversion. Although many members

considered that the PARE methodology technically could be made operational for the next scale, the Committee could not agree on applying that methodology for systematic adjustments of national income data. That improved statistical tool, together with an analysis for individual countries of national income growth, could, nevertheless, be used in identifying countries where relative price changes had caused serious distortions in national income levels.

19. Some members expressed the view that the PARE methodology was based on an abstract concept of mutually co-ordinated movements of prices and exchange rates, which was alien to actual economic processes. They said that artificial adjustments in prices and exchange rates would lead to the deviation from the well-established principle of evaluating national incomes in current market prices and result in incomparability of incomes. The methodology of calculation itself had a number of deficiencies because of arbitrary assumptions that made its results highly inappropriate. For those reasons, they did not consider it appropriate to use the PARE method for establishing an equitable scale of assessments.

20. Many members of the Committee expressed their strong support for furthering the work of the United Nations Statistical Office on purchasing power parities (PPPs). They felt that an appeal should be made to Member States to extend financial support to the United Nations International Comparison Project (ICP) and to participate, if they had not done so, in the project itself with a view to making the participation in the project universal in the near future.

D. External debt

21. The Committee recalled the difficulties it had faced at the time of preparing the 1986-1988 scale in developing an approach that took into account the impact on the capacity to pay of high levels of external debt. The basic problem was that of the inadequacy of data as well as the crudeness of the data available for comparison purposes. In the event, in 1985 the Committee opted for a pragmatic approach: an essentially ad hoc formula was developed with provisions for relief for 37 countries identified as especially badly affected by external debt. The approach, however, was "without prejudice to the future position [the Committee] might adopt" and indeed there was a sense that "future refinements and perhaps new approaches would not only be desirable but essential". 5/

22. The Committee devoted a good deal of attention at its forty-seventh session to examining statistical sources on external debt. It emerged that the data available were much improved from previous years. There were still deficiencies, however, in particular in statistics available from official sources. In fact, the most comprehensive data, covering debt service obligations for all types of external debt, including private as well as public and publicly guaranteed external debt, appeared to be those compiled by a private banking institution, the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company.

23. At the end of its forty-seventh session, the Committee was informed that an "external debt group", consisting of the World Bank, IMF, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), had been established to harmonize definitions of external debt statistics. Based on the results of the group's discussions, IMF was expected to have available a data bank on external debt outstanding to include countries currently covered by the World Bank and the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company. That

data bank would cover the external debt of approximately 100 countries classified by types of debt instruments, maturity and interest rates and should be available to the Committee in 1988 prior to its next session. It would not, however, include information on external debt-service payments, which could be found in the IMF balance-of-payments statistics. A further investigation into the two sources was needed to evaluate whether they satisfied the Committee's criteria on coverage and intercountry comparability.

24. There was a sense in the Committee at its forty-seventh session that, with the new availability of data, it might be possible in future scales to develop the external debt-service burden as the better index of capacity to pay than the indicators of the external debt outstanding to export earnings and of the external debt outstanding to national income, which had been employed in 1985. The external debt-service burden index could therefore bear more relevance to the capacity to pay, which the Committee recognized, remains the fundamental criterion in developing an equitable scale.

25. In the discussion on the matter, it was noted that interest payments were already deducted from national income estimates. It was, therefore, recognized that the use of external debt service as an index should be net of interest payments.

26. The Committee was conscious that, apart from the choice of the appropriate index or indices to measure debt burden, there would be a need at its forty-eighth session to review and develop appropriate recommendations on how best to incorporate the impact on the capacity to pay of the external debt factor into the calculation of the scale. The methodology developed in 1985 was seen to have some continuing merit but might still be susceptible to further improvement depending on final decisions on data and index or indices to be used.

IV. REVIEW OF THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT METHODOLOGY

A. Statistical base period

27. In 1977, following the guidance of the General Assembly in its resolution 31/95 A of 14 December 1976, the Committee departed from the use of averages of national income for a period of three years, which had been its practice since 1953, and formulated a scale of assessments based on a seven-year period in order to alleviate the sharp variations in the rates of assessment of countries whose national incomes had risen rapidly in the early 1970s. The argument had also been put forward that, in addition, a longer base period would provide a statistical approximation to a measure of national wealth. A seven-year base period had been used in the establishment of the scales for 1978-1979 and 1980-1982.

28. By resolution 36/231 A of 18 December 1981, the General Assembly decided that, pending fulfilment by the Committee on Contributions of a thorough study on alternative methods to assess the real capacity of Member States to pay, in the subsequent review of the scale of assessments, the statistical base period should be 10 years. Thus, a 10-year statistical base period was used for the last two scales, 1983-1985 and 1986-1988.

29. Referring to the decline in recent years in the economies of many Member States, especially the developing countries, several members expressed the view that a shorter statistical base period would appear, conceptually, to reflect more realistically the economic and financial situation of these countries and, therefore, the capacity of Member States to pay. After weighing the pros and cons and reviewing machine scales based on varying base periods, the Committee decided to retain a 10-year base for the next scale as it would provide stability and continuity in the statistical base. A frequent change in base period would entail greater distortions in the relative apportionment among Member States. It also was noted that the impact on assessment levels of individual Member States resulting from use of a shorter base period could be offset by the application of the existing scheme of limits. These observations notwithstanding, the Committee was urged to bear in mind that national income estimates for 1986 would be used in the next scale of assessments. Thus decisions of the Committee at the current session would be reviewed in this context.

B. Low per capita income allowance formula

30. In reviewing the low per capita income allowance formula, the Committee recalled the evolution of that formula since the outset. It noted that per capita income limits and the corresponding gradients had been adjusted from 1948 as follows:

Scale of assessments	Per capita income limit (United States dollars)	Gradient (Percentage)
1948 to 1952	1 000	40
1953 to 1973	1 000	50
1974 to 1976	1 500	60
1977 to 1979	1 800	70
1980 to 1982	1 800	75
1983 to 1985	2 100	85
1986 to 1988	2 200	85

31. The Committee also had before it variants of machine scales based on 1976-1985 national income averages. For the purpose of this exercise, the ceiling and floor rates were kept at 25 and 0.01 per cent, respectively, and the scheme of limits for alleviating excessive variations between successive scales was the one used by the Committee in drawing up the scale for 1986-1988. The variable element was the per capita income limit. It was noted that the offsetting increases and decreases in index points - each index point is equal to 0.01 per cent - resulting from changing the current per capita income limit to $2,500, would amount to less than 30 points in total, with limited effect on the developing countries. That was due to the strong dampening effect of the scheme of limits on excessive variations between successive scales.

32. The Committee decided, subject to the review of data available in 1988, to retain the per capita income limit at $2,200 and the gradient at 85 per cent for the scale of assessments for 1989-1991.

C. Scheme of limits to avoid excessive variations of individual rates of assessment between successive scales

33. Having reviewed the scheme of limits, as given below, that was applied to the scale of assessments for 1986-1988 and taking into account its effect on the machine scales, based on 1976-1985 national income averages, the Committee was in favour of retaining that scheme for the scale of assessments for 1989-1991:

Combination of percentage limits and index point limits with eight rate brackets

If the present official scale is	the percentage change in the new machine scale should not be more than the lesser of: Percentage limits	Index point limits
Above 5.00 per cent	5.0	75 points
2.50 - 4.99 per cent	7.5	30 points
1.00 - 2.49 per cent	10.0	20 points
0.76 - 0.99 per cent	12.5	11 points
0.51 - 0.75 per cent	15.0	10 points
0.25 - 0.50 per cent	17.5	6 points
0.05 - 0.24 per cent	20.0	2 points
0.01 - 0.04 per cent	-	1 point

D. Ceiling and floor rates

34. The ceiling rate, which is the maximum contribution of any one Member State, had been gradually reduced from 39.89 per cent in 1946-1949 to 35.12 per cent in 1953, to 31.52 per cent in 1971-1973 and to 25 per cent since 1974.

35. The floor rate of assessment, which is the minimum rate a Member State is assessed, was 0.04 per cent until 1973; it was reduced to 0.02 per cent for the scale period from 1974 to 1977 and again to 0.01 per cent in 1978.

36. A member stated that an increase in the floor rate of assessment was justified to encourage the overall interest of Member States in the United Nations budgeting process. It was recalled that alternative II presented by the Committee on Contributions to the General Assembly at its forty-first session contained, among others, the sovereign equality factor, which had the same purpose of encouraging fiscal restraint.

37. Some other members felt that an increase in the floor rate might result in further deviation from the principle of the capacity of Member States to pay. A preliminary analysis of a table showing contributions to the United Nations budget in 1987 as a percentage of 1985 national income seemed to indicate that almost half of the developing countries assessed at the floor rate of 0.01 per cent paid proportionately more in United Nations contributions than developed countries. An examination of this issue will be pursued at the forty-eighth session.

38. No changes in the ceiling and floor rates were recommended by the Committee.

V. OTHER MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE

A. Communication from the International Labour Organisation

39. The Committee took note of the communication from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the contents of the report of the ILO Allocations Committee (GB.235/7/24). It instructed its Secretary to keep ILO informed of the work it had carried out at its current session, in particular, the refinement in methodology for assessments.

B. Collection of contributions

40. The Committee took note of the report of the Secretary-General, which indicated that, at the conclusion of the current session, the following 13 Member States were in arrears in the payment of their assessed contributions to the expenses of the United Nations under the terms of Article 19 of the Charter: Benin, Democratic Kampuchea, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Romania, Saint Lucia, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

41. With regard to the collection of contributions, the Committee reaffirmed its previous decision to authorize its Chairman to issue an addendum to the current report, should it be necessary.

C. Payment of contributions in currencies other than United States dollars

42. Under the provisions of paragraph 3 of its resolution 40/248 of 18 December 1985, the General Assembly empowered the Secretary-General to accept, at his discretion and after consultation with the Chairman of the Committee on Contributions, a portion of the contributions of Member States for the calendar years 1986, 1987 and 1988 in currencies other than United States dollars.

43. The Committee considered a report of the Secretary-General on the arrangements made for payments by Member States of their 1987 contributions in currencies other than United States dollars. The Committee noted that 11 Member States would avail themselves of the opportunity of paying the equivalent of $US 3.7 million in nine non-United States dollar currencies acceptable to the Organization. In accordance with the recommendation of the Fifth Committee, the Committee also noted that the Secretary-General had continued to give priority to each Member for payment in its own currency, to the extent that that currency could be used by the United Nations.

D. Date of the next session

44. The Committee decided to hold its forty-eighth session in New York from 6 June to 1 July 1988. The forty-ninth session was tentatively scheduled for a period of from two to three weeks, depending on the guidelines of the General Assembly.

E. Tribute to the Chairman

45. The Committee took note of the unanimous wish of members of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly at its forty-first session 6/ to pay tribute to Ambassador Amjad Ali on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his chairmanship of the Committee on Contributions. The Committee joined unanimously in congratulating Ambassador Ali and expressed its appreciation and thanks for his outstanding services to the United Nations.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 11 (A/41/11), paras. 5-47.

2/ Ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 11 (A/40/11), para. 38.

3/ Ibid., Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 11 (A/41/11), paras. 48-51.

4/ Ibid., paras. 65 and 67.

5/ Ibid., Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 11 (A/40/11), para. 18.

6/ Ibid., Forty-first Session, Fifth Committee, 25th meeting, para. 99.

Annex

COUNTRY GROUPINGS BASED ON THE TIMELINESS AND AVAILABILITY OF DATA ON NATIONAL INCOMES/GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCTS AND NET MATERIAL PRODUCTS a/

Latest year (1985) (1)		One-year lag (2)	More than one-year lag (3)
Australia	Luxembourg	Argentina	Algeria
Austria	Malaysia	Bahrain	Gabon
Bangladesh	Mexico	Côte d'Ivoire	German Democratic Republic
Belgium	Netherlands	Egypt	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Brazil	New Zealand	India	Romania
Brunei Darussalam	Norway	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	Saudi Arabia
Bulgaria	Oman	Iraq	
Canada	Pakistan	Morocco	
Chile	Panama	Nigeria	
China	Paraguay	Portugal	
Colombia	Peru	Qatar	
Costa Rica	Philippines	Spain	
Cuba	Poland	Trinidad and Tobago	
Cyprus	Singapore	United Arab Emirates	
Czechoslovakia	South Africa	Yugoslavia	
Denmark	Sweden	Zimbabwe	
Dominican Republic	Syrian Arab Republic		
Ecuador	Thailand		
Finland	Tunisia		
France	Turkey		
Germany, Federal Republic of	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics b/		
Greece	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland		
Guatemala	United States of America		
Hungary	Uruguay		
Iceland	Venezuela		
Indonesia			
Ireland			
Israel			
Italy			
Jamaica			
Japan			
Kuwait			

a/ As obtained through the annual United Nations Questionnaire on National Accounts.

b/ Includes the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

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Litho in United Nations, New York 00300 16747–July 1987–3,475