

EB/APC/Mtg/04/3

August 9, 2004

To: Members of the Executive Board

From: The Acting Secretary

Subject: **Agenda and Procedures Committee—Summary Record of Meeting 04/3**

Attached for the **information** of Executive Directors is a summary record of the July 20, 2004 meeting of the Agenda and Procedures Committee.

Att: (1)

Other Distribution:
Department Heads

Summary Record
Agenda and Procedures Committee (APC)
Meeting 04/3
Tuesday, July 20, 2004—4:00 p.m.

Members present: Mr. Mozhin (Chair), Mr. Misra, Mr. Hauser, Mr. Vittas, Mr. Kashiwagi, Mr. Anjaria (Secretary).

Also present: Mr. Alazzaz, Mr. Callaghan, Mr. Crelo, Mr. Daïri, Mr. Ge, Mr. Gitton, Ms. Indrawati, Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Kidiwu, Mr. Kremers, Mr. Le Fort, Ms. Lundsager, Mr. Meissner, Mr. Shaalan, Mr. Solheim, Mr. Steiner, Mr. Usman, Mr. Villavicencio, Mr. Zurbrügg.

Voluntary Best Practices Guidelines on the Character of Oral Interventions and the Handling of Board Meetings

Following up the discussion on this issue at the 2004 Executive Board retreat and the APC meeting on June 15, the Committee considered Mr. Kremers' proposals to further improve the efficiency of Board meetings by (i) introducing a two-round order of interventions at Board meetings, and (ii) encouraging a more active style on the part of the Chair.

Speakers generally welcomed the proposal to introduce a two-round order of interventions. Many speakers considered that when a large number of grays had been issued and only a few Directors were on the speakers' list, it would be more equitable to allow the remaining speakers to intervene, and have the staff answer questions afterwards. If staff answered the questions first, what the remaining speakers had to say could have the appearance of an afterthought. Speakers' interventions should be accorded the same weight regardless of whether they are issued as a gray or are in the form of an oral statement.

At the same time, Directors acknowledged that it was useful to have the staff clarify or elaborate on questions or comments in Directors' gray statements to better focus the discussion and make it more efficient. For many Board agenda items that did not elicit a large number of grays, therefore, the current system of asking the staff to answer questions in the grays before moving on to the interventions of those on the speakers' list remained useful. The Committee agreed that the determination of when the staff should respond should be left to the Chair, bearing in mind the concerns that had been raised and the importance of evenhandedness in the treatment of all types of interventions.

One speaker wondered whether in cases where there are many grays and only a few speakers, Directors who issued grays should wait to make further comments until after the Directors on the speakers' list addressed the Board; he suggested that this would seem to be consistent with the two-round order of interventions.

Some speakers agreed that it would be reasonable to give Directors on the speakers' list the first opportunity to address the Board, followed by comments from Directors who issued grays, and the staff's response to questions. Other speakers preferred allowing Directors who issued grays to comment further on them before the interventions of those on the speakers' list, which would help move the discussion along. In this connection, it was noted that, especially for Directors with many countries in their constituencies, sometimes new information had to be conveyed to the Board to reflect communications with their authorities after their grays had been issued.

The Secretary commented that the practice of calling first on Directors who had issued grays reflected the fact that the grays were preliminary statements intended to set the stage for, or advance, the discussion. If Directors who had issued grays wished to change their preliminary statements, it seemed appropriate to invite them to do so at the start of the meeting. The reason for asking the staff to respond to questions after about eight grays and/or oral interventions was that if several of the same or overlapping questions had been raised in them, the staff could answer them at an early juncture, so that they would not have to be raised by yet other speakers, thereby allowing the rest of the discussion to proceed more efficiently. Of course, the system had originated at a time when there were fewer grays and more oral interventions. At present, there was a wide range of Board discussions, from the WEO—where there were usually many grays, few (if any) full oral interventions, a substantive presentation by the Economic Counsellor, and then often lively open discussion among Directors—to more structured discussions on Article IV consultations and use of Fund resources, where the distribution between grays and oral interventions was more evenly balanced. Practices could evolve to take account of the different characteristics of each type of discussion.

With regard to the merits of inviting a more active style of the Chair in the Board meeting, Directors' views were mixed. A number of speakers welcomed this possibility, if flexibly applied, and depending on the type of the Board meeting. For example, some straightforward Article IV consultation discussions probably would not require more active involvement by the Chair. On the other hand, some saw room for a more engaged style of the Chair, whenever this would help facilitate a more candid and balanced discussion, leading toward a stronger consensus on a policy item, for example, where the initial views were quite divergent. Several speakers were in favor of the Chair lightly directing the discussion, but emphasized that this should not become a formal rule. One speaker cautioned that if the Chair did adopt a more active style, the principle that a Director always has the right to speak during the Board meeting would still have to be scrupulously observed. It was also generally observed that every Chair may wish to follow his own style and approach to conducting Board meetings, and that the Board should accommodate that.

The Committee Chair suggested the Committee inform management that any guidance management could provide in Board meetings would be welcome, but that the Committee would not necessarily encourage the Chair to more actively direct the Board discussion.

The Nature of Staff Comments at Board Meetings

The Secretary asked whether Directors felt that the staff generally adhered to the guideline of responding specifically to Directors' questions to clarify the issues. In response, a few speakers considered that Board discussions would be more productive if the staff addressed the broader policy issues behind Directors' questions, rather than responding to questions in a narrow technical way, as was sometimes the case. A few speakers expressed frustration that from time to time the staff focused too narrowly on factual matters and was reluctant to delve into the broader issues, which in their view impeded consensus-building and the decision-making process. The Secretary stated he would follow up with individual Directors on the particular concerns they had raised.

Installation of a Timer Device in the Executive Board Room

The Chair noted that two options for installing a timer device in the Board room were currently being explored. The first option, which was relatively inexpensive and could be introduced rapidly, was to have several public screens—or a private screen for each speaker—that would show the time elapsed of interventions at the Board. The second option, similar to a system that would soon be introduced in the World Bank, was more comprehensive and used the latest technology, and would permit the introduction of timekeeping and other functions.

A few speakers considered that having a timer would not necessarily be effective, and could constrain Directors in making their points. If using a timer were unavoidable, then they would support the less costly option. Other speakers supported the use of a timer, which they thought would likely shorten Directors' interventions. One of these speakers said that it would be important that the timer work effectively, and from that perspective he could support the more expensive and comprehensive option.

The Chair suggested that the Committee discuss these alternatives when more information was available.

Staff Working Group on Streamlining Reports

The Secretary informed Committee members that a staff working group is considering how to streamline country and policy papers. The working group is considering recommending that certain supporting information currently contained in staff papers be placed either in background papers, or on the website, with appropriate web links to the information provided in the main paper. The Secretary would seek the Board's feedback on the working group's recommendation in the next few days.

The meeting concluded at 5:10 p.m.