

A new breed of ACABQ members

The difficulties I faced chairing the advisory committee were consequences of developments such as those described above, difficulties which grew incrementally from the beginning of the eighties. The changing composition of the committee contributed a great deal to these difficulties. From 1985 to 1991 at least 28 individual changes in membership occurred, each bringing new members, except for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), of which a previous member returned to the committee. In some cases, like the United States, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Nigeria, a total of three new members for each country joined the committee in seven years. This meant members from these and other similar countries served for less than the required full term of three years. It was a phenomenon that haunted the committee for years, becoming worse as the committee became larger.

The rapid turnover and the poor qualifications of newcomers affected the quality of discussions in the committee, putting more pressure on me to maintain the high standard of performance I thought the committee deserved. To this end I simply dismissed silly comments by some members who said I took on too much and that I was making some of them lazy. What they did not appreciate from my work ethics was that I never wanted to preside



over a committee that would embarrass me or the committee members. But they did not see it that way. Some were so busy concocting schemes to get rid of me they had no room in their plans to appreciate what I was doing to protect their reputation and that of the committee. Indeed, by 2003 some members told me the reputation of the committee and its performance would deteriorate after my departure. These comments did not surprise me because the committee was already behaving like a patient on life support, with me acting like a head nurse.

Historically the above changes were not unusual; it was the attitude of new members that changed the atmosphere in the committee. Henceforth I felt like a man under siege by a new breed of members. Many behaved like prosecutors, making me feel like the accused. Several were masters of political intrigue and self-centred shenanigans. When I did not side with them all the time they accused me of not being a politician. They thought of themselves more like north-south standard-bearers; to them I was no more than their servant who should keep quiet, obey, or get out of the way. Several were disdainful of the collegial atmosphere in the committee in the past; the old tradition by which the ACABQ Chair and members would dialogue and criticise each other's point of view in closed meetings was tossed out. Later I was even instructed how to address some of them: "Your Excellency," "Mr Ambassador," that sort of thing.

I was henceforth not expected to say anything critical of any member, in or out of meetings. Yet new members claimed the privilege to say anything about me anywhere, whether fair or foul, but mostly foul, if you asked me. And in their view, the committee, not me, had to be in charge of the proceedings at all times; but they had no clue how to accomplish this feat. The most disturbing claim was that each set of new members was sovereign and therefore not bound by whatever the committee

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agreed to in previous sessions. This concept may work well in national legislative bodies, but for an international body like the advisory committee it was a recipe for chaos verging on anarchy. Old losers still on the committee liked this concept; it gave them the opportunity to gang up with newcomers to demand frequent debates concerning working methods, demands that were often alibis for self-serving proposals.