1. At its 118th plenary meeting, held on 23 August 1979, the Conference took a decision regarding the organization of work for the ninth session. In adopting a definite time-table divided into four stages, the fourth of which would be the final stage, the Conference took into consideration the need for concluding a convention during its ninth session in 1980 as, in the absence of such a programme which the Conference would accept as binding on it, there would be a very serious risk of final decisions being deferred in the belief that more time would be available.

2. As noted in paragraph 9 of the report of the General Committee as submitted to and approved by the Conference at its 118th meeting the Conference concurred in the proposal that the Conference must impose a discipline on itself and agree at the expiry of each stage indicated in the time-table to proceed to the next stage without modifications that would
disrupt the schedule and defeat the declared objective of the Conference.

3. The time-table approved by the Conference provided that, in the first stage covering the first three weeks of the ninth session, the following items would need attention: the completion of the work on the final clauses in the informal plenary with the assistance of the group of legal experts on final clauses; the conduct of the necessary consultations, involving all delegations, by the Chairmen of the three committees, assisted by the chairman of the negotiating groups and the group of legal experts on settlement of disputes relating to Part XI. within their respective spheres of competence, in order, to the extent possible, to reach compromise solutions on outstanding issues; and informal meetings by the drafting committee so that it might complete its work on informal recommendations which would have to be taken into account in the preparation of the final version of the informal composite negotiating text.

4. During the second stage, beginning at the start of the fourth week, on 24 March, there would be a formal discussion in plenary to give delegations an opportunity, before the preparation and the adoption of the revised informal composite negotiating text as a final draft convention, to place on record their position, both in regard to proposed revisions and on the entire package. That would also be the obvious time and place for any comments on the Committee reports which had been left outstanding at the close of the last session. That discussion by the plenary of proposed changes in the negotiating text before revision was effected was necessary to enable the collegium, as required by document A/CONF.62/62, to prepare the revision.

A time-limit of 15 minutes for every speaker was set by the Conference on the understanding that delegations would be permitted to present written statements, whose contents would appear as part of the official records of the Conference, without forfeiting the right to make oral statements as well. These oral statements themselves would form part of the summary records.

It was estimated that about 12 plenary meetings of three hours each, with night meetings, would be necessary for this purpose and that the debate would be concluded in one week.

In the interests of coherent discussion designed to promote agreement, it would be necessary for delegations to refrain from reopening issues which had already been discussed at length but had not found sufficiently wide acceptance to appear in the precise form in which they had originally been presented at merit inclusion in the negotiating text.

5. At the end of that period, which was expected to continue into the middle of the fifth week, the President and the Chairmen of the committees, with whom the Chairman of the Drafting Committee and the Rapporteur-General would be associated, would revise the informal composite negotiating text in accordance with the provisions prescribed in paragraphs 10 and 11 of A/CONF.62/62, and read as follows:

"Any modifications or revisions to be made in the informal composite negotiating text should emerge from the negotiations themselves and should not be introduced on the initiative of any single person, whether it be the President or a Chairman of a Committee, unless presented to the plenary and found, from the widespread and substantial support prevailing in plenary, to offer a substantially improved prospect of a consensus.

The revision of the informal composite negotiating text should be the collective responsibility of the President and the Chairmen of the main committees, acting together as a team headed by the President. The Chairman of the Drafting Committee and the Rapporteur-General should be associated with the team as the former should be fully aware of the considerations that determined any revision and the latter should, ex officio, be kept informed of the manner in which the Conference has proceeded at all stages."

6. The third stage would begin in the middle of the fifth and last week of the first part of the ninth session, which would be Wednesday, 2 April, thus leaving three days for the work of the third stage. During this stage the following items of work would have to be undertaken. The plenary should meet to decide on altering the status of the revised negotiating text to that of a final Conference document that would serve as a draft convention. All formal proposals which had previously been presented would be treated as having lapsed without prejudice to the right of any State to move a fresh amendment similar to or different in substance from the one that had lapsed. When the draft text had been given the status of a final draft convention.

7. After the decision was taken to give the revised negotiating text the status of a formal Conference document, the Conference must take a decision on the question of referring it for examination to the three committees and the plenary, operating as a committee.