CHAPTER FIVE
THE DRAMA OF THE FINAL DAYS

The life of the Rome Diplomatic Conference was only five weeks. Many voices have been raised over the effect of this brief time on the work of the Conference and the nature and shape of its negotiations. The question of the time available was an issue at the Conference itself. In the final weeks there were proposals to recess and resume the Conference, and there were also assertions then and later that an early deadline accelerated the negotiations and was ultimately important to their success.

Legislatures and similar bodies often use deadlines and time pressures to speed up their work and bring it to an end. However, because national legislatures are permanent, they can miss deadlines and still avoid damaging consequences through various techniques. For example, the United States Congress in recent years has regularly missed its deadlines for approving the national budget but keeps the government going through the use of continuing resolutions. Legislators who only need a few extra hours or days past the deadline have been known to resort to simple methods such as literally halting the hands of the clock in the legislative chamber.

The Rome Diplomatic Conference did not have these options. It was not a permanent body and had to leave the FAO building at the prescribed time to make way for other events. For these reasons, as well as the imperative need to retain the final momentum of the Conference, Kirsch could not entertain a request from the United States delegation to extend the Conference for two or three more days.

After a recess the Conference would not have been the same. A good many participants would be new and the relations among them and other actors would have changed. Moreover, as the opponents of a recess pointed out, the collective will and strong forward movement toward completing and adopting a text would stall without the forward pressure of vanishing time. The many members of the Conference with experience in negotiations also recognized that during a recess, positions would harden or change as governments had time to consider, the emotional and psychological pressure to complete a task in which so much had been invested
would fade, and the sense of a special moment and the power of a collective will would diminish.

The prospect of a recess, although always a threat waiting on the sidelines, never really took hold. The majority saw it as a proposal by nations like the United States that were believed to want the Conference to fail or at least to be indefinitely suspended. Ironically, concern about it made negotiators push on harder and speed up their search for ways to agree.

With the five-week deadline, everyone attending the Rome Diplomatic Conference knew that time would be a constant factor and have a major influence on negotiation techniques employed there. They accepted as a given that the chair would attempt to use time and lack of time as a negotiating tool throughout the Conference. Ultimately, the swift pace of the negotiations exhausted delegates and, at the very least, weakened otherwise zealous filibusterers. Most delegates at first underestimated the need for a rapid pace of negotiations. However, lunch sessions were held from the first week of the Conference, simultaneous and competing afternoon informal meetings quickly became routine, and night and weekend sessions later followed.

After the first two weeks of negotiations, the Rome Diplomatic Conference turned into a marathon. Delegates ate on the run and were often seen arriving at informal meetings with a small sandwich in hand or quickly chewing a panini in the small and smoky Polish Bar at three in the afternoon. This process managed at times to foster a bond and a sense of common enterprise among all actors. Being in the same boat and suffering together favored a relaxed etiquette. It also soon triggered complaints that the process was unfair. Smaller delegations once again felt excluded because they were absolutely unable to cover all meetings.

As the pace of negotiations under tightening time became an around-the-clock sprint, the FAO building came to be home for many of the participants. The outside world receded. This intense experience, while it lasted, distanced those engaged in it from those outside it, such as colleagues in capitals.

From the beginning of the Preparatory Committee, the negotiations had a complex rhythm in the movement of issues, problems, and texts. They moved vertically up and down from the Bureau and the plenary, to and from informal working groups, facilitators, focal points, coffee and corridor conversations, caucus gatherings and debates, and converged in the adoption of resolutions in the General Assembly. This movement also seemed to alternate horizontally between the negotiating bodies and official, nongovernmental, regional, and caucus meetings held between