

United Nations Security Council Open Debate on Working Methods

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The Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions (IWG) was established in 1993 to study and make recommendations for the improvement of the Council's practices and working methods and has since become a key framework within which the Security Council's working methods have been revised and improved. One key mechanism for making Council working methods more accessible to the UN membership and the public was the agreement of the most recent iteration of Presidential Note 507 (S/2017/507) in 2017 under Japan's chairmanship of the IWG. This Note summarised developments in Council working practices, including through incorporating the content of a number of separate Presidential Notes. Most recently, under the chairmanship of Kuwait, in the context of the IWG, the Council agreed to issue 8 additional notes, all dated 27 December 2019, on a wide variety of subjects, such as the fair distribution of work for the selection of chairs of subsidiary bodies among all members of the Council, the use of an unofficial addendum to the Council's provisional programme of work and the early involvement of incoming Council members in a broader range of activities. Each of these notes were negotiated and adopted in the spirit of maintaining transparency and efficiency of the Council's work. I take this opportunity to recognise the dedication of Ambassador Alotaibi and the members of the IWG that led to the adoption of these notes.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines began its tenure with a Joint Retreat on the Working Methods of the Security Council, held in January 2020 in conjunction with the State of Kuwait as outgoing Chair. The aim of this retreat was for members of the Working Group to engage in an informal dialogue that would generate concrete proposals for the way forward. Consistent with Article 30 of the Charter, improving the Council's working methods is a Council-led process, and the retreat presented an opportunity for members to explore ideas in concert that would result in practical proposals reflective of consensus. The joint summary, dated 3 March 2020, was issued as a document of the Security Council (under the symbol S/2020/172). Several topics were discussed during the retreat, such as intra-Council dynamics, the process of drafting outcomes and the issue of penholdership, inclusion and interaction among Security Council Members, the Security Council's relationship with the wider membership and effectiveness and efficiency in times of austerity, all of which were highlighted in the official summary.

During this retreat, emphasis was placed on the critical importance of the implementation of agreed upon working methods as compiled in Note 507. At the retreat, the members of the Working Group embraced the idea of action-oriented implementation of Note 507 and all relevant notes thereafter. This led to a furtherance of the growing practice of written monthly commitments by different Presidencies. Through these commitments the various Presidencies have recalled the provisions of Note 507 and subsequent notes and have introduced different means to ensure and promote the Council members' adherence.

The first meeting of the IWG of 2020 was held on 6 March and focused on the idea of action-oriented implementation, as well as the idea of striking a balance between transparency and

efficiency with a goal of enhancing the Council's effectiveness. The second meeting was held on 30 April 2020 and was so done via video teleconference (VTC).

As we are all aware, since our last in-person meeting on 12 March (S/PV.8745), the Security Council has had to adapt its working methods in order to maintain a state of readiness to convene and make decisions under unprecedented and extraordinary circumstances. The Council's ability to discharge its mandate has come under scrutiny in this period and measures to ensure the continuous functioning of the Council have been adopted under the Presidencies of China (during the month of March), the Dominican Republic (in April) and Estonia (now in May) .

In its capacity as President of the Council for the month of March 2020, China took the initiative - on the basis of the agreement among Council members - to set forth a written procedure for the adoption of resolutions as well as a set of working methods for the use of video conferences of the members of the Council as reflected in the letter of the President of 27 March (S/2020/253). To ensure the transparency of those videoconferences, it was also agreed that the President would circulate within 48 hours a compilation document containing the interventions of the briefers and of all those Council members who requested the inclusion of their statements in the document, as a document of the Council. As mentioned in the letter circulated by the Presidency, these measures are "temporary, extraordinary and provisional" to enable the Council to discharge its mandate and would not be considered as a precedent in the future.

Under the Presidency of the Dominican Republic and in the spirit of transparency, the Council, further expanded the scope of its interim measures by, *inter alia*, introducing the Informal VTC Plan, including the open and closed video teleconferences that would have usually appeared as briefings and consultations in the Council's programme of work as reflected in the letter of the President of the Security Council of 2 April (S/2020/273). In the same spirit of transparency, it was agreed that the interventions of the briefers in VTCs, moderated by the President of the Council, would be streamed by United Nations webcast. Similarly, it was agreed that there would be a negotiation of press statements or elements for the press after every Council discussion and that the President would thereafter deliver any agreed elements for the press orally through United Nations webcast.

On 17 April, Council members further agreed to webcast open VTCs in their entirety; the first of which was fully livestreamed on 21 April. Moreover, on 8 May, under the Presidency of Estonia, the first ever virtual ministerial-level Arria-formula meeting was held. Most recently, the Estonian Presidency has built further on the work done by China and the Dominican Republic with its own letter on working methods dated 7 May (S/2020/372). The letter, among other things, expresses its support for the continuation of the work of the subsidiary organs of the Council to the greatest possible extent.

The extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances within which we now operate, have presented acute and unique challenges. These challenges go hand in hand with the responsibility that the heart of multilateralism continues to beat. This situation has provided food for thought as to how the Security Council can continue to improve its working methods, regardless of the global challenge before us. In light of the Security Council's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, we must not allow the Council to be rendered paralysed.

As per article 24(1) of the UN Charter, the Security Council acts on behalf of the members of the United Nations. As such, the holding of this debate demonstrates that the Council attaches significant value to the voice of the UN membership and remains sensitive to the opinion of the wider membership about the conduct of its work. Over the years, open debates have been the flagship opportunity for the broader UN membership to weigh in on the working methods of the Council, with many of the interventions having been taken into consideration by the IWG in the past. At the initiative of the Presidency of Estonia and in collaboration with my delegation as Chair of the IWG, the Council is holding its 12th open debate on working methods, on the theme “Ensuring Transparency, Efficiency and Effectiveness”. The concept note for today’s debate emphasizes the significance of these elements, and introduces the concept of “agility”, as a critical element for the effective functioning of the Council. I should note that ensuring transparency, efficiency and effectiveness are equally critical to the work of the Council, not just during this extraordinary period, but also for the Council’s everyday functioning under ordinary circumstances. More often than not, the Council operates under normal circumstances; as such, the ability of the Council to function effectively on a day-to-day basis is similarly important.

It is timely that this open debate can take place on the eve of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. We must approach this moment in good faith, as we contemplate how best we can improve existing practices and procedures, while identifying and exploring new areas for development. Many tools remain at the disposal of the Security Council. These tools must be used innovatively and in the most efficient ways to allow for a fully effective Council. I look forward to hearing the voices of the wider membership and the various proposals that can be used to inform the deliberations of the IWG going forward. Our commitment to working together, not just among Council members, but also in these valuable moments of constructive interaction with the UN membership, is evidence of our shared desire for a Council that functions transparently, efficiently and effectively. We must not allow ourselves to fall short of this ambition.

Thank you.