

**Agility and Innovation: Lessons for the Future from the
Coronavirus disease
(COVID-19) pandemic**

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Thank you, Mr President, I welcome the opportunity to brief you as Chair of the Informal Working Group of Documentation and Other Procedural Questions. Before I proceed, however, I would also like to pay tribute to Professor Ed Luck and Ambassador Kenzo Oshima, both of whom contributed extensively to the working methods of the Security Council and are no longer with us.

Over one year ago, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a number of acute disruptions to the Security Council's sturdy mode of operation. While the centrality of the Council's mandate remained unchanged, our ability to discharge this mandate was challenged. Not only were we unable to convene in person, but our ability to interact with the wider United Nations membership was challenged. The Security Council was forced to contemplate and adopt a new mode of operation to ensure its continuous functioning, in line with the Charter of the United Nations. Through a series of letters, beginning with the Chinese Presidency in March 2020, which has been built upon by successive presidencies, the Security Council adapted its working methods to the circumstances, in order to maintain its effective functioning. Over one year since the WHO declared

a pandemic, the Security Council continues to convene uninterruptedly, both in person and via video teleconference (VTC), negotiate and adopt resolutions, ensuring the timely renewal of mandates, maintain its engagement with other UN organs, as well as the wider UN membership, particularly through the monthly briefing on the Programme of Work and wrap up sessions, and has incorporated multilingualism in its open video teleconferences. Notwithstanding the existence of some outstanding issues, the Security Council has been able to ensure its continuous functioning, in a manner that strives to secure transparency, efficiency and effectiveness.

The extraordinary circumstances under which we have operated for the majority of the past year, demonstrated a need for the Security Council to remain agile and responsive to all situations that may disrupt its functioning. In 2020, the open debate on working methods was held on the theme “Ensuring Transparency, Efficiency and Effectiveness”. While we emphasized the significance of these elements, the concept of “agility” was introduced as equally critical to the work of the Council. Contained within the statements and submissions summarised in the subsequent Analytical Summary were a number of proposals and views related to the issue of the Council’s working methods. In this context, the UN membership considered the interim practices introduced during the pandemic that can be adopted during ordinary functioning of the Council to enhance its effectiveness. This year, the Open Debate is appropriately themed “Agility and Innovation: Lessons for the Future from the COVID-19 Pandemic.” This theme may be regarded as a sequel to last year’s open debate, as it aims to reflect on how far we have come, and urges us to think ahead.

To this end, the IWG remains a critical framework within which we can assess and improve our working methods. Accordingly, the Working Group has continued to meet, virtually, approximately every five weeks. Under the standing agenda item “Implementation of Note 507: Reflections from past presidencies and proposals for future action”, Presidencies have been given the opportunity to reflect on the working methods of the Security Council during their respective months, assessing some of the best practices, challenges and areas for further movement. This agenda item facilitates reflection on the Security Council’s working methods, as well as on Presidential Note S/2017/507, which contains many useful provisions that are sometimes overlooked. To ensure our effective, efficient and transparent functioning, during both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, we must continue to implement all provisions contained within Presidential Note S/2017/507 and all subsequently adopted Notes. Allow me, at this opportune moment, to recall the remarks of Professor Ed Luck during last year’s Open Debate, where he noted that the ultimate test is how fully and faithfully measures are implemented. It is also worth noting that the IWG is considering the practice and procedure concerning the circulation of communications for the consideration of the Security Council in order to promote transparency and to strengthen its efficiency.

The Security Council slowly made a much-welcomed gradual return to the Council Chamber, resuming in person meetings in the ECOSOC Chamber under the German Presidency in July 2020 and in the Security Council Chamber under the Russian Presidency in October 2020. The Council has held a blend of VTCs and in person meetings, with the latter having been the format for the majority of briefings and consultations in recent weeks. This month, the majority of the meetings are envisaged to take place in the Chamber. In this regard, this Open Debate is an

opportunity for the Security Council to listen to the wider membership's comments about the Council's achievements, and suggestions for further enhancement of its working methods. The timing of this dialogue is apposite, as we return to ordinary functioning. The unforeseen COVID-19 challenges and constraints have given us much to consider for future extraordinary circumstances, such as the status of our VTCs, how to better facilitate the meaningful participation of the wider membership in VTCs, how to secure multilingualism during VTCs and produce comprehensive records of VTCs, and how to undertake a procedural vote in cases where in-person meetings cannot take place; however, it has provided us with new and innovative ways to maintain our continuous functioning, including through the use of technology. I take this opportunity to recognise and emphasize the general position that modern technology can never replace interactive communication and the quality of engagement among Council members in person, including the valuable discussions that take place on the margins of normal Council meetings.

Working methods remain the foundation upon which the Security Council effectively discharges its mandate. Despite formidable challenges, the process of improving our working methods and adapting them to reflect current circumstances must not waver. I look forward to the proposals of the membership of the United Nations, as we strive towards enhancing and maintaining the Council's effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, as well as preparedness and agility. I have no doubt that this is a collective endeavour to which we are all committed.

Thank you.

Chair's closing remarks

- I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ms Sievers and Ms Langrin for their insightful reflections which will no doubt inspire our working methods deliberations within committee. I also thank my colleagues for their critical observations during this debate it is clear that we are all committed to the optimal functioning of the Council.
- Mr President, it is worth repeating that this flagship Open Debate remains a critical opportunity for the Security Council to engage with the wider membership of the United Nations. Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the quality of this engagement; however, the Council's resilience did not falter, and, as such, the Council was able to creatively adapt its working methods to maintain, and in some cases, enhance, this engagement.
- While we were not able to convene this Open Debate in the usual format, with the wider membership physically with us, the Presidency's willingness to facilitate the Security Council's presence in the Chamber is indeed laudable. It is our hope that the next Open Debate on Working Methods will be convened with the Council and wider membership assembled jointly in this Chamber to continue these important discussions. Until then, I look forward to reading the Membership's written interventions, geared towards strengthening the working methods of the Security Council.
- I close by recalling the words of the late Professor Edward C. Luck during his last briefing to this august body, last May, in which he reminded that and as I recalled in the chair's text earlier "the ultimate test will be how fully and faithfully measures [we adopt to

improve our working methods] are implemented.” He went on to say “As we have seen with different elements of the 507 process, putting agreed words into practice has not always been easy or quick. Some of the phrasing sounds ambiguous, imprecise, or open to interpretation—in other words, diplomatic. The first responsibility for monitoring the results lies with the members of the Council but external observers should not take their eye off the ball in [the] consolidation phase...” In that context I reiterate that we do welcome the written statements to be submitted by the wider membership.

- We will miss Professor Luck’s engagement and his wisdom, but his legacy will live on. May He Rest in Eternal Peace.