

Glossary: United Nations Security Council

A3

The three non-permanent members from Africa with a seat on the Council.

Adoption

Formal, public and webcast meeting held in the Security Council Chamber when members vote on a draft resolution, adopt a presidential statement, or submit an annual report to the General Assembly. Council members may also comment on their votes during adoption meetings.

Agenda of the Security Council

The Council's agenda currently includes around 30 country and regional contexts and 20 thematic issues (children in armed conflicts, protection of civilians, etc.). Adding or removing items from the agenda is subject to a formal process. The Security Council's agenda also includes an "Any other business" (AOB) item whereby Council members may raise other contexts or issues connected to international peace and security. The agenda is not to be confused with the Council's programme of work (see below).

Arria-Formula meeting

Informal meeting for Council members that is not recorded or included in the Security Council's programme of work, nor results in a Council outcome. Arria-Formula meetings may be public or closed, and may be called by any Council member on their own initiative. They often involve speakers from high-level delegations of UN member states without a seat on the Security Council, senior UN officials, or representatives of non-state actors, international organisations, NGOs and civil society. The meetings are named after the former Venezuelan permanent representative to the UN, Fernando Arria, who first used this meeting format in 1992.

Briefing

Formal, public and officially recorded Council meeting held in the Security Council Chamber during which one or more speakers, usually from the UN Secretariat, brief Council members. UN member states without a seat on the Security Council whose interests are affected may be invited to participate. Council members may give statements after a briefing. Briefings on specific topics are often combined with closed consultations that take place immediately afterwards.

Consultations of the whole

Informal Council meeting often simply referred to as 'consultations' that takes place behind closed doors in a room adjoining the Security Council Chamber. Consultations are often combined with a briefing that takes place just before. They may also take place in order to adopt the programme of work or to conduct procedural discussions in preparation for a formal meeting. Consultations include discussions with the UN secretary-general, other senior UN Secretariat officials, or special envoys, for example.

Co-sponsorship

Formal expression of support for a resolution by a state. Although each UN body has a different process, as a rule, the sponsor of each resolution decides on a case-by-case basis whether or not to open the resolution for co-sponsorship. Eligibility for co-sponsorship is also handled differently – for example, in some cases only member states of a given body may do so, in other cases non-member states of the body may also be permitted. Only a small number of Security Council resolutions are open for co-sponsorship.

Debate

Formal, public and officially recorded Council meeting held in the Security Council Chamber in which only Council members may participate, in principle. UN member states without a seat on the Security Council who are directly concerned or affected or have shown a special interest in the issue under discussion, may, upon request, be invited to participate. A debate differs from a briefing in that there are no presentations by external speakers.

E10

In addition to its five permanent members (see P5), the Security Council has ten non-permanent members who are elected for a two-year term. Elections for five of these seats are held each year so that the terms of office for non-permanent members overlap. Seats are allocated to the ten non-permanent members in keeping with the different UN regional groups as follows: three seats for the African Group, two for the Western European and Others Group (WEOG), which includes Switzerland,

two for the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), two for the Asia-Pacific Group, and one for the Eastern European Group. Each summer, the UN General Assembly (193 members) elects the new non-permanent members who require two-thirds of the votes of those present in order to be elected.

I5 (Incoming 5)

One third of the Security Council is replaced each year. Although the five permanent members do not change, half of the ten elected members are replaced each year – those who are elected to begin their two-year term the following year. These states are known as the Incoming 5 (I5).

Informal interactive dialogue

Informal, private meeting for Council members which is often situation-specific and involves other UN representatives, governments or regional organisations. These dialogues are not recorded and do not result in a Council outcome, although there may be a press conference afterwards.

Joint media stakeout

Joint press conference. Although Security Council member states can express their views on a given issue, this is not considered a Council outcome. Council members may speak individually or as a group in varying constellations. UN member states without a seat on the Security Council are sometimes invited to join. Media stakeouts are usually held just before or after a Council meeting in the press area in front of the Security Council Chamber.

Joint statement (JST)

In the different UN bodies, member states may issue statements to formally express their position on a particular issue. This includes joint statements, which allow several states to assert a common position. Security Council members may make a (joint) statement during a briefing or other type of public Council meeting.

Note by the president

Used to transmit a report from another body, a letter from a UN member state, or an agreement on working methods, for example. A note or letter by the president means that the text has been agreed on by all Security Council members through informal consultations or a no-objection procedure.

Open debate

Formal, public, webcast and officially recorded Council meeting held in the Security Council Chamber which also includes external speakers. This is the format that best allows all UN member states to take part in the Council's work. It also includes members of the media and general public. Each month there are usually one to three open debates, which are mainly called by the Council presidency. Most of the issues discussed are thematic rather than geographically focused.

Outcome

Measures taken by the Security Council, particular after a Council meeting. The hierarchy of Security Council outcomes is as follows: resolutions; statements, notes or letters by the president; press statements; remarks to the press.

P5 (Permanent five)

The five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) who have the power of veto, allowing them to block Council decisions. In practice, the veto is not used very often; in recent years, it has been used three or four times a year on average. Current discussions on Security Council reform include restricting this power. Switzerland and other like-minded states are seeking to convince the P5 to voluntarily renounce the power of veto in cases of genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Penholder

Security Council term for the Council member who mainly handles the substantive issues surrounding a specific situation, including drafting the relevant outputs and convening discussions and negotiations. Although any Council member can theoretically be a penholder, in practice it is usually one of the permanent members, in particular either France, the UK or the US (the **P3**). There are more and more

calls for non-permanent members to also be included in these processes, however, which has led to the gradual establishment of co-penholderships.

Police-contributing country

Like troop-contributing countries but involving police officers, who are seconded to work for the UN under Security Council mandates while remaining officers of their national police force. The police officers' role is to help maintain security and public order in certain contexts, thereby contributing to violence prevention and mitigation as well as reconstruction efforts.

Presidency

The presidency of the Security Council is held in turn by the members of the Council in English alphabetical order for a one-calendar-month period. The president is responsible for the proper management of all Council affairs and chairs all plenary meetings during the presidency month.

Press statement

Security Council press statements require agreement from all of its members before being read out to the press by the Council president. They are usually issued in response to an immediate situation and are not categorised as Council documents, but do constitute Council outcomes and are published by the UN Secretariat as UN press releases. Security Council press statements are usually issued in order to condemn a terrorist attack or comment on other events.

Programme of work

The rotating Security Council presidency plans the programme of work for the month. The UN Secretariat provides the base programme of work with information on mandate renewals and reporting cycles, to which the presidency usually adds events it considers of particular importance. Ahead of the presidency month, the presidency team consults with other Council members on the provisional programme, which is usually adopted after an informal meeting on the first working day of the month in question. The programme is updated throughout the month, leaving room for unforeseen events, and is published on the Security Council's website.

Remarks to the press

Also known as press elements, Security Council remarks to the press are categorised as a Council output and are used to give an idea of the Council's discussions, especially for closed consultations on the situation in a particular country. The remarks, which are not a fully-agreed text but rather elements which have been approved by Council members, are read out to the press by the Council president.

Resolution

Standardised decision taken within the framework of an international organisation or conference. A resolution usually consists of preambular paragraphs (PP) followed by operational paragraphs (OP) dealing with the issues covered in the PP. UN resolutions contain statements and demands that relate to the UN Charter, although the procedure and legal limitations may vary from one body to another. Resolutions issued by the General Assembly or Economic and Social Council are not binding but considered to be recommendations. General Assembly decisions on budgetary or internal organisational matters are binding. The Security Council can only adopt a resolution if it is approved by a majority of nine votes and is not rejected by any of the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, UK, US). These resolutions may contain binding or non-binding measures under international law, or may only be issued as recommendations.

Statement by the president of the Security Council (PRST)

Presidential statements (PRSTs) are consensus documents, adopted at formal Council meetings. They allow Council members to issue statements on the situation in a particular country or on a specific topic. A PRST may be used to reaffirm specific elements of a previous resolution, or to lay the groundwork for future Security Council decisions. In the hierarchy of Council outcomes, PRSTs are the second most important after a Security Council resolution – and both can be binding on UN member states.

Subsidiary body

The Security Council has 15 sanctions committees and six thematic committees, which are chaired by different Council members. All Council members are also members of each committee. It is customary

for the subsidiary bodies to be chaired by the Council's non-permanent members (see E10), who share the work involved.

Troop-contributing country

Countries that voluntarily provide troops for UN peacekeeping operations (blue helmets). Troop-contributing countries meet regularly in the Security Council on a formal and private basis. These meetings may also be attended by Council members, UN Secretariat staff, or parties invited by the Council – such as countries whose interests are directly affected by the issue under discussion. Any UN member state may also be invited to participate on occasion.

Working methods

Processes and procedures enabling the Security Council to be functional, such as processing Council documentation or procedures for allowing different actors to participate. The Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Matters (IWG), which was set up in 1993, produced a compendium on all Council working methods in 2006 published as Note by the President S/2006/507. Since then, Note 507 has been updated regularly. In recent years, elected members have emphasised improving transparency in the Security Council's processes and decisions in particular. Switzerland has long been committed to improving the Council's working methods, including as coordinator of a cross-regional group currently composed of 27 member states (the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group or ACT).

Veto

Each Council member has one vote. The Security Council can only adopt a resolution if it is approved by a majority of nine votes. Under Article 27, paragraph 3 of the UN Charter, each permanent member (P5) of the Council has the power of veto, which can prevent the adoption of a Security Council resolution. An abstention is not considered a veto. If the nine votes required to adopt a resolution are not reached, a negative vote from a permanent member is not considered a veto either.

Written no-objection procedure

Once a draft decision or proposal has been circulated among all Security Council members, they are given a certain period of time to file any written objections. If none of them do so within the given timeframe, the draft is considered adopted. This procedure is most often used for adopting statements and notes by the president as well Security Council press statements.