

**SYNOPSIS OF THEMATIC MEETINGS OF THE AD HOC  
WORKING GROUP ON THE REVITALIZATION OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

8 July 2009

**Introduction**

1. By its resolution 62/276, the General Assembly decided to establish, at its sixty-third session, an **ad hoc working group** open to all Member States on the revitalization of the General Assembly:

(a) To identify further ways to enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly, inter alia, by building on previous resolutions;

(b) To submit a report thereon to the Assembly at its sixty-third session.

2. During the sixty-third session of the General Assembly, on 20 March 2009, the **President of the General Assembly** appointed us as the two chairpersons of the Working Group.

3. Following our appointment as Co-Chairs, we convened a **first meeting** on 15 April 2009 to allow for a general exchange of views among the membership, including on the best way forward.

4. We further continued to conduct **informal meetings** with many Member States and representatives of the different regional and political groups subsequent to the first meeting. During these informal meetings we benefited extensively from the insights, experience and concrete ideas of Member States on both the substance and the technical and procedural aspects of the revitalization process.

5. As a result of these exchanges and the contributions received from Member States during the meeting of April 15, we identified various issues as having been underscored most frequently and emphatically as being most central to the revitalization process and developed a **work plan** on that basis which we circulated to all Member States in a letter dated 29 May 2009. In the letter we proposed to convene three thematic meetings on the most important issues as identified by Member States during the month of June. As announced at the first meeting, we are hereby presenting to you a synopsis of these meetings, including recommendations on the way forward.

**A. "Implementation of GA resolutions and the GA agenda; Operational and technical issues, including information on the GA voting system, in the framework of the Capital Master Plan"**

6. The first thematic meeting, as indicated in the work plan, was held on 3 June. Nine delegations, some also speaking on behalf of groups, intervened in our discussions on the issues indicated above.

7. On the **implementation of resolutions** pertaining to the revitalization of the GA, the view was expressed that over the years a sufficient number of proposals had been adopted by the Assembly and that Member States should now focus on their implementation. In this context, several speakers underlined that the Chart developed by the previous Ad hoc working group during the 62<sup>nd</sup> session would be a good basis for that effort. While some thought that the Secretary-General should be requested to update the Chart on a regular basis, including an indication of reasons for non-implementation, one delegation suggested that review of the implementation of resolutions should be undertaken only every 4-5 years. Of those in favour of continuing the review exercise, some indicated it may be beneficial to consider, at the outset, modalities for such a review, and one delegation noted a linkage between such an exercise and the mandate review process. The same delegation argued that information on the implementation of Assembly resolutions should also become an integral feature of the Secretary-General's annual report.

8. Regarding the question of the **GA agenda**, several speakers argued that the best way to revitalize the Assembly would be for it to facilitate consideration of the most pressing issues of our time and which are of relevance to all Member States as well as the international community as a whole. A number of speakers also suggested that a streamlining of the agenda could be beneficial so that the many imminent crises and new challenges that have come to the forefront of the international political agenda in recent years could be more fully and effectively addressed. Many Member States indicated willingness to approach the challenge of the agenda of the GA, while at the same time underlining their awareness of the political sensitivity of any such undertaking. The possibility of the elimination, biennialization, triennialization, etc. of items was cited. One proposal put forward was to consider a sunset clause for agenda items.

9. In the wider context of the Assembly's agenda, the use of **thematic debates** was also addressed by many Member States. There was widespread agreement on the importance of holding these debates on issues of relevance to the international community and of concern and interest to the Organization. It was also noted that their themes and timing should be decided in consultation with Member States, and that they should be well prepared. Some delegations proposed that future thematic debates should become more results-oriented and be tied to emerging issues. Thematic debates could lead to the adoption of a resolution or the establishment of an open-ended working group on the issue discussed, and a list of proposals made by Member States during their thematic discussions could be drafted accordingly. Another delegation, while generally

supportive of the important role played by thematic debates, expressed concern over duplication of discussions with those in other bodies (e.g. the Fifth Committee).

10. At the same meeting, several speakers intervened on the **voting system** in the GA, offering a variety of views and comments, including the following:

- A group of Member States requested further information on voting systems. Other delegations shared the view that it would be useful to hear a follow-up briefing on voting systems.
- One delegation suggested requesting the ASG for IT to provide information on the latest voting technology available and asked which system would be in place during the CMP.
- Another delegation argued that empirical data was required to aid Member States in making a decision on the various options for a new voting system.
- One delegation proposed to refer the issue to the 5<sup>th</sup> Committee and the ACABQ.
- Several Member States wanted to improve the existing system of counting ballots by hand whereas one associated delegation added, in its national capacity, that it was in favor of making full use of new technology.
- Another delegation was not opposed to new technology if it could be done form within existing resources.
- And yet another delegation suggested it would be extremely easy to implement option A to achieve improvements right away.

11. In other remarks, the issue of **documentation** was raised by a group of countries which emphasized the importance of the timely issuance of documents in all the six official languages and requested clarification from the Secretariat on the possible savings that could accrue through the reduction of the distribution of hard copies, assuming that electronic distribution would be quicker, less costly and more environmentally benign. Another group of countries touched upon the role of the **Main Committees**, namely to explore the possibility of streamlining the Assembly's work load between the Main Committees and the plenary. And one delegation suggested that there should be no parallel meetings between Main Committees and the plenary.

**B. "The role of the General Assembly and its relationship to the other principal organs of the Organisation and the visibility and public outreach capacity of the Assembly; The role and responsibility of the General Assembly in the process of appointing Secretaries-General of the United Nations"**

12. At the second thematic meeting, on 5 June, fifteen delegations, some again speaking on behalf of various groups, intervened on the issues under discussion.

13. On the **relationship between the GA and the other principal organs**, the view was expressed by a large group of Member States that the primary objective of GA revitalization was to continue to strengthen the role and position of the GA as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the UN. On the other hand,

references were made by several speakers to the relevant Charter provisions setting out the respective bodies' functions and powers.

14. Numerous speakers however noted a growing concern over the perceived **encroachment** by the **Security Council** on the work of the General Assembly, and some raised the perceived increased role of the Security Council in the field of norm-setting in this regard. It was noted that past resolutions aiming to increase coordination among the two bodies existed and only needed to be implemented. This included regular meetings among their respective Presidents. There was also some concern that provisions regarding the improvement of the annual report by the SC to the GA and the submission of special subject-oriented reports have not been implemented. One delegation however noted in this regard that the Security Council report did not suggest subordination of one body to another and that those delegations wishing to receive further details on the Council's work should consult with the respective members elected from within their own regional group. Views varied among delegations on the extent to which the revitalization and Security Council reform processes were either interdependent or independent of each other.

15. Various delegations expressed their support for increasing the **public visibility** of the work of the Assembly which, they argued, was proportional to and a function of the relevance of the issues discussed by it and the way that the GA dealt with the issues. It could also be achieved by increasing interaction with civil society or through travel activities by the President and the Vice-Presidents. It was proposed to examine the reasons why the apparent public disconnect with the work of the General Assembly has been growing. And some delegations indicated that the form of debates in the GA could be made significantly more attractive.

16. A group of countries, on the other hand, suggested that the question of public visibility should continue to be considered in the Committee on Information. Another delegation, through the Co-Chairs, submitted the following two questions to DPI: 1) is there a direct channel between the Department and the **major media** outlets, and 2) are there any plans to harness modern media techniques, such as You Tube? A paper by DPI on these issues requested by Member States was distributed to the Group at its third thematic meeting.

17. Several speakers also intervened on the **selection process of the Secretary-General**, offering a variety of views and comments. While some underscored the importance of retaining the current practice and approaching the issues in full compliance with the provisions of the Charter, others suggested, choosing different words, that the process had become less transparent and inclusive over time, and that the permanent members of the Security Council had assumed too large a role in it. Many stressed the importance of implementing existing resolutions on this issue and also emphasized the inadequacy of the past selection processes and the need for improvement. In that context, it was indicated that it might be useful to reconsider or abolish the provisions contained in resolution 11/1 of 1946 on the appointment of the Secretary-General. The word most frequently used during the discussions to describe the GA's role in the selection process

had been "rubber stamping" the decision taken by the Security Council. It was also stressed by some that now was the best time to undertake a comprehensive review of the Assembly's role in the process. Some speakers suggested that the GA provide a forum for candidates for SG to express their views and aspirations on their possible tenure.

**C. "Strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly and enhancing its functions and relationship with the Secretariat"**

18. At the third thematic meeting, on 19 June, ten delegations, some again on behalf of various groups, intervened.

19. Those Member States intervening generally agreed with the importance of strengthening the OPGA. Several delegations supported increases in both financial and human resources. Many speakers, including two groups participating in the discussions, underlined that **priority** should be given to the **implementation of existing resolutions** on these matters. Another large group however noted that those provisions were **far from sufficient** and that the financial support extended had been stagnating for too many years. One delegation suggested that a specific proposal could be submitted to the Fifth Committee and ACABQ. Others, on the other hand, explicitly conditioned its support for the strengthening of the Office on this being within existing resources. Interest was expressed in receiving information updating the situation on staffing and financing of the OPGA.<sup>1</sup> In addition, several comments touched on the importance of strengthening the Office's institutional memory, including through strengthening the role of permanent staff, with the understanding that these staff must be accountable to the entire GA.

20. To strengthen the Office's **institutional memory** and bolster the smooth transition from one President to the next, several delegations reiterated the usefulness of the incumbent **submitting a report to PGA-elect** which could include specific recommendations and **lessons learned** on the working methods of the Office. A large number of Member States argued that such an annual report should be shared with the wider membership, and one speaker suggested formalizing a request in this regard. Another intervention further noted that the PGA should also submit a **report on all travel activities** undertaken.

21. In a different matter, one group of Member States made the proposal to consider a consultative mechanism for strengthening the interaction between the **PGA and the Main Committee Chairs**, to allow the PGA to be adequately informed of the proceedings of and challenges in those Committees.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent to this request, confirmation was received by the Co-facilitators that the provisions relating to the staffing and financing of the OPGA adopted during the 58<sup>th</sup> session remain unchanged. Their status is indicated in cluster III (paragraphs 35-38) of document A/62/952.

#### **D. Conclusions and way ahead**

22. The Co-Chairs were strongly encouraged by the interest shown by Member States in the work of the Working Group, as witnessed by the high level of participation during the three thematic meetings held so far.

23. As we indicated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> meetings, respectively, we took careful note of Member States' views on the basis of which we drafted this synopsis, which we hope is both comprehensive and reflective of the various positions of delegations.

24. As we also indicated earlier, we have been in contact with the Secretariat to arrange for briefings on the balloting and voting technology as well as on documentation. We would like to inform you that both of these will take place in a meeting scheduled for 27 July. We further intended to engage in an open exchange of views with the UN Correspondents Association, the outcome of which we will equally forward to the wider membership as soon as possible.

25. At our meeting on 27 July, we would also like to hear your feedback on the synopsis and invite Member States to express their views on the next steps that the AHWG should take.