

**Second Committee Bureau's Paper  
on the work of the Committee at the  
seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly**

**1. Introduction**

The constraints resulting from physical distancing requirements associated with the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the work of the main part of the General Assembly, including with respect to its six main committees. With a focus on the health and safety of the delegates and secretariat staff, this paper outlines the options for the business continuity of the Second Committee for the seventy-fifth session under the extraordinary circumstances and shall apply only to the seventy-fifth session and would not set a precedent for any future sessions.

Given the constraints resulting from the current physical distancing requirement, only the General Assembly Hall can accommodate the presence of the entire membership. In addition, work on technically joining conference rooms has been completed, which allows the membership of main Committees to spread across three large conference rooms (combined CRs 1/2/3) for in-person meetings, with a possible limit on the number of representatives that could attend. Such meetings would be held during regular working hours (from 10.00-1.00 and from 3.00-6.00) and the expectation is that intergovernmental bodies would rotate, so that the same body would not meet during both the AM and PM sessions on the same day. An added complexity in convening in-person meetings, is that to service a meeting of one body, the interpretation teams need to occupy the booths located in multiple conference rooms in order to ensure that only one interpreter, instead of the normal two, would be present in any single booth.

Additionally, for meetings requiring remote simultaneous interpretation, provision of interpretation is limited to two-hour blocks, rather than the standard three hours. (Interpretation provided by on-site interpretation teams will continue to be provided for three-hour blocks.) Given these constraints, it may be necessary for each Main Committee to reduce by 50% or more the number of in-person formal plenary meetings convened during the seventy-fifth session and to coordinate the duration and timing of such meetings.

Subject to the medical guidance and physical distancing measures in effect at the time, a limited number of in-person formal meetings could be convened. In accordance with the letter of the Secretary-General dated 29 July 2020, such in-person meetings would require an occupational safety assessment and would need to be held within the constraints of limited conference room availability and services (including interpretation) due to the need to adhere to physical distancing guidelines and taking into account the fact that all six main Committees, as well as the GA plenary and other bodies, will be meeting during the same period.

This paper has been prepared and updated by considering the feedback and comments received from the Member States. The measures suggested here are subject to revision based on the evolving situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and related safety and health guidelines of the UNHQ.

## **2. Programme of work of the Second Committee**

In light of the implications of the measures surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and expected continued limitations on the convening of in-person meetings at UN Headquarters, the programme of work has been adjusted accordingly to ensure the continuation of the business of the Committee. The draft programme of work is contained in document A/C.2/75/L.1.

## **3. Organizational meeting**

A virtual informal organizational briefing will be held to discuss the programme of work and other procedural matters on 2 October 2020.

However, as the options for adopting decisions at a virtual meeting are not in place, the in-person meeting on 5 October 2020 will approve the programme of work of the session (to be issued in document A/C.2/75/L.1), immediately prior to the keynote address and opening of the general debate of the session.

Following established practice, approval of the organization of work will be on the understanding that the programme will be adjusted as necessary taking into account developments during the session.

## **5. General debate**

In accordance with General Assembly decision 74/537 B on revitalization of the work of the Second Committee and following consultations, the Bureau proposes the following theme for the general debate taking into account the theme agreed by the General Assembly for the 2021 session of ECOSOC and the 2021 high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF): *“Building back better after COVID-19: ensuring a more equitable global economy, inclusive societies and sustainable recovery”*.

Subject to the medical guidance and availability of conference services, a general debate will be convened where delegations can deliver a statement either in person or remotely via VTC or a pre-recorded video on the theme and on any or all items before the Committee. Given the limited availability of large conference rooms, the timing of the in-person meetings for the general debate will have to be coordinated with meetings of other Main Committees and the GA plenary. Under the special circumstances prevailing at the seventy-fifth session, the Bureau proposes that the time limits for statements in the general debate be reduced by one minute, namely to 9 minutes for statements made on behalf of groups and to 6 minutes for national statements.

While time limits will need to be strictly implemented, delegations participating in the general debate will have the opportunity to circulate longer versions of their statements through Second Committee Place in the e-delegate portal.

In order to make the necessary arrangements for in-person and possible virtual meetings, the e-list of speakers for the general debate was opened on 22 September. The Bureau encourages Member States to inscribe as early as possible and no later than 30 September and to state their preference to deliver a statement at an in-person meeting or a virtual meeting. Member States intending to submit written statements do not need to inscribe through the e-list of speakers.

Each delegation will decide whether they wish to deliver their statements in person, by prerecorded or live video-message displayed in the room, and/or submit their statement in writing, which would be circulated and posted on the e-deleGATE portal and would also be reflected in an annex of the official reports of the Committee.

If conditions for in-person meetings are not met, the entire general debate would be conducted virtually, with interpretation provided in all six official languages.

## **6. General Discussions on agenda items:**

**6.1 Virtual general discussion:** General discussions on agenda items will be conducted in virtual meetings, also considering the overall calendar and avoiding overlap of schedule with informal consultations on draft resolutions. Delegations wishing to do so may opt to participate in the general discussions through the circulation of written statements to be posted on Second Committee Place on the e-deleGATE portal

In order to make the necessary arrangements for virtual meetings for general discussions and to accurately plan the number of meetings needed, the e-lists of speakers for the general discussions will be opened on 28 September. The Bureau encourages Member States to inscribe as early as possible and no later than 30 September. Member States intending to submit written statements do not need to inscribe through the e-list of speakers.

Under the special circumstances prevailing at the seventy-fifth session, the Bureau proposes that the time limits for statements in the general discussions be reduced by one minute, namely to 6 minutes for statements made on behalf of groups and to 4 minutes for national statements. For joint discussions referred to below, the time limits of 7 minutes, and 5 minutes, respectively, would be maintained.

**6.4 Joint-Consideration of Agenda Items:** Given the need to reduce in-person formal meetings and taking into account the recent decision of the Second Committee on revitalization of its work, consideration could be given to streamlining such discussions through joint consideration of two or more agenda items. In accordance with existing practice, a joint general discussion is held on the items on macroeconomic policy questions and financing for development. For the 75<sup>th</sup> session, the Bureau

will arrange for the joint consideration of agenda items on Information and communications technologies for sustainable development and Globalization and interdependence.

Similarly, the Bureau will arrange for the joint consideration of agenda items on Global code of ethics for tourism and Poverty eradication and other development issues.

**6.5. Introduction of reports:** The reports of the Secretary-General will be introduced through short oral statements (of no more than six minutes<sup>1</sup>) in a virtual meeting. The Secretariat is encouraged to focus on critical issues and recommendations for the Committee's attention. Delegations are strongly encouraged to keep the meeting interactive and to participate in question-and-answer sessions following the introductory statements.

## **7. Joint meeting of the Committee with the Economic and Social Council, dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions and side events**

The annual joint meeting of the Committee with the Economic and Social Council, as well as the annual dialogue with the Executive Secretaries of the regional commissions will be organized as informal virtual meetings. The dates for these meetings have been reflected in the Programme of Work.

Pursuant to decision 74/537 B, the informal side events of the Committee would be limited to a maximum of three, on themes to be selected by the Bureau after consultation with the wider membership and with the support of the Secretariat, taking into account the themes of ECOSOC, the General Assembly and the Second Committee for any given session and current and emerging issues of interest.

Under the current constraints, only one side event will be organized on a virtual platform on 15 October 2020.

## **8. Informal consultations on draft proposals**

**8.1 Overview:** The holding of in-person informal consultations on draft proposals also presents challenges due to the fact that physical distancing measures will not allow the Committee to organize consultations in the alphabet, medium-sized or Secretariat board rooms usually used for such consultations in previous sessions.

Informal consultations on a number of draft proposals will be held through a virtual platform. The Bureau will coordinate in identifying and liaising with (co-)facilitators and organizing a comprehensive calendar of informal consultations, within regular UN working hours, while avoiding parallel

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<sup>1</sup> Some flexibility may be exercised when two or more reports are introduced in one statement.

negotiations as far as possible, considering the limitations for delegations and secretariat to work under the extraordinary circumstances.

**8.2. New draft proposals:** Without prejudice to the right of Member States to submit draft proposals in the Committee, the Bureau had strongly encouraged delegations to defer the submission of new draft proposals to a time when the Committee can negotiate the resolution in a comprehensive manner. The Bureau thanks the delegations for their understanding in their regard.

**8.3. Options for draft resolutions:**

The Bureau encourages delegations to focus on the resolutions with programmatic impacts and open mandates. Sufficient time will be allocated for informal consultations on the Quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR) of operational activities for development of the United Nations system. Subject to the availability of a large room to provide for physical distancing, it may be possible to convene a limited number of informal consultations on the QCPR in-person.

Also, the draft resolution on Mid-term comprehensive review of the implementation of the International Decade for Action, Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028 will be considered for more detailed negotiations as it pertains to the modalities of the review. The Bureau will revert if it appears that the absence of decision by the Committee would hinder the effective continuation of another process.

Based on the interactions with the delegations and feedback received,, the Bureau suggests the following way forward, to be implemented in a uniform way . These arrangements would be made voluntarily by the respective main sponsors, and it should be clear for all that they do not set precedent for future sessions. Also, these arrangements will be without prejudice to the right of Member States to state their position on redline issues contained in previous resolutions.

For all recurring resolutions except those mentioned above), the following would apply:

Draft proposal would present all paragraphs as adopted in previous resolution, with technical updates, and further include:

- One preambular paragraph recognizing the general impact of COVID-on economic and development aspects (Cross-cutting paragraph).
- No more than one PP for substantive COVID-19 related aspects as it pertains to the resolution, and no more than one OP for action-oriented solutions and way forward to deal with the challenges.

Technical updates that are critical to the resolution would be made as following: reflecting elements that are factual in nature; updating the paragraph requesting a report from the Secretary-General to include, inter alia, COVID-19 related aspects, effects and/or responses;

and updating the paragraph that requests the allocation of the agenda item to the specific session depending on each resolution's periodicity.

All substantive negotiations would be limited only to the COVID-19 paragraphs tabled by the proponents of the draft proposals. It is also understood that the new paragraphs will be subject to regular negotiations, and therefore, all parties to the negotiations will have the right to introduce amendments to these paragraphs.

All language adopted in previous resolutions would be considered as a package that could not be reopened, with the exception of making technical updates and to introduce updates reflecting previous agreements between the proponents and negotiating stakeholders. Such updates will be subject to transparent and inclusive consultations.

#### **8.4 Implementation of the decision on revitalization**

The suggestions on draft resolutions made in (paragraph j –i to ix) of decision 74/537 B should also be considered while submitting the draft proposals. This would also apply in connection with the options and parameters suggested in sections 8.2 and 8.3.

**8.5. Cross-cutting language:** The Bureau will facilitate a discussion of 'cross-cutting' language on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, to be initiated at an early stage in the Committee's work, for inclusion in relevant draft proposals.

**8.6 Other matters:** The use of the e-deleGATE portal for circulation of updated draft proposals and messages from facilitators is important and will be retained to ensure transparency.

Pursuant to GA decision 65/530, the multiple mandatory deadlines for the submission of draft resolutions approved by the Committee as part of its programme of work at the beginning of the session will need to be strictly implemented, and in accordance with the paragraph j (i) of decision 74/537 B, in order to facilitate negotiations, proposers of draft resolutions will be invited to share the drafts early in an editable format and in track changes where possible, with sources of new language.

### **9. Introduction of and action on draft proposals**

**9.1 Introduction of draft proposals:** Introductions of draft resolutions could be made through written statements, on an exceptional basis, circulated through the Second Committee Place and posted on the e-deleGATE portal.

#### **9.2 Adoption of draft proposals:**

Subject to medical guidance, in-person meetings will be arranged for adoption of draft resolutions that enjoy consensus as well as those requiring voting towards the end of the session. This would require the scheduling of approximately six in-person meetings in November.

In the course of those meetings delegations will have, as per usual practice, the possibility to deliver explanations of position or general statement(s) in connection with the adoption of draft proposals. Alternatively, explanations of position or general statement(s) could also be circulated in writing and posted on the e-deleGATE portal by those delegations opting to do so.

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