

14 December 2011

English only

Sixty-sixth session
Third Committee

Agenda item 121

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly**Methods of work of the Third Committee****Report of the Chair of the Third Committee to be presented orally to the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly**

1. The present report is presented in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 65/315, in which the Main Committees were encouraged to discuss their working methods at the sixty-sixth session and the Chairs of the Main Committees were invited, at the sixty-sixth session, to brief the Ad Hoc Working Group, as appropriate, on the discussions on the working methods, with a view to identifying best practices and improving working methods.
2. The primary focus of this exercise is not to attempt to reduce the Committee's agenda but to review its work in a manner that would improve the quality of discussions and the impact of its deliberations and decisions, with suggestions on the streamlining and rationalization of its work.
3. The review of the working methods of the Third Committee was also conducted keeping in mind General Assembly resolutions 45/175, on the rationalization of the work of the Third Committee, 50/227, on further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, and 48/264, 58/126, 58/316, 59/313, 60/286 and 64/301, on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

Election of the Bureau, rotation of the Chair and division of responsibilities

4. The Third Committee wishes to reaffirm its practice of having the Chair elected on the basis of geographical distribution, as well as its practice, reaffirmed at its sixty-first session, of electing the Rapporteur on the same basis, as much as possible and practicable.



5. The Third Committee reaffirms section B, paragraph 9, of the annex to resolution 58/126, which stipulates, inter alia, that the Bureau should be elected three months in advance of the next session in order to foster better advance planning and preparation of the work. The Bureau-elect will meet immediately after its election to discuss the organization and division of the work. With a view to ensuring the continuity and the effective organization of its work, the incoming Bureau will continue to meet with the outgoing Bureau to consult on and review issues relating to the efficient functioning of the Committee.

6. The Committee also wishes to continue its recent practice of dividing among the Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteur the Bureau's responsibility for monitoring draft resolutions emanating from their respective regional groups. The Bureau and the secretariat are kept informed of the status of negotiations on all proposals in order to prepare for smooth proceedings in the Committee. When a draft resolution is agreed in Committee, one of the Vice-Chairs may be called upon to facilitate the negotiations on the draft, which is presented as the Chair's text, for example, the draft resolution on the follow-up to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, under the agenda item entitled "Advancement of women". An informal meeting is held after the Bureau is elected, to consider the programme of work of the Committee.

Agenda and programme of work of the Committee

7. The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee) deals with issues relating to the treatment of refugees, population, famine, social welfare, racial discrimination, human rights, ageing, crime prevention, drug control, the advancement of women, the protection of children, and indigenous people. The agenda of the Third Committee has undergone several changes since the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 45/175 and 50/227.

8. There is now a new standing item placed on the agenda of the Third Committee for the sixty-sixth session following the adoption of resolution 65/281, on the review of the Human Rights Council, whereby the General Assembly decided to continue its practice of allocating the agenda item entitled "Report of the Human Rights Council" to the plenary of the Assembly and to the Third Committee. Also, the agenda item entitled "Indigenous issues" was renamed "Rights of indigenous peoples" at the sixty-fifth session.

9. All agenda items referred to the Third Committee are considered annually. The submission of some reports and draft resolutions has been biennialized, and it is the intention of the Committee to proceed further in this direction.

10. Several agenda items have been clustered (Social development, sub-items (a) to (c); Advancement of women, sub-items (a) and (b); Promotion and protection of human rights, sub-items (a) and (d) and sub-items (b) and (c)), and other items are considered jointly (Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and Right of peoples to self-determination; Crime prevention and criminal justice and International drug control).

11. The draft programme of work of the Committee is prepared in accordance with paragraph (b) of rule 99 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. For the

sixty-sixth session, the General Assembly allocated 14 agenda items to the Third Committee, as follows:

5. Election of the officers of the Main Committees.

A. Promotion of sustained economic growth and sustainable development in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and recent United Nations conferences

27. Social development:

- (a) Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly;
- (b) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family;
- (c) Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing.

28. Advancement of women:

- (a) Advancement of women;
- (b) Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

B. Maintenance of international peace and security

62. Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions.

D. Promotion of human rights

64. Report of the Human Rights Council.

65. Promotion and protection of the rights of children:

- (a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children;
- (b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children.

66. Rights of indigenous peoples:

- (a) Rights of indigenous peoples;
- (b) Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

67. Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance:

- (a) Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance;
- (b) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.

68. Right of peoples to self-determination.
69. Promotion and protection of human rights:
 - (a) Implementation of human rights instruments;
 - (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms;
 - (c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives;
 - (d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

H. Drug control, crime prevention and combating international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations

107. Crime prevention and criminal justice.
108. International drug control.

I. Organizational, administrative and other matters

121. Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.
135. Programme planning.

12. The Committee will continue, in consultations with the Member States, to consider and make proposals for the further biennialization, triennialization or clustering of items on its agenda, while taking into account the relevant recommendations of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

13. The Chair of the Third Committee will continue to hold an informal briefing on the status of preparation of work and on the programme of work of the Committee a few weeks prior to the opening of its session, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/316.

Question time, interactive dialogues and general discussion of agenda items

14. It is the established practice, at the time of consideration of items or clusters of items, and pursuant to subparagraphs 3 (c) and (d) of the annex to General Assembly resolution 58/316, to hold interactive debates and “question time” with the heads of departments and offices, representatives of the Secretary-General, special rapporteurs and other special mechanisms/procedures of the Human Rights Council immediately following the introduction of reports by executive heads and senior members of the Secretariat at the beginning of each discussion, as part of the formal proceedings of the Committee. The presenters will be required to respect the time limit of 8 to 10 minutes for the presentation and to limit their replies to delegations’ comments and questions to 10 to 15 minutes. Delegations are encouraged to participate actively in these dialogues with questions and unscripted comments. It is strongly advised that the comments and questions in the interactive dialogues be

limited to two to three minutes. The general discussion of each agenda item or cluster of agenda items follows the question time.

15. In accordance with the established practice of the Committee, statements made during the general discussion under each agenda item or cluster of agenda items continue to be limited to 7 minutes for individual delegations and 15 minutes for statements made on behalf of a group of delegations.

16. Also, in accordance with previous decisions of the General Assembly, delegations exercise their right of reply at the end of the day whenever two meetings have been scheduled for the consideration of the relevant agenda item on that day or at the conclusion of the consideration of the item, whichever is sooner. The first statement is limited to five minutes and the second, if any, to three minutes.

17. Since the Third Committee holds individual general discussions on each item on its agenda, further rationalization by clustering or joint consideration of items would be desirable, as it would free time from the plenary meetings for delegations to negotiate the text of draft resolutions, thus resulting in economies for the Organization.

Conclusion of the work of the Committee

18. Bearing in mind the number of meetings allocated to the Third Committee, a target date of late November (before the Thanksgiving holiday) is set each year for the conclusion of its work. The Committee will, however, endeavour to conclude its work earlier.

Draft resolutions submitted in the Third Committee

19. The General Assembly, by its resolution 45/175, encouraged delegations to draw up omnibus resolutions to the extent possible. The Committee has been able to adopt this procedure for one item (Rights of the child). For other items, the practice has evolved towards the adoption of "comprehensive" draft resolutions that encompass many but not all of the issues. That has not led, however, to a reduction in the number of draft resolutions adopted under a given item.

20. The Committee adopts proposals throughout the session after the conclusion of the consideration of an item or cluster of items. An evolving practice has been to set aside Tuesdays for introduction and Thursdays for introduction and action on proposals during the first five weeks of the session, when the agenda items are introduced and discussed. This provides delegations with a certain lead time during which delegations can obtain appropriate instructions from their capitals and which enables them to focus on introduction and action on the agreed day and time.

21. Following the consideration of the items, during the last three weeks of the session, the Committee is prepared to take action on draft resolutions at any given meeting, provided the Member States have been notified 24 hours in advance. Decision-making over the past 10 years has changed very little in the Third Committee. There is an established pattern by which some proposals are adopted by consensus while others are adopted by a recorded vote, mostly in the human rights cluster of items.

22. With a view to taking action on more concise, focused and action-oriented resolutions, Member States are encouraged to ensure that preambular and operative paragraphs are concise, focused and designed to have an impact on policy development. Member States are also encouraged to table resolutions, when appropriate, biennially or at longer intervals. Member States within the Third Committee are further encouraged to avoid duplication in the presentation of resolutions and decisions, in particular those that have already been adopted by the Economic and Social Council or its subsidiary bodies.

Reports and documentation before the Committee

23. Member States should continue to make every effort to reduce the number of requests for reports of the Secretary-General, *inter alia*, by considering requesting consolidated reports prepared in accordance with resolution 57/300. There should be no automaticity in requesting reports of the Secretary-General. Reports should be requested only if they would assist in taking stock of developments on a particular issue.

24. When reports are not available in all languages within the six-week time frame, then every effort shall be made to make them available, in their advance unedited version, in English only, on the website of the substantive department responsible for them.

25. Reports shall be substantive and analytical in order to provide the General Assembly with useful elements for its consideration of items. The focus should be kept on recent developments, progress made, challenges, conclusions and recommendations. To ensure that documents are available to delegates at the beginning of each meeting and to avoid delaying the commencement of meetings, documentation should be made available for distribution in the meeting room 15 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.

Utilization of the Third Committee website and QuickPlace

26. With a view to expediting information-sharing and promoting efficient and cost-effective work, the website of the Third Committee should be regularly improved, developed and utilized. The increased utilization of QuickPlace, the informal Web-based information tool for circulating updated information on the status of the Committee's work and negotiations, has greatly facilitated the smooth and timely conclusion of the Committee's work in the past few years.

Conference facilities and meeting arrangements and resource constraints

27. Unless otherwise specified, official meetings of the Committee are held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and from 3 to 6 p.m. The Chair and Bureau members try to ensure that meetings start on time, which is critical to the efficient utilization of services allocated to the intergovernmental bodies of the United Nations. In accordance with past practice, the Committee will continue its practice and waive rule 108 of the

rules of procedure of the General Assembly with respect to the quorum to declare a meeting open.

28. Owing to the large number of informal consultations on the draft resolutions tabled in the Committee, the Bureau and delegations have expressed concern at the lack of availability of rooms and secretariat support for the consultations, which can hamper the timely conclusion of the Committee's work.

29. The workload of the Third Committee has traditionally been the highest of all the Main Committees in October and November. It is therefore advisable to review the support given to the secretariat of the Third Committee so that it adequately reflects the requirements in terms of office space and equipment, whether in the North Lawn building or elsewhere following the completion of the capital master plan.

Future efforts towards the revitalization of the work of the Third Committee and collaboration with other Main Committees

30. The Third Committee should consider closer collaboration and cooperation with other Main Committees to identify and address issues that are also under the consideration of those Committees while respecting the division of responsibilities. The Third Committee should also take into account the experience and best practices of other Main Committees in improving its methods of work.

31. The Third Committee shall continue to examine ways to revitalize its work, as requested in General Assembly resolutions 60/286, 64/301 and 65/315, and to take appropriate action by consensus and shall keep the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly updated in this regard.
