

Enhancing the role of the First Committee of the General Assembly

Multilateralism is a core principle of our efforts to address non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. Multilateral, legally binding and verifiable arms control treaties are essential tools for setting new norms that can enhance our common security.

In today's new security environment, it is time to review the functioning of the United Nations and global multilateral institutions involved in disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation. In a new security environment we must consider steps that will enhance the effectiveness and impact of the UN and multilateralism. Today the multilateral approach to disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control is under strain, and this include the First Committee of the General Assembly.

The agenda of the First Committee is overloaded: it has to consider more than 50 resolutions and decisions in a way that is often mechanical and repetitive. UN member countries spend much time consulting on resolutions that subsequently have little impact on current global security challenges. The resolutions rarely help to create a common approach to addressing these challenges. Sometimes, they may even be intended to do the opposite: to reveal new divisions in the international community. The messages of certain key resolutions may be lost among resolutions and decisions that have no political and practical value. An issue is not necessarily closer to being resolved simply because it is included on the agenda of the First Committee.

Norway would like to propose the following practical steps as a basis for discussion:

- The duration of the Committee should be shortened by more efficient time management. Each session of the First Committee should focus on a limited number of key topics. Topics for each session of the First Committee should be identified in a preparatory meeting.
- The general debate of the Committee should be shorter, more interactive and concentrate on the topics selected for each session. The UN

Secretary General should introduce the main topics at each session of the Committee. His introduction should be circulated in advance so that delegates are better prepared for the discussion.

- The number of resolutions and decisions considered should be drastically reduced. Resolutions should be much more thoroughly discussed on a biennial or triennial basis.
- Member countries should be encouraged to exercise restraint in tabling new resolutions. The introduction of any new resolutions should be carefully considered, taking into account the international priorities.
- Administrative resolutions/decisions taken by the Committee should be clustered into one general set of conclusions.
- Substantive issues should be clustered around a few topics such as weapons of mass destruction, conventional weapons and cross-sectoral issues .
- The organization of the thematic segment of the First Committee should be integrated. Ideally, the thematic discussion, presentation of resolutions and subsequent action should be done in one go. It may, however, be necessary to allow for voting to take place at the end of the session, in order to give more time for consultations.
- The role of the Chair of the First Committee should be re-considered. The Chair should be selected one year in advance. This would allow the Chair to play an active role in the substantive preparations for the session. Together with regional co-ordinators, the Chair should identify and plan the agenda and decide which resolutions/decisions should be considered and acted on. An alternative could be to select a bureau one year in advance.

Revitalization of the First Committee should have a positive spin-off for multilateral disarmament mechanisms such as the Conference on Disarmament, the UN Disarmament Commission and the various multilateral treaties.

All countries should be engaged into a broad and transparent consultative process with a view to strengthening our global disarmament institutions. Consultations should be held after the 58th session of the UN General Assembly with the task to present concrete recommendations for the 59th Session.