

Enhancing the role of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly. Informal workshop in New York 3 October 2004.

An informal workshop organised by Norway was held in New York on 3 October 2004. The purpose was to continue the discussions on possible concrete measures to improve the working methods of the First Committee. The New York workshop built on a similar informal meeting held in Oslo in December 2003.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Kim Traavik opened the workshop by underlining the need for strengthening the multilateral disarmament machinery, taking into account global security challenges and the need for arms control and disarmament.

Participants from 28 countries from all regions, including the Chair of the 59th Session of the First Committee of the General Assembly, Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba (Mexico), attended the workshop.

The Chair of the First Committee outlined his ambitions for improving the working methods of the First Committee. The participants expressed appreciation for his commitment to make the committee work better.

Based on the informal discussions, the convener observed emerging consensus on the following issues:

- The process towards improved working methods must remain flexible and inclusive, given the exploratory phase of discussions.
- A firm commitment to strengthening the role of the First Committee, and linking these efforts up to the reform of the UN General Assembly and overall efforts for strengthening the multilateral disarmament machinery.
- Improved time management for the General Debate. Introduction of indicative time limits and a rolling speakers' list, to make more time available for thematic debates and informal consultations.
- Interest in involving experts and civil society at all levels in a balanced manner. A need to clarify the modalities in this regard.
- Better prioritisation on the part of Member States in generating new activities to be undertaken by the UN Secretariat.
- Need to further improve the quality and availability of information on the deliberations in the Committee, taking into account the existing capacity in the UN Secretariat.
- Support for strengthening the thematic debates, including interactive consultations in informal sessions. Interest in conducting substantial discussions on the basis of reports from the intergovernmental expert panels/groups.

- An interest in holding a separate thematic segment on the status of the multilateral disarmament machinery.
- Timely consultations on budgetary implications of draft resolutions/decisions, both with the UN Secretariat, the ACABQ and the Fifth Committee.
- More informal consultations on draft resolutions/decisions with a view to reaching consensus.

The following issues and proposals were raised, and should be subject to further consideration:

- Improve coordination with the work of other UN General Assembly main committees.
- A particular need to agree with the Fourth Committee on distribution of time and facilities, to make full use of morning and afternoon sessions.
- Thematic preparations during meetings of the UN Disarmament Commission and other relevant bodies.
- A need to further explore the agenda of the committee and the clustering of items, taking into account the right of all countries to make use of the committee.
- Continued discussion on priority-setting for follow-up of resolutions, in particular consensus resolutions versus those adopted by a majority vote.
- Constraint on the part of Member States in tabling new resolutions, and further efforts to bi- and triannualise resolutions.

There was agreement that the outcome of this informal workshop should be shared with all interested states, and that further consultations should be encouraged.

The Norwegian government expressed its interest in further supporting the process towards enhanced working methods of the First Committee.

New York, 3 October 2004