

Follow-up of resolutions and decisions adopted by the First Committee
at its past session / Presentation of reports

Statement before the First Committee
of the
General Assembly

by

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
Madam Chairperson,

This is the third consecutive year that DDA presents a report on the implementation of resolutions to the Committee within the context of General Assembly resolution 59/95 on “Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee”.

This Committee has been, for the past three years, engaged in efforts to improve the effectiveness of the methods of its work. It has undertaken exercises aimed at consolidating and streamlining its agenda items.

Of course, most of the responsibility for refocusing the activities of the First Committee falls on the Member States.

The First Committee continued to adopt annually over fifty resolutions and decisions (51 resolutions and 3 decisions in 2004, compared to the 53 resolutions and 6 decisions adopted in 2005) addressing the full range of issues in the field of disarmament and international security. Twenty-nine of the resolutions adopted last year requested the Secretariat to prepare a report on their implementation and to be submitted to the General Assembly.

Unless specifically requested, the Department has no mandate to evaluate the views of Member States in preparing the reports, nor to undertake substantive analysis of these views to assess the implementation of specific disarmament initiatives.

DDA has continued however to consolidate reports on similar issues, where possible, bringing down the total number of reports to 26. Furthermore, all reports, upon issuance, are available electronically in all six official languages on the web site of the General Assembly under the category “Documentation”.

For the purpose of illustrating how the resolutions requesting reports that would require Member States’ inputs have been implemented, the Department has prepared three tables.

Table I compares the number of responses from Member States to General Assembly requests for views or information at the 60th and 61st sessions. Table II provides a comparison between the 60th and 61st sessions of the following information: which Member States provided inputs, timeliness of such provision, the level of response from the main sponsors of the relevant resolutions, regional distribution of the inputs provided and whether the contents of inputs provided have changed. Table III contains a list of those reports that require substantive input from the Department.

Of the 26 reports submitted this year, 11 reports (Table I) contain the views of individual Member States on specific issues, two reports provide information submitted by Member States using the format or template endorsed by them (i.e. the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and the United Nations instrument for reporting military expenditures - MILEX) (Table I), while DDA contributed the substance of 13 reports (Table III).

As regards inputs on behalf of regional groups of States, only two reports contain “en bloc” reporting of views – the reports respectively on “observance of environmental norms in the drafting and implementation of agreements on disarmament and arms control” and on “promotion of multilateralism in the area of disarmament and non-proliferation”, same as last year’s.

Compared to the 60th session that showed a record low number of submissions, the current session indicates some improvement with a slight increase in the number of States submitting their views. It is regrettable however that the number of sponsors of the resolutions that submitted their views ranges from zero to four, representing less than one-quarter of the total number of sponsors of each of the respective resolutions. This pattern shows more or less the same for both the 60th and 61st sessions.

Again, at the 61st session, the reports on the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and on MILEX contain the most replies, respectively a total of 106 (compared to 107 for the 60th session) and 79 (compared to 69 at the 60th session). However, even these numbers translate into meagre results. For example, 44% of the UN Member States did not submit inputs for the report on the Arms Register, while some 63% of the Member States did not submit the information for the MILEX.

The statistics presented above do not in any way call into question the value of the individual resolutions. However, the low number of submissions by Member States under relevant resolutions highlights the need for a fresh approach concerning the ways and means to interact between the Secretariat and the Member States and among Member States in the context of further revitalizing the activities of the First Committee.

Here are some questions to you in view of these statistics.

First, the Member States' response to the request for national inputs has remained appallingly slow and low. Only 16 responses at most came out of the 192 members of this organization, accounting for even less than 10%. One resolution with 10 co-sponsors turned out to have zero inputs from these sponsors. Does this warrant any decent analysis on the subject? Is it still worthwhile to continue requesting the Secretary-General to compile the views of the Member States on such a subject? Of course, the Secretariat has to send note verbales as a reminder, and DDA has to spare a good amount of manpower to keep track of this process. Is it not cost saving to make such exercises on a biennial basis? Or wouldn't it even be worth considering removing such requests from the resolutions?

As I said earlier, the Secretary-General should submit his reports only when requested to do so by the policy-making organs. This is the practice of the First Committee. However, the Secretary-General is constantly exposed to the media and the public on a daily basis,, making comments and remarks or delivering speeches including on the subjects of concern to this Committee. Wouldn't it be worth considering that the Secretary-General should be encouraged to submit his views on certain subjects of topical concern of many MS?

Thirdly, if enough statistics are ready and available for the delegates, wouldn't it be worth considering to request the Secretary-General to provide more analytical information that would enable you, the Member States, to better assess the effectiveness of the mandates and how they contribute to the overall goals of the Organization.

Discussions under the thematic debate for the last week and a half prove that the Committee has achieved significant progress in making its thematic discussions more focused and more interactive. These are some points for discussion, food for thoughts for the delegates who wish to make the Committee more proactive and productive at the same time.

Reports remain an essential tool to assess progress in achieving the solemn goals of resolutions. Let me reaffirm DDA's intent to continue working to promote a better response to the report requests. In short, we will implement our mandates faithfully and in full.