



# Security Council

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## Letter dated 3 March 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

It is our honour to transmit herewith the report on the informal retreat on the working methods of the Security Council, organized by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the State of Kuwait, which was held from 17 to 19 January 2020 in Kingstown (see annex).

The report has been compiled, in accordance with the Chatham House Rule, solely under the responsibility of the Permanent Missions of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and of the State of Kuwait. The document is a reflection of the discussion engaged in by Council members and is not intended to represent agreement in any form.

We should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Mansour **Al-Otaibi**  
Permanent Representative of Kuwait

*(Signed)* Inga Rhonda **King**  
Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines



## **Annex to the letter dated 3 March 2020 from the Permanent Representatives of Kuwait and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

### **Joint retreat on the working methods of the Security Council, co-hosted by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Kuwait, in Kingstown, 17–19 January 2020**

#### **I. Background and objectives**

1. While the Security Council is considered to have sole authority over its own procedure and has the latitude to determine its own practices under Article 30 of the Charter of the United Nations, it has become evident that the working methods of the Council are not only of interest to its members, but also to the wider United Nations membership and the populations affected by its actions.

2. Through various Council decisions, Council members have committed themselves to enhancing the efficiency and transparency of the Council and improving its working methods, as well as interaction and dialogue with non-Council members as a means of discharging its mandate to maintain international peace and security, and to doing so on behalf of the entire membership, as provided for in Article 24 (*I*) of the Charter. In that endeavour, we recognize the pioneering efforts of Japan and its commitment to enhancing the working methods of the Council in its capacity as former Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, alongside the contributions and progress achieved under the leadership of all other former Chairs of the Informal Working Group, the most recent being Kuwait, which served as Chair during 2018 and 2019.

3. In summary, it is clear that the way in which the Council functions in pursuit of its mandate depends largely on its working methods. As such, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, along with Kuwait, convened an informal retreat in order to engage in an inclusive dialogue with all Council members to allow for the generation of concrete proposals for the way forward. The planning retreat was also convened at an important juncture in the history of the Security Council, during the year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. It was our hope, therefore, to be progressive, as we identified positive trends and practices of the Council and explored areas of procedure and practice that had not been addressed and how to improve existing practices, in addition to continuing to promote further implementation of the note by the President of the Council ([S/2017/507](#)).

4. Improving the Council's working methods remains a Council-led process and, as the current Chair of the Informal Working Group, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines hopes to facilitate and engage in discussions that result in practical outcomes that are reflective of consensus.

#### **II. Overview**

5. The opening session, held on 17 January, featured welcoming remarks by the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and current Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, Inga Rhonda King; the Permanent Representative of Kuwait and former Chair of the Informal Working Group, Mansour Al-Otaibi; the Director of the Security Council Affairs Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Hasmik

Egian; and the Deputy Executive Director of Security Council Report, Joanna Weschler.

6. On 18 and 19 January, the programme included round-table discussions among all members on the following themes:

(a) Informal Working Group, working methods of the Security Council and programme of work of the Group for 2020 (session I);

(b) Intra-Council dynamics, the process of drafting outcomes and the issue of penholdership (session II);

(c) Inclusion and interaction among Security Council members (session III);

(d) Best practices relating to the Security Council's relationship with the wider membership, in addition to cooperation with other United Nations organs and regional organizations (session IV);

(e) Ensuring and maintaining effectiveness and efficiency in times of austerity (session V);

(f) Wrap-up and main outcomes (session VI).

### **III. Summary of discussions**

#### **A. Highlights of the opening session**

7. During the opening session of the retreat, members highlighted that working methods could help to improve the efficiency of the Security Council and contribute to smooth outcomes. They also underscored the importance of implementing the proposals contained in note [S/2017/507](#) and acknowledged the work undertaken in that regard when Kuwait was Chair of the Informal Working Group, as well as the adoption of eight new notes by the President. Some members underlined that one of the notes ([S/2019/993](#)) provided for the incoming members of the Security Council to receive Council communications five months before officially becoming a member. In that connection, other members stressed the significance of the three-month observation period of Council meetings for incoming members.

8. Some members dwelled on the need for flexibility, while others emphasized the need to ensure predictability in the application of working methods. Members also recalled the importance of preserving the unity of the Council and the desirability of working towards consensus. In that regard, some cautioned against excessive codification and instead supported the progressive development of the practice of the Council in certain areas.

9. During the session, the Security Council was also likened to a board, with the Secretariat being described as the executive directorate. This idea was further elaborated on and explored by members during the discussion that followed, with some Council members expressing a desire for the Council to stay true to its role of an executive organ, and not just as a deliberative body, or one for public expression. In addition, Council members should work towards reflecting an expression of the Council, in the form of press statements, resolutions or even elements to the press, and not be just a forum for presenting 15 individual national statements. To facilitate the Council's operation as an executive body and enable more effective decision-making, members indicated a desire for more informal meetings of experts and more interactive consultations.

**B. Session I**  
**Informal Working Group, working methods of the Security Council and programme of work of the Group for 2020**

10. At the beginning of the session, the Chair announced that the programme of work of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions for 2020 would be centred on action-oriented implementation. This was supported by many members, some of whom also highlighted that responsibility in that regard rested on the shoulders of all Council members. The Chair affirmed that she intended to build on the work of her predecessor by furthering the discussion on issues such as penholdership, striking a balance between transparency and efficiency and ensuring implementation of note [S/2017/507](#). In order to do so, she confirmed that she would explore, in collaboration with the rest of the Council members, mechanisms to monitor implementation, building on best practices and initiatives developed by Kuwait as Chair of the Informal Working Group and by other members. She called upon members to share their views on the various issues proposed. The issues outlined below were raised.

**Implementation of note [S/2017/507](#)**

11. All members acknowledged the importance of ensuring the implementation of note [S/2017/507](#), noting that the document contained numerous provisions that could greatly improve the day-to-day work of the Council, if and when it is fully implemented.

12. Members discussed the significance of the role of the Presidency in ensuring the implementation of working methods, with some also reflecting on the role of all members of the Council in implementing note [S/2017/507](#).

**Striking a balance between transparency and efficiency in the work of the Security Council**

13. In the context of transparency, members focused on the balance between open meetings and closed consultations and on ensuring action by the Council. Regarding consultations, many members agreed that the process of drafting and agreeing on press elements needed to be reconsidered, as the current process had become quite cumbersome and unproductive, with members engaging in lengthy negotiations on proposed elements. Members emphasized that elements to the press should be a succinct reflection on the facts of the meeting, not requiring long or difficult negotiations.

14. Members also discussed the preparation and quality of the annual report and the monthly assessments by the Presidency. While some did not see much value in having monthly assessments, others acknowledged that they could be used as a means of enhancing transparency.

15. The Chair expressed the intention of holding a yearly open debate on working methods in accordance with note [S/2017/507](#) and proposed to do so in 2020 on the topic “Striking a balance between transparency and efficiency”.

**Codification of working methods**

16. Some members emphasized that there were some aspects of Security Council practice that should be allowed time to develop without first being codified, as there was a certain amount of experimentation that took place when new practices were introduced. In that regard, they made reference to a recent example, namely the introduction of the informal meetings known as “sofa talks” among Permanent

Representatives, not to indicate that no new outcomes should be adopted by the Informal Working Group, but rather to point out that the Group could engage in productive discussions and achieve meaningful results without codification.

17. While many members agreed that too much codification could be counterproductive, others pointed out that a certain degree of it was necessary, in particular for non-permanent (elected) members, as the Council's daily practice involved many unspoken and unwritten rules of which non-permanent members were often unaware. Therefore, there should be a minimum degree of codification allowing for more room for non-permanent members to better contribute to the Council's day-to-day discussions and activities.

#### **Security Council visiting missions**

18. The effectiveness of visiting missions was discussed, as they were understood as a mechanism to allow a better assessment of certain situations. Members noted the value of such visits and also called for careful consideration of their number and impact. The importance of follow-up actions after the visiting missions was also highlighted. A proposal was made to involve political coordinators in the missions of the Council, separately or in addition to Permanent Representatives, Deputy Permanent Representatives and sanctions experts.

#### **Vice-Chair**

19. It is codified that a Chair is appointed in a personal capacity and that the Vice-Chair should take over that role if the Chair is unable to continue in that role. However, whenever the Chair is not available, the practice has become that the Deputy Permanent Representative of the Chair's delegation assumes the role of Chair. During the retreat, members considered how best to reconcile this, discussing whether the time had come to reflect on the codification of this practice. It was also acknowledged that some Vice-Chairs wished to play a more active role in their respective dossiers.

#### **Meetings with troop- and police-contributing countries**

20. Members suggested that there should be greater connection between meetings with troop- and police-contributing countries and discussions in consultations and that the meetings could be more interactive.

#### **Statements after the adoption of a decision**

21. Some members cautioned against speaking after the issuance of a presidential statement, noting that, given that such statements were consensus outcomes, expressions of disagreement risked undermining the unity of the Council. All members called for a consistent approach, including with regard to resolutions adopted unanimously.

### **C. Session II Intra-Council dynamics, the process of drafting outcomes and the issue of penholdership**

22. Members noted that, while it was sometimes argued that penholdership was deemed an efficient and informal mechanism, it often resulted in non-permanent (elected) members being excluded from negotiations on texts. The expansion of the role of the pen holder was also underscored, noting that it was not limited to the drafting of outcome documents but included other activities of the Council, such as

the holding of emergency meetings, leading on visiting missions or speaking first in the Chamber.

23. Most members called for the discussion and work on penholdership commenced by Kuwait as Chair of the Informal Working Group to be continued, since it was still an important topic worthy of further engagement. The issues outlined below were raised.

#### **Maintaining flexibility in the drafting of outcomes**

24. Several members stressed the importance of maintaining flexibility regarding the Council's working methods and practice, adding that there was not always merit in formalizing these practices by way of codification. One member highlighted that predetermining who could draft outcomes on particular items could paralyse the Council. Others disagreed, noting that there was a need for the Council to codify some language on the issue of penholdership, in particular as the role of pen holders often went beyond merely drafting the Council's outcome documents.

#### **Co-pen holder role for the Chairs of sanctions committees**

25. Some members emphasized the important role that Chairs of sanctions committees could play on country-specific items on the Council's agenda. In that regard, some members supported the idea that Chairs be considered co-pen holders of those items, if they so choose, in the light of their expertise and knowledge of the relevant regions given their periodic travels and periodic engagement with States concerned and the Panels of Experts and their direct role in monitoring and following up on the implementation of sanctions imposed by the Council. Some members expressed their readiness to implement, even informally, the ideas proposed on penholdership by Kuwait as Chair of the Informal Working Group. At the same time, some members were not in favour of the Chairs of sanctions committees automatically becoming co-pen holders.

#### **Working methods of subsidiary bodies**

26. During the discussion on the working methods of subsidiary bodies, which dictate the ability of such bodies to effectively support the work of the Council, members put forward a range of views. While it was acknowledged that there was room for improvement in that area, some members suggested a complete revision of the working methods while acknowledging that each subsidiary body had its own specific working methods.

### **D. Session III Inclusion and interaction among Security Council members**

27. Members who attended session III emphasized that the principles of inclusion and interaction among Council members were included in note [S/2017/507](#) and that each Presidency played a role in encouraging conduct consistent with those principles each month. They also emphasized that, while positions on some issues were divided and unlikely to achieve consensus, in many other areas Council members could find agreement. For that reason, they called for greater communication and interaction among Council members at all levels, both inside and outside the Chamber. The issue outlined below was raised.

### **Role of political coordinators**

28. Many members underscored the connection between the work of the Informal Working Group and the potential role of political coordinators insofar as it concerned action-oriented implementation. Some members signalled a disconnect, at times, between what occurred in the Group and how political coordinators were informed, and proposed that the Chair of the Group play a role in bridging the gap.

29. In that regard, members suggested various proposals to bridge the gap, as well as to enhance reflection among political coordinators towards action-oriented implementation, including a dedicated monthly or periodic meeting of political coordinators focused on working methods in relation to the programme of work.

## **E. Session IV**

### **Best practices relating to the Security Council's relationship with the wider membership, in addition to cooperation with other United Nations organs and regional organizations**

30. Members recalled that, while in Article 24 of the Charter of the United Nations it was stipulated that the Security Council had primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, there was also a reference in Chapter VIII of the Charter to "regional arrangements", including with regard to the pacific settlement of disputes. In that regard, members discussed the contribution of regional arrangements to the work of the Council. Some members also addressed the subject of interaction with other principal organs of the United Nations, such as the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The issues outlined below were raised.

#### **Cooperation of the Security Council with regional organizations**

31. Many members stressed the importance of developing more effective partnerships between the United Nations and regional organizations and noted that the Council already maintained a good working relationship with several regional organizations, including the African Union and the European Union. Some members observed that there was room for improvement with respect to cooperation with other organizations, such as the League of Arab States and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Some members underscored the individual responsibility of Council members in cooperating with their respective regional groups and organizations.

32. Some members noted that there was a need for more innovative approaches in the areas of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and utilizing the capabilities of regional organizations in the areas of dialogue, reconciliation and mediation. That could include more cooperation between regional organizations themselves on aspects such as peacekeeping, and the sharing of best practices among themselves. While it was underscored that regional organizations should not be contributing to the imposition of sanctions measures, which fall under Chapter VII of the Charter and are therefore within the purview of the Security Council, members emphasized that close cooperation between the Council and regional organizations could assist in the effective implementation of sanctions.

#### **Collaboration between the Security Council and other principal organs of the United Nations**

33. With respect to interaction with other principal organs, members emphasized that there was potential for greater collaboration with the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council. It was ascertained

that while the President of the General Assembly met on a monthly basis with the President of the Security Council, that was not the practice with respect to the President of the Economic and Social Council.

34. Beyond the interaction with the President of the General Assembly, members underlined the significance of the annual report of the Security Council to the General Assembly. In that regard, members discussed means to improve the timeliness of the report as well as its contents, including the timely issuance of monthly assessments or collaboration among Council members in support of the principal drafter. Monthly assessments were also discussed as a means of disseminating information about the Council, and some members proposed re-establishing their original purpose and making them more analytical. It was also highlighted that it was not a requirement for monthly assessments to reflect consensus. Another option was to have monthly assessments under the responsibility of the relevant Council member and not representing the views of the Council.

35. Some members noted the need to strengthen the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly, noting that failure to do so could have an adverse impact on the credibility and transparency of the Council.

36. In addition, members recognized the importance of the deliberations of the Fifth Committee with regard to the Council's work, in particular when negotiating mandates of peacekeeping missions. Members called for greater interaction with the Fifth Committee, in particular the pen holders, to ensure that there was no disconnect between the political discussions in the Council and the budgetary issues that were negotiated in the Fifth Committee.

37. With respect to the International Court of Justice, members called for greater interaction at the annual closed meeting with the President of the International Court of Justice and for the consideration of greater support for the work of the Court.

#### **Disseminating information to the broader membership**

38. Members underscored that there was room for improvement in sharing documents with the broader membership in accordance with note [S/2017/507](#). Some members advocated greater flexibility in sharing Council documents.

39. Several members also referred to the monthly wrap-up sessions held by the Presidency of the Council and called for those sessions to be more analytical and ensure meaningful engagement with the wider membership. The sessions were discussed as a possible forum for the Chair of the Informal Working Group to hold briefings and engage on issues relating to working methods, as well as an opportunity for the Chair to commend the President of the Council for a particular month on any efforts adopted with a view to implementing the working methods. The wrap-up sessions were discussed as a possible medium for analysis, as well as interaction.

### **F. Session V Ensuring and maintaining effectiveness and efficiency in times of austerity**

40. Members noted that it was vital to reassess the daily practices of the Council and the way in which it conducted its work in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. It was also emphasized that efforts aimed at increasing efficiency should not be limited solely to times of austerity. The issues outlined below were raised.



**Use of briefers during meetings**

41. Several members called for better time management regarding the statements delivered in the Chamber, whether by Council members, briefers or speakers invited under rule 37 of the provisional rules of procedure. Some members suggested the use of a permanent device to time the statements and assist in solving the problem. Other members noted that this was the responsibility of the Presidency, and that the President for the month could consider sending letters to briefers and other participants in Council meetings beforehand, stressing the importance of concise and timely statements. Some members also mentioned the need to reconsider the overall number and relevance of the expertise of briefers.

**Interaction during meetings**

42. Many members voiced their desire for more interaction in closed consultations, adding that members should avoid repeating what was said in open chamber. In addition, many members considered that reading prepared statements in both the Chamber and the consultations room defeated the purpose of convening closed consultations, which were meant to be interactive. Some members suggested that the Presidency could also contact briefers ahead of the meeting and ask for written statements for prior circulation among Council members so as to better steer the discussion.

**Meeting formats**

43. Members discussed the practice of holding open briefings followed by closed consultations, noting that in recent years more and more consultations had been cancelled because all members delivered statements in open meetings. Some members suggested that the practice of holding open briefings followed by closed consultations needed to be reconsidered for the purpose of effectiveness and efficiency and to consider alternative approaches.

44. Members also noted the increasing use of “other matters”, also known as “any other business”, during closed consultations. Some members noted that “any other business” was meant to be used to discuss urgent and time-sensitive matters, but more recently some Council members were calling for the consideration of other matters, with several briefers, under “any other business”, often resembling ordinary closed consultations. Members noted that this had an impact on the discussion and contributed to the unproductive consideration of “any other business”. Some members suggested other formats for such discussions, including private meetings of informal interactive dialogues.

**Monthly programme of work**

45. Several members noted the need to effectively manage the Council’s monthly programme of work. Some suggested reducing the number of times that an agenda item was discussed if no recent developments pertaining to that item had taken place and if no meeting was mandated.

**G. Session VI  
Wrap-up and main outcomes**

46. In closing the informal retreat, the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shared the following points by way of a summary and personal reflection on the discussions held:

(a) Implementation of note [S/2017/507](#): Chairs of the Informal Working Group will undertake efforts to build on the indicators for implementation of the note already established by Kuwait when it held the Chair. The discussion reaffirmed the critical role of monthly presidencies in the implementation of the note, including in creating and testing new practices or establishing alternatives to existing practices. Accordingly, members intend to work closely with monthly presidencies to foster greater partnership, as well as with other members. In that regard, members discussed the possibility of each President taking the initiative to adopt creative ways to monitor and implement working methods;

(b) Penholdership: this remains an unresolved issue that merits further engagement in the Informal Working Group;

(c) Transparency versus efficiency: striking a balance between closed and open meetings is an issue that could be addressed in the annual open debate on transparency versus efficiency, as well as the efficiency of consultations. In addition, consideration should be given to reflecting on the number of briefers. While on the one hand, civil society participation has increased in Council meetings, on the other hand, some consider that in some meetings there have been too many briefers. Regarding the elements to the press issued after consultations, efforts should be made to remain faithful to the purpose of press elements as a transparency measure and not as an outcome document, which should be kept short. In addition, consideration should be given to the dissemination of Council documents to the wider membership;

(d) Security Council visiting missions: efforts should be undertaken to explore the possibility of having specific outcomes for visiting missions with a specific focus, in order to consider their quality and “implementability”.

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