



Security Council

Distr.: General
31 March 2020

Original: English

Letter dated 30 March 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I am writing on behalf of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group (ACT Group) regarding the working methods of the Security Council in the context of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The Group, comprising 25 Member States* from all regional groups, promotes a more transparent and efficient United Nations. Advocating for Security Council working methods that meet higher standards of efficiency, as well as of accountability and inclusion towards the wider United Nations membership, is a priority of the group.

The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group acknowledges the unprecedented nature of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic for the day-to-day work of the Security Council and its working methods. We welcome active discussions within the Council and proactive efforts, including by the Security Council's presidency, to adapt the Council's working methods to these extraordinary circumstances, notably with a procedure for voting on draft resolutions in the absence of a physical meeting.

However, the ACT Group is concerned that the meetings of the Council that have taken place since the crisis made physical meetings in the Council's chamber impossible have not been included in the programme of work, officially announced or webcast. This jeopardizes the Council's ability to function continuously and the discharge of its mandate in accordance with established practice. If not corrected, the present way of operating also risks undermining progress made over the years in strengthening the transparency, inclusion and accountability of the Council towards the wider United Nations membership as reflected in the latest updates in working methods decided by the Council and the most recent Council practice.

In this challenging context, we welcome the commitment made during the joint virtual briefing for Member States on the COVID-19 pandemic of 27 March 2020 to adjusting working methods and maintaining transparency. We also welcome the press releases following the meetings that took place on 24, 26 and 30 March 2020, as well as the initiatives by individual members to organize ad hoc virtual debriefings on the Council's deliberations or draw attention to the Council's work on social media.

In order to implement these commitments and efforts further, the ACT Group invites the Security Council to:

(a) Continue efforts to adapt its working methods to the unprecedented circumstances while upholding high standards of transparency and accountability;

* Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay.



(b) Include all virtual meetings taking place in accordance with the Council's mandate in the Council's programme of work and/or in a President's addendum on the Council's official website;

(c) Continue to improve the videoconferencing network system to allow videoconferencing sessions to be broadcast on the United Nations webcast; as a rule, all virtual meetings of the Council taking place in lieu of discussions in the open chamber should be accessible online to the public. We trust that the Secretariat will provide the necessary technological support to enable this to take place;

(d) Until the previous point is implemented, ensure that all statements made by briefers and Council members during the virtual meeting taking place in lieu of briefings and discussions in the open chamber are made available on the Security Council's official website and through other appropriate means;

(e) Until the third point above is implemented, continue efforts to agree on press releases after virtual meetings of the Council in order to enhance the transparency of the Council's deliberations;

(f) Ensure that civil society representatives continue to have the opportunity to brief the Council, and that interested States and organizations have the opportunity to participate in relevant debates;

(g) Organize, under the leadership of the Council's presidency, virtual and public information-sharing and interaction sessions with Member States on the Council's programme of work (briefing on the programme of work), as well as on the Council's activities during the month (wrap-up session), including the month of March;

(h) Make available to the wider membership in a timely manner any documents agreed to by the Council regarding the adaptation of its working methods in the context of COVID-19.

As it is becoming increasingly clear that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the Security Council's ability to conduct its work, the ACT Group welcomes Council members' efforts to steer international action in the field of international peace and security through this unprecedented global crisis, in accordance with the Council's mandate. Creativity, innovation and initiatives by Council members to this end are very much encouraged. Along the same lines, we support current efforts by individual Council members to push for a Council product on the COVID-19 crisis and its link to international peace and security.

(Signed) Jürg **Lauber**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative