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Letter dated 8 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to send you the report of the eighteenth annual workshop for the newly elected members of the Security Council, which was held on 12 and 13 November 2020 in New York (see annex). The final report has been compiled in accordance with the Chatham House Rule, solely under the responsibility of the Permanent Mission of Finland.

I would like to warmly thank all participants for their active participation in the workshop, which provided a unique opportunity to take stock, in person, of the Council's work. Despite the limitations caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the shorter amount of time allocated to the sessions, participants managed to maintain the interactive mode of the workshop and generate active discussion and a frank exchange of views.

The Government of Finland remains committed to sponsoring the workshop as an annual event and hopes that it could return to its traditional venue, the Greentree Foundation, as soon as conditions related to the pandemic permit. The Government of Finland hopes that the annexed report will contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of the work of the Council, its practices, procedures and working methods.

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

(*Signed*) Jukka **Salovaara**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations

Annex to the letter dated 8 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Finland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

"Hitting the ground running": eighteenth annual workshop for newly elected members of the Security Council, held on 12 and 13 November 2020 in New York

The Government of Finland, in cooperation with the non-profit organization Security Council Report, the School of International and Public Affairs of Columbia University and the Security Council Affairs Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the Secretariat, convened the eighteenth annual workshop for the newly elected members of the Security Council on 12 and 13 November 2020.

In 2003, the Government of Finland, observing how little time and how few resources newly elected members had to prepare for their two-year terms, organized and hosted the inaugural "Hitting the ground running" workshop. It has consistently hosted and supported this annual event ever since.

Over the years, the workshop has offered the current and incoming members of the Security Council the chance to have the kind of candid, relaxed and interactive conversations that are hard to come by in formal United Nations settings. The workshops have provided the five newly elected members with an early opportunity to get acquainted, in an informal setting, with their soon-to-be colleagues in the Council and with aspects of its inner workings. For both current and incoming members, the workshops have always been an occasion for frank reflection on the Council's performance. They have also afforded participants an opportunity to discuss challenges and priorities, lessons learned by outgoing members and ways in which to improve the Council's working methods in order to make it more effective.

From the outset, the conversations have been held under the Chatham House Rule of non-attribution, to encourage candid and interactive discussions. To that end, speakers are not identified in the present report, which was prepared by Security Council Report.

On account of restrictions related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the opening dinner, which has traditionally been held on the eve of the workshop and has featured a keynote address by a prominent United Nations official or other notable figure, was not held in 2020. As in previous years, the programme for 2020 consisted of round-table discussions involving all participants. The conversation focused on the following themes:

(a)   State of the Security Council 2020: taking stock and looking ahead (session I);

(b)   Lessons learned: reflections of the class of 2020 (session II);

(c)   Working methods and subsidiary bodies (session III).

Session I
State of the Council 2020: taking stock and looking ahead

Moderator

Ambassador Sven Jürgenson
Permanent Representative of Estonia

Commentators

Ambassador Nicolas de Rivière
Permanent Representative of France

Ambassador Geng Shuang
Deputy Permanent Representative of China

Moussa Maman Sani
Political Coordinator of the Niger

Assessment of the performance of the Council in 2020

Participants observed that, overall, the Security Council had acted responsibly and managed well in 2020, in particular in respect of its working methods under pandemic conditions and its adoption of resolution 2532 (2020) on COVID-19, but that its effectiveness had been hindered by divisive geopolitics, especially among the permanent members. One speaker suggested that there were grounds for hope with regard to some of the Council's agenda items, including Afghanistan and Libya. The range of issues that Council members were addressing had also been expanded, with the security implications of climate change, pandemics and cyberthreats added to its other responsibilities.

However, one speaker observed that, while the Council was effective, there needed to be realism about what it could accomplish. Since it was the "strongest body" in the United Nations system, there was a tendency to put a lot on its plate. The Council could not resolve every crisis or issue, even though it was an executive organ that had various tools at its disposal. Domestic agendas had often taken priority in Council decision-making. In addition to divisions among the permanent members, there was disagreement among colleagues within regions. It had been difficult to adopt the two resolutions on cross-border aid for the Syrian Arab Republic in 2020 and it had taken the Council three and a half months to adopt resolution 2532 (2020), which had not been implemented. One member lamented the fact that the Council could be accused of too much talk and too little action.

Participants discussed how using a virtual platform since March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic had affected the quality of the Council's work. Some argued that the Council had done well in the face of that challenge, given that it had resumed its full work schedule after one week of not meeting and another week of testing the virtual platform, but that videoconference platforms were no substitute for human interaction.

Looking ahead, one speaker maintained that the new Administration of the United States of America would have an enormously important role to play in the work of the Council. It was added that the new momentum provided by the United States and the five ambitious incoming members would create an interesting and significantly different dynamic in the Council.

Thematic issues

The participants discussed how deeply the Security Council should be engaged in thematic issues. One speaker argued that, over the previous 20 years, thematic issues, such as the protection of civilians, children in armed conflict, and women and peace and security had taken up a significant amount of the Council's time and attention, which could have been more constructively focused on preventing and resolving conflicts in specific contexts. He posited that preventing war and ending conflict were the best ways to enhance the safety and security of groups such as women and children. According to another speaker, over the years, the Council had

had success in reducing the number of child soldiers, addressing sexual abuses and upholding human rights in conflict situations.

It was further argued that the Council needed to adapt to the changing international security environment by addressing emerging threats to international peace and security. One speaker said in that regard that the Council needed to break its taboo on addressing non-traditional threats to international peace and security, such as climate change, cyberthreats and organized crime. The speaker compared climate change to a slow-moving strain of COVID-19 with no vaccine, adding that once a certain threshold was reached, it would be difficult to respond effectively.

Conflict prevention

Several speakers emphasized the importance of conflict prevention, with one speaker noting that nobody questioned whether that was the Security Council's main task. It was also an area in which the Council had underperformed. Later in the discussion, a participant referred to the "stigma" of being a country on the Council's agenda and wondered how to reduce that stigma. Scepticism was also expressed about adding specific prevention matters to the Council's agenda. One participant observed that the Council tended to give in to politics rather than address particular situations; if the Council could act in a less politicized way, it would be better able to support mediators in preventing and reacting to potential crises. It was easier to reach a compromise in addressing emerging challenges than it was to manage ongoing conflicts. Another speaker underscored the critical role that regional organizations could play in preventing conflicts. He called upon the Council to strengthen its cooperation in that regard with various regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It was suggested that the Council must do a better job of listening to countries in crisis, which should have a seat at the table in discussions pertaining to them. However, on the subject of more effective management of the Council's time, one speaker felt that interventions made under rule 37, according to which non-Council Member States could participate but not vote in the organ's meetings when their interests were affected, tended to be overlong.

Negotiations and management of the Council's difficult dynamics

Several speakers argued that Security Council members needed to find a way to cooperate in a political environment in which achieving consensus had become increasingly difficult. Referring to past examples in which months had been spent negotiating painstaking compromises, one speaker said that there was currently more of a "take it or leave it" approach. Speakers said that the protracted negotiations on resolution 2532 (2020) had achieved some success, albeit to a low standard, and that the delayed reaction to the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire had fallen short of expectations. Notwithstanding international criticism of the protracted negotiations, response to the adoption of the resolution had been positive.

It was observed that national directives from capitals, "deploying red lines to dead ends", often hindered the ability of experts to make compromises during negotiations. One speaker urged permanent representatives to be more engaged in negotiations: as "plenipotentiaries" they could be more effective, bring more authority and might at times be able to shift the positions of their capitals. Another speaker noted that whenever penholders made concessions to fellow Council members, there should be an expectation for those compromises not to be met with abstentions.

The role of the elected members was discussed. One permanent member underscored that it was not only the five permanent members that made decisions, as every resolution required nine affirmative votes for its adoption. Interaction among the 15 permanent representatives of the Council should be encouraged, in order to reach compromises and strike agreements. Another participant observed that cooperation among the elected members had improved in recent years; they were not a "club against the Permanent Five" and they tried their best to cooperate to accomplish as much as they could during their two-year terms.

Some members argued that the Council needed to spend more time taking action and less time discussing issues: in recent years, the number of speeches had gone up, but the amount of action taken had gone down, as one speaker said. There were differences in opinion on how that should be addressed, although the Council had many strong tools at its disposal. One participant recommended, for example, that Council members should have recourse to press elements or statements more often than to resolutions, which could be difficult and time-consuming to negotiate. Another argued that what ultimately mattered was the concrete impact of the Council's work, rather than the number of resolutions that it adopted or what mix of closed and open meetings that it convened.

Working methods

Many of the observations made during session I dealt with working methods, which was the theme of session III. One participant said that the focus on working methods in a session on the state of the Council perhaps reflected the divisions in the Security Council on matters of substance; in his view, it was less controversial to speak about working methods than it was to discuss other matters on the Council's agenda.

There were a considerable number of comparisons made between closed consultations and open meetings and how to strike a balance between the two formats. One participant emphasized that meetings should be closed when there were sharp divisions among members, as public meetings meant that you had to be strong and tough. In the past, the practice had been to address controversial issues in consultations and to show agreement in the chamber, but that it was now the opposite, he lamented.

Some members questioned whether closed consultations worked as intended: to induce unscripted and open discussion and improve the readiness to compromise. In practice, closed consultations had become too scripted. One participant said that there had been more off-the-cuff discussion in consultations before the Council had moved to a virtual platform in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, while another maintained that stilted conversation had long been a problem in consultations. In that and other respects, a speaker warned against any sense of "the good old days", but said that it might help if Member States came to consultations without scripts and if the President of the Security Council abandoned the formal speaking order. Members could also be kinder to one another. A speaker expressed concern that delegations sometimes talked to the press, leaking information to the public prior to consultations; it was suggested that leaks to the press helped to account for the reason why members read prepared statements during consultations.

While open meetings helped to promote transparency and accountability, one participant said that they were not always needed and that, in some instances, it might be preferable to hold only closed consultations in which members could interact with Secretariat officials. Sometimes, long open meetings were followed by closed meetings on the same topics, in which members, who were at that point exhausted, repeated the same observations. Two discussants underscored the value of agreeing

on elements to the press in consultations that could be shared with the public and reflected the views of Council members. In determining the mix of open and closed meetings, including under "any other business", which had in recent times frequently been used, the Council should pursue a formula that allowed it to achieve its purposes in the most effective way possible.

Although the Council had been fortunate to find ways to carry out its work during the pandemic, observed one participant, the quality of engagement among members had suffered in the virtual format. Face-to-face interactions were vital to diplomacy and the lack of such interactions had hindered the Council's work. One participant believed that resolution 2532 (2020) would have been adopted sooner if Council members had been able to meet in person. On the other hand, it was observed that virtual meetings made it easier for officials in different parts of the world to participate in open debates and open Arria-formula meetings because they did not have to travel.

Session II
Lessons learned: reflections of the class of 2020

Moderator

Ambassador Dang Dinh Quy
Permanent Representative of Viet Nam

Commentators

Ambassador Philippe Kridelka
Permanent Representative of Belgium

Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani
Permanent Representative of Indonesia

Ambassador Jerry Matjila
Permanent Representative of South Africa

Ambassador José Singer Weisinger
Special Envoy of the Dominican Republic to the Security Council

Ambassador Günter Sautter
Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany

Roles within the Council and beyond

Several participants stressed that incoming members should have a clear agenda for their two-year term and follow up on promises made during their Security Council campaign. Speakers recounted priorities that they had pursued during their terms, including prevention and protection; human rights; women and peace and security; and climate and security. It was argued that members should strike a balance between national and multilateral interests and strive to promote issues that were not directly related to their national interests. Although Council members represented their respective countries and elected members had to explain to the public what they had achieved during their terms, they also had a shared responsibility to the Council and to the United Nations as a whole. One speaker said that there was too often a disproportionate emphasis on theatrics and making declarations, with less time spent on delivering results through substantive work, such as negotiating resolutions.

It was argued that incoming members should seize opportunities to play an active role in the Council's work, including by chairing subsidiary bodies and taking the pen on specific agenda items. While there was a call for "democratization" of the chairing of subsidiary bodies, one speaker said that subsidiary body chairs did not

hold much power because of the strict guidelines that they must follow and because any action required consensus among all 15 members. Other speakers mentioned ways in which a chair's decisions and actions could have an impact, if, for example, they chose to include visiting missions in the subsidiary body's schedule or provided clarification regarding measures related to the implementation of sanctions regimes.

One speaker stated that elected members should view their role in the Council as part of the broader picture of engagement and adopt a holistic approach to situations in countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic. His country's involvement in respect of the situation in Libya ranged from activity in the Council to national diplomatic efforts, including the hosting of an international conference on the issue. The role of a Council member, stressed the speaker, does not end after two years. Elected members should stay involved in political processes linked to situations on the Council's agenda and in long-term efforts, such as Security Council reform.

An incoming member suggested that it could be useful to establish criteria for success during tenures on the Council. He also noted that clarification might be needed regarding the responsibilities that an incoming member undertook, as a member both of the Council and of a regional group, such as ASEAN or the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC).

Partnerships

Building partnerships, it was emphasized, was crucial to the success of members' terms on the Council. To make effective decisions, a Council member should obtain information from multiple sources, including its embassies, the media and civil society. One discussant said that Security Council Report served as an example of the important role that civil society could play and that he started and ended his day by reading that organization's publications. Another speaker said that Security Council visiting missions were incredibly important to the Council's understanding of the situations on its agenda, and that trips to Colombia, Iraq and South Sudan had afforded Council members an important opportunity to interact with political figures and local civil society.

The need to strengthen cooperation between the Council and regional organizations was highlighted by several speakers. One discussant noted that the African Union had established several institutions that oversaw issues related to peace and security and that more work needed to be done to deepen the trust between the United Nations and the African Union to ensure that their respective efforts on the maintenance of peace and security complemented each other. Another speaker stated that the cooperation between the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and ECOWAS, as well as the effective work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and Head of UNOWAS, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, were key factors in the success of UNOWAS. The speaker also observed that there was still a North-South divide that needed to be overcome on certain issues.

Communicating and negotiating

Several speakers pointed to difficulties in communication among Council members in general, as well as between elected and permanent members. One participant stated that, although Council members argued, they must maintain dialogue on contested issues and have useful discussions with one another, which was their shared responsibility. However, members should also take a strong stand on issues and be ready to have tough and frank discussions with each other about sensitive matters, such as humanitarian cross-border aid authorization in the Syrian

Arab Republic. In such situations, it was easier for some members to block positive outcomes, so it was important to be ready to fight on crucial matters. It was a question not only of the Council's credibility, stressed one speaker, but also of its effectiveness.

A participant said that the so-called "elected ten" positions had been developed because the Permanent Five did not communicate well with the elected members, and at times failed to share all relevant information. When negotiating resolutions, the permanent members first negotiated among themselves and often sent the texts to the elected members late in the process. That remark subsequently brought a "mea culpa" from one permanent member. Another speaker encouraged better burden-sharing in the chairing of subsidiary bodies, including among the permanent members taking on such duties. A discussant lamented the fact that members of the Permanent Five often blocked members of the elected ten from chairing certain subsidiary bodies, saying that a member wanting to chair a specific committee should be allowed to do so.

Council members, it was said, should be transparent about the Council's work with regard to civil society, the media and the wider United Nations membership. Consistency in the Council's conduct was important because many people followed its work: the speaker suggested in that regard that press elements be issued at the end of every Council session. One discussant argued that, when voting, abstentions should be a last resort and a good explanation should be provided for not voting "yes" or "no". Council members should also communicate more positively, one speaker said, and focus on achievements, such as the recent agreement on the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan.

Session III
Working methods and subsidiary bodies

Moderator

Ambassador Jonathan Allen
Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

Commentators

Ambassador Tarek Ladeb
Permanent Representative of Tunisia

Anna Evstigneeva
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation

Ambassador Richard Mills, Jr.
Acting Permanent Representative of the United States of America

Responding to the pandemic

The COVID-19 global pandemic had initially disrupted the Security Council's work in March and affected many aspects of its working methods throughout 2020. However, as one speaker noted, the Council's work had evolved, and the pandemic had provided it with an opportunity to evaluate whether certain practices developed during the pandemic could be continued after it. Another participant argued that it was important to maintain the creativity and flexibility shown by the Council during the early phases of the pandemic. While extraordinary steps had been taken to maintain a fast pace of work, it was important for decisions on evolving practices to be taken by consensus and with a view to overcoming technical difficulties.

One commentator argued that the procedural changes brought about by the pandemic had been particularly challenging for newly elected Council members, who

had just been getting used to the Council's normal provisional rules of procedure when the pandemic had struck. The new practices introduced, such as written voting procedures, showed that the Council could be innovative.

Although the Council had achieved some success in adapting to the difficult situation, one participant noted that the pandemic-related practices exposed several other challenges with regard to the use of technology, the conduct of diplomacy and procedural issues. No technology could replace in-person communication among Council members, which was crucial for the effective conduct of the Council. One speaker noted that members came to meetings with prepared statements to be delivered virtually and then often appeared to disengage from the proceedings. The cumulative effect was that Council discussions were less interactive than before and it was even harder to resolve contentious issues. However, it was reiterated that the videoconference format had had the positive effect of enabling broader participation in Council proceedings.

Several participants raised the question of whether meetings held by the Council by videoconference during the pandemic should be considered formal or informal and a number of speakers voiced strong views on the issue. It was noted in that respect that only one Council member had insisted that all videoconference meetings from the start of the pandemic be considered informal. While exceptions had been made in organizing the videoconference meetings, one participant maintained that the practice did not allow for close adherence to the provisional rules of procedure. One speaker asked how to ensure that substantive videoconference meetings did not "disappear from the records".

Many participants raised concerns about procedural votes, which currently could not be conducted in a virtual format. The Council's sole procedural vote since the start of the pandemic had been in person, in October; one participant noted that that illustrated the importance of holding in-person meetings, as the Council had done in July and October, and briefly in mid-November. Concerns regarding the security of the online format and technical malfunctions had been persistent, one speaker acknowledged. Another speaker posited that those malfunctions presented a high-risk scenario that could undermine decision-making in the Council.

Notwithstanding the Council's ability to adapt to the challenges posed by the pandemic, a unanimous view was not reached about whether the meetings held by videoconference should be considered to be formal. One participant concluded that, while it was a pity not to have had formal meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic, that had not had a major impact, as the Council could still make decisions.

Transparency and efficiency

Building on a theme that had been addressed in session I, there was discussion about the comparative value of open meetings and closed consultations. Several speakers argued that more closed meetings were needed so that Council members could speak frankly, and one participant said that the real diplomatic work was done in the closed chamber. Another speaker noted that, while the virtual format used during the COVID-19 pandemic allowed for closed consultations, it did not provide an environment conducive to diplomatic work. According to several other participants, although closed meetings were essential for more candid discussions, open debates were still necessary, especially given that Council meetings were of interest to all Member States. As such, open meetings provided access to and a voice for the larger United Nations membership. Open meetings, one participant noted, were an opportunity not only to hear diverse voices, but also for the Council to convey certain messages.

One speaker reminded participants that Council members had agreed in April 2020 that it was important to promote transparency, especially because during the challenging pandemic, the Council was reliant on the virtual format. Looking beyond the pandemic-related practices, according to some members, striking the right balance between open and closed meetings depended on whether more closed meetings were needed in order to allow more interaction and in-depth discussion. In the view of one participant, while the pursuit of greater frankness and interaction was a good thing, there were times when a member had to articulate its national position to a larger audience and open meetings provided that opportunity. The importance of using all of the tools afforded to the Council for various meeting formats was noted: less frequently used options, such as informal interactive dialogues and private meetings, provided Council members with an opportunity to "listen without broadcasting". One permanent member emphasized the importance of open lines of communication between the permanent and elected members. Permanent members should bring the Council's 10 elected members into their discussions earlier; at the same time, he added, the elected members needed to remind the permanent members to be more inclusive.

Several speakers drew a connection between the Council's management of its overall workload and its efficiency. One participant maintained in that respect that the Council should stick more closely to its priorities and work towards a better and more well-defined division of labour on issues dealt with by the Council and organs such as the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The speaker added that complaints by Council members about endless meetings and an overburdened agenda were the result of the Council dealing with too many thematic issues. It was also the case, the participant said, that sometimes meetings included too many briefers, both from the United Nations and civil society, who did not necessarily add value to the discussion. Another participant said that some of the permanent members were reluctant to discuss thematic issues and countered that those discussions were important but that there may be more efficient ways for the Council to approach them. To relieve the burden of the Council's heavy agenda, one speaker asked whether every report of the Secretary-General needed to be discussed during meetings.

Reference was also made to the Council's annual report to the General Assembly. One participant challenged criticisms of the substance of the report, noting that the report could not be interesting because it was a "minimal denominator of positions" of Council members.

Another issue raised in the context of the Council's agenda was that of visiting missions. As there had been no Council visiting missions in 2020 and only one sanctions committee visit, one speaker noted that the travel constraints caused by the global pandemic provided members with an opportunity to consider how to make better use of such trips. Before the pandemic, Council members had not been able to make the best use of visits to the field, the speaker said, as they tended to be moved from the airport to conference rooms and back to the airport without adequately seeing the situation on the ground. One participant suggested that the Council consider virtual visiting missions during the pandemic.

Penholdership

Participants discussed the distribution of penholders with regard to items on the Security Council's agenda and the chairing of subsidiary bodies. It was noted that there had been positive cooperation and co-penholderships in 2020, such as between Germany and Belgium on the Syrian humanitarian file and between Germany and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur. One member maintained that those developments ensured that there were "more eyes" to follow the issues, promoted

enhanced understanding and improved the Council's work. A permanent member added that more elected members should become penholders. Another participant observed that 2020 had posed challenges to negotiations on the distribution of co-penholdership because the COVID-19 pandemic had made in-person meetings difficult, and so most negotiations had been held virtually. Members from a given region should be considered de facto penholders for situations in that region, one participant said. Another participant suggested that elected members' experience and expertise needed to be taken into account when selecting penholders.

Conclusion

Near the end of the meeting, one participant observed that, just as the Security Council had been innovative in 2020 in adapting its working methods in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, since the pandemic would persist in 2021, it would need to continue to demonstrate agility with regard to its working methods. The speaker also encouraged the Council to make creative use of different meeting formats, such as private meetings and informal interactive dialogues. She urged members to seek ambitious outcomes that could be implemented, while mandates for peace operations should be clear, unambiguous and not too long. Noting the divisions in the Council, she said that the elected members had traditionally been "bridge builders", and challenged the class of 2021 to make progress in that regard.

The Director of the Security Council Affairs Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Hasmik Egian, and the Executive Director of Security Council Report, Karin Landgren, participated in the workshop. Both presented introductory statements and Ms. Landgren gave closing remarks, as did the permanent representative of an elected member. Both emphasized how well the Council had adapted its working methods to the COVID-19 pandemic, sustaining the pace of its activity under difficult circumstances. Ms. Egian observed that the Council had also continued to conduct its activities in a transparent manner during the pandemic, holding open videoconference sessions, convening interactive wrap-up sessions and compiling the written statements of Member States (which could not be accommodated on the virtual platform used for open debates) in publicly released United Nations documents. Ms. Egian also noted the coalescence in 2020 of different groupings of Council members, including the three A3+1 (three African members and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), Indonesia and Viet Nam, and the European members, as reflected in joint statements made by such groups.

In her closing remarks, Ms. Landgren observed that there were a number of challenges that the Council at times seemed reluctant to address, for example, thematic issues such as climate change and human rights; threats of non-State actors other than terrorism, such as criminal networks; and military interventions by States, or their non-State proxies, that were politically uncomfortable to confront. She argued that such "blackout issues" might come to dwarf the issues that the Council was ready to address, called on members to respond more substantively to such issues in the future and expressed optimism on account of the level of their engagement and interest in addressing threats to international peace and security. She highlighted the need for more use to be made of article 99 of the Charter of the United Nations, which granted the Secretary-General the authority to "bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security", as a path forward on blackout issues.

Appendix

Prior to the workshop, Security Council Report suggested the following questions:

Session I

- It has certainly not been business as usual for the Security Council in 2020. Since mid-March, the restrictions on meetings in the Council chamber have forced the Council to find new ways to carry out its mandate. Has the Council been able to carry out its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security so far in 2020 during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic? What have the challenges been of the Council not having formal meetings? In what ways has the Council's performance been affected by not being able to meet and negotiate in person? How have relationships among Council members been affected? Has the loss of field visiting missions been important?

- It took the Council three and a half months to adopt a resolution supporting the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Did this slow response negatively affect the Council's credibility? Have the Council's discussions of the global pandemic as a thematic issue and in country-specific situations been useful? What more, if anything, can the Council do to address the peace and security implications of the pandemic? What threats to international peace and security are most concerning at present, whether from a security, political or humanitarian perspective? What Council action could be most useful in addressing such threats? What could or should members do or not do to avoid the escalation of such threats?

- In a number of situations, deep divisions among Council members have made it difficult for the Council to send a strong message to parties to conflicts. How can Council members overcome their differences in order to reach constructive outcomes? Have there been situations in which the Council has been able to make some progress in 2020? What has enabled progress in these cases?

- Mandate renewals for peace operations and sanctions regimes are among the key responsibilities of the Council. Negotiations on peace operation mandates and sanctions regime renewals have not been easy in recent years, with differences arising over key elements of the sanctions regimes, as well as issues outside the core mandate of peace operations. Has this difficulty in getting agreement resulted in weaker mandates for peace operations and difficulty in implementing mandates? Has the implementation of sanctions regimes been affected by non-unanimous adoptions? What can be done to promote greater consensus for these renewals?

- In 2020, the Council is overseeing a transition from African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur to the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in the Sudan, while it has also been planning for the exit of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau, as well as the eventual withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. What are the main challenges in these transitions and how can they be most constructively addressed by the Council? How can the Council best seize opportunities to work with the host countries and other actors to promote peace and security in the Sudan, Guinea-Bissau and the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

- Several countries on the Council's agenda, such as Mali, South Sudan and the Sudan, are undergoing internal political transitions. How can the Council most effectively support, or continue to support, these processes? How can the Council coordinate with regional and subregional bodies and other parts of the United Nations system to assist these countries as they undertake political transformations? Are there any actions that Council members should avoid in this regard?

- The importance of the Council's relationship with regional and subregional organizations has been highlighted in previous workshops. What steps has the Council taken to strengthen its relationship with regional organizations in 2020? In what way could the Council's relationship with regional and subregional organizations be deepened beyond regular briefings? The financing of peace operations has been an issue in the Council's relationship with the African Union Peace and Security Council. Can this be resolved in 2021?

- In previous workshops, members stressed the need to put more emphasis on conflict prevention. Have there been any concrete steps taken in this direction in 2020? How can the Council's Chapter VI tools be used more effectively in this context? In what ways has the Council supported the Secretary-General's preventive diplomacy efforts? Over the past few decades, the Secretariat has sought ways to alert the Council to potential issues that could threaten international peace and security. Should the Secretariat be encouraged to provide informal briefings in informal settings more systematically?

- New thematic issues, such as cybersecurity and climate and security, have been discussed in various formal and informal meeting formats. However, Council members are divided on whether some of these thematic issues are best dealt with by the Council or by other parts of the United Nations system. What role should the Council play in addressing such emerging security threats? Assuming that the Council should engage more systematically on these matters, what should the next steps be in this engagement? How can the Council work more closely with relevant parts of the United Nations system to address such issues more effectively?

- Council divisions on a number of issues have given rise to subgroups of Council members choosing to make statements following meetings when a Council outcome has not been possible. Is this emerging practice a useful one? Does it have an impact on the perception of the Council as an ineffective body?

- Over the past few years, the Council has regularly been briefed by civil society representatives under rule 39, as well as by other experts. The choice of briefer can at times become controversial. Most recently, the Council President's choice of a briefer at the October public meeting on chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic was put to a procedural vote. To what extent should the choice of briefer be up to the Council President? What is the best way to determine whether a briefer has pertinent information for the Council? Can Council members resolve such issues without the acrimony of a procedural vote?

Session III

- The experience of 2020 confirmed the Council's adaptability, with numerous innovative working methods developed under the pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic. Which of the COVID-19 working methods have been most effective? Which aspects of the COVID-19 working methods have been most challenging? Are there practices developed during this period worth keeping as part of the Council working methods beyond the current period? Are there practices that

members should take particular care not to continue once the Council returns to its more normal functioning?

- How can the Council address the mounting workload and use its time more effectively? Is the balance between public meetings and consultations appropriate? Thematic open debates are much appreciated by the membership at large and considered an important tool for greater Council transparency. They are, however, very time-consuming and their impact is not always proportional to the energy and resources invested. When, after the COVID-19 hiatus, the Council returns to holding regular open debates, should it steer them back to situation- and conflict-specific open debates rather than focusing them mainly on thematic issues? Should there be a review of the reporting cycles? Is it necessary to discuss all reports received?

- The previous General Assembly discussion of the Council's annual report was more substantive and analytical in comparison with previous years. Several participating Member States acknowledged the Council's efforts to improve the annual report process. Keeping in mind the resolve to adopt the next report by 30 May 2021, as expressed in presidential note S/2019/997, what steps can be taken for the Council to meet this goal? Should all Council members produce an assessment of their presidency in a timelier fashion? In this context, should they return to the original formula, whereby the assessments were produced by individual presidencies, and, while other members were consulted, the assessment was not considered a consensus document?

- The issue of penholdership has been discussed at previous workshops. It also loomed large during the retreat on the Council working methods, held in January 2020 in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (S/2020/172). With it confirmed, in principle, in numerous Council documents that any Council member may be a penholder, what is needed for this to become common practice? Is this a matter of interested members taking more initiative, or do other impediments remain to expand penholdership opportunities? In 2019 and 2020, Germany held two co-penholderships with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. What lessons have been learned from that experience? Are the incoming elected members keen to seek co-penholdership arrangements?

- The issues of chairing subsidiary bodies of the Council and the distribution of chairs to different members have been controversial for several years. The process became more consultative in 2016, with discussions held among the five incoming members and the appointments coordinated by one permanent member and the Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions. With some snags and delays still being experienced, how could the appointment process be improved?

- Elected members have sometimes called for the chairs of sanctions committees, if they so choose, to be considered co-penholders on those situations. This, it is argued, would leverage their expertise and knowledge of the relevant regions, their periodic travels to and engagement with the 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. Should this idea be explored further?

- There have been efforts in recent years to increase informal interactions among senior diplomats to discuss issues of concern among Council members. The permanent representatives' breakfast meetings on the programme of work at the start of each month began in 2015. Last year, Council members began to have "sofa talks", which were designed to provide an informal environment for Council members to have a frank discussion. Have these various formats been

helpful? Have they allowed Council members to discuss creative options for some of the more divisive issues? Could they be improved, and if so, how?

• What has the impact been of not having Council visiting missions in 2020? Are there alternatives that should be explored in 2021, given the likelihood of travel restrictions continuing into the year?

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