



## Security Council

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### **Letter dated 25 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

It is my honour to transmit herewith a letter in my capacity as immediate past Chair of the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions, in which I share reflections on my two-year term as Chair (see annex). To that end, the letter contains seven recommendations related to working methods for the consideration of the Security Council within the framework of the Informal Working Group. It is my hope that the letter will be beneficial to the Council, the current and future Chairs of the Group, newly elected members and the wider membership of the United Nations.

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

*(Signed)* Inga Rhonda **King**  
Chair

Informal Working Group on Documentation and  
Other Procedural Questions



## **Annex to the letter dated 25 January 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions is the framework that underpins the effective functioning of the Security Council. Discussions that take place within the Informal Working Group help to improve working methods in a number of ways, including through the assessment and adjustment of existing working methods and best practices to ensure continued relevance and appropriateness.

2. Between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021, I had the privilege of chairing this indispensable subsidiary body. The present letter, prepared in my capacity as outgoing Chair of the Informal Working Group, is intended as a means of reflecting on my chairpersonship and setting forth recommendations for the consideration of the Group and of future Chairs. In so doing, it is my hope that the letter can be drawn upon by Security Council members, newly elected members and the whole membership of the United Nations.

### **II. Reflections of the Chair of the Informal Working Group (2020–2021)**

3. I assumed my duties as Chair of the Informal Working Group on 1 January 2020. My chairpersonship began with a retreat on working methods organized jointly with Kuwait, as the preceding Chair, in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. This unprecedented event facilitated informal dialogue among Group members and generated concrete proposals that underpinned my tenure. The summary of the discussion, including the main outcomes, was prepared by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and is contained in a letter to the President of the Security Council dated 3 March 2020 (S/2020/172). One of the key outcomes of our discussions, which essentially shaped the focus of the Group during my tenure, was the concept of action-oriented implementation. To this end, the work of the Group was geared towards establishing concrete steps to secure the implementation of the note by the President of the Council dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and all subsequently adopted notes.

4. My chairpersonship of the Informal Working Group was marked by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which precluded our ability to continue to meet in person. This notwithstanding, we continued to meet approximately every five weeks (13 meetings in total), as initially intended, including via videoconference when necessary owing to health and safety restrictions. As the Security Council adjusted its working methods to ensure its continuous functioning despite the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the Group contemplated how to safeguard the effectiveness of the Council during extraordinary circumstances. This consideration influenced the theme of the 2020 annual open debate on working methods, which was held virtually on 15 May 2020 under the first presidency of Estonia, the Vice-Chair of the Group. The theme proposed for the open videoconference was “Ensuring transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Security Council”, and in the concept note participants were encouraged not only to think about concrete ways to ensure the traditional concepts of transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the deliberations, decision-making and follow-up processes of the Council, but also to consider how to maintain its agility whereby it would remain prepared to meet and make decisions in extraordinary circumstances. The summary, which was prepared by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is contained in my

letter to the President of the Council dated 8 July 2020 (S/2020/675) and reflects the interventions made during the open videoconference, as well as those that were submitted in writing. Building on the statements and proposals that were made during the open videoconference in 2020, and cognizant of the impact of the pandemic, the theme proposed for the open debate on working methods in 2021 was “Agility and innovation: lessons for the future from the COVID-19 pandemic”. The meeting was held on 16 June 2021 under the second presidency of Estonia. While Council members were able to participate in person, the wider membership submitted their interventions in writing owing to pandemic-related restrictions. A number of key points were raised in the various interventions, which related to enhancing the overall working methods of the Council, including by creatively formulating and developing working methods to adapt to evolving circumstances. To this end, and in addition to sharing new ideas on how to enhance the overall working methods of the Council, speakers focused on the best practices and challenges of the remote working methods of the Council during the pandemic, including how to ensure full implementation of the provisional rules of procedure, participation of the wider membership, multilingualism and adequate record-keeping. The summary of the briefing remarks and interventions made in person and submitted in writing, which was prepared by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, is contained in my letter to the President of the Council dated 7 October 2021 (S/2021/860).

5. The review of working methods is an ongoing exercise that must be premised on the idea that the working methods of the Security Council must evolve and adapt to reflect changing circumstances. To this end, many of the agenda items discussed in meetings of the Informal Working Group were influenced by current and pressing issues related to working methods that were being discussed in the Council and that required further attention, as well as those brought up by the wider membership in the context of the annual open debates on working methods. In this regard, the topics, some of which were discussed on the basis of non-papers prepared by the Secretariat at my request, were wide-ranging and included:

- (a) Ensuring transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and agility in the work of the Council;
- (b) Burden-sharing and penholdership;
- (c) Engagement with other principal organs of the United Nations;
- (d) Order of speakers in Council meetings;
- (e) Annual report to the General Assembly;
- (f) Practice regarding the replacement of Chairs of subsidiary bodies;
- (g) Review of the process for the selection of Chairs of subsidiary bodies;
- (h) Overview and impact of working methods during the COVID-19 pandemic on the existing practice and procedures of the Council;
- (i) Practice and procedures concerning the circulation of communications for the consideration of the Council;
- (j) In-person participation of invitees under rule 37 in open debates of the Council during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- (k) Striking the right balance between open and closed discussions: format of meetings;
- (l) Wrap-up sessions;
- (m) Decision-making regarding requests for participation under rule 37;
- (n) Enhancing Council visiting missions, including through the use of technology to facilitate virtual missions.

6. In line with our focus on implementation during my chairpersonship, the agendas for meetings of the Informal Working Group also included a standing item entitled “Implementation of note 507: reflections from past presidencies and proposals for future action”. This item became a critical aspect of each meeting, as it allowed for periodic reflection from the two most recent presidencies on working methods during their respective months, including on efforts to secure implementation and any challenges that may have been faced. The agenda item was also intended to encourage members to contemplate the provisions contained in the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes and determine how to better utilize some of the provisions that are often overlooked, incorporate them into the monthly written working methods commitments and promote their implementation.

### **III. Achievements**

#### **Monthly working methods commitments**

7. In line with the focus on action-oriented implementation and closely related to the agenda item on reflections from past presidencies, we encouraged all presidencies of the Security Council to prepare and circulate written monthly working methods commitments and formalized this good practice in a presidential note dated 12 July 2021 (S/2021/647). These written commitments ultimately operated as a guide for presidencies. In 2020 and 2021, almost all Council presidencies circulated monthly working methods commitments, increasing in number, as a means of ensuring continuity and undertaking joint commitments with other presidencies, including on thematic issues such as implementation of the women and peace and security agenda by the Council.

#### **Adoption of presidential notes**

8. Between April and December 2021, I presented a number of draft presidential notes to the members of the Informal Working Group, which were based on discussions and outcomes from the working methods retreat held in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 2020 and the open debates held in 2020 and 2021, as well as general discussions that took place within the framework of the Group. While I did not assume my duties as Chair endeavouring to adopt presidential notes, the preparation of the draft notes that were ultimately presented arose naturally where there was scope to adjust or advance the existing working methods. To this end, the draft notes presented were focused on:

- (a) Capacity-building, with a view to facilitating the process for the selection of Chairs of subsidiary bodies;
- (b) Role of political coordinators in the implementation of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes;
- (c) Role of the President of the Security Council in the implementation of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507), subsequently adopted notes and monthly working methods commitments;
- (d) Prioritizing multilingualism at all times;
- (e) Training opportunities for incoming elected members;
- (f) Commitment of the Council to maintaining its state of readiness in all circumstances in order to ensure that it can function continuously in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations;

(g) Extraordinary working methods of the Council, with a view to addressing, inter alia, the application of the provisional rules of procedure to meetings of the Council conducted via videoconference;

(h) Virtual Council visiting missions in instances when visiting missions are not possible for a prolonged period of time owing to concrete and ongoing risks to the safety and well-being of representatives of Member States and accompanying United Nations personnel;

(i) Criteria for the selection of a smaller representative grouping of Council members for the purpose of carrying out a visiting mission;

(j) Issue of penholdership, with a view to ensuring consultation between the penholder and the Chair(s) of relevant subsidiary bodies on draft documents ahead of their introduction for negotiation and informal consultation among Council members;

(k) Alternative method to the use of the draw or sign-up sheet for preparation of the speakers list, also taking into account the ability of the President of the Council to inscribe first the relevant Chairs of subsidiary bodies of the Council and those Council members from regions directly concerned or affected;

(l) Stressing the importance of early and inclusive engagement of all Council members in the informal consultation process for the selection of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of subsidiary bodies, as well as the need to consider shared responsibility and fair distribution of work in the selection process.

9. Some of these draft notes were not adopted, for varying reasons. While some did not gain enough traction to encourage us to pursue them, others were met with irreconcilable views of members of the Informal Working Group that precluded the finding of consensus under my chairpersonship. Nonetheless, in July 2021, the Group successfully adopted the following four presidential notes, each of which codified best practices that enhanced the efficient, transparent and effective functioning of the Security Council:

(a) [S/2021/645](#): this note was geared towards strengthening newly elected members' familiarity with the working methods of the Council and its subsidiary bodies and, in this regard, the Secretariat was invited to take appropriate measures, including by keeping a register of available training opportunities being offered. In accordance with the note, a register was prepared by the Secretariat and circulated, for the first time, in October 2021. It contributes specifically to the capacity of incoming members as they prepare to assume their responsibilities in the Council;

(b) [S/2021/646](#): this note underscored the role of those who coordinate monthly activities of the respective missions on the Council in securing the implementation of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 ([S/2017/507](#)) and subsequently adopted notes. Without prejudice to the role of experts, these delegates, whether political coordinators or otherwise, are critical to conveying what occurs within the Group to the Council at large;

(c) [S/2021/647](#): this note also served to recognize the importance of implementation, and to this end underscored the role played by the President of the Council. In this context, the presidential note invited all presidencies to consider preparing and widely distributing written monthly commitments;

(d) [S/2021/648](#): this note addressed the issue of multilingualism. Bearing in mind the challenges of securing simultaneous interpretation in videoconferences during the COVID-19 pandemic, the note explicitly affirmed the commitment of the Council to prioritizing multilingualism at all times. Although the final version did not reflect the ambition of the first draft, it was recognized as a necessary building block to ensure that multilingualism would be ensured at all times.

10. On 22 December 2021, the Informal Working Group adopted a final presidential note under my chairpersonship (S/2021/1074). It affirmed the commitment of the Security Council to maintaining its state of readiness in all circumstances in order to ensure that it can function continuously in accordance with Article 28 of the Charter. In this context, the Council agreed to draw from lessons learned and, for the first time in a presidential note, recalled the temporary, extraordinary and provisional measures set out in the various letters of Presidents of the Council during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the note does not address some of the outstanding videoconference-related working methods issues that were discussed in the Group over the past two years, it nevertheless represents an important commitment by the Council to stand ready under all circumstances, both ordinary and extraordinary.

**Seven recommendations to the members of the Security Council within the framework of the Informal Working Group and its future Chairs**

11. The presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes must be regarded as living documents. As such, working methods must be given the scope to evolve to reflect new realities, and the Security Council members must be willing to compromise in a manner that genuinely enables this evolution. Working methods were not intended to remain frozen in time and, if they are interpreted as such, the ability of the Council to function effectively would be stunted. The Informal Working Group must continue to critically review and reflect on working methods-related issues to ensure that they remain relevant and, where working methods have become outdated or no longer appropriate, there must be a willingness to facilitate their evolution.

12. Cognizant of the need for the working methods of the Security Council to be adapted to reflect current circumstances, and against the backdrop of the ongoing pandemic, the impact of which continues to be unpredictable in the context of the work of the Council, it is important that the Council establish a formal contingency plan to ensure that it can continue to deliver on its mandate in circumstances in which it is not able to convene in person. The starting point for this should be the letters of the successive presidencies outlining the temporary, extraordinary and provisional working methods agreed upon by Council members during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> A number of important proposals were also suggested during the open debate on working methods in 2021 and warrant further consideration. Contingency planning will not override the ordinary working methods of the Council, but rather complement them, so that in rare, extraordinary circumstances the Council can seamlessly transition to its auxiliary mode of operation, which ensures its ability to function continuously and in accordance with Article 28 of the Charter. To this end, the Council should consider the issue of the status of virtual meetings and the application of the provisional rules of procedure therein and further build on the provisions of the presidential note dated 22 December 2021 (S/2021/1074).

13. When its mode of operation is no longer threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Security Council should give due consideration to the best practices that were adopted during that extraordinary period to determine those that will enhance its work during its ordinary functioning. In this regard, the Council should harness technology to enhance its engagement with stakeholders that cannot be present at meetings in New York. The use of technology should be extended to facilitate visiting missions when the Council is unable to travel. While virtual work, including virtual field visits, cannot replace in-person functioning, it presents a temporary alternative in extraordinary circumstances that facilitates the uninterrupted functioning of the Council.

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<sup>1</sup> S/2020/253, S/2020/273, S/2020/372, S/2020/490, S/2020/639, S/2020/778, S/2020/877, S/2020/966, S/2020/1077, S/2020/1163, S/2021/18, S/2021/106, S/2021/245, S/2021/326, S/2021/428, S/2021/524, S/2021/703, S/2021/776, S/2021/848, S/2021/939 and S/2021/1013.

14. The Informal Working Group, through the Chair, should continue to focus on action-oriented implementation of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes. In this regard, the focus should be on familiarizing Group members, including political coordinators, with the provisions of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes. These documents contain provisions indispensable to the operation of the Security Council and therefore necessitate implementation in order to be effective. However, in order to properly operationalize the provisions, it is important that all members, incoming and existing, are well acquainted with their contents. The extent to which members are able to effectively implement the provisions of the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes is directly influenced by the extent to which they are familiar with them. To assist in this task, I have enclosed with my letter a demonstration of an index that sets out the location of key words and phrases contained within the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes, which is intended to enhance the user-friendliness of those documents (see enclosure). In this regard, I hope that, by making it easier to manoeuvre within the texts, the index will assist in the preparation of written monthly commitments, contribute to members' acquaintance with the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and subsequently adopted notes and thereby support their implementation. In addition, the Security Council Affairs Division has expressed a willingness to host training sessions on the working methods of the Council to help members to become more familiar with the provisions.

15. Draft notes presented to the Informal Working Group should add value to the working methods of the Security Council. These notes require a delicate balance and genuine compromise from every member of the Group and should be negotiated with the sole aim of enhancing the functioning of the Council. While some of the notes that I presented did not garner the necessary support, there were some around which there remains a lot of appetite to continue discussions, such as penholdership, and some to which I would encourage future Chairs to give due consideration to pursuing, such as criteria for visiting missions of a representative grouping of Council members on behalf of the Council, virtual visiting missions and the process of selecting Chairs and Vice-Chairs of subsidiary bodies.

16. I would urge future Chairs and members of the Informal Working Group to consider preparing an annual report similar to that of other subsidiary bodies. As with any other outcome of the Group, such a report would be based on consensus and would outline the summary of activities undertaken by the Group each year. Such a document would serve to enhance the transparency of the Group vis-à-vis the wider membership of the United Nations and make it possible for incoming members, the wider membership and other interested parties to acquaint themselves with its work. Such a report could include, in an annex and as relevant, the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507), or future iterations thereof, and subsequently adopted notes as a reference for incoming and existing Council members, together with revised versions of the index described above.

17. Finally, in my capacity as Chair of the Informal Working Group, together with representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, I co-facilitated the process for selecting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of subsidiary bodies in 2020 and 2021. In both years, the agreement on the Chairs was not reached before the deadline of 1 October set out in the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507). Furthermore, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs were not agreed upon or formalized before the start of the new term (1 January of the following year), leaving the Council without any formal agreement on the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of subsidiary bodies and, importantly, not allowing incoming members the time necessary to prepare for their respective chairpersonships. This notwithstanding, I encourage the Council and

all of its members and incoming members to make every effort to conclude this process in a timely fashion, as envisaged in the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507) and in a balanced, transparent, efficient and inclusive way. Cognizant of the fact that delay due to a lack of consensus is a real possibility with which the Council may have to contend in the future, I suggest that the Group discuss how to avoid the terms of both the Chair and Vice-Chair(s) of any given subsidiary body expiring at the same time. That is, the term of the Chair of any given subsidiary body should not run for the same two-year period as the term of the Vice-Chair. I make this recommendation as an attempt to safeguard against the negative impact of such delays on the work of subsidiary bodies. Furthermore, in co-facilitating the process for the selection of bureaux, the Chair and Vice-Chair(s) of the same subsidiary body should not be agreed upon for concurrent terms of two years (as is sometimes the case) but rather for alternate two-year terms, thereby ensuring that, in the event of political disagreement regarding one or the other, the subsidiary bodies in question would be reliant on an existing Chair or Vice-Chair to continue its work in an uninterrupted fashion. This would alleviate the situation of having no Chair for a subsidiary body in the month of January since the previously agreed Vice-Chair could step in to chair the subsidiary body until the delayed process of selecting the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of those bodies for incoming members is complete. In this regard, I would emphasize in relation to this process the importance of exchanging information related to the work of the subsidiary bodies involved, as foreseen in the presidential note dated 30 August 2017 (S/2017/507), in order to critically understand the responsibilities of Chairs and Vice-Chairs and better prepare incoming elected members to assume these roles.



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