
Update Report

Working Methods: Wrap-Up Sessions

Expected Council Action

On 28 February, the Republic of Korea will hold a “wrap-up session” of its February Council presidency. The meeting will be held under the agenda item “Implementation of Note S/2010/507 (Wrap-up Session)” as a private meeting at which non-Council members will be invited to attend if they express their interest (several states have already done so).

No outcome is expected.

Background

Wrap-up sessions first appeared in the Council’s practice in 2001. They emerged as a response to concerns among the UN membership about the lack of transparency of the Council, its accountability as a body and the availability of information about its work. Member states agreed that holding interactive wrap-up sessions at the end of a presidency were a possible way of providing more information to the wider membership. The first wrap-up session was scheduled by Bangladesh on 29 June 2001 as a public meeting (S/PV.4343), with the attendance of the Secretary-General, in which only Council members wishing to speak were given the floor (Mali and the US chose not to address the Council). During the meeting, many Council members took the opportunity to speak about working methods. The aim of the meeting—and those to follow—was to assess the work of the Council, to evaluate its implementation of its own decisions, highlight important decisions taken that month and allow for greater transparency of its work. It also allowed reflection on what the Council had not done during the month, what it would like to have achieved and how it could improve its work.

In the next few years, several presidencies—all of them elected members—conducted such wrap-up sessions, with varied formats and content. In 2001, following on the precedent set by Bangladesh, three other non-permanent members (Colombia, Jamaica and Mali) scheduled wrap-up sessions. The following year was the highest on record for wrap-up sessions with Colombia, Mauritius, Mexico, Singapore and Syria holding them during their presidencies. After a peak of five sessions in 2002, the number of wrap-up sessions decreased to three in 2003 (Mexico, Pakistan and Syria), none in 2004 and only one in 2005 (at the end of the March presidency of Brazil). A total of 13 such sessions were held over a stretch of five years.

Some of the meetings were held in public and others in private with the attendance of non-Council members. Those held in public allowed a rare glimpse into the ongoing internal debate on working methods. While in most meetings the participants were Council members, in two of these public meetings, non-Council members were given the floor as well (S/PV.4748 of 30 April 2003 under Mexico and S/PV.5156 of 30 March 2005 under Brazil). In these two meetings the Council also invited the then Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, Ibrahim Gambari (S/PV.5156) and the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council (S/PV.4748) to speak.

The two wrap-up sessions held in December were viewed as an opportunity for departing elected members to summarise and reflect on their time in the Council. In the wrap-up session of 21

December 2001 under Mali, the departing members were invited to address the Council first as they reflected on their two-year terms (S/PV.4445). In the wrap-up session of 20 December 2002, the President of the Council, Colombia, invited members to participate in a special wrap-up session for departing members (S/2002/1387). During the public meeting, the departing members were given the floor first (S/PV.4677).

Though most wrap-up sessions were general in scope, a few were focused on specific issues. For example, prior to the 28 August 2003 session under the presidency of Syria, Council members agreed in consultations to focus their discussion on peacekeeping operations (S/PV.4818).

While it is hard to gauge the impact of these wrap-up sessions on the Council's work, they afforded an opportunity to voice opinions on key working methods concerns and other agenda items. For example, in December 2001 states emphasised the interaction of the Council with the troop-contributing countries and the relationship between the P5 and elected Council members (S/PV.4445). In the wrap-up session of March 2005, several states highlighted the importance of UN-AU cooperation (S/PV.5156). In November 2001, Ireland called for placing time limits on speeches in the Council chamber, reflecting what has become the norm in Council working methods (see S/2006/507).

Though the last wrap-up session was formally held in March 2005, over the years some Council members held informal briefings with the wider membership at the end of their presidency (for example, Brazil on 26 February 2011 and South Africa on 31 January 2012).

Recent Developments

In recent months there have been several suggestions to revive the holding of wrap-up sessions. During the open debate on working methods on 26 November 2012 (S/PV.6870 and Resumption 1), Iran—speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)—said that the NAM “appreciates the holding of informal wrap-up sessions at the end of each presidency to evaluate what has been achieved”. The Nordic countries also stressed the need for “interactive wrap-up sessions at the end of each presidency”. Such sessions have also been encouraged by other member states in recent years as a means of increasing Council accountability and transparency. The presidential note on working methods of 12 December 2012 (S/2012/922) suggested that formal wrap-up sessions be organised when appropriate.

On 31 January, the Council held a private meeting under the agenda item “Implementation of Note S/2010/507”. The meeting was convened by Pakistan—as Council President in January—as a wrap-up session of the Council's work for the month. Twenty-eight countries attended as did the permanent representative of the EU. Pakistan was initially keen to have the wrap-up session as a public briefing, but there were some Council members—in particular permanent members—that preferred to keep it to a private meeting format.

Pakistan opened the meeting by stating that its rationale was to reflect on the Council's work, to recognise broader trends and to inform the wider UN membership of its work. Pakistan then proceeded to summarise the Council's work for the month of January. Several states, such as Guatemala and Luxemburg, spoke of the importance of the meeting in enhancing Council transparency and welcomed the initiative. Rwanda and the UK mentioned their wish to revive the monthly “horizon scanning” briefing from the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) on emerging issues of concern (the last such briefing took place on 17 September 2012). Russia voiced its opinion that wrap-up sessions do not enhance the Council's efficiency, and the body should spend its valuable time addressing pressing issues. On country-specific issues, the UK criticised the Council for its slow response to the situation in Mali and China expressed its dismay with recent actions taken by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The US noted the need to strengthen human rights language in Council decisions.

Key Issues

The main issue for the Council is deciding whether wrap-up sessions will become a regular fixture on its programme of work and, if so, how they can be best utilised to enhance Council efficiency and transparency.

Options

Options for the Council include:

- holding wrap-up sessions on a regular basis;
- holding public wrap up sessions;
- allowing non-Council members to participate in the discussions;
- focusing more on lessons learnt that could inform the Council’s work on future events; and
- using the wrap-up sessions held in January and February as a platform for discussion on advancing the Council’s working methods by reviving other Council practices, such as the “horizon scanning” briefings.

Council and Wider Dynamics

It seems that P5 members in particular were critical of the wrap-up sessions in the past, believing that the sessions had lost substantive content and had become little more than an opportunity for the presidency to showcase its role during the month. Another factor, which led to discomfort about these sessions, was the disagreement they generated within the Council about the issue of involving non-members.

The permanent members, and in particular, China, Russia and the US, have tended to be wary of changes to the Council’s working methods. The US and Russia have noted that even when steps are taken to enhance non-Council member participation and interaction with the Council, members at large have showed little interest. Russia reflected this view during the wrap-up session in January, taking the position that such meetings are a “waste of time” and non-member attendance is low. (Russia will assume the Council presidency in March and it seems unlikely that it will hold a wrap-up session.)

France and the UK, while amenable to some revisions of Council working methods, have focused on those procedures and issues related to the efficiency of the Council. One such example is the UK’s support for reviving the practice of the “horizon scanning” briefings by DPA. The UK and several other states are of the opinion that rather than monthly wrap-up sessions, the “horizon scanning” briefings are more effective, as they alert the Council to situations requiring the Council’s attention and enhance its ability to address these matters in a timely fashion.

Several other Council members and non-members are supportive of conducting wrap-up sessions on a regular basis as they provide information on the Council’s work to the wider membership. In particular, they value the rare opportunity to hear first-hand about topics normally discussed in closed consultations, such as the DPRK, and within the Council’s subsidiary bodies. While some states support making these sessions public and allowing the wider membership to address the Council, others feel that the private setting allows for more candid statements by Council members on sensitive issues. At the same time, several UN members hope that future discussions will focus less on summarising the agenda items dealt with during the month and will provide a more critical self-examination and reflection on the Council’s work and ways to improve performance while looking ahead.

UN DOCUMENTS

Security Council Meeting Records of Wrap-Up Sessions

- [S/PV.6914](#) (31 January 2013) was a private meeting under the presidency of Pakistan.
- [S/PV.5156](#) (30 March 2005) was a public meeting under the presidency of Brazil.
- [S/PV.4818](#) (28 August 2003) was a public meeting under the presidency of Syria.
- [S/PV.4766](#) (30 May 2003) was a public meeting under the presidency of Pakistan.
- [S/PV.4748](#) (30 April 2003) was a public meeting under the presidency of Mexico.
- [S/PV.4677](#) (20 December 2002) was a public meeting under the presidency of Colombia.
- [S/PV.4562](#) (28 June 2002) was a private meeting under the presidency of Syria.
- [S/PV.4547](#) (31 May 2002) was a private meeting under the presidency of Singapore.
- [S/PV.4482](#) (28 February 2002) was a private meeting under the presidency of Mexico.
- [S/PV.4466](#) (31 January 2002) was a public meeting under the presidency of Mauritius.
- [S/PV.4445](#) (21 December 2001) was a public meeting under the presidency of Mali.
- [S/PV.4432](#) (30 November 2001) was a public meeting under the presidency of Jamaica.
- [S/PV.4363](#) (31 August 2001) was a public meeting under the presidency of Colombia.
- [S/PV.4343](#) (29 June 2001) was a public meeting under the presidency of Bangladesh.

Other Security Council Meeting Records

- [S/PV.6870 and Resumption 1](#) (26 November 2012) was an open debate on working methods.

Presidential Notes on Working Methods

- [S/2012/922](#) (12 December 2012).
- [S/2010/507](#) (26 July 2010).
- [S/2006/507](#) (19 July 2006).

Security Council Letters

- [S/2005/188](#) (18 March 2005) was a letter from Brazil to the Secretary-General inviting member states to participate in the 30 March wrap-up session.
- [S/2002/759](#) (15 July 2002) was a letter from Syria to the President of the Council containing a summary prepared of the 28 June wrap-up session.
- [S/2001/822](#) (27 August 2001) was a letter from Colombia to the President of the Council on the 31 August wrap-up session.

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