

Statement by Karin Landgren, Executive Director, Security Council Report  
[Security Council Open VTC/Annual Debate on Council Working Methods](#)  
15 May 2020

Mr President, Excellencies,  
Good morning.

I appreciate this opportunity to address the Security Council on behalf of Security Council Report and would like to acknowledge the work of Ambassador King and of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in taking forward the considerable legacy of Kuwait's two years of chairing the Informal Working Group on Documentation and Other Procedural Questions.

Security Council Report, an independent think tank, marks its 15th anniversary this year. Our goals were inspired by the 2005 World Summit recommendations for greater Council transparency, accountability and effectiveness and for an increased involvement of the wider membership in the Security Council's work. I thank all those who make SCR's work possible, including Council members, other Member States, UN colleagues and civil society.

Today, I will address the matter of participation by the wider membership in enhancing the Council's effectiveness. The Security Council's interaction with other actors has strengthened in some respects—with regional organisations, for example, notably with the African Union Peace and Security Council, and with the EU—and in more invitations extended to civil society briefers.

The time is right for the Council to expand and deepen its external interactions, for three reasons.

The Security Council acts on behalf of the entire UN membership. Therefore, the Council should hear from those members consistently, as well as from organisations and citizens among them.

Second, the nature of security threats is shifting. If members prefer to take a comparatively narrow view of the Council's role in addressing new forms of threat, the Council might then consider entering into an active dialogue with those bodies it believes do hold responsibility for preventing and responding to modern-day threats to security and to underlying causes of conflict.

The third reason for expanded interactions, now, is that the Council has the capacity for this interaction like never before. The Council is known to be dynamic and creative as the master of its own working methods. Now, the global pandemic has forced new tools on all of us. This is an opportunity not to return to business as usual. The best of these pandemic-inspired tools can be retained and developed, allowing the Council more agile and responsive ways to interact with the wider world.

Consistent engagement with the wider membership could easily start with the General Assembly and ECOSOC. Member states have made clear their wish for a meaningful discourse: in last year's open debate on working methods, Argentina called for a "fluid dialogue" between the Council and the GA. The monthly wrap-up sessions at the end of nearly every Council presidency are one forum for a more fluid dialogue, particularly if they are interactive and devote time to hearing the feedback of non-Council members; and are included in the Council's monthly programme of work and the Journal of the United Nations, as called for in a Presidential Note of last December.

The Council has at times hesitated to take up particular forms of global threats: whether climate threats, cyber threats, pandemic threats, or root causes of conflict that lie in structural inequality and other chronic human rights violations. There is no shadow Security Council set up to address these systemic threats to our shared security. If this Council does not lead on these issues, then who is to do so? The Council does not want to encroach on the mandates of other bodies. That being so, it could be timely to strengthen the exchanges between the Council and those other bodies—as an expression of the Council's own role and as a support to those bodies' taking up these global threats.

Article 65 of the Charter, providing for ECOSOC to furnish information to the Security Council and to assist the Council if requested has potential to bring some root causes of conflict more strongly to the fore. The Peacebuilding Commission has also emerged as a platform for discussions on prevention, on transitions from peace operations, on region-wide developments, and on current risks and challenges for sustaining peace, also in countries not on the Council's agenda.

Whether with ECOSOC, the GA, the PBC or others, Council members can be encouraged to develop ways to work coherently and burden-share with those entities to address threats to peace and security.

Mr President,

Last year, the then Permanent Representative of France, Ambassador François Delattre, memorably regretted the relatively fleeting attention the Council is able to give to the mandating of peace operations, a phenomenon he described as “adopt and forget”. This Council has actively sought to strengthen its interaction with the field, including the visiting missions that became an effective Council tool in the early nineties: five such missions a year are typical.

COVID-19 has halted field trips. Last year, speaking in this debate, several former members called for the Council to ensure “that we are not just speaking about countries concerned, but also speaking to them”. Technology makes this more possible, more of the time. The Council has long had Special Representatives brief via VTC. There is potential for a more dynamic engagement with the field than the Representative beamed in from a room bare but for the UN flag. Virtual meetings with the head of government, parliamentarians, ministers, a range of civil society representatives; with the UN agencies, funds and programmes on the ground; visits to hard-to-reach field locations—all are potentially available, freed from the severe constraints of time, security, and logistics that are part and parcel of most Council field visits.

By the same token, technology can open up possibilities for more regular engagement with troop- and police-contributing countries. Virtual discussions with the field and with TCCs and PCCs can also be held at various points of the mandate cycle, actively mitigating the risks of “adopt and forget”.

In closing, Mr President,

With the UN turning 75, we may forget what a radical and determined act its establishment represented and still represents, and the extraordinary powers that member states have conferred on the Security Council. When the Council is at risk of an impasse, proactive members can at times find ways forward—for example, when nine elected members called on the Secretary-General to brief on COVID-19. That briefing was over five weeks ago now. A sustained and regular interaction between the Council and the Secretary-General on COVID-19 would convey to the wider membership the Council’s resolve to remain engaged on the progress of the global ceasefire initiative and on the many security threats that this pandemic can unleash and for the mitigation of which, as the Secretary-General said, the Council’s engagement will be critical.

Thank you.

[Link to the full Working Methods Debate](#)