



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

10 August 2020

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to forward herewith, a letter from the Permanent Representative of Ghana, H. E. Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, and the Permanent Representative of Slovakia, H. E. Michal Mlynár, co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group (AHWG) on the revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly.

Following the conclusion of the work of the AHWG and the adoption of General Assembly resolution A/RES/74/303 on 4th September 2020, the co-chairs, via the aforementioned letter, share the enclosed informal summary of the general and thematic discussions on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly at its 74th session (Annex 1).

I would like to, once again, thank the co-chairs for their tenacity and commitment during these difficult times and for successfully concluding the work of the AHWG.

I avail myself of this opportunity to express my solidarity with Member States who are fighting COVID-19 and extend my sincere condolences for their loss.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tijjani Muhammad-Bande'.

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



New York, 8th September 2020

Excellency,

We are writing to you in our capacity as Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (AHWG).

Attached please find a brief informal summary of the general and thematic discussions on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly at its 74th session (Annex 1), for further reference and perusal. We strongly believe that the adoption by acclamation of Resolution A/RES/74/303 on 4th September 2020 was a clear sign of the persistent commitment towards the AHWG work and all discussions held during this and previous sessions will advance our vision towards making the General Assembly work more focused, efficient and relevant.

Excellency, we would like to take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation for your remarkable work in the context of these unprecedented times, which has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Ghana
Slovakia
to the United Nations

Michal Mlynár
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of
to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande
President of the UN General Assembly
New York

Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly

Proceedings

The Working Group held a total of five meetings, on 2, 3 and 12 March, 9 and 16 June.

The programme of work was organized as follows: general discussion and four thematic meetings on the following themes identified by the Co-Chairs:

- (a) The role and authority of the General Assembly;
- (b) The working methods of the Assembly;
- (c) The selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads of the United Nations system;
- (d) The strengthening of the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

On 5 May, the Co-Chairs convened a virtual informal meeting of the Working Group in order to consult Members about the remaining programme of work in light of the impact of the 2019 coronavirus pandemic. Subsequently, the interactive dialogue between permanent missions and the Secretariat was cancelled in light of the periodic online briefings by the Secretariat related to Covid-19 impact on the arrangements at the United Nations Headquarters and two thematic meetings were held virtually. The zero draft of the resolution was circulated by the Co-Chairs in their letter dated 17 August 2020 and discussed virtually on 24 and 26 August.

General discussion

The first and second meetings of the Working Group were convened by its Co-Chairs on 2 and 3 March 2020. Following introductory remarks by the President of the General Assembly, the participants of the meeting heard interventions from 33 delegations, including on behalf of groups of States. The Working Group also had before it a tentative timetable for the thematic discussions; the report of the Secretary-General on mandates addressed to the Secretariat that had not been implemented (A/74/704), issued pursuant to resolution 73/341 and a draft updated inventory chart of all revitalization mandates, which was uploaded on the dedicated revitalization link accessible from the website of the General Assembly (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/revitalization/>).

In his opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly referred to the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations as an opportunity to consider the future of the United Nations, and how to revitalize the work of the Assembly in order to achieve a bold vision, while preserving the primacy of the General Assembly. The President acknowledged that progress in revitalizing the work of the Assembly has been slow, but noted the great achievements made, including in the selection and appointment process of the Secretary-

General, and on the elections and strengthening of the Office of the President of the General Assembly. He urged delegations to continue looking for “low hanging fruits”, including in the area of general agreement to consider limiting the number of high-level meetings and side events, particularly during the high-level week in September. He further suggested to look at the possibility of ending consideration of some agenda items, while biennializing and triennializing others. The President called on the delegations to collaborate and make more progress at this session with a focus on the theme for the seventy-fifth anniversary titled “The future we want, the United Nations we need: reaffirming our collective commitment to multilateralism”. He committed to continuing engagement of the General Committee on improving and streamlining the work of the Assembly. The President stated that he had been upholding and upgrading best practices inherited from his predecessors in strengthening the accountability, transparency and institutional memory of his office. One such measure was the publication of a regularly-updated roadmap for the implementation of the vision of the President that was published by his office to show the priorities and activities planned and undertaken.

In the subsequent debate, speakers overwhelmingly noted the importance of the revitalization process and highlighted the significant achievements realized during the previous sessions, citing, in particular, the adoption of resolutions 69/321, 70/305, 71/323, 72/313 and 73/341. Many delegations mentioned the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations as an important time for the Working Group to make further progress. One group stated that the opportunity must be seized to reaffirm that there is no alternative to multilateralism in addressing global challenges. Many speakers identified the anniversary as an opportunity to uphold the universal values of the Charter of the United Nations and ensure that the Organization is fit for purpose.

The desire to streamline the agenda of the General Assembly was raised, including through the biennialization, triennialization, clustering and elimination of agenda items, in consultation with the Member States concerned. The need to eliminate duplication and overlap among different bodies was also mentioned. Some delegations suggested to limit the number of resolutions calling for the reports of the Secretary-General. One speaker stated that the primary objective of reforming the Assembly was to restore its ability to create authoritative documents on pressing issues. In this context, it was mentioned that although the agenda should be streamlined, its volume did not hamper the Assembly’s ability to act. Another delegation called for reducing the number of duplicative resolutions and items across all intergovernmental bodies and committees, as well as eliminating duplicative or irrelevant resolutions and reports that were of limited or no value. A delegation called for placing development issues at the top of the agenda and urged not to cut back on investment in development issues under the pretext of rationalizing the agenda. Speakers also recalled past and ongoing efforts to streamline the agendas of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and underlined the need to eliminate duplication and overlap and promote complementarity in the consideration and negotiation of similar and related issues.

Member States expressed concern about rationalizing the scheduling of high-level meetings during the high-level week in September. One group proposed to focus the work of the Working Group on streamlining and rationalizing the programme of work of the Assembly and high-level events, especially during the high-level week. Many stressed that meetings should be kept to the absolutely critical minimum in order to preserve and strengthen the sanctity of the general debate. One speaker mentioned the particular difficulty faced by smaller delegations and suggested that before any new high-level meetings could be planned, they should be presented for discussion in an open meeting of the General Committee. Another speaker suggested requiring events to have concept notes with specific goals, circulated in a timely fashion.

Referring to an alternative opening date of the regular session of the Assembly, one speaker suggested bringing the opening forward by at least a week. Another delegation emphasized that the start date should allow the serving President to exercise full leadership in preparing for the high-level week. The same speaker stated that the issue required further examination, including potential financial implications.

Delegations called for the increased inclusion and participation of all stakeholders in the work of the Assembly, particularly of civil society and youth. Some speakers referred to the importance of making meetings at the United Nations more accessible to persons with disabilities.

One speaker expressed appreciation for the development of the e-deleGATE portal and called for ensuring true equality of the official languages, including in the Journal of the United Nations. He further suggested examining the possibility of machine translation of unofficial documents. It was also underlined that the facilities of the United Nations must be used in line with the purposes and principles of the Organization.

Attention was given to the selection process of the Secretary-General and other executive heads. Delegations referred to the conclusions from the most recent selection process (A/72/514-S/2017/846) and argued for the consolidation of the historic achievement attained. Several delegations highlighted transparency and inclusiveness as important principles in the selection and appointment process of the Secretary-General and other executive heads. Member States called for continuing to examine innovative ways to select and appoint the Secretary-General. One group stated that the process should continue to be transparent, democratic and inclusive, and reiterated that the process should be carried out in full compliance with the mandate of the General Assembly. They expressed appreciation for the collaboration between the General Assembly and the Security Council and encouraged interaction between both organs in all stages of the process. They further encouraged greater openness, without compromising the confidentiality of the straw poll process. It was also stressed that any new proposals must be studied very carefully to ensure their conformity with the Charter of the United Nations.

Regarding the appointment of other executive heads and senior officials in the Organization, one group advocated that the Secretary-General should exercise independence in appointing senior officials, while securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity, as well as equal and fair distribution based on gender and geographical balance. While commending the Secretary-General for the steps already taken, many delegations wished to receive a clearer overview from the Secretariat regarding vacancies for all senior posts and a broader and timely dissemination to the wider membership of positions available at the level of Under-Secretary-General and other senior posts, bearing in mind geographical representation and gender equality. In the context of gender parity, speakers stressed that recruitment of female candidates at all professional levels, particularly from the developing world, was essential for sustaining women's representation at the United Nations.

With regard to the strengthening of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, delegations generally expressed support for strengthening the institutional memory of the Office. A group of States wished to see additional posts in the Office of the President of the General Assembly on a permanent basis, as well as sufficient human and financial resources from the United Nations regular budget. The same group stated that it was inappropriate for the Office to be funded by voluntary contributions from Member States. One speaker called for respect for equal geographic representation and gender balance in the staff of the Office. Another speaker expressed concern about possible budgetary implications.

Regarding the draft resolution of the Working Group, one group suggested that the Working Group should "lead by example" and streamline both its programme of work and its resolution. Other speakers stated that there was no need to repeat paragraphs for the sake of documenting previous agreements and suggested focusing on new elements and drastically reducing the length of the resolution. Additionally, biennializing the resolution on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly was suggested, so that substantive changes would be made every two years, while implementation would be monitored in the off-year.

In concluding remarks, the Co-Chairs noted the wide range of substantive issues raised and emphasized that their main objective would continue to be to listen to Member States' interventions during the forthcoming thematic debates. The views and positions would form the basis for the zero draft of the resolution to be circulated before the commencement of the negotiations.

Thematic meetings

The role and authority of the General Assembly

In the course of the thematic meeting on the role and authority of the General Assembly, held on 12 March 2020, 12 delegations made statements, including on behalf of groups of States. A briefing was provided by Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications on efforts by the Department of Global Communications to enhance the visibility of the work of the General Assembly.

The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications highlighted the efforts of the Department of Global Communications to disseminate information related to COVID-19, to both United Nations staff and the public, as well as its regular duties. In its outreach efforts, the Department of Global Communications used as many languages and platforms as possible. The Under-Secretary-General noted the dramatic increase in viewership of the website and social media channels of the United Nations, particularly among young people. The Department was also providing live web coverage of all official meetings in the official languages of the United Nations and is seeking solutions and resources to provide searchable archives in all official languages. She further described the Department's efforts to support the Office of the President of the General Assembly, including providing a spokesperson, arranging interviews and monitoring coverage of the President's activities, and facilitating connections with civil society, academia and celebrities. DGC also continued to maintain and update the websites of the General Assembly and its Main Committees in all official languages.

In an interactive segment, one delegation stated that communications of the United Nations were often issued in very technical language, which was not familiar to the general public, and suggested rendering the activities of the United Nations into simpler language that anyone can understand. The Under-Secretary-General noted that press releases from meetings were intended for delegates, rather than the general public, and that the public-facing platforms traditionally avoided using technical jargon and produced content on the work of the United Nations and the General Assembly in simple terms. Another speaker inquired about the ways in which the Assembly could make its work more accessible to the public. The Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications noted that making the Assembly accessible was a challenge that the Department had been facing regularly in its extensive coverage. The speaker further enquired about the Department's principal objectives, intended audience and its engagement measures. Another delegation suggested focusing on fewer priorities and messages, delivered consistently over time. The Under-Secretary-General noted a particular focus on themes, including the Sustainable Development Goals, climate action, gender equality and peace and security issues. She mentioned that the news platforms of the United Nations were more trusted than other media, providing reliable information and producing content that was impactful and audience focused.

In the course of the subsequent debate, delegations focused on the role and authority of the General Assembly, especially from the perspective of the Assembly's relationship with the other principal organs, in particular the Security Council.

Many Member States reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the authority of the General Assembly, including in matters of peace and security. For example, one group of States stressed the necessity of complete observance by the Security Council of all Charter provisions, as well as of General Assembly resolutions, and urged the Council to submit a more comprehensive and analytical annual report to the General Assembly. Other speakers stressed that the best way to enhance the role and authority of the Assembly was to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, pointing to, among other elements, the respective and complementary functions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Many delegations called for greater coherence in the work of the various principal organs, including the rationalization of agenda, and greater coordination among them through regular meetings of their Presidents. Speakers also stressed the importance of implementing 2030 Agenda. More generally, some argued that the voluminous agenda of the Assembly was a burden for Member States and advocated the streamlining of agenda, resolutions and other outcome documents. Delegations reiterated that all proposals to remove or change the frequency of consideration of agenda items would require consultations with the concerned Member States. Some delegations emphasized the importance of including other stakeholders in the work of the Assembly and its Main Committees.

With regard to the interactive and comprehensive dialogue between permanent missions and the Secretariat, which was established under the cluster of this thematic debate, delegations welcomed the dialogue as a "standing mechanism". One speaker suggested to consider expanding the practice to holding similar dialogues upon request of a number of delegations, for example in connection to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the work of the Organization.

In concluding remarks, the Co-Chairs noted the wide range of substantive issues raised, which they intended to take into account when preparing the zero draft of the draft resolution.

The working methods of the General Assembly

The thematic meeting on the working methods of the General Assembly was convened by the Co-Chairs on 12 March 2020. In accordance with paragraph 26 of resolution 73/341, the meeting participants heard briefings from the Chairs and representatives of the six Main Committees. In addition, at the invitation of the Co-Chairs, the Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly briefed on behalf of President of the General Assembly in his capacity as the Chair of the General Committee. During the interactive question-and-answer segments that followed, delegations had an opportunity to pose questions.

The Co-Chairs, in their opening remarks, emphasized the importance of the working methods for the revitalization of the GA, since they had a direct and comprehensive impact on efficiency, effectiveness and transparency. They highlighted that Member States had already advanced important initiatives to streamline the agenda, consolidate documents and improve various procedural matters, including planning of meetings and voting. However, discussions during the current session reflected that Member States saw potential and need for further improvement.

Briefings by the Chairs of the Main Committees

The Chair of the Fourth Committee reported that the Committee held 25 meetings and considered 13 substantive agenda items, including biennial items. The Committee continued its practice of considering the five decolonization items in a clustered manner and holding interactive dialogues with high-level representatives of the Secretariat and agencies, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/316. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/241, the First and Fourth Committees had closely coordinated their meetings at the current session to allow smaller delegations to cover both, but acknowledged this was not always possible, due to the expanding workload of the Committee. Time management, according to the Chair, was crucial to the success of the session, including through the use of flashing lights and automatic microphone cut-off. He highlighted the successful use of the electronic functionalities offered by the Secretariat, including e-DeleGATE, webcast and PaperSmart.

The Vice-Chair of the First Committee (Lebanon) noted that the Committee was able to complete its work within the provided timeframe, despite a contentious session. She stated that time management was strict, and that delegations had agreed to drastically reduce the time allotted for statements and rights of reply. She applauded delegations' efforts to deliver their statements within the time limit. She further referred to the successful use of the e-DeleGATE portal and its tools, which added convenience to delegations and increased transparency of the Committee proceedings. The Vice-Chair mentioned the excellent pre- and post-session planning, as well as regular meetings of the Bureau, as contributors to the success of the work of the Committee.

Chair of the Second Committee stated that incremental improvements to the work of the Committee, which have been implemented since the seventieth session, were expanded. For example, the programme of work was finalized early, and an informal briefing was held before the beginning of the session, allowing for advanced planning for both delegations and the Secretariat. The Chair also mentioned the joint briefing that the Secretariat provided to delegates of the Second and Third Committees on the editing of draft proposals and the programme budget implications process. He mentioned the strict implementation of time limits, the use of e-DeleGATE and the establishment of a comprehensive schedule of informal consultations. These measures and the Committee's hard work enabled it to conclude its work at its earliest date since 1949. The Chair also

referred to challenges to the work of the Committee, including the difficulty of negotiating draft proposals.

The Chair of the Third Committee referred to the Committee's practice of clustering agenda items but allowing delegations to make separate statements on clustered items, if they so wish. The Chair lauded the cooperation with Geneva, that allowed for a smooth process of scheduling briefings by special mandate holders and other experts. He referred to time management as essential in allowing the Committee to complete its work. He mentioned the establishment of time limits, a timer display and microphone cut offs, and suggested that given the increased interest in participating in the meetings, time limits for group statements should be further reduced. The Committee continued to utilize e-DeleGATE as well as a live list of speakers, which proved beneficial. A handover meeting of the Bureau with its outgoing members had proven useful as well.

The Chair of the Fifth Committee reflected on the practice of the Committee to make decisions by consensus, a strenuous and lengthy process which was nonetheless worthwhile as a culmination of multilateralism. He lamented the Committee's chronic problem of working outside normal working hours, to the detriment of both delegates and Secretariat staff. He recalled that the President had been encouraging the Committee to break this pattern. The Chair also expressed concern that the Committee overburdens itself with procedural matters, sometimes at the expense of substance. Another difficulty facing the Committee was the late submission of reports, which impacted the pace of its work. One possible solution for this issue could be to allocate specific matters to different parts of the session. The need to become more resource-conscious had led to the Committee halting the unnecessary printing of documents, a practice which the Chair hoped other Committees could adopt as well. The Chair stated it would be critical for the United Nations to digitally adapt and come up to speed with new technologies, in order to create efficiencies and achieve cost-effectiveness.

The Chair of the Sixth Committee reported that the Bureau of the Committee continued to be proactive in addressing overlap in the programme of work of the Committee and of the Assembly, such as the consideration of the reports of the International Criminal Court and the international residual mechanisms. He noted that the Bureau was able to reach out to the presidencies of the courts and tribunals and to create a common schedule based on agreement, thus minimizing overlap. The Committee also adopted a proposed programme of work for the seventy-fifth session. The Chair noted the successful use of e-services and encouraged the Secretariat to further expand the services available. With regards to time limitations, the Chair noted that though these measures have been utilized in other Committees, an official time limit may not be applicable to the Committee and may impede the continued development of certain legal issues, and that informal encouragement to delegations to limit their own statements when possible has proven to be successful. Another successful measure taken in this session was to share the topic of the annual presentation of the President of the International Court of Justice with delegations in advance, thus enabling delegation to prepare better questions.

The Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly, speaking on behalf of the President, noted that the General Committee had broad representation across regions and groups. She further noted that the role of the Committee was to draw up the agenda of the Assembly and make recommendations on the inclusion of items and their allocation to the Main Committees. She suggested that the General Committee could be more proactive and consider further biennialization, triennialization, clustering and elimination of items. She stated her belief that the diversity and representativeness of the General Committee could be further leveraged to make tangible progress in revitalizing the work of the Assembly. It could be viewed as the Bureau of the President of the General Assembly. She brought forward some ideas, including the holding of informal meetings and briefings on specific issues pertaining to the work of the Assembly, keep an overview of all initiatives pursued in the Main Committees to avoid a high number of high-level events, provide support to Chairs and their bureaux, to compare common challenges and best practices. The General Committee could also monitor items and resolutions to ensure they are not carried on needlessly. The Chef de Cabinet stated that many of her suggestions were based on the recommendations by the Working Group, but they had not been sufficiently implemented.

In the subsequent question-and-answer segment, two delegations intervened. One speaker asked if the Chairs of the Main Committees could reflect on the agendas and the resolutions considered this year, whether they reflected the dynamism of the issues, and whether they all needed to be considered annually. Additionally, he inquired about the issue of placing time limitations on speakers and suggested that the work of the Committees might benefit from a lengthier discussion of fewer items. Addressing the Chair of the Second Committee, the delegation inquired if the resolutions adopted by the Committee align with the Sustainable Development Goals, and if the Committee should focus more directly on the goals. Another speaker suggested that the work of the Committees and of the Assembly could be improved not by decreasing the number of resolutions, but rather by increasing the possibility of real, interactive debate, as there is very little opportunity to discuss and respond to the positions of delegations. In response, the Chair of the Second Committee noted that clustering of items and statements was useful and stated that adherence to speaking times was essential in saving time and allowing the Committee to complete its agenda. With regards to the Sustainable Development Goals, he agreed that streamlining was necessary, but noted that there are some issues that are not related to the Sustainable Development Goals that remained pertinent to the Committee's work, and were part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in a broader sense. The Chair of the Third Committee agreed that the quality of discussion had a direct link to the number of items on the agenda, which often reflected political balances in the membership. It was therefore difficult to suppress or change existing items, and there was a need for political will to cluster items. Supporting this, the Chair of the Second Committee urged delegations and groups of delegations to communicate directly, so that decisions could be made more easily. The Chair of the Fourth Committee, responding to the question on time allocated to statements, noted that time allocated was often ample, but speakers should also adhere to the time given. Regarding

the suggestion of biennializing and triennializing items, the Chair noted that this had to be done on a case-by-case basis, and could not be generalized. The Vice-Chair of the First Committee, responding to the question on interactivity, noted that the Committee's work was delayed by discussions not related to the substance of the Committee's work. The Chair of the Sixth Committee noted that the Committee differed from the others, as it had a lighter agenda which enabled it to devote more time to more difficult issues. The Chef de Cabinet of the PGA underscored that the discussions held in the Assembly were of the utmost importance, but working methods and efficiencies had to be improved. She noted that real, interactive debates existed, in the GA, in the Main Committees and in the General Committee, and expressed her support for the continuation of these discussions.

Statements

During the debate, 14 delegations made statements, including on behalf of groups. Speakers reviewed the implementation of the provisions adopted by the General Assembly under this thematic cluster during the seventy-third session, noting and highlighting various achievements. The issues raised during the debate ranged from rationalization the agenda, also in light of the 2030 Agenda, to election-related matters, multilingualism and the proliferation of side-events.

A group of States stressed the urgent need for steps to be taken towards rationalizing the agenda in order to reprioritize, eliminate duplication and overlap and promote complementarity in the consideration and negotiations of similar and related issues, including in the light of the 2030 Agenda. A group of States proposed to include a placeholder paragraph in the draft resolution on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly for the subsequent inclusion of the outcome of the agenda alignment process and stressed the need to synchronize these processes so that they are mutually-reinforcing. Another group of States suggested to consider detaching the process of the agenda alignment with appointment of separate co-facilitators that would report to then Working Group on the progress achieved. Prior to taking that decision, the group sought a briefing by the Secretariat on the previous experiences of how the agenda had been streamlined in the past. Many delegations recognized that some resolutions could be biennialized or triennialized, while emphasizing that considerations by Member States, particularly the sponsors of resolutions, should be duly taken into account. One delegation suggested utilizing the General Committee to review the agenda of the Assembly, including the frequency of resolutions and requests for reports. A group of States stressed that increased focus on implementation of draft resolutions would create public visibility and generate awareness on the ability of the Assembly to fulfil its mandates. One delegation noted that the current high volume and complexity of the intergovernmental processes de facto impeded the ability of Member States to represent their national interests at the United Nations and suggested reducing the volume of documentation and introducing new technologies in order to give equal opportunity to all delegations to participate.

A group of States expressed its support for streamlining the text of the resolution on the revitalization of the General Assembly and stressed that previously agreed language should not be reopened. It further suggested biennializing the resolution, thus reducing the budgetary impact and allowing to focus on concrete outcomes.

The scheduling of meetings was identified as another important area for possible improvement in the working methods of the General Assembly, with many speakers stressing that meetings organized in parallel with the general debate should be kept to the absolutely critical minimum in order to preserve the integrity of the debate. A group of States reiterated a suggestion to create guidelines to minimize the number of side-events held during the general debate and suggested utilizing the General Committee to this effect. A delegation suggested spreading out high-level events throughout the year, while grouping them by theme. A group of States reiterated that high-level thematic debates organized by the President of the General Assembly should be limited to current issues of critical importance to the international community.

A group of States mentioned that elections for the bureau of the Main Committees should be based on fair geographical representation and held at least three months before the opening of each session, preferably up to six months, to guarantee adequate preparation. A group of States proposed to elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council a full year before their term of office, instead of six months before, as provided for in resolution 68/307. A delegation called for the development of a code of conduct for election campaigns with a view to improving standards of transparency, accountability and equity.

On the matter of multilingualism, delegations stated that the Working Group contributes to the objective of promoting multilingualism, and stressed that the need to ensure quality multilingual communication through the provision of documentation, translation and interpretation services, which must ensure the transmission of messages in all six official languages. One delegation called for the equality between all official languages, taking into account the financial resources of the organization, and considering using machine translation for unofficial documents.

With regards to preserving the institutional memory of the Main Committees, delegations reiterated that outgoing Chairs should brief their incoming counterparts on the best practices and lessons learned from previous sessions. A group of States also encouraged chairs and members of the bureaux to consult with Member States after their election on the conduct of the Committees.

Several delegations raised the matter of accessibility. While recognizing that great strides forward had been taken, delegations stated they were insufficient, and that the United Nations could not be considered accessible and inclusive when the participation of persons with disabilities was limited by accessibility issues.

Many delegations welcomed the improved format of the Journal. While noting that the renewed Journal reflected the Organizations' commitment to multilingualism, delegations called for further improving the ease of access to the Journal on electronic devices. One group looked forward to steps to be taken to ensure the full implementation of rule 55, namely, publication of the Journal in the six official languages. Another group requested continued improvement in accordance with the requirements provided in paragraph 51 of resolution 71/323 and paragraph 31 of resolution 73/341.

A group of States called on the Secretariat to come up with ideas for a workable solution to ensure that General Assembly meetings were provided with interpretation services, irrespective of whether they ran overtime. The debates of the General Assembly and the Security Council could be improved, for example by the more active implementation of the "all protocol observed" principle, particularly when there is limited time for debate. Delegations also requested the timely issuance of documentation and increased the use of e-services. One group requested the Secretariat to further improve, harmonize and unify e-services provided by the Secretariat, under the e-deleGATE portal. However, the full use of these e-services should not be interpreted as an alternative to the printing of documents and other relevant documentation, in particular important official communications to be transmitted by email. A group of States called for more flexibility by the Secretariat in providing estimates of programme budget implications to Member States during negotiations, as it would contribute to the informed discussion of draft resolutions. The speaker further called for the development of a common and harmonized approach towards the deadlines for submission of draft resolutions, as well as for silence procedures. In concluding remarks, the Co-Chairs expressed gratitude for the rich debate and assured delegations that they had taken careful note of the views expressed, which would be duly taken into account.

Selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads of the United Nations system

The Co-Chairs convened the thematic meeting of the Working Group on the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General and other executive heads of the United Nations system on 16 June 2020 virtually and heard statements from 23 delegations, including on behalf of groups of States. Before the debate, the Working Group received a briefing from the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources on the gender balance and regional origin of the executive heads of the United Nations system and the Senior Management Group of the Organization, as well as on the issue of candidacies of senior United Nations officials currently holding office, in accordance with paragraph 50 of resolution 73/341.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources informed the Working Group that 60 per cent of Secretariat staff were men and 40 per cent were women. Of those, 39 per cent were from the Western European and other States, 25 per cent were from African States, 19 per cent were from Asia-Pacific States, 9 per cent were from Eastern European States and 7 per cent were from Latin American and Caribbean States. Of the 45 members of the

Senior Management Group, 30 members or 67 per cent were women. Of the 31 Executive Heads, 10, or 32 per cent, were women. 45 per cent of the Executive Heads were from Western European and other countries, 19 per cent were from African countries, 19 per cent were from Asia-Pacific countries, 6 per cent were from Eastern European Countries and 9 per cent were from Latin American and Caribbean countries. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources reported that in effort to achieve equitable geographical distribution and greater regional diversity, the Office of Human Resources had launched a geographical diversity strategy, which aimed at increasing internal awareness, strengthening accountability mechanisms and attracting new talent with targeted outreach activities, including through partnerships with Member States. She noted the development of programmes for unrepresented, underrepresented and troop-contributing countries, as well as the Office's support for the implementation of the United Nations system gender perspective. The Assistant Secretary-General further noted the efforts to expand accessibility for persons with disabilities, both in the physical facilities of the Secretariat and in creating preconditions that allow for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the work of the Organization.

In an interactive question-and-answer segment, two delegations intervened. One speaker inquired about the timeline for the presentation of candidates or for the re-election of the incumbent Secretary-General. Another speaker requested a more detailed breakdown of the regional statistics provided by the Assistant Secretary-General.

In the subsequent debate, speakers reiterated as success the selection process that had led to the appointment of the ninth Secretary-General, citing the various innovative steps taken as a result of resolution 69/321 and 70/305. Many delegations emphasized their expectation that the innovative procedure used in the most recent appointment process pursuant to resolution 69/321 (including the sending of a joint letter from the Presidents of the General Assembly and of the Security Council inviting candidates to come forward; the circulation of candidacies received as official documents; and the convening of informal dialogues) should be applied in all future selection processes. On the other hand, other delegations stated that it was premature to adopt any additional measures regarding the selection process of the Secretary-General during the current session, noting that it would be counterproductive to draft new criteria or parameters for the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General while in-person negotiations cannot be conducted, due to COVID-19 pandemic. To safeguard the institutional memory and lessons learned from the most recent process, delegations requested the Working Group to consider developing a compendium of best practices. References were made to the notes containing lessons learned from the selection process (A/71/774-S/2017/93 and A/72/514-S/2017/846).

Delegations called upon the President of the General Assembly at future sessions to play a proactive role and the Security Council to recommend more than one candidate for the Assembly's consideration.

The possibility of considering the establishment of a single, non-renewable term for future Secretary-Generals was raised, noting that the proposed change would fully democratize the process and improve regional rotation and gender equality. Several delegations also emphasized the importance of presenting female candidates.

Various speakers touched upon the informal hearings with candidates, which they welcomed as a tangible improvement or, in the words of one group, as an essential component of the appointment process.

In order to guarantee a more inclusive and transparent selection process, it was further argued that a deadline for presentation of candidatures, as well as a timeline for the overall process should be followed for all future processes, while bearing in mind that ultimately the best possible candidate should be appointed. A number of delegations the value added by various stakeholders, including civil society, in searching for suitable candidates at their own initiative as an input for consideration by Member States. In the context of the re-election of an incumbent Secretary-General, a number of delegations requested that the incumbent present a vision statement for his or her next term and brief Member States on its contents, as well as report on the achievements of his or her tenure.

Other delegations underscored the need for full implementation of Article 97 of the Charter and stressed the role of the Security Council in the selection process of the Secretary-General.

Turning to senior appointments and the selection of executive heads, delegations welcomed the attainment by the Secretary-General of gender parity in the Senior Management Group. Many delegations strongly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue along that path with a view to achieving gender parity within the Organization as a whole, and ensuring regional balance, while maintaining the highest standards of competence, leadership and ability.

Several delegations reiterated that there should be no monopoly on senior posts and stressed the importance that recruitments be made on as wide a geographical basis as possible. Delegations underlined that the Secretary-General should exercise complete independence in the selection of senior officials with due regard to geographical and gender balance.

In concluding, the Co-Chairs stated that they would duly take the discussion into account.

Strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly

The Co-Chairs convened the thematic meeting on the strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly on 9 June 2020 virtually. It included briefings by the President of the General Assembly and the Under-Secretary-

General for General Assembly and Conference Management. The briefings were followed by an interactive question-and-answer session and, subsequently, by remarks from 25 delegations, including on behalf of groups.

The Co-Chair (Slovakia), in his opening remarks, noted the universal support of Member States for achievements made in recent years by the Working Group, including the code of ethics and oath of office for the President of the General Assembly. He further commended the President and his team for their leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, including in ensuring business continuity, and particularly noted the holding of virtual meetings as well as the procedure for taking decisions through silence procedure.

The President of the General Assembly expressed his appreciation to the membership for their understanding and support, and noted the significant impact that the inability to hold in-person meetings had had on the work of the Assembly, as well as the difficulty in providing interpretation services to virtual meetings. Despite the constraints, 26 proposals had been adopted under the silence procedure mechanism to date, including a decision on the procedure to conduct elections of the non-permanent members of the Security Council and members of the Economic and Social Council. The President noted that the office would benefit from permanent staff hired under the regular budget to ensure continuity and maintain institutional memory. On funding, the President further noted that the funds allocated to the office remained very low, compared with the rapid increase of mandates addressed to it, and further noted that increasing the allocation of funding from the regular budget will ensure that the work of the Office does not get impeded by financial constraints. The President highlighted his commitment to transparency and accountability, and steps undertaken to ensure them, such as the disclosure of information on staffing, activities and travels, as well as the consideration of gender equality and regional balance in appointing facilitators for the General Assembly processes.

The Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management briefed the Working Group on the support provided by the Secretariat to the Office of the President of the General Assembly, which covered the staffing, sources of funding and the regular Secretariat support available to the Office, while highlighting the wide range of support provided from within the Secretariat, which transcended any one Department. As to staffing, the Department covered the expenses of five staff members (2 D-2, 1 D-1, 1 P-5 and 1 General Service) in the Office. In addition, and also from within its own resources, the Department made available two General Service staff members, who were located in the Office, as well as translators and text processors, as needed. The Department also provides protocol services, as required, and correspondence services. The Department of Operational Support provided a car and driver for official purposes, as well as office space, including transitional office space during the three-month transition period. The Department of Safety and Security provided a detail of two security officers, including during travel. The President is entitled to select a spokesperson for the term of office from the Department of Global Communications, while legal guidance was provided by the Office of Legal Affairs on an as-needed basis. Other substantive departments and offices

were ready to accommodate the needs of the President, as required, for the work of the General Assembly. The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management also provides administrative support for the President's official travels when financed by the United Nations and the Trust Fund of the Office of the President.

With regard to funding, the regular budget allocation amounted to approximately \$307,800 per annum. In the light of the static nature of the funding, a trust fund had been created in 2010, the importance of which had been stressed by Member States in General Assembly resolutions. Contributions were usually earmarked either for specific purposes, that is, in support of particular meetings, or for general administrative, logistical and management support, and were associated with a specific session. Since November 2015, the Department of Management, which had since been renamed the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, approved a reduction of the programme support cost for the trust fund from 13 to 7 per cent. Noting that the activities of the President have increased markedly in recent years, the General Assembly has expressed continued interest in seeking ways to further support the Office in accordance with existing procedures, as well as to continue discussions in the Ad Hoc Working Group on further steps to strengthen the Office. In response to a request from the General Assembly, the Secretary-General had included relevant proposals in the proposed programme budget 2018-2019 for the establishment of one additional P-5 position in the Office of the President to ensure continuity and manage the transfer of knowledge between sessions, including to assist in the preparation of the President's end-of-presidency report and in the handover briefing, as well as for the additional general temporary assistance resources corresponding to an overlap period for one month for four positions in the Office to maximize the use of the transition period for incoming Presidents. At the end of the main part of its seventy-second session, the General Assembly decided against the establishment of the requested additional P-5 position in the OPGA but approved the additional general temporary assistance resources corresponding to an overlap period for one month for four positions in the Office of the President to maximize the use of the transition period for incoming Presidents. By resolution 72/313, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit proposals to review the budget allocation to the Office of the President in the context of the proposed programme budget for 2020. In response to this request, and in accordance with the recommendation in the report of the Task Force on the functioning of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General again included in the proposed programme budget for 2020 the establishment of an additional P-5 position in the OPGA to ensure continuity and knowledge transfer. The General Assembly decided against approving the request for additional resources.

In terms of other support, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management fulfilled the role of focal point and assisted the Office throughout the year through conference management support, protocol and institutional memory. The Department would also continue the practice of organizing an induction programme for incoming Presidents.

With regard to the request contained in paragraph 59 of GA resolution 73/341, in which the Assembly requested the Secretariat to issue, within existing resources, in coordination with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, a compendium of best practices of past Presidents that could serve to contribute to strengthening the institutional memory of the Office, the Under-Secretary-General informed that the Secretariat could only prepare this compendium on the basis of inputs by the former Presidents. He recalled that the end-of-presidency report had been serving as a mechanism to ensure continuity and manage the transfer of knowledge in the Office between sessions. He further noted that since the additional P-5 post for this purpose had not been approved by the Assembly there was no permanent capacity dedicated for this purpose in the Office.

In an interactive exchange, responding to a question about the transition between presidencies, the President of the General Assembly stated that the transition period was insufficient. About a possibility to create a hybrid model of work in order to provide for circumstances in which delegations cannot be physically present at the United Nations Headquarters, the President noted that the matter of legality of meetings must be considered, and that the Assembly should consider whether the rules of procedure can be amended to provide for hybrid meetings. Responding to a question about the availability of simultaneous interpretation during virtual meetings, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management reminded of the technical difficulties and the lack of platforms to support remote interpretation during virtual meetings, as well as security matters. He briefed on ongoing efforts to provide a solution, yet recommended that interpretation, when it becomes available, to be limited to public meetings, and not be used for closed meetings and negotiations.

In the subsequent debate, many delegations expressed support for the allocation of sufficient human and financial resources to Office of the President of the General Assembly from the regular budget, while noting with appreciation the practice of secondment of staff from Member States and emphasized the importance of gender parity and geographic balance in the staffing of the Office. Some speakers, while acknowledging the importance of adequate resources for the Office, expressed support for voluntary contributions. Delegations noted that the code of ethics and oath of office were an important milestone, and two speakers suggested to expand it to other senior posts.

One group highlighted the importance of strengthening accountability and transparency and noted the strong engagement shown in the dialogue with the candidate for the position of the President. Delegations recommended holding more interactive dialogues between the President and the membership throughout the session. One speaker, while expressing support for holding informal dialogues with candidates for the position of the President of the General Assembly, cautioned against over-regulating the process.

A delegation welcomed the annual retreat, annual handover report and induction programme as steps in the right direction towards strengthening the Office. With regards to the compendium of best practices of past Presidents, a group of States noted that it was

looking forward to its issuance by the Secretariat, in coordination with Office of the President of the General Assembly, noting that it would strengthen the institutional memory of the Office. Delegations also welcomed the digital publication of documents by the President and encouraged further improvements on the matter. One speaker suggested outreach to institutional archives of ministries of foreign affairs to request collaboration in creating historical archives of past Presidents.

Several delegations welcomed the measures introduced by the President to ensure the efficient functioning of the Assembly under the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic. One speaker further noted that the pandemic has highlighted the indispensable role of the President in this regard. Another speaker noted that the United Nations should apply the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on increasing the use of technology in the future. Two other delegations, similarly, stated that the United Nations cannot return to business as usual without meaningful reflection.