



General Assembly

Seventy-second session

54th plenary meeting

Tuesday, 14 November 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Lajčák (Slovakia)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Tevi (Vanuatu),
Vice-President, took the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 120 and 121 (continued)

Implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Mr. Ngundze (South Africa): I wish to take this opportunity to express my delegation's appreciation for the convening of this debate on the theme of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, as well as for the leadership and interest shown by the President on the issue. Be assured of South Africa's continued support and cooperation on that important issue.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/72/PV.48). I would like to make the following additional comments.

The revitalization of the work of the General Assembly is a vital component of the comprehensive reform of the United Nations and remains one of South Africa's main priorities during the seventy-second session. In that context, we welcome the achievements and progress made in a number of areas, including the successful campaign to strengthen the role of the General Assembly in the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General. We fully support the

recommendations contained in resolutions 69/321, 70/305 and 71/323 to advance and strengthen the work of the General Assembly. However, as the world continues to evolve, it is important that the Assembly consistently adapt to those changes.

South Africa has long proposed steps aimed at achieving a stronger and more effective General Assembly, including by enhancing its role, within the limitations of the Charter of the United Nations, in the maintenance of international peace and security. That is particularly the case in the current global environment characterized by conflicts of new types, especially the increase in terrorism, violent extremism and transnational organized crime and the displacement of populations owing to war and global migration, poverty and inequality brought on by pandemics and famine resulting from climate change.

Such challenges and the transnational nature thereof make it impossible for individual States to effectively respond to them alone, thereby making multilateralism even more important, and the United Nations even more central in addressing those critical issues. Furthermore, South Africa is of the view that the General Assembly remains the best forum in which to do so.

South Africa actively participates in the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly. We attach a great deal of importance to the entire cluster of issues under discussion by the Working Group. In that connection, I wish to highlight

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the following issues as the priorities of South Africa at this session.

On the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, South Africa would like to see the reforms adopted at the seventieth and seventy-first sessions institutionalized, with the Ad Hoc Working Group continuing to discuss further reforms. Those reforms include the possibility of a term limit and the appointment of the next Secretary-General by a vote in the Assembly, as was the intention of the founding Member States. We also recommend that the Security Council submit more than one name to the General Assembly to choose from when selecting the Secretary-General, in accordance with rule 141 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

With regard to strengthening of the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, South Africa agrees that additional human resources must be assigned to that Office on a permanent basis from the Secretariat, specifically with the aim of improving record-keeping and assisting with continuity from session to session. For its part, South Africa continues to send one of its experienced staff members to the Office to assist it in discharging its responsibilities effectively and efficiently. We also thank those Member States that have done the same. Furthermore, we welcome the increased role and profile of the President of the General Assembly in recent years, but remain concerned that the human and financial resources of the Office remain the same, with vast implications for the work and efficacy of the Office. We therefore support the call for the effective and genuine strengthening of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, as well as the allocation of sufficient resources from the United Nations regular budget to the Office.

With regard to the role of the authority of the Assembly, South Africa remains optimistic that the convening power of the General Assembly makes it best suited to address inequality and the growing gap between the rich and the poor, including among Member States. In that regard, South Africa welcomes the progress made by the Main Committees in improving their working methods. We also welcome the progress made in ensuring closer coordination between the Main Committees and the Ad Hoc Working Group.

South Africa joins the majority of Member States in underscoring the significance of preserving the

intergovernmental, inclusive and democratic nature of the United Nations, as well as the need to consult States Members of the Organization.

In conclusion, South Africa wishes to reaffirm its commitment to contribute constructively to the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly during this session and remains ready to work with other Member States in a transparent and a professional manner in that regard.

Mr. Awad (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we welcome the holding of this annual meeting on these two important items on our agenda, namely, the implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations and the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. We would also like to express our congratulations and appreciation for the appointment of the Permanent Representative of Croatia and the Permanent Representative of Colombia as co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly during the seventy-second session.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/72/PV.48).

The General Assembly plays a central role in the United Nations as the main organ with the broadest international representation and as a platform for multilateralism and decision-making. Egypt believes that the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly forms an integral part of the wider efforts to enhance the United Nations as a whole. Therefore, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the General Assembly is a first step forward towards a more democratic and inclusive United Nations that is capable of carrying out its international functions and obligations in line with the Charter of the United Nations. The latest General Assembly resolution on the topic (resolution 71/323), adopted by consensus on 8 September, gives additional momentum to the process of consolidating the role and authority of the General Assembly.

We call on the international community to move forward with mobilizing all the resources needed to fully implement that resolution and to build on its achievements, especially when it comes to enhancing the role and authority of the General Assembly, developing its working methods at the administrative,

organizational, technical and substantive levels, supporting the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly and improving the process of selecting and appointing the Secretary-General.

The United Nations today faces grave challenges and threats, especially in countering international terrorism, maintaining international peace and security, achieving sustainable development and addressing the root causes of crises and conflicts around the world. That calls for cooperation, concerted efforts and coordination and for complementarity in the international endeavours of the main organs of the United Nations, while taking into account the delicate balance between the functions, terms of references and scope of the mandates of those organs in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We therefore hope for a real and tangible clarification of the practice established by the Security Council in the past few years with regard to the importance of increasing coordination, cooperation and interaction among the main organs of the United Nations, especially the General Assembly and the Security Council, in order to address global issues in a more effective manner.

I would now like to highlight some topics for discussion among Member States at the current session of the General Assembly.

First, the mechanisms for holding elections by secret ballot at the United Nations and its specialized agencies need to be reviewed on a priority basis. We have noticed recently that the secret-ballot system has occasioned violations of the principle of responsibility and transparency in international relations. It even runs counter to certain good-governance efforts, and that leaves room for manipulation and a lack of transparency during the voting process.

Secondly, it is important that we activate the role of the General Assembly when dealing with urgent international crises, in coordination with the relevant United Nations organs.

Thirdly, there is a need to provide the human and financial resources necessary to ensure a smooth workflow within the Organization. We therefore look forward to the Secretary-General's new vision of United Nations reform regarding the three pillars.

In conclusion, I would like to express our deepest appreciation and thanks for the great efforts made by the President of the General Assembly and his team.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the observer of the European Union (see A/72/PV.48). I wish, however, to make a few additional points in my national capacity.

Let me start by thanking the President for convening this plenary debate on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly and for inviting us to speak. We appreciate his role and leadership in making the work of the General Assembly more focused, efficient and relevant, which we find to be commendable and vital. In that respect, we welcome the commitment to further strengthen the position and authority of the General Assembly in the global governance system. We also welcome efforts to deepen the culture of collaboration, dialogue, consensus-building and inclusiveness in the work of the General Assembly.

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Croatia, Mr. Vladimir Drobňak, and the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates, Mrs. Lana Nusseibeh, for their leadership and important work during the previous session. We are happy to see Ambassador Drobňak continue as co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly this year, and it gives me great pleasure to welcome the Permanent Representative of Colombia, Ambassador Mejía Vélez, as the new co-Chair of the Working Group during the current session. They can both count on our support in the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group.

The sixty-ninth to seventy-first sessions of the General Assembly showed that the Assembly can make significant progress with regard to its revitalization process, ranging from issues such as enhancing the appointment process — in particular the appointment of the Secretary-General — and voting and balloting processes, through strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly to streamlining working methods. We warmly welcome all those recent developments, and we call for the full implementation of those and other relevant provisions aimed at making the General Assembly's work even more substantive and relevant in future.

During this session, we should continue to make further strides in pursuit of our common goal to

revitalize the General Assembly, so as to make it a truly deliberative and functional body. I believe that, among other important issues, we could make further progress in aligning the General Assembly's work with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and further strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, as well as in the ongoing negotiations of the regular budget for the biennium 2018-2019.

We could also strengthen the relationships between the General Assembly and other principal organs so as to ensure better cooperation on issues that require coordinated action by the United Nations, in accordance with the respective mandates of those bodies, while also taking into account the lessons learned and best practices from the process of selecting the Secretary-General and advancing gender equality in relation to the work of the General Assembly.

In conclusion, Slovakia looks forward to engaging with the President — as well as with Member States — in a results-oriented process during the seventy-second session of the General Assembly in order to further improve the Organization's ability to make relevant contributions to global peace, prosperity, sustainability and human rights.

Mr. Castañeda Solares (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): I wish to thank the President for convening this debate.

Our delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/72/PV.48).

Allow me to begin by sincerely congratulating the Permanent Representative of Colombia, Ms. María Emma Mejía Vélez, and the Permanent Representative of Croatia, Mr. Vladimir Drobnyak, on their appointment as co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly. We are sure that, under their leadership, we will be able to make headway in achieving consensus on that most important issue. I also wish to take this opportunity to commend the exceptional work carried out by the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates and the Permanent Representative of Croatia during the seventy-first session, a joint effort that led to the adoption of resolution 71/323.

Our delegation reiterates the need to continue strengthening the role, authority, effectiveness and

efficiency of the General Assembly. The Assembly's work is highly valuable in today's world as the Organization adapts to the global challenges we face.

In past years, the commitment shown within the framework of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly has enabled us to make important progress, including a review of the working methods of the Main Committees and an exchange of best practices; a more fluid relationship between the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council so as to strengthen coherence in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals; coordinated planning of the Assembly's high-level meetings in order to optimize their interactivity; as well as a notably higher level of interaction between Permanent Missions and the Secretariat. It is also important to highlight the progress made in the context of the appointment of the Secretary-General.

We must note the significant role played by the Assembly in terms of the functions conferred upon it by the Charter of the United Nations, as well as the proposed reforms in the areas of administration, peace and security and development. The proposed reforms reaffirm that which is underscored in resolution 71/323 regarding the adaptation of the General Assembly's programme so that the Assembly can provide its full support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is precisely within the framework of the proposed reforms that our delegation reaffirms the authority of the Assembly to convene a broad discussion that will enable us to take a more extensive approach towards analysing the reforms, taking into account the interdependence between the three pillars of the Organization: peace and security, development and human rights. From this rostrum, our delegation reaffirms and supports the Secretary-General's vision on prevention, as we firmly believe that further investment in prevention will result in fewer social and armed conflicts in future.

Ms. Tachco (United States of America): The United States would like to thank Ambassador Nusseibeh and Ambassador Drobnyak, co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly for the seventy-first session. They led the Working Group through a robust series of meetings on the General Assembly's working methods, the authority of the General Assembly and the strengthening of the Office of the President of the

General Assembly, in addition to other important issues. Their leadership throughout the session, from our first meetings last January to the successful negotiation of the wide-ranging resolution 71/323, which was adopted in September, ensured that the Group's efforts were productive and focused on improving the work of the General Assembly.

We have accomplished a lot within the framework of the Ad Hoc Working Group, including improving balloting processes for elections. We also moved ahead in curbing gifts provided by Member States in the General Assembly Hall on election days. We must now move forward with developing a code of ethics for future elections.

Secretary-General Guterres, whose election was preceded by the Group's efforts to improve the transparency and inclusiveness of the process for the selection of the Secretary-General, is off to a strong start in his first year of office. His efforts to implement meaningful United Nations reform enjoy wide support among Member States, and he can count on our continued support for reforming this institution so that it can better serve the peoples we represent.

Resolution 71/323 details many of our efforts to improve and streamline the General Assembly's work and make the body more efficient. The United States believes that the General Assembly should look for opportunities to consolidate and streamline its agenda, and to consider grouping or reviewing topics at greater intervals, as appropriate. The General Assembly and its Main Committees should continue to identify resolutions suitable for biennial or triennial review, as outlined in resolution 71/323.

The Working Group could itself model that increased efficiency and effectiveness by considering shifting the consideration of the draft resolution on General Assembly revitalization to a biennial process. Additional time between draft resolutions on revitalization would allow for more thorough implementation and would move us closer to achieving what we set out to accomplish — a more efficient, effective General Assembly.

We should remain mindful and prudent, during our Working Group meetings and negotiations on the next revitalization draft resolution, with regard to any suggestions that could entail financial implications. Part of improving the efficiency of the General Assembly means working within existing resources.

We also believe that the Working Group should stay focused on its core competence of strengthening the work of the General Assembly. Rededicating ourselves to the Working Group's fundamental remit will ensure that our work will result in concrete improvements.

The United States is committed to working with fellow Member States to revitalize the work of the General Assembly. We look forward to working within the Ad Hoc Working Group during the seventy-second session to achieve that goal.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We welcome the convening of today's meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the resolutions of the Assembly and on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. We would like to congratulate the Permanent Representative of Croatia and the Permanent Representative of Colombia on their appointment as co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly. We wish them every success in their work. We also attentively listened to the statement made by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák (see A/72/PV.48).

We note the work of the Permanent Representative of Croatia and the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates as co-Chairs of the Working Group during the previous session. Thanks to the rigorous efforts of Member States under their leadership, resolution 71/323, adopted on 8 September, includes a number of important provisions designed to further revitalize the working methods of the General Assembly and its Main Committees so as to avoid possible communication issues with the Secretariat and improve the publication of *The Journal of the United Nations*, and so on. The document is also fairly balanced.

The Russian delegation is ready to continue to participate constructively in the efforts to revitalize the General Assembly. However, such efforts must be depoliticized and be aimed primarily at improving the effectiveness of the Assembly. The latter goal can largely be achieved by further streamlining its working methods and its agenda, which remains overly busy. In particular, it is necessary to continue to work towards considering some items of the agenda of the General Assembly on a two or three-yearly basis and removing the ones that are no longer relevant.

We support the initiatives to ease the workload of the high-level week as part of the general debate. During their stay in New York, Heads of State and Government, as well as Foreign Ministers, already have an intensive schedule of bilateral contacts. It is advisable to limit the number of high-level events for that period; they could instead be evenly distributed throughout the session. Furthermore, it is important that such changes take into account the interests of all Member States.

We believe that any initiative should be based on strict observance of the distribution of prerogatives among the main organs of the United Nations, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The Security Council is often criticized for encroaching on the competences of other United Nations bodies, which is a concern that we share. Our colleagues in the Security Council know that we are cautious when it comes to discussing topical or thematic issues in the Council. We believe that the Security Council should focus on country-specific issues and issues on which it can and must take concrete decisions.

In recent years, much attention has been paid to improving the transparency and democratic nature of procedures for the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General. We are prepared to continue to work on the sensible streamlining of the existing process. However, we believe that ideas on that subject require painstaking study, primarily on the subject of strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations, according to which the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. Moreover, we should not forget that the main task is to select the most worthy candidate for the post of Secretary-General. The desire to excessively codify that procedure is fraught with undesirable consequences.

As for the implementation of General Assembly resolutions, the problem there seems to be not only a lack of political will, which is certainly necessary for their effective implementation, but also how practical those decisions are. Before proposing a particular draft resolution, it is important to consider the extent to which it can actually be implemented if approved.

Mr. Drobnyak (Croatia): I have the honour to deliver a brief joint statement on behalf of the Permanent Representative of Colombia, Ambassador María Emma Mejía Vélez, and myself.

Allow me, at the outset, to thank the President of the General Assembly for the confidence entrusted in me to continue serving as co-Chair of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly. I wish to also express gratitude to Ambassador Mejía Vélez for accepting to join me in facilitating such a vital, important and far-reaching process. I truly look forward to our cooperation in the coming months, and I am confident of her valuable contribution to our work.

Let me also warmly thank my co-Chair during the seventy-first session, Ambassador Lana Zaki Nusseibeh of the United Arab Emirates, for her support, guidance and friendship over the past year. I also wish her every success in steering another major reform process in the United Nations. It has indeed been a privilege to work alongside her.

Evidently, there is widespread recognition of the fact that the resolutions adopted on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly represent a success for all of us, for the United Nations and Member States alike. They serve as the best proof of how much can be achieved through constructive, reform-oriented and consensus-based work. They are the result of the willingness of Member States to engage in a thorough and substantive debate on numerous issues that are vital for the improvement and enrichment of the work of the General Assembly. And we have certainly achieved a lot in the past, including introducing innovations in the selection and appointment of the Secretary-General, strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly and increasing its accountability, and, most recently, improving the working methods of the General Assembly.

It would be a daunting task to try to present a precise overview of all our achievements, which would certainly make these remarks much longer. But our previous successes make us certain that we can continue building on the progress achieved to date. We have taken very careful note of yesterday's (see A/72/PV.48) and today's debate, and we will take everything that has been said as guidelines for our upcoming work. We stand at the disposal of Member States for consultations, the exchange of views and the exploration of new ideas in the month to come.

In conclusion, let me say that we look forward to another fruitful year of deliberations in the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of

the General Assembly, and we once again express our appreciation for being entrusted with such an important task in the current General Assembly session.

Mr. Kazi (Bangladesh): Bangladesh conveys its profound condolences on the tragic loss of lives resulting from the earthquake in Iraq and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the weekend. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their bereaved families.

We align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Algeria on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (see A/72/PV.48).

We thank the President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session for his introductory statement (see A/72/PV.48) and for reaffirming his commitment to the oath of office and the code of conduct through tangible action and results. We hear his call on the priorities that deserve the added attention of Member States, and we affirm our trust in his able leadership of the most inclusive and representative organ that is the United Nations.

Bangladesh attaches great importance to the mandated roles and functions of the principal organs of the United Nations, as envisaged by the Charter. It is crucial that the functional relations among the principal organs be further strengthened while maintaining respect for their respective competences and responsibilities. The efficiency of the Organization can be ensured primarily through efforts to build synergy and complementarities and avoid duplication and overlap. It does not help to create unwarranted barriers in the work of the various organs, but it also serves no particular interest to encroach unnecessarily into each other's mandated areas. We believe that the monthly meetings among the Presidents of the principal organs would help make a difference in that regard.

Bangladesh welcomes the adoption by consensus of resolutions 69/321, 70/305 and 71/323 over the past three years and looks forward to similar constructive engagements among delegations during the current session. We urge delegations to recognize the need to demonstrate flexibility in addressing certain long-outstanding critical issues. We take note of the incremental changes being made, but stress the need for a much bolder and more decisive approach in order to make the United Nations truly fit for purpose.

There have been some notable changes in the appointment process of the Secretary-General, in

the conduct of elections to various bodies, in further strengthening the role, effectiveness and institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly and in promoting gender parity at the level of senior management. We underscore the need to sustain those trends with the paramount interest of making the United Nations more efficient and effective, and reinforcing the role and authority of the General Assembly.

Bangladesh continues to take an interest in the reform of the working methods of the General Assembly and its main Committees. In that regard, we see merit in regular briefings and consultations among and within the relevant entities, including the General Committee, the Main Committees and the Committee on Conferences. That requires our collective understanding and determination to ensure due prominence for the general debate segment of the annual General Assembly session. It also calls for the utmost discretion and consideration among all groups and delegations to adhere to the arrangements made in the Main Committees for enhancing efficiency in documentation, co-sponsorships and time management.

Bangladesh appreciates the user-friendly changes made to the format, production and editing of *The Journal of the United Nations*. We stress the need for further consultations with Member States with a view to addressing some of the remaining inconveniences. We recommend dialogue between the Secretariat and Permanent Missions at regular intervals in order to help address issues of mutual interest and concern in an interactive, transparent and constructive manner.

Bangladesh strongly advocates that General Assembly meetings, conferences, thematic debates and other sessions be scheduled in a way that would allow for and encourage the active participation of least developed countries (LDCs). We appreciate the facilitation of the participation of capital-based LDC representatives, including through trust fund arrangements for certain high-level conferences. It is critical that the main objective and purpose of such funding arrangements be maintained in order to enable those delegations truly deserving of such support to access such meetings without undue competition or encumbrance. In a similar spirit, further consultations are required in order to make the election campaign procedures fair and equitable for all candidates.

Bangladesh looks forward to constructively engaging in the thematic debates and negotiations on the future draft resolutions prepared under the auspices of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly. We welcome the new co-Chairs, the Permanent Representative of Croatia and the Permanent Representative of Colombia, and assure them of our delegation's continued cooperation

in what they have just termed "a vital, important and far-reaching process."

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on these agenda items.

The Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda items 120 and 121.

The meeting rose at 10.50 a.m.