



General Assembly

Seventy-fifth session

26th plenary meeting
Friday, 13 November 2020, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Agenda items 125 and 126 (continued)

Implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations

Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

Draft decision (A/75/L.7/Rev.1)

Draft amendment (A/75/L.15)

The President: We shall now proceed to consider draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 and the draft amendment contained in A/75/L.15. In that connection, I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Nakano (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): This statement is made in the context of rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which states that

“No resolution involving expenditure shall be recommended by a committee for approval by the General Assembly unless it is accompanied by an estimate of expenditures prepared by the Secretary-General. No resolution in respect of which expenditures are anticipated by the Secretary-General shall be voted by the General Assembly until the Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee) has had an opportunity of stating the effect of the proposal upon the budget estimates of the United Nations.”

Under the terms of operative paragraph (g) (iii) of draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1,

“Member States may vote ‘in favour’ or ‘against’ or indicate ‘abstain’ through an electronic means provided by the Secretariat within the existing resources and specified by the President before the voting period, which shall be one hour; the votes cast by Member States shall become visible to other Member States five minutes before the closure of the voting period”.

In order to implement operative paragraph (g) (iii), additional expenditures would need to be incurred by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in the amount of \$25,900 in 2020, for software development services, quality assurance and deployment on the new e-deleGATE platform. However, the additional requirements in the amount of \$25,900 would be met from within existing resources. Accordingly, should the General Assembly adopt draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, no additional requirements would arise under the programme budget for the year 2020.

Following the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Budgetary and Administrative Questions in paragraph 67 of its report A/54/7, which was endorsed by the General Assembly, the Secretariat wishes to inform the Assembly of the difficulties that the phrase “within existing resources” poses for the implementation of mandated activities.

The President: Delegations wishing to make a statement in explanation of vote before the voting on the draft decision or the draft amendment are invited to do so now in one intervention. Before giving the floor for

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explanations of vote, I would like to remind members that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Pedroso Cuesta (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would like to explain its vote on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, entitled “Procedure for decision-making in the General Assembly when an in-person meeting is not possible”. Since the start of the discussion on whether to set up a mechanism for remote virtual decision-making in the General Assembly, my delegation, along with others, has conveyed in a timely, clear and transparent manner its legitimate concerns about such an initiative. However, the crux of these concerns, which are substantive, procedural and technical in nature, has not been addressed or resolved. We firmly believe that this draft decision has serious implications for the rules of procedure and established practice of the General Assembly and that the proposed mechanism is unable to replicate the wide range of procedural rights and options available to Member States, as established in the existing rules of procedure.

Beyond the legal discussion on whether or not this draft decision constitutes a modification of the rules of procedure, the truth is that if it is adopted, it is possible that the application of rules accepted by all Member States could be suspended in order to activate a mechanism that, as we have seen, is controversial for many. In our opinion, any decision that affects the application of the General Assembly’s rules of procedure should be adopted by consensus.

The General Assembly’s rules of procedure are the only thing safeguarding equality among all Member States and their participation in the work of this organ. The development of new rules or mechanisms, even if they are exceptional and temporary, must fully respect the principle of equality. The draft decision before us does not do that. The rules governing the work of the General Assembly are objective in order to avoid interpretations based on particular political interests. However, the draft decision includes ambiguous and subjective references that would be open to interpretation and could lead to inappropriate use of the proposed mechanism. Moreover, we note serious inconsistencies between the arguments put forward to justify the creation of the mechanism and its characteristics as laid down in the draft decision.

On the one hand, it is argued that it is necessary to establish an exceptional mechanism for situations in

which the work of the General Assembly is seriously disrupted, and yet the scope that is proposed is standard. If the proposed mechanism really is exceptional and to be used only in the most pressing circumstances, its scope should be reduced to the most urgent issues vital to the continuity of the Assembly’s work. Here, it is fair to acknowledge the sponsors’ attempt to incorporate language conducive to a restrictive application of the mechanism. However, due to the ambiguity of the formula, there are no guarantees that the mechanism will not be abused in order to adopt proposals on non-urgent or non-essential issues, many of which might be controversial, by taking advantage of a context that allows only for minimal substantive negotiation.

On the other hand, the establishment of the mechanism is justified by the need to ensure the vitality of the General Assembly as the most democratic and representative organ of the United Nations. However, the formula used to activate the mechanism does not provide for consultation of the entire membership. In other words, a small group of people would be taking a decision that would have an impact on the rights of all 193 Member States, which is not very democratic. In our view, the decision to apply any exceptional mechanism such as the one that has been proposed should rest with the Member States, especially in the organ of universal representation *par excellence*.

We also have serious concerns about the voting process through the mechanism. The fact that votes cast are visible to the rest of the membership only at the end of the vote and that it is possible to change votes without restriction within the voting period is neither transparent nor trustworthy. On the contrary, this would promote the ability of developed countries that have sufficient technology to monitor the voting process in real time to put pressure on developing countries. Such a process would differ from how votes are held in the Hall, where votes are visible as they are cast, thus guaranteeing the integrity, transparency and reliability of decision-making processes.

As if that were not enough, the new mechanism relies on digital platforms that by definition are vulnerable to cyberattacks and would therefore be prone to manipulation, either against specific countries or with the general intention of obstructing the work of the General Assembly. Furthermore, not all countries have the same levels of development, technology, equipment or Internet access for participating in the voting process, following up or making decisions

in real time from their capitals. That is compounded by the possibility that decisions might be taken on several draft texts simultaneously, which would also complicate the task for smaller missions. In practice, therefore, the new mechanism will contribute only to worsening the disadvantage that developing countries, particularly smaller ones, already find themselves at, which is unacceptable and contrary to the spirit of our Organization.

None of the aspects addressed in this explanation of vote are new to those promoting this initiative. They are the same concerns that we have been voicing since this process began, and they have been disregarded just as much as they have been repeated. While my delegation recognizes that the General Assembly must be able to fulfil its mandate under any circumstances, we firmly believe that this initiative is not acceptable and we have put forward several alternative options, which have not been considered in depth. Despite the serious misgivings we had and still have with regard to the draft decision, my delegation engaged in the negotiations in a constructive spirit. We made several proposals that we believe could have resolved some of the key concerns we have raised, but there was little or no flexibility on the part of the sponsors of the initiative.

Finally, I would like to express our disappointment at the unbalanced and hasty manner in which the final part of this process was conducted. The fact that a date was set for the adoption of the draft decision before the very limited negotiations had even ended indicates that there was no genuine intention to present the General Assembly with a universally acceptable mechanism. The obvious lack of consensus on this proposal, as well as Member States' low participation in the mere two consultations that were held, would also indicate the need to continue discussing the issue. Yet a path has been chosen to impose the vision of one group of countries irrespective of the legitimate concerns of others. My delegation is therefore left with no option but to vote against the draft decision.

We fully share the goal of finding a way to enable the General Assembly to continue its indispensable work in any circumstances. However, this is not the solution. We advocate for continuing to explore other options in a balanced way to achieve that common goal.

Mr. Yao Shaojun (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China would like to express its regret that the Assembly failed to adopt the motion proposed by China and Russia

yesterday (see A/75/PV.25). The result of yesterday's vote shows that e-voting has caused serious division among Member States. China will vote against draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, proposed by Liechtenstein and other countries, mainly for two reasons.

First, the draft fails to address the legitimate concerns of many countries, including China. E-voting is not the best option to ensure the General Assembly's business continuity and effective functioning in exceptional circumstances. China participated actively and constructively in the consultations and, along with like-minded countries, proposed amendments, including on the scope of application and a triggering mechanism. Unfortunately, the sponsors ignored or rejected reasonable proposals. As a result, China and the other countries involved were compelled to propose a draft amendment that we hope will get the support of Member States.

Secondly, e-voting creates serious loopholes. It does not guarantee Member States' right to make procedural requests in accordance with the Assembly's rules of procedure. On a technical level, we cannot rule out risks associated with cybersecurity and the potential manipulation of voting results. On a practical level, e-voting is unfair to the Permanent Missions of small- and medium-sized countries with insufficient personnel and equipment, as access cannot be ensured and there are additional burdens and risks that could restrict or even deprive them of their legitimate voting rights.

China would like to reiterate that this is not a political battle but an important matter bearing on the rights and interests of every Member State. Should exceptional circumstances, such as the pandemic, arise again, we must stay united and work together to respond to the crisis, ensure the effective functioning of the General Assembly and uphold multilateralism. The draft decision proposed by Liechtenstein does not solve the problem but rather sows disagreements and division. China therefore calls on Member States to vote against it.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am taking the floor to explain our position on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. During the period in which the General Assembly was unable to hold in-person meetings, my delegation welcomed the consideration of draft resolutions under decision 74/544 as the consensus-based instrument to deal with circumstances arising from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. We

were convinced that if urgent and vital issues had to be considered, technical and organizational arrangements could feasibly be made to allow the General Assembly to take appropriate action. We were therefore successful in keeping the Assembly alive and relevant.

The draft decision we are discussing today goes beyond the situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and attempts to define general methods for exceptional situations when the General Assembly is unable to convene in-person meetings. Furthermore, it fails to provide for open, inclusive, transparent and orderly consultations and dialogue among Member States on such an important issue. We join other Member States in highlighting the technical issues and concerns with regard to the security and reliability of digital voting and acknowledge the concerns about the full applicability of the General Assembly's rules of procedure for voting in absentia. We firmly believe that broad application of this mechanism will inevitably change the Assembly's working methods and rules of procedure. In addition, we join those Member States that asked for the draft decision to be referred to the Sixth Committee in accordance with rule 163 of the rules of procedure, because that Committee is the best place to deal with the issue, after all.

My delegation regrets that despite the divergent views among Member States, the sponsors of the draft decision opted not to hold the appropriate informal consultations that would give all Member States an opportunity to raise their legitimate concerns and discuss different proposals to address them. We also deeply regret that contrary to well-known practices for multilateral bodies, an issue related to the working methods of an international organization is not being considered on a basis of consensus. My delegation has been acting in good faith since the beginning and has been in close consultation with a large number of Member States in an effort to bridge the gap between different views. In consultation with the President, we have tried to convince the sponsors to give due consideration to the legitimate concerns of a number of Member States. Unfortunately, the main sponsors showed insufficient flexibility and chose to go for a quick adoption of the text with minor cosmetic changes.

It is our understanding that regardless of the various difficulties associated with the current text, a majority of countries believe that any method of in absentia voting should apply only to the limited number of resolutions that are essential and necessary for the

smooth work of the United Nations. Based on that understanding, my country joined the others to propose an amendment to the draft resolution to that effect.

In conclusion, we firmly believe that at a time of pervasive crisis, we, the United Nations, should work together closely, be more flexible and focus on essential issues. At this juncture, we need more cohesion than division. We should therefore not rush to adopt a draft decision that does not enjoy consensus. Instead of pushing for the adoption of a divisive text, we should work hard to arrive at a consensus on an issue that is extremely important to all Member States.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): Yesterday I had the honour to introduce draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 on behalf of 43 sponsors (see A/75/PV.25). I am now taking the floor to address the amendment proposed in A/75/L.15 and to explain why our group is opposed to it.

Let me first say that we have engaged in particular with our colleagues from Cuba, who were active participants in the town-hall meetings that we organized. We had good, friendly bilateral engagement with them after that and regret that we were not able to come to a full agreement with the Cuban delegation and those who have supported the draft amendment. We are encouraged and grateful to see that they have engaged on this text and agree with the principle of e-voting being made available to the Assembly.

The draft amendment essentially has two parts. It addresses the questions of trigger and scope. These are the two areas of the text that were subject to the most intensive consultations after we resumed work on this text with our partners. On the question of the trigger, concerns were expressed about ensuring that the membership has a say in and control over when the procedure in the draft decision would be triggered. We share those concerns and have made revisions to our text that reflect what partners said to us bilaterally and in the town-hall meetings. The language in our draft does in fact reflect the established practice of the United Nations, including in particular the language used by you, Mr. President, on the last occasion that the United Nations building was temporarily closed so that we could not meet here. We offered additional elements that would have reflected intergovernmental involvement, but unfortunately that was not sufficient to convince our partners to accept our text.

The draft amendment introduces an element that in practice makes it impossible to apply to procedures and thereby defeats the draft decision's very purpose, by making the application of the mechanism conditional on a recommendation by the General Committee. The General Committee itself would face the same conditions preventing the General Assembly from meeting in person and would therefore not be able to vote on a recommendation giving each member of the General Committee a veto on applying the mechanism. I want to draw the attention of the membership to the fact that the draft decision provides that a majority of Member States can ensure that the General Assembly meets again in person, even against the will of the President, should such a scenario arise.

The second part of the amendment pertains to the scope of the application of the voting mechanism as outlined in the draft decision. I addressed this aspect in detail yesterday, so I will summarize it as briefly as possible. We have done very extensive work on the scope of application, which is indeed extremely restricted as a result of the consultations we have held. First, it is limited to the most exceptional of circumstances, in other words, to situations of extreme crisis when we are unable to come to the United Nations building even while respecting very restrictive safety measures. Secondly, the Assembly has to be unable to meet for a prolonged period of time. So a temporary closure, such as the one that we experienced together a couple of weeks ago, would not qualify for the application of the procedure. Furthermore, in order to safeguard the interests of Member States, it will clearly always be possible for proponents of draft resolutions not to subject the proposals they bring before the Assembly to an e-voting procedure, and postponement can always be an option. Finally — and some speakers have mentioned this before — I want to quote from our draft decision, which says that

“the present decision shall be applied in as limited a manner as possible and with a particular focus on the continuity of essential functions of the General Assembly”.

Those are all the restrictions we have put in place. As I also made clear yesterday, it is our hope that we will be able to continue doing our business the way we are doing it today and that we will not be forced to resort to this extraordinary procedure at all. That said, we do not agree with the substance of the second part of the draft amendment because it would prevent

the Assembly from adopting draft resolutions that are of political relevance. We are of the view that on the contrary, the Assembly's voice must be heard on such questions, in particular during crisis situations. An obvious example is that of the omnibus resolution on the pandemic itself (resolution 74/306), which, after being negotiated for several weeks, would not, per the language contained in the draft, have been subject to an e-voting procedure.

For those reasons, we will vote against the draft amendment and call on the membership to do the same. We look forward to the adoption of draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 and are grateful for the support we have received from the membership.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bearing in mind Nicaragua's firm commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and multilateralism, our country attaches great importance to the decision-making process of the General Assembly. Since these exceptional times began, we have always said that the United Nations must set an example in responding to the pandemic and that it is essential that we be able to continue our work on important matters in those difficult times. We applaud the efforts that have made it possible to vote in person at United Nations Headquarters since the beginning of September and the fact that the Organization has demonstrated its ability to take into consideration all the relevant safety and health protocols in the context of the pandemic.

Nicaragua has participated constructively in the discussions on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, which we are considering today, while always reaffirming the importance of complying with the General Assembly's rules of procedure. But so far these discussions have been imposed by a group of countries without taking account of the importance of ensuring a consensus among all Member States on the proposed changes to the rules of procedure. We believe that business continuity is essential for the United Nations, but we do not see the urgency of rushing to a vote on this issue. Nicaragua believes that the General Assembly should not rush into a divided and unequal vote on the issue of voting in absentia, and I reiterate that this decision is being imposed and will compromise the General Assembly and its established transparent, inclusive and democratic rules of procedure.

We are concerned about the impact of these changes to the rules of procedure, especially through unforeseen

effects that no one can guarantee will not happen. We too consider that this decision is a matter for the Sixth Committee, where the advice and opinions of every State can be heard along with the legal opinions of the Department of Legal Affairs. It is vital to bear in mind that delegations from developing countries are at a disadvantage in every aspect of electronic absentee voting, humanly, technologically and logistically. In practice the new mechanism would therefore only help to deepen the disadvantage at which developing countries, particularly smaller ones, already find themselves, something that is unacceptable and goes against both the spirit and the letter of our Organization.

It is truly sad and regrettable that in these tragic times of pandemic, when we all say that we must work in an environment in which cooperation, collaboration, flexibility and especially working by consensus prevail, practice tells us quite the opposite. The intention to cooperate, collaborate and reach consensus seems to apply only when it benefits the interests of developed countries. Accordingly, our delegation is not in a position to support this draft decision and will vote against it. We hope that our sisters and brothers from developing countries will also vote against it in order to protect the voice and vote of our countries.

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica, as a member of the group of countries that presented draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, will vote against the draft amendment (A/75/L.15) presented by the representative of Cuba for the following reasons.

The first is that the draft amendment makes the application of the mechanism conditional on a recommendation from the General Committee. The amendment ignores the fact that the General Committee would be dealing with the same conditions that would prevent the General Assembly from meeting in person. In addition, it gives each member of the General Committee the power to veto the implementation of the mechanism, adding an extra and completely unnecessary layer of difficulty to the decision-making process.

The second is that the draft amendment restricts the scope to budgetary and purely procedural issues. This would prevent the General Assembly from taking any political decisions, which is precisely the mandate of each and every State represented in the General Assembly. Ensuring that the General Assembly is functional and politically relevant at all times is not an option but a necessity, and it is our responsibility. The

proposed amendment prevents that and is incompatible with the rules of procedure, which do not provide any basis for limiting the scope of decisions taken by the General Assembly. We have a collective responsibility to better prepare for future crises.

For those reasons, Costa Rica respectfully calls on States to vote against the proposed amendment, as it goes against the very purpose of the draft decision.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Humankind passed through many stages before reaching the levels of progress and development that we are proud of today, the result of accumulated experience over the ages. But we should remember that prehistoric humans, despite their weakness and lack of resources, had the wisdom to know that individuals cannot face the difficulties of life alone. That was the basis on which we launched the idea of the social compact that paved the way for the creation of modern societies.

With the increasing challenges facing humankind, the belief of prehistoric humans shifted to the idea of the creation of contemporary societies. States have recognized that no matter their size and capacities, they cannot survive on their own. Thus began the stages of first the bilateral and then the collective coalitions that today we call multilateral diplomacy. The United Nations is the supreme expression of multilateralism. We therefore have had a duty to tackle our problems, difficulties and challenges, especially in the wake of the two world wars that confronted humankind and claimed millions of lives and that, members will recall, were the reason why wise men and women acted at the time and cooperated to create the United Nations Organization. That great heritage was bequeathed to us by our founding fathers, and with a great heritage comes greater responsibility, especially when serious challenges threaten it.

My country's delegation received the letter the President circulated containing draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, presented by a group of Member States, on electronic voting. As with any new decision, we have considered this new proposal positively and openly. We have given it serious consideration in the hope that it will bring good for all. When we examined its content in depth, we found a number of thematic, procedural and legal gaps that I will discuss briefly.

First, the proposed new mechanism contradicts, albeit temporarily, the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. Those are rules

that we have spent decades creating and implementing so that they have reached their present form in the interests of all Member States and based on consensus.

Secondly, the draft will set a precedent in the work of the United Nations and will change how work is conducted in the Organization, especially since it deprives States of the privilege of face-to-face meetings and the right to vote. Furthermore, the elements of the draft are shrouded in ambiguity. There is no time frame for the validity of the mechanism, which does not explicitly state the exceptional circumstances that would lead us to use it. It is as if the exception will constitute the basis for our work.

Thirdly, this new mechanism cannot be considered just a matter of form or a technical amendment to the current rules of procedure, as touted by the sponsors of the draft. It is quite the opposite. It only undermines effective, sound procedures that we have agreed on. It breaches consensus in the service of political interests and agendas that are not in Member States' common interest. It also imposes a number of artificial rights that favour a group of States at the expense of the international community in general.

Fourthly, the basis on which the United Nations was founded is the equality of all, as stated in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations, and the right of countries to speak and record their votes in absolute equality. Today that sacred right is being put into the hands of an electronic mechanism that reveals or hides the votes of countries as it pleases, thereby undermining credibility and transparency. The mechanism also requires fairly advanced technical means that may not be available to many delegations. Proof of this lies in the problems we face in the informal meetings we hold via videoconferencing.

These and many other differences prompted a large number of Member States to hold a meeting with the President of the General Assembly. Many of the countries even submitted a joint letter requesting that the vote on this draft decision be postponed for more legal, technical and procedural consultations and research in order to establish the most appropriate mechanism to serve the interests of all Member States. Unfortunately, neither the letter nor our concerns and considerations of sovereignty received a favourable response. When our group of countries said that it was prepared to initiate discussions with the sponsors and proposed a number of amendments that could serve the

general interest, the sponsors' generous response was to allocate a mere two pro forma meetings in which a small group of countries took part, without giving sufficient opportunity to all to express their views and without any genuine intention of bridging the gaps. That is why we are in the voting phase today.

What concerns us is not the other side's lack of openness and its unwillingness to cooperate in order to come up with a draft decision enabling us to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and other hardships and assure the continued work of the United Nations. What truly concerns us is the incomprehensible haste with which the draft has gone from a simple proposal to a vote on its adoption. I began my remarks citing prehistoric humans, but is it possible that prehistoric humans were wiser than humans today? What would the founding fathers say if they saw the current attempts of certain Governments to change our noble Organization and strip it of its content?

What we see before us is very worrisome. Differences on procedural issues have become a general rule, as opposed to efforts to build consensus among Member States. The trend among certain States to issue diktats only weakens diplomacy, sidelines consensus and fosters a unilateral approach to decision-making. That will be negatively reflected in all negotiations on substantive issues. If we strongly disagree on procedure, how can we deal with substantive issues? My delegation is therefore not in a position to support the draft decision and we urge other countries to vote against it.

Ms. Eneström (Sweden): Sweden is part of the core group and rejects the draft amendment A/75/L.15 presented by Cuba. As the representatives of Liechtenstein and Costa Rica have said, making the proposed decision-making mechanism conditional on a recommendation by the General Committee makes it impractical, if not impossible, to apply. If the General Assembly cannot meet in person, neither can the General Committee. The Committee would therefore be unable to take decisions, which would result in giving each of its members a veto. Sweden does not want to see restrictions of scope such as the amendment proposes. We need the General Assembly to be able to take any political decisions, even in extraordinary circumstances. It must be fully functional at all times. That is the entire purpose of the core group's draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 — to enable Member States to fully exercise their rights under the Charter of the

United Nations and the General Assembly's rules of procedure. We therefore encourage Member States to vote against the draft amendment.

Mr. Maung (Myanmar): I am taking the floor to explain Myanmar's position on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. Myanmar has always considered the business continuity of the General Assembly to be extremely important in these extraordinary circumstances. The draft decision before us concerns the decision-making procedure of the General Assembly, the principal organ of the United Nations. Our position is that any initiative that might affect the General Assembly's decision-making process should take the concerns of all Member States into account, and should be agreed on by all Member States and adopted by consensus. This draft decision on e-voting will have serious implications for the rules of procedure and established practices of the General Assembly. Moreover, on a practical level, in its current formulation it would put small delegations like Myanmar in a difficult position, with the possibility of multiple resolutions being considered through e-voting simultaneously, and in addition to the technical difficulties that Member States might face during the e-voting process.

In order to make the mechanism fair for all Member States, Myanmar, together with like-minded countries, has proposed an amendment (A/75/L.15), which includes provisions for limiting the scope of e-voting to essential operational decisions of the General Assembly. Accordingly, my delegation will vote against draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1.

Mr. Guerra Sansonetti (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We have requested the floor to explain our position on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. My delegation reiterates the importance we attach to ensuring both the continuity of activities and the privilege of reaching and adopting decisions by consensus, and to the need to strictly observe the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, in particular with regard to alternative mechanisms for decision-making when it is not possible to hold meetings in person. In our view, proceeding differently might not be a very positive precedent for the future work of the principal organs of the United Nations.

We participated constructively in the discussions, but our position on this issue has not changed. The draft decision still does not address the issues that were discussed during the process that was facilitated

a couple of months ago. We are also aware of the fact that if it stays the way it is now, it will open the door to misinterpretation, which in turn could undermine the constitutional nature of our work. The issues include the method considered for establishing a quorum; the complexity and lack of clarity of the method considered for dealing with proposals of a procedural nature, such as motions for a separate vote on specific parts of a proposal or amendment; points of order; decisions of the President; ways of protecting and securing the mechanism against any manipulation, including the misuse of information and communication technologies, which could call into question the legitimacy, integrity and transparency of a result; time frames for votes to be visible once they are cast virtually, which could enable the exertion of coercion or external pressure to change original voting intentions; and the additional burden on delegations, particularly those from the developing world, owing to potential technological challenges that would create an uneven playing field.

If the voting mechanism can be invoked only in exceptional circumstances, its scope should be limited to the most urgent issues that are critical to the continuity of the General Assembly's work, that is, key draft decisions and resolutions on the adoption of budgets for agenda items under the remit of the Fifth Committee; the extension of mandates previously authorized by the General Assembly; and the rescheduling or adjournment of meetings and events that form part of the mandate of the General Assembly. Furthermore, if the General Assembly's rules of procedure are the guarantee of due process and Member States' equal participation in its work, then any initiative aimed at partly or totally modifying them should comply with the constitutional principle contained in part 1 (c) of annex II to the rules of procedure, which provides that such initiatives be referred to the Sixth Committee for further examination of their impact and consequences. That exercise would also promote the preservation of a political element that the General Assembly has sought throughout its existence and in the most important moments for the international community — consensus.

As pressing as the situation may be, we the Member States have a duty to preserve the spirit, purpose and *raison d'être* of the General Assembly's rules of procedure. Accordingly, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for the reasons just stated, and bearing in mind the importance of maintaining continuity in the activities of the General Assembly in full compliance

with its rules of procedure, will vote against the draft decision.

Mr. Kakanur (India): We appreciate the efforts made by the proponents of draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 to generate a conversation on the preparedness and business continuity of the General Assembly, and we engaged in the informal consultations on the draft decision in that spirit. However, we cannot support the proposal before us for the following reasons.

India remains unconvinced that this draft decision is even necessary. The provisional procedures adopted at the peak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis worked very well. We conducted essential business, successfully held crucial elections and adopted more than 70 resolutions. Big and small countries alike participated and had their say.

Silence is golden, and we all witnessed the power of silence in action as it was broken on several occasions when draft resolutions were put forward over the last few months. The silence procedure that we all agreed to during the seventy-fourth session is not a veto in the hands of Member States. It simply gives equal power to all countries, irrespective of their size. At the same time, a veto for all is a veto for none. The silence procedure ensured that all Member States were heard and their views accommodated. The procedure was a great leveller of the playing field and ensured that we all went ahead together, with no one left behind. Let us not forget that even the seventy-fifth anniversary declaration (resolution 75/1) was negotiated this way, and we are all proud of that outcome. So why fix something that has worked well?

The draft proposal before us requires more detailed, inclusive and transparent deliberations, including on seeking relevant legal advice. Such a decision cannot simply be pushed through after a couple of sessions of informal consultations and core-group meetings. As a country that conducts electronic voting for 1.3 billion people, India is not against e-voting. What we are opposed to is the notion that 193 delegates cannot come to the United Nations and physically exercise their vote. This decision in no way prepares the General Assembly for extraordinary times. It merely asks us all to run and hide behind computer screens.

We are not working in a war zone. Even during the First and Second World Wars, diplomacy was active and functioning. Why are we now shying away from a physical meeting during a pandemic? What

is preventing us from congregating in this Hall, with social distancing, in order to take decisions? Every measure has been taken by the Secretariat to make this place safe, including the best of heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems and hospital-grade sanitizers. During the peak of the COVID-19 crisis, did we ask our front-line workers to hide behind computer screens and desks? Did doctors and nurses fail to turn up to work in hospitals? When our doctors, nurses, relief workers, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers can work in troubled circumstances and conflict situations at the height of a pandemic, why can we, as United Nations diplomats, in all our suits and fancy clothes, not walk across to the United Nations Headquarters to cast our votes?

At a time when the world wants action from the United Nations, it is disappointing that all that we can successfully come up with is to take decisions from the confines of our homes and offices. That is disrespectful to all the front-line workers who have not shrunk from turning up at their workplaces every morning at the height of the pandemic. We do not want to see the United Nations operate from a cloud platform or Member States become anonymous bots negotiating in private chats and operating in a wired world. The United Nations is meant to handle real-world problems. As diplomats, let us not put ourselves on a pedestal where we look like a privileged class to every other worker who is combating the pandemic.

It is for those reasons that India is unable to support the proposal before us. We urge other delegations to give these factors serious thought and vote against the draft decision. We should be front-line diplomats and vote against it.

Mrs. Ndayishimiye (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): My delegation is taking the floor to express its concern about the voting mechanism proposed by a group of countries and contained in draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. First of all, I would like to state that Burundi is for business continuity in the Organization as a whole and in the General Assembly in particular, and I would like to take advantage of this occasion to commend the extraordinary efforts that have been made to ensure that our work continues.

That said, we would like to emphasize a few points. Although it is important to ensure the continuity of the Assembly's work, we regret that this decision was submitted in haste. We believe that it could have waited

with a view to ensuring its adoption by consensus and allowing for wider consultations so as to bring everyone on board. Unfortunately, the rush and pressure have brought about a collapse of the consensus so dear to the principal deliberative body of the United Nations, which would have benefited this draft decision if the main sponsors had been willing to listen to our concerns.

Electronic voting has several vulnerabilities, as previous speakers have pointed out, related to transparency, cyberattacks and connectivity. Some countries are already experiencing difficulties in following the meetings remotely, but everyone has acted responsibly and made the effort to continue our work. I am not exaggerating when I say that on three occasions my delegation has been unable to make its statement in certain committees. And making statements is not the same as voting. Technology and equipment — because they are what is at issue here — present real problems, and the work of some missions will obviously suffer. This mechanism will only aggravate the disadvantaged situation in which our countries already find themselves in terms of technology and equipment.

It is for all those reasons that my delegation cannot support this draft decision. We would have liked to see the Sixth Committee examine the draft so that it could give its opinion on it and allow every State to express its position in full sovereignty.

Mr. Tozik (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We regret that the proposals made yesterday for consideration by the Sixth Committee were not supported by Member States. We believe that the Sixth Committee is the body whose purview includes the consideration of issues related to the procedural application and possible modifications of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. Draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1 in essence limits the right of Member States to independently determine the format and modalities of the General Assembly's work, making the opportunities for in-person meetings and votes dependent on the opinion of certain individuals in the Secretariat, such as the directors of the medical and security services and others. That is unacceptable. We think that the leading role in determining how the General Assembly functions belongs to the Member States.

In that connection, we support the draft amendment (A/75/L.15) proposed by a group of States. We believe that there are times in the current circumstances when we are all obliged to vote, although we are against

resorting to a vote on such an important issue. The draft amendment is constructive, primarily because it enables us to limit the scope of electronic voting to urgent issues and operational matters such as those related to the budget, the renewal or ending of mandates and the adjournment or rescheduling of events that fall under the mandate of the General Assembly. Secondly, it proposes making the triggering algorithm for e-voting conditional on a recommendation by the General Committee, which would create an additional barrier to potential unnecessary, arbitrary or unilateral decisions.

Without the proposed amendments, we believe that the draft decision is hasty and incomplete and does not take the views of all Member States into consideration. It runs counter to the General Assembly's rules of procedure and undermines its authority. It could ultimately lead to reducing and potentially abolishing in-person meetings in the General Assembly. We call on Member States not to allow this.

Mr. Mabongo (South Africa): We spoke in detail yesterday (see A/75/PV.25) in order to expand on our views on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. We regret that we have reached a stage where voting will take place on it this morning. It is indeed an unfortunate moment when we find ourselves voting on a decision concerning voting. We believe that this is an issue at the United Nations on which no country should be left behind. Certainly, when we vote this morning, many countries — perhaps half of the States Members of the United Nations — will be left behind. Let us be clear. Those who are being left behind today support the full business continuity of the General Assembly. South Africa fully supports the General Assembly's business continuity at all times. We believe that more time for deliberation among Member States would have yielded a better, more inclusive outcome. We are therefore left with no option but to abstain in the voting on this draft decision.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote before the vote.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Nakano (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I would like to announce that since the submission of the draft decision, and in addition to those delegations listed in document A/75/L.7/Rev.1, the following countries have also become sponsors: Andorra, Belgium, Canada,

Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, the Gambia, Hungary, Lebanon, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Sierra Leone and Ukraine.

I would also like to announce that, since the submission of the draft amendment, and in addition to those delegations listed in document A/75/L.15, the following countries have also become sponsors: Belarus, Burundi, Eritrea, the Russian Federation and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The President: In accordance with rule 90 of the rules of procedure, before we proceed to take a decision on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1, the Assembly will first take a decision on the draft amendment contained in document A/75/L.15. A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Dominica, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russian Federation, Sudan, Suriname, Syrian Arab Republic, Turkmenistan, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tonga, Turkey,

Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Vanuatu, Yemen

Abstaining:

Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Bhutan, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cabo Verde, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Fiji, Gambia, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Namibia, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay

The draft amendment was rejected by 33 votes to 86, with 42 abstentions.

The President: Since the draft amendment contained in document A/75/L.15 was not adopted, we will proceed to take a decision on draft decision A/75/L.7/Rev.1. A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Albania, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kiribati, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand,

Timor-Leste, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Tuvalu, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Yemen

Against:

Angola, Belarus, Burundi, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Dominica, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Mozambique, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russian Federation, Syrian Arab Republic, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Zimbabwe

Abstaining:

Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan

The draft decision was adopted by 123 votes to 19, with 29 abstentions (decision 75/510).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Zambia informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The President: Before giving the floor for explanations of vote after the voting, I would like to remind members that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. De Souza Schmitz (Brazil): Brazil voted in favour of decision 75/510 in awareness of the imperative need for the General Assembly to have agreed procedures for ensuring an appropriate level of business continuity when in-person meetings are not possible. Given the significant impact that this decision could have on the work of the United Nations, we would have liked to see a more transparent and inclusive process leading to its adoption. The proposal touches on the General Assembly's rules of procedure and working methods and creates a regime for extraordinary decision-making. That is no ordinary undertaking. The decision should therefore enjoy the broadest possible support as a way to safeguard the legitimacy of decisions taken based on it.

Brazil reiterates how important it is that we restrict the use of this extraordinary procedure to essential decisions only, understood as being those relating to

budgetary or administrative matters and the cancellation or postponement of meetings. We would caution against the abuse of remote voting when in-person meetings are not possible. The General Assembly is more than an organ for adopting resolutions. It is a deliberative forum, a space for dialogue among States, which should collectively build the instruments it adopts. There are limits to doing that virtually, and the implementation of the newly adopted special regime should take that into account.

Mr. Taufan (Indonesia): Indonesia supports decision 75/510, which we have just adopted, on a procedure for decision-making in the General Assembly when in-person meetings are not possible. We understand that the initiative has been under deliberation since very early in April, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic crisis, and has continued to be improved and followed up through negotiations coordinated by the core group of Liechtenstein and other initiator States.

Since the very beginning of the negotiations on this matter, my delegation has always believed that the proposed decision-making procedure will serve as a crucial instrument for ensuring the full functioning of the General Assembly during an emergency or crisis. That is why we have no hesitation at all in supporting the initiative. Furthermore, Indonesia was actively and constructively involved during the negotiations on the matter, including by providing different perspectives. For instance, we expressed our opinion that the scope of the decision should be limited to specific matters, such as administrative or budget issues, time-bound or sensitive matters and the postponement or cancellation of events or meetings. We also fervently hoped that in view of the decision's significant impact on the future, it would be adopted by consensus and that there would be opportunities to conduct further negotiations among Member States.

Nevertheless, now that the decision has been adopted, Indonesia wishes to underline that it should apply strictly to the most exceptional circumstances when an in-person meeting of the General Assembly is not possible and should be focused on ensuring the continuity of the General Assembly's essential functions, as the decision stipulates.

Mr. Chatrnúch (Slovakia): Slovakia voted in favour of decision 75/510, as we fully recognize the need to ensure that the General Assembly stays

entirely operational even in the most challenging circumstances. The procedure enabling action to be taken on draft decisions and resolutions when it is not possible to convene regular meetings of the Assembly is aimed at avoiding a situation similar to the one we have all experienced this year. However, my delegation believes that the decision does not clarify all the difficulties that remote voting may entail. In our view, it amounts to an amendment to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. Since it is likely that adhering to the process for amending the rules of procedure would not have been feasible in the current circumstances, it was extremely important to attempt to exhaust every possible avenue for seeking consensus and thereby enable such a decision to be consensus-based. Last but not least, taking into account the extraordinary nature of the decision, my delegation understands that remote voting should be used only with a limited scope, *ratione materiae*, with a view to enabling the proper functioning of the General Assembly.

Mr. Simonoff (United States of America): The United States thanks Liechtenstein and the core group for their initiative. The General Assembly needs to be prepared to take central operational decisions in the event that it is unable to hold in-person meetings in the future. We hope that day will not come again. But it is important to ensure that the Assembly has the tools it needs for the United Nations to function. The United States therefore voted in favour of decision 75/510 and welcomes its provision that

“the procedure set out in the present decision shall be applied in as limited a manner as possible and with a particular focus on the continuity of essential functions of the General Assembly.”

Accordingly, we should commit to using the procedure to adopt essential operational decisions, such as the adoption of budgets, the extension of mandates and the postponement or cancellation of meetings. It should not be business as usual when the General Assembly is unable to meet in person. Each and every Member State will have to exercise self-restraint. Finally, it is well within the Assembly’s authority to adopt this decision, and we would hope that all Member States will respect any decisions that it may adopt under this process in the unfortunate event that we need to resort to it in future.

Mr. Roscoe (United Kingdom): The United Kingdom voted in favour of decision 75/510 and is pleased to see that it has secured a significant majority.

It will enable the General Assembly to continue to function in exceptional circumstances where in-person meetings are not possible. In doing so, it facilitates the democratic functioning of the Assembly. However, we underline that as the text makes clear, the decision should be applied in as limited a manner as possible. It will enable all Member States to be fully and effectively involved in relevant decision-making. States will be able to exercise their full rights to make proposals, amendments, procedural motions and points of order in line with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. No State or group of States will suffer any prejudice to their rights under the rules of procedure. In that respect, while this is an innovation, we consider the decision to be an application of those rules rather than an amendment that affects the procedural rights of States.

Ms. Mac Loughlin (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Argentine delegation abstained in the voting on decision 75/510, on a procedure for decision-making in the General Assembly when an in-person meeting is not possible. We did so in the belief that a significant modification of the decision-making procedure and rules of procedure of the General Assembly should take into account the concerns of all Member States and should be adopted by consensus or garner as much political support as possible. Today we saw that that did not happen.

We adopted the decision through a majority vote, the preferred option of its proponents, who submitted it before the consultation process had even concluded, having prejudged or led the consultations to the desired outcome in a competitive rather than cooperative manner. The win-or-lose dichotomy that a vote implies disregards the possibility of compromise or other mutually beneficial solutions. The text should have been negotiated without haste, within an open and transparent consultation and negotiation process, allowing all delegations to participate sufficiently and ensuring that there was enough time for agreements to be put together.

I would like to conclude by respectfully calling for this hastily adopted procedure for taking decisions when face-to-face meetings are not possible to be used with the utmost caution and without undermining the work and authority of the General Assembly.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We congratulate the sponsors on the adoption

of decision 75/510. It is their time to enjoy their triumph. They won, after all. Why not celebrate this great success with some champagne tonight?

I would like to thank the sponsors. I want to thank them for plunging the General Assembly into discord and division that could have been avoided. I want to thank them for their conduct of the negotiations and for ignoring the interests of all the delegations that had other proposals. I want to thank them for not allowing all who disagreed with them to have their concerns addressed and taken into account and for not giving all Member States sufficient time to consider their proposals. It seems that they either have not heard or do not want to hear what many delegations have been telling them openly in this Hall for the past two days. Do they understand that they have split the General Assembly? Was that their goal? The explanations that we have heard yesterday (see A/75/PV.25) and today do not stand up to criticism, and some of them, such as the assertion that decisions cannot be made in the General Committee, are simply misleading. They have rammed this decision through. They have been trying to present this as if it is they who support ensuring the business continuity of the General Assembly in any circumstances while we are opposed to it.

We have already spoken about the fact that the difference between us and them is not that they are for the business continuity of the United Nations in crisis situations and we are against it. We too support ensuring that the United Nations can operate in any circumstances. The difference lies in our methods and their refusal to listen to any reasonable arguments. They do not want the decision that they have imposed to reflect the reasonable proposals of other delegations. The vote on the draft amendment (A/75/L.15) proposed by Cuba is just one more example of that. We want to once again express our deep disappointment at the methods they have chosen in order to get this dubious decision adopted at any cost and the disrespect they have shown to other delegations during the voting process. They have managed to get it done, but what is there to celebrate?

The Charter of the United Nations and the rules of procedure envisage voting as a decision-making tool of the General Assembly. However, they also stipulate that any decision should be taken in accordance with those rules. The decision that was adopted today is unprecedented and is aimed at creating an alternative voting system that clearly fails to correspond not only

to the rules of procedure of the General Assembly but even to common sense. Furthermore, the process for adopting the decision itself does not correspond to the rules of procedure, and as a result is of dubious legitimacy. Mr. President, we recommend that you and to all your successors in your post refrain from using this process in order to ensure that the disagreements within the General Assembly do not worsen.

We were surprised to hear from the Secretariat today that the decision would not entail any budgetary consequences. However, we are aware that the Secretariat had started to develop an e-voting system before there was any mandate to do so. The claims that the decision would not entail any budgetary consequences sound extremely optimistic, especially in the light of the liquidity crisis at the United Nations. For our part, we will request further clarification on this issue and will closely monitor the accuracy of this declaration regarding budgetary consequences in order to ensure that the financing of mandates that have already been approved does not suffer.

This is indeed a sad day. Those who put forward and imposed this decision do not even realize that they have planted a time bomb under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, with potential effects that we cannot predict at this point but that may be devastating for our Organization as a whole.

Mr. Bessedik (Algeria): The crisis caused by the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic has presented the United Nations with an unprecedented test that has revealed the limitations of some of its working methods and the need to adapt them to new circumstances. In that context, we have to point out that amending the methods of work of the United Nations is a delicate process that requires the involvement of all States and regional groups in a transparent and inclusive negotiation process with due respect for our working methods and rules of procedure, as is the case in the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, the legal framework in which all relevant resolutions have been adopted and approved by the General Assembly. Given the consensus rule, this is the first time that we have witnessed a vote on the revitalization process.

Since the beginning of the discussions on the methods of work and mechanisms needed to enable the General Assembly to take decisions when in-person meetings are not possible in the Hall, as facilitated

by the Permanent Representative of Jamaica — whom we salute for the work he has done — my delegation has insisted that all options should be discussed on an equal footing. Unfortunately, the discussions were limited to electronic voting for reasons that remain unknown, despite the Secretariat's confirmation that it is impossible to give the security of the process a 100 per cent guarantee. That raises legitimate questions about the legality of the mechanism and the decisions to be taken with it in future.

As has been mentioned before, we know that the e-deleGATE platform, through which sponsorship and other actions are undertaken, does not function in the same way when it comes to voting. Voting is time-constrained, whereas sponsoring, or any other action undertaken through e-deleGATE, sometimes requires days or even weeks. Also, when the new draft of decision 75/510 was first circulated, in October, my delegation insisted on the importance of giving delegations sufficient time to work together to reach consensus. But the main sponsors of the decision rushed the process and surprised all of us by submitting the draft for adoption after holding only two webinars. That incomprehensible urgency on the part of the main sponsors, especially since the epidemiological situation did not require it, pushed some delegations to request a vote on the non-consensus text. We have all seen the difficulty of working on digital platforms, which compromises the possibility of reaching consensus, especially on controversial issues, as demonstrated by the large number of draft amendments that have been submitted this year. Accordingly, several States emphasized the need to restrict this mechanism's scope of application to the essential work of the General Assembly, and to issues related to the Fifth Committee in particular. However, the decision's main sponsors stuck to their position and stepped away from the initial draft presented by the Jamaican facilitator, which raises many questions about the purpose of the decision.

The Algerian delegation firmly believes that the adoption of a mechanism affecting the General Assembly's methods of work relating to the adoption of draft decisions and resolutions in such exceptional circumstances should be done by consensus, which is a fundamental rule of established practice in the General Assembly and the Ad Hoc Working Group. Based on the elements I have mentioned, my country abstained in the voting on this decision.

Ms. Tang (Singapore): Singapore supported and voted in favour of decision 75/510, as we believe it is important for the United Nations to be equipped with a mechanism for decision-making that can ensure business continuity. The effective functioning of the multilateral system and the United Nations does indeed require various methods for decision-making, including an electronic voting system that can enable our work to continue even in times of crisis such as pandemics. It is in no one's interest to have the United Nations and the multilateral system frozen or paralysed with inaction as the result of an inability to take decisions at an in-person meeting.

At the same time, my delegation wishes to put on record our firm belief that an important and significant decision such as this one should have been taken in a way that enables the broadest possible number of countries to support the decision. In that regard, we would have very much liked to see further consultations over the next few weeks and months in order to bring more countries on board with the text. While this decision was needed sooner rather than later, we did not see the need to proceed in such haste so as to take action today. As I said, we would have welcomed further consultations to strengthen and broaden support for the decision. We would also have liked to postpone action on the decision until early next year. In any event, it is now adopted and we hope that it will be implemented in a way that will be inclusive and transparent and will bring all States Members of the United Nations on board.

Ultimately, the credibility of today's decision depends not on the words and paragraphs that we have just adopted but on whether it is implemented in a transparent and inclusive manner that inspires trust and confidence. We have every confidence that you, Mr. President, and future Presidents will use this mechanism wisely and prudently in a way that strengthens the role of the General Assembly.

Mr. Eldandarawy (Egypt): Egypt firmly believes in the importance of ensuring the business continuity of this Organization in times of crisis. However, we are of the firm view that the means by which such business is to be conducted should be widely agreed on through an enhanced process of inclusive and accommodating engagement aimed at achieving convergence in a spirit of consensus. While we have to keep in mind that actual consensus is hard to attain, the spirit of consensus is necessary for such decisions to have sustainable legitimacy and validity. Egypt's position has long been

to support the continuity of the work of the General Assembly in any circumstances through a workable method of voting. We shared that position in our statement on behalf of the Group of African States at the last town-hall meeting of the seventy-fourth session.

We acknowledge the core group's efforts to address some Member States' views concerning States' engagement in the decision-making process. However, we expected greater inclusiveness and discussion on addressing pending matters, such as additional well-defined criteria for application, which would have enabled decision 75/510 to enjoy the broad-based support it currently lacks. Egypt abstained in the voting on the decision based on a clear and objective position of support for the core group's valid aim of ensuring business continuity in the General Assembly, while highlighting our reservations about the limited consultation process and the rushed timeline that led to the prematurity of today's vote, which was made clear by the lack of an overwhelming majority. That has obviously fostered divisiveness at a time when unity is required and should be fortified rather than undermined, leading to the unfair and false perception that there are two opposing camps on the issue of enthusiasm for and commitment to the continuity and efficiency of the work of the General Assembly.

Critical matters such as adjustments to the working methods of the General Assembly should not be approached in the same manner as other issues in other decisions and resolutions. A spirit of consensus, though not necessarily unanimity, should have been accorded greater priority. Not doing so calls into question the legitimate application of today's decision. It is clear that we are going through a challenging global situation that is full of unknowns associated with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, one that requires Member States to build bridges through inclusivity and cooperation and certainly not to plunge the Organization into further unknowns.

Egypt wishes to put on record its understanding that decision 75/510 is inextricably linked to the present COVID-19 pandemic and that we do not support its application beyond the current situation without an adequate inclusive evaluation and review process to further decide on our best common way forward.

Mr. Elbahi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to explain our vote after the voting on document A/75/L.15 and its proposed amendments to decision

75/510, entitled "Procedure for decision-making in the General Assembly when an in-person meeting is not possible", in addition to our vote on the decision as a whole, with the following observations.

First, we firmly believe that it is the duty of the General Assembly, as it seeks to revitalize its work, to take into account any future emergencies and prepare the necessary measures and procedures so that the Organization can continue its work without interruption. This is why today's adoption of decision 75/510 is important.

Secondly, we believe that the proposed amendments would have made the text more balanced and enabled us to adopt the decision without a vote.

Thirdly, there is still time before we have to face another pandemic or emergency situation that would prevent delegations from coming to the building. There was therefore logic to the call for postponing the adoption of the decision, referring it to the Sixth Committee or amending it in order to make it more balanced and acceptable to all Member States.

Fourthly, the decision is on a topic that is extremely important to all Member States. We were hoping that the text would receive greater support from all Member States.

Fifthly, we need consensus on a decision such as this one more than ever. In the current circumstances, we call for promoting multilateralism and greater cooperation and partnership in the face of pandemics that threaten the whole of humankind, as the coronavirus disease pandemic is doing now. We should therefore address such threats collectively by taking measures at the thematic and procedural levels.

In conclusion, in the light of these observations, my delegation voted in favour of the proposed amendments and abstained in the voting on decision 75/510. Lastly, the draft was adopted without amendment, and we hope that it will not be resorted to except in limited circumstances and significant emergency situations.

Mr. Gutiérrez Segú Berdullas (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain voted in favour of decision 75/510 because, given the experience of recent months and the uncertainty of the near future, we consider it crucial to ensure that the tools available to the General Assembly include the possibility of adopting draft resolutions and decisions remotely or by deferral when it is not possible to hold meetings in person, even with considerable

limitations, as is the case with our meeting today. We regret, however, that we were not able to adopt the decision by consensus or with a large majority and no votes against. Since the negotiations began, our position has been that we should promote debate and dialogue. In one way or another, we have spent more than six months debating this issue without being able to build agreement. That appears to us to be yet another symptom of the vital need to rebuild the bridges of agreement. We must be consistent in our calls for strengthening multilateralism, which we will be able to accomplish only through dialogue, understanding, agreement and consensus.

Mr. Salibaev (Kyrgyzstan): The coronavirus disease pandemic has significantly affected the work of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. For a long time the United Nations was forced to work online. Even today it is operating in a limited capacity. All over the world, including in New York, the numbers of people infected with coronavirus are increasing every day, so the epidemiological situation in the city remains unclear. We therefore understand the impatience and welcome the efforts of the authors of decision 75/510 to ensure the continued functioning of the General Assembly and its Main Committees in the event of an emergency, the complete closure of United Nations Headquarters and a transition to online operations. At the same time, we note that there is opposition on the part of a number of States. Kyrgyzstan believes that their concerns required due attention and should have been taken into account when making a final decision. In our view, a number of issues require careful study, including those of transparency and the security of the e-voting process. We therefore abstained in the voting on the decision. We believe that the General Assembly should consider the possibility of developing and adopting new alternative decision-making methods that are supported by all Member States.

Mrs. Dime Labille (France) (*spoke in French*): France voted in favour of decision 75/510, which will enable the General Assembly to continue its activities effectively in exceptional circumstances where health considerations preclude face-to-face meetings. Its implementation will be strictly limited to essential activities and functions of the Assembly, particularly the renewal of previously adopted mandates and decisions and, where appropriate, the adoption of budgets essential to the continued functioning of the Organization.

Mr. Wenaweser (Liechtenstein): We would like to thank all the delegations who supported the adoption of decision 75/510 in a vote in favour of a strong role for the General Assembly, which we believe is extremely important at a time when multilateralism is under attack and being undermined. For us, this is not a moment to be jubilant or congratulate ourselves. After all, we believe we have merely made up for past failings. In our view, the Assembly should always have been equipped to apply its rules of procedure as faithfully as possible at all times.

As you know, Mr. President, we would have very much liked to see a consensus agreement on the decision, and the Assembly had a long discussion yesterday (see A/75/PV.25) and today about why that was not possible at this time. In our view, consensus is a political concept as well as a process. Accordingly, we will be engaging with our partners to build consensus on this after the adoption. I think the discussion we heard after the adoption indicates that we are on a good path. We do agree with all those who have said that they want to see the procedure applied in the most limited and prudent manner possible. We will be working with the Office of the President and our partners to that end. Most importantly, though, we will work with the President, the Secretariat and the city of New York to ensure that we can continue meeting and conducting our business in person, especially when it comes to taking decisions. This is a precarious moment, but we hope that we can conduct all our work in the manner and conditions under which we are currently operating.

In conclusion, let me also say that some of our partners have mentioned proposals that they want to put forward that would provide the Assembly with more alternatives as to how it can meet in person. We remain open to discussing any proposals that complement what the General Assembly has just agreed on.

Mr. Ayebare (Uganda): I thank the sponsors of decision 75/510, but I also want to call on the membership to continue working on this e-voting decision. As everyone has said, these may be unprecedented times, but we are cognizant of the fact that unity is needed in the General Assembly. We believe, Mr. President, that you will apply this decision diligently and ensure that it is not abused to promote the narrow interests of some Member States.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the voting. Before we

conclude, I would like to express my appreciation to all delegations for their constructive engagement in an important and complex discussion on the key issues that relate to the functioning of the General Assembly and to business continuity.

As one delegation has expressed unhappiness at my conduct of this issue and this meeting, I would like to reiterate that in the exercise of my functions as President of the General Assembly, I remain under the authority of the Assembly in accordance with rule 36 of the rules of procedure. It is therefore up to the membership to decide on the postponement or adoption of any draft decision or resolution. I would like to assure members that the decision we have adopted (decision 75/510),

enabling decision-making when the General Assembly cannot meet in person, will be resorted to only in the most exceptional situations.

We also heard yesterday and today other ideas and proposals on ways to strengthen the role of the General Assembly. I am confident that the membership will continue to show the same level of commitment in the discussions ahead, including in the framework of the process of the revitalization of the General Assembly.

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda items 125 and 126.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.