

THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
**A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR NGOS**



**ISHR** | INTERNATIONAL SERVICE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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The International Service for Human Rights is an independent, international non-governmental organisation (NGO) which promotes and protects human rights by supporting human rights defenders and strengthening human rights standards and systems. We achieve this through a strategic combination of research, advocacy, monitoring, coordination and capacity building.

Founded in 1984, and with offices in Geneva and New York, ISHR has a proven track record of achieving human rights change: from facilitating global civil society input to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993), and leading the development of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders (1999), to contributing to the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council (2006), catalysing and coordinating the adoption of the Yogyakarta Principles on Human Rights and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (2007), leading the adoption of a landmark UN Human Rights Council resolution strengthening protections against reprisals (2011) and developing an influential Model National Law on Human Rights Defenders (2014-2016).

For many years, ISHR has also played an important role in facilitating civil society access to the UN, by advocating for reform of the Economic and Social Council Committee on NGOs and its modalities towards a fairer, less politicised and more expeditious accreditation process, and by accompanying NGOs as they seek to obtain consultative status.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- ACABQ** The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
- CANZ** Subgroup of JUSCANZ comprised of Australia, Canada and New Zealand
- CARICOM** the Caribbean Community Group
- EEG** Eastern European Group
- EU** European Union
- FOSS** Forum of Small States
- G-77** Group of 77
- GRULAC** Latin American and Caribbean Group
- HCHR** High Commissioner for Human Rights
- JUSCANZ** Grouping of States known by an acronym created from the names of its founding members. It includes Andorra, Austria, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States
- NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation
- NHRI** National Human Rights Institution
- OHCHR** Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- OIC** Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
- NAM** Non-Aligned Movement
- UNGA** United Nations General Assembly
- UNHQ** United Nations Headquarters
- WEOG** Western Europe and Others Group

The Third Committee of the United Nations General Assembly meets annually for eight weeks every October and November. It is the largest body of the UN responsible for taking up human rights issues. Its membership includes all 193 Member States of the United Nations. While the opportunities for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to engage with the Third Committee are limited, it is nonetheless an important space for NGOs wishing to press the UN and Member States to address violations of human rights and the promotion of respect for human rights for all.

The International Service for Human Rights has witnessed first-hand the difficulties many NGOs face in navigating the Third Committee processes. This handbook is intended to serve as a user-friendly resource and reference guide for assisting NGOs in understanding how the Third Committee conducts its work and how to engage with it effectively. Our hope is that the information provided in this handbook will not only help NGOs better understand the practices and procedures of the Third Committee and bring some transparency to its work, but also contribute to strengthening the engagement of NGOs with the Third Committee.

The first chapter provides an overview of the Third Committee, including some background information on where it fits into the larger UN system, as well as its agenda and composition. Chapter 2 addresses what the Third Committee does; its relationship with other UN bodies; which stakeholders can participate in its work; and the role of regional and political groups. Chapter 3 provides an overview of how a UN resolution is crafted and negotiated. Chapter 4 considers how NGOs can engage with the Committee. Finally, Chapter 5 outlines key practical information on accreditation, physical access to the UN, resources and documents, as well as on how to host a side event.

**Practical tips to assist NGOs have been dispersed throughout the handbook. Look for these in green.**

A glossary and abbreviations section has been provided to help in the navigation of this handbook and of Committee procedures and practices.



# CHAPTER I WHAT IS THE THIRD COMMITTEE?

## Background

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) is 'the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations.'<sup>1</sup> It is one of six principal organs created by the UN Charter, and the only one with universal membership.<sup>2</sup> The UNGA has a membership of 193 States.

The UNGA allocates most of its work to its six main committees which take up different issues and present draft resolutions and decisions to the plenary of the UNGA. A limited number of issues are taken up directly in the plenary. All UN Member states are represented in all of the six committees.<sup>3</sup> The committees are:

- **First Committee**  
(Disarmament and International Security Committee)
- **Second Committee**  
(Economic and Financial Committee)
- **Third Committee**  
(Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee)
- **Fourth Committee**  
(Special Political and Decolonization Committee)
- **Fifth Committee**  
(Administrative and Budgetary Committee)
- **Sixth Committee**  
(Legal Committee).

The overwhelming majority of the work on human rights is carried out by the Third Committee. Though "human rights" does not appear in the Third Committee's official name – 'The Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Affairs Committee' – more than half of its work focuses on human rights. The remainder of its work addresses related issues, including social development, the advancement of women, drug control, crime prevention and refugees.

### *What is on the Third Committee's agenda?*

Each year, the plenary of the UNGA allocates a number of its agenda items to its committees. Between September 2016 and September 2017, the 71st session of the UNGA had 173 items on its agenda, of which the following 14 were allocated to the Third Committee:

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1 A/RES/55/2 (18 September 2000).  
2 The six organs also include the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice and the UN Secretariat.  
3 The Committees' work is guided by the General Assembly Rules of Procedure, in particular Chapter XIII.

## AGENDA NUMBER & ITEMS

<b>5</b>	Election of the officers of the Main Committees
<b>26</b>	Social development: (a) Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (b) Literacy for life: shaping future agendas
<b>27</b>	Advancement of women
<b>60</b>	Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions
<b>63</b>	Report of the Human Rights Council
<b>64</b>	Promotion and protection of the rights of children: (a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children
<b>65</b>	Rights of indigenous peoples: (a) Rights of indigenous peoples (b) Follow-up to the outcome document of the high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples
<b>66</b>	Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: (a) Elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (b) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action
<b>67</b>	Right of peoples to self-determination
<b>68</b>	Promotion and protection of human rights (a) Implementation of human rights instruments (b) Human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (c) Human rights situations and reports of special rapporteurs and representatives (d) Comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action
<b>106</b>	Crime prevention and criminal justice
<b>107</b>	International drug control
<b>121</b>	Revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly
<b>135</b>	Programme planning

The list of items passed to the Third Committee remains pretty similar from year to year, with only the occasional change.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For example, an agenda item could be added relating to a specific event such as a special session or a thematic year or decade. Following the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006, the item on the Report of the Human Rights Council was added to the agenda of the Third Committee.

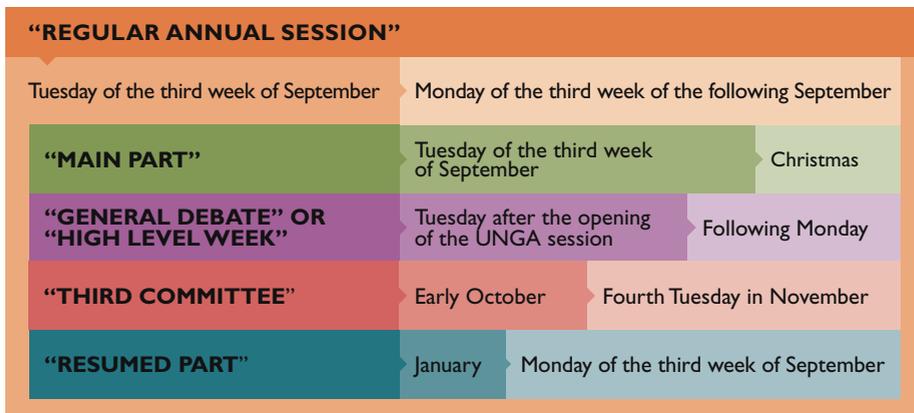
**When does the Third Committee meet? What about the rest of the UNGA?**

The Third Committee of the UNGA meets annually for approximately eight weeks in October and November. This meeting takes place during the UNGA's annual 'regular' session or 'main part', which runs from September to December. The annual General Assembly sessions are numbered chronologically. The UNGA's 'regular' session for 2016 was the 71st session of the General Assembly held (known as UNGA71 for short).

The UNGA begins every year with the 'General Debate' or 'High-level week', which Heads of State and Government attend. Each year the President of the General Assembly (PGA) chooses a theme for the debate.<sup>5</sup> For example, the theme for UNGA 71 was 'The Sustainable Development Goals: a universal push to transform our world.' The theme for UNGA70 was 'The United Nations at 70: the road ahead for peace, security and human rights.' In recent years, one or several UNGA high-level meetings or summits have also been scheduled during the high-level week, such as the 'Summit for Refugees and Migrants' at UNGA 71.

The busy months between September and December, during which the General Debate and the committee work take place, are informally known as the 'main' part. The quieter second part of the General Assembly agenda beginning in January, during which thematic debates, consultations and working groups take place, is known as the 'resumed' part. The 'resumed' part runs until all issues on the agenda have been addressed. This is often just before the next session starts, meaning that effectively the UNGA is more or less always in session.<sup>6</sup>

The UNGA can also meet in 'special sessions' and 'emergency sessions'.



5 In June of each year, the UNGA elects, by secret ballot, its President and the 21 Vice Presidents of its plenary. The selection of the Assembly President traditionally follows a system of geographical rotation.

6 The UNGA may also meet in special or emergency sessions at the request of the whole or part of the Security Council, of a majority of Member States, or of one Member State if the majority of Members concur. The UNGA also meets for ad hoc high level meetings and debates on a range of topics.

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**Who makes up the Third Committee Bureau? How are they selected?**

The Third Committee elects a bureau every year ahead of the session, comprising a chair, three vice-chairs and a rapporteur, each representing a different region. The Chair is chosen within the relevant regional group, usually by consensus.

The Third Committee agrees and makes public the upcoming rotation, established recently as follows:

- 71st GA (2016) GRULAC (Chair) Africa (Rapporteur)
- 72nd GA (2017) WEOG (Chair) GRULAC (Rapporteur)
- 73rd GA (2018) Asia-Pacific (Chair) WEOG (Rapporteur)

The Chair of the Third Committee presides over the meetings of the Committee and ensures that rules of procedure are followed. The rapporteurship is largely a symbolic role principally focused on presenting the Third Committee's report at the end of its session. The Third Committee Secretary sits next to the Chair during sessions to provide advice on process and procedure.

The election for the bureau takes place mid-June, usually on the same day as the election of the President of the General Assembly (PGA), and usually without a vote. If a regional group has not agreed on a candidate at that time, the election of some bureau members can be postponed until the start of the Committee.



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**Activities**

Over the course of its session, the Third Committee members negotiate a number of resolutions on a range of topics, engage in interactive dialogues with UN human rights experts, and hold a number of discussions on its agenda items.

**PRACTICAL TIP FINDING OUT WHEN DEBATES AND DIALOGUES WILL TAKE PLACE**

The Third Committee website includes a link to relevant documents: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/>

These include:

1. A calendar of meetings outlining when the following will take place:
  - the discussions on each agenda item
  - the deadlines for submissions of draft resolutions under each agenda item
  - the introduction of draft resolutions under each agenda item; and action on resolutions under each agenda item
2. A schedule of interactive dialogues between Special Procedure mandate-holders and other experts, and the Third Committee.

**Note that these documents are only issued in early September once the Third Committee Bureau has met.**

*General discussions*

There is no general debate at the start of the Committee's session. Following a brief welcome and coverage of organisational matters, the Committee jumps into discussions under each agenda item. Generally, a report will have been prepared on the issue under discussion, in the name of the Secretary General, by the UN Secretariat. The UN department who has authored the report will introduce it. This is followed by 'question time,' where States have an opportunity to engage in relatively open-ended discussions on related issues, which usually takes the form of prepared statements. In an effort to work more efficiently, the Committee began enforcing a time limit on statements in 2016 – five minutes for individual States, and 12 minutes for groups of States.

*Interactive Dialogues*

Interactive dialogues are an opportunity for States to exchange views with, and/or ask questions to the UN's human rights experts, including the Special Procedures, commissions of inquiry, Treaty

Body chairpersons, and certain Special Representatives of the Secretary-General. These dialogues generally focus on the reports submitted by the experts on the thematic or country specific issues on which they work. The UN human rights experts will have presented a brief summary of their report ahead of the dialogue. The dialogue is a formal affair; with States expressing support or otherwise towards the expert(s), highlighting some aspect of the report that is of interest to them, referencing some relevant national level experience and then putting a question or more to the expert. Where a report is country-focused, by convention, the concerned State is given priority in engaging with the expert.

States also have an opportunity to engage in a dialogue with the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HCHR) and the President of the Human Rights Council (PHRC).

Some States with questionable human rights records occasionally use these dialogues to reprimand certain experts for engaging on issues they allege fall outside the experts' mandates, rather than addressing the human rights issues discussed by the expert.

The Committee began enforcing a time limit on interventions by States during interactive dialogues in 2016 – two to three minutes per State, unless the State is the subject of a country specific mandate, in which case they are allotted 10 minutes.

### **WHAT IS THE SOURCE OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE'S MANDATE TO ENGAGE WITH UN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS?**

The resolutions creating the mandates of human rights experts establish that the experts will report to the General Assembly and engage in an interactive dialogue with States. In the vast majority of cases, experts are mandated to report and engage annually with both the Human Rights Council and the UNGA. At the start of their session of work, the Third Committee formally invites the experts to attend and engage in a dialogue with them.

### ***Negotiation of resolutions***

Draft texts of resolutions are formally tabled and adopted in the Committee according to a schedule for each agenda item. However, most of the work negotiating resolutions takes place outside of the formal sessions – in parallel meetings known as 'informals'. During these closed meetings, States attempt to arrive at an agreement on the wording of resolutions, often through a series of intense negotiations. Some resolutions – most typically resolutions on country situations – are not usually negotiated in informals, as the issues have traditionally been so polarising that a discussion in groups is not productive. Rather, they are negotiated with key States on a bilateral basis.

### Side events

Side events take place in parallel to the Third Committee meetings. They are usually organised by NGOs together with States to bring awareness on an issue and/or signal State support for a particular position. A side event might be used to raise awareness about a particular human rights issue of concern to a State or NGO on the agenda of the Committee; to gauge other States' reactions to a new issue a State might bring to the Committee; or to highlight the content of a report submitted to that session by a particular UN expert.

Unlike side events at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, NGOs cannot organise their own events. Rather, a side event must be sponsored by a State or by the UN in order to be held in the UN premises. This can affect the substantive content of events as it may not be possible to hold events focused on certain issues or country situations for lack of State support.

For more on hosting side events, see Chapter 4.

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## Who participates in the work of the Third Committee?

### States and observers

The Third Committee is a “committee of the whole”, meaning that representatives of all 193 Member States of the UNGA can participate.

The Secretariat maintains a list of Non-Member States - entities and organisations that have a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the UNGA. Like the observers, the two ‘Non-Member States’ – the State of Palestine and the Holy See – may attend and participate in meetings but cannot vote. The Holy See is particularly known for being active in trying to influence States during resolution negotiations.

#### PRACTICAL TIP WHO'S WHO?

Member States are generally represented in the Third Committee by one or more diplomats – also referred to as ‘experts’ – based in the country’s UN mission in New York. In smaller missions, the same diplomat may be representing the State in more than one committee or UN body. In very small missions, the ambassador is the sole representative in all spaces. Some States will also send reinforcements from Geneva or their capitals to assist temporarily during the Third Committee session.

The ‘Blue Book’ lists the contact information for all the Permanent Missions to the UN in New York and can be found at: <https://protocol.un.org/dgacm/pls/site.nsf/BlueBook.xsp>. The Blue Book does not include individual emails or mobile numbers for delegates, but a call to a mission can on occasion facilitate access to these.

## *Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)*

**NGOs cannot formally participate in the work of the Third Committee.** This is unlike the UN Human Rights Council, where NGOs have the ability to make and circulate statements, host their own side events, and attend and participate in informal negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

However, NGOs can engage with the work of the Third Committee in a range of advocacy activities: lobbying diplomats and foreign ministries; observing and reporting on open meetings; hosting side events together with States; and in some cases sitting in on informal negotiations, with the permission of the State sponsoring the resolution.

This practice extends beyond the Third Committee, as there are generally no formal arrangements for NGOs to participate in the work of the General Assembly. The exception is the limited participation of NGOs in some committees,<sup>8</sup> and ad hoc high-level thematic meetings of the UNGA.<sup>9</sup>

### **PRACTICAL TIP SEATING FOR NGOS**

The formal meetings of the Third Committee are open to anyone holding a UN pass, including NGOs. Several rows of seats are reserved at the back of the room for civil society. For votes or debates on controversial issues, you can find State representatives filling unspecified seating generally used by NGOs. Be sure to arrive in good time to get a seat!

## *National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)*

The Third Committee does not allow the participation of NHRIs in its work. However, the UNGA adopted a resolution in December 2015 calling for expanded participation of NHRIs in the work of relevant UN bodies and processes, in line with the modalities NHRIs enjoy at the Human Rights Council.<sup>10</sup>

7 NGOs have formal consultative arrangements with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which was the parent body of the now defunct Commission on Human Rights (CHR). NGOs accredited through ECOSOC can still participate in the CHR's replacement, the Human Rights Council, even though it doesn't report to ECOSOC.

8 For example, NGOs have the opportunity to deliver statements at the start of the First Committee.

9 In the case of the ad hoc high-level meetings of the UNGA – of which there are a handful each year – NGO participation has been a hotly contested issue among States and the specific modalities are negotiated for every meeting. Generally the modality adopted establishes that NGOs without consultative status can only participate if no Member State objects. Objecting States generally remain anonymous and NGOs barred from attending receive no reasons for the objections and have no further recourse. See 'General Assembly President should protect civil society engagement with the UN' (ISHR, 28 February 2014) <<http://www.ishr.ch/news/general-assembly-president-should-protect-civil-society-engagement-un>>.

10 A/RES/ 70/163 (10 February 2016).

Advocates for greater participation of NHRIs consider the modalities NHRIs enjoy at the Human Rights Council as the model to be followed in other UN spaces.<sup>11</sup> 'A-status' NHRIs (i.e. NHRIs in full compliance with the Paris Principles<sup>12</sup>) are granted observer status at the Human Rights Council, giving them comprehensive participation rights, including designated seating, the right to submit written statements and make oral statements, and the ability to organise parallel events.<sup>13</sup> It is hoped that the General Assembly resolution will encourage a greater recognition of the value of NHRI participation in the working of UN entities in New York and lead to formalisation of that participation.

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### What is the Third Committee's relationship with other UN bodies?

#### *What is the Third Committee's relationship with the Human Rights Council?*

The Human Rights Council in Geneva is an inter-governmental body of the UN consisting of 47 Member States. It is responsible for promoting and protecting human rights. The resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council over the course of a calendar year are compiled in one document known as the **Report of the Human Rights Council**. The Report contains Council resolutions and decisions from the March and June sessions with addendums covering the work of the September session and any special sessions that took place later in that year.

Though it remains contentious, the Third Committee adopts a resolution every year on the annual report of the Human Rights Council. Some States continue to hold the view that the Council should report directly to the UNGA plenary rather than to the Third Committee, in line with the Council's status as a subsidiary body of the UNGA. However, the opposing view – that the Third Committee has the human rights expertise to address the report – won out during the Human Rights Council's five year review, and the UNGA decided to continue its practice of allocating the agenda item entitled 'Report of the Human Rights Council' to the plenary and to the Third Committee.<sup>14</sup>

The President of the Human Rights Council also holds an annual interactive dialogue with the Third Committee, a move that is viewed positively by States with limited representation at the Human Rights Council in Geneva. For them, it is an opportunity to participate more meaningfully in debates regarding the Council's work.

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11 See 'Promoting participation: Why and how national human rights institutions should be allowed to contribute at the United Nations' (ISHR, June 2015) <[http://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/nhri\\_research\\_report\\_formatted\\_final.pdf](http://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/nhri_research_report_formatted_final.pdf)>.

12 The Paris Principles were adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Commission by Resolution 1992/54 of 1992, and by the UN General Assembly in its Resolution 48/134 of 1993. The Paris Principles relate to the status and functioning of national institutions for the protection and promotion of human rights.

13 NHRIs that comply fully with a set of standards known as 'the Paris Principles', are bestowed with A-status by the Global Alliance of NHRIs (GANHRI), A/Res/48/134.

14 A/RES/ 65/281 (17 June 2011).

## WHAT IS THE PRACTICAL EFFECT OF THE THIRD COMMITTEE CONSIDERING THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL?

The Third Committee has generally ‘made note of’ the resolutions of the Human Rights Council contained in the Council report, which simply indicates that it has considered them. However, it has twice tried, and once succeeded, at using the Third Committee resolution on the Human Rights Council report, to block a Human Rights Council decision.

In 2013, the Third Committee succeeded in blocking a resolution of the Human Rights Council that had called on the Secretary-General to appoint a system-wide high-level focal point to address reprisals against those cooperating with the UN human rights system. The African Group, with the support of States including China and Russia, used the resolution on the ‘Report of the Human Rights Council’ to defer consideration of, and action on, the resolution creating the focal point. They argued that further consultations on the issue were needed.<sup>15</sup> When the issue was considered the following year, the Third Committee and the General Assembly once again deferred it. The issue remained contentious, and it was not until 2016 that a focal point was finally appointed by the Secretary General.

In 2016, the Third Committee tried but did not succeed in blocking a resolution of the Human Rights Council that created the mandate of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (See page 49). The African Group used the same tactic as in the case of the reprisals focal point but was defeated in the Third Committee and the Plenary.

## WHAT IS THE VALUE OF A THIRD COMMITTEE RESOLUTION VS A HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL RESOLUTION?

Some topics of concern, including some country-specific resolutions, are the subject of resolutions both at the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee. The two fora provide States with opportunities to try and raise the level and content of commitments. Sponsors of resolutions are keen to avoid decreasing human rights commitments agreed upon by the other body.

Resolutions on a similar theme at the Human Rights Council and the Third Committee are not always advanced by the same State in both spaces. For example, a resolution on national human rights institutions has traditionally been

15 A/RES/68/144 (30 January 2014) UN Doc A/RES/68/144. After nearly three years of stalled progress on this issue, in October 2016, the Secretary-General designated his Assistant Secretary-General to take up the issue of reprisals and intimidation, seemingly using his position to circumvent the block by States, see *Transcript of Secretary-General's press conference at The Palais des Nations* (3 October 2016) <<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2016-10-03/transcript-secretary-generals-press-conference-palais-des>>.

advanced by Australia at the Human Rights Council and by Germany at the Third Committee. The two States invariably work closely together on the texts and negotiation processes, even as one takes the lead.

The political value of a Third Committee resolution as compared to a Human Rights Council resolution is difficult to assess. On the one hand, the Human Rights Council is the UN body exclusively responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights. On the other hand, a Third Committee resolution is the expression of all 193 Member States (as compared to 47 in the Human Rights Council). Whether Third Committee resolutions are more widely or fully implemented than Human Rights Council resolutions are, is difficult to say.

It should be noted that the universal membership of the Third Committee versus the more limited 47 State membership of the Human Rights Council throws up different political dynamics. States that are rarely members of the Council – such as small Pacific States – hold political clout at the UNGA. They are numerous in number, seeking to influence the UNGA and ensuring their presence for votes becomes a critical objective of States and NGOs alike.

## COUNTRY RESOLUTIONS IN THE THIRD COMMITTEE

The Third Committee has adopted country resolutions since its 30th session in 1975. The number of such resolutions peaked at a dozen in the 1990s, and started to decrease thereafter.

For some years, the Third Committee has annually considered resolutions on four countries: Democratic Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran, Myanmar<sup>16</sup> and Syria. The creation of the Human Rights Council increased pushback by some States against country resolutions in the Third Committee. These States argue that the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process is the only appropriate mechanism to deal with country situations, given that all States undergo it and the process is grounded in the principle of non-politicisation. Similar arguments against country resolutions are advanced at the Human Rights Council. Despite this resistance, two new country resolutions have been adopted in recent years at the Third Committee and then at the UNGA plenary: a resolution on Syria in 2011 and a resolution on Ukraine in 2016.

### *What is the Third Committee's relationship with the plenary of the General Assembly?*

All the UNGA's main committees report to the General Assembly Plenary. This means that at the conclusion of the Third Committee, all the resolutions adopted are considered drafts and are included

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<sup>16</sup> A resolution on Myanmar was not introduced at the 71st Session, see Case Study page 27.

in a report to the Plenary. This takes a few weeks to prepare. The Plenary then meets, usually in mid-December, to consider the Committee's recommendations and adopt these resolutions, at which point they become UNGA resolutions. The resolutions can be voted again in the Plenary if a State asks for a vote. States can also introduce amendments to these resolutions which the plenary will consider, in writing or orally.

### **ARE RESOLUTIONS ADOPTED BY THE THIRD COMMITTEE EVER MODIFIED OR REVERSED IN THE PLENARY?**

It is rare but it can happen.

For example, in 2010, the Third Committee voted to amend a resolution on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions by deleting a reference to sexual orientation. The language was reinserted when an amendment to that effect was successfully adopted at the Plenary a few weeks later. States and NGOs had lobbied hard between the end of the Third Committee and the General Assembly Plenary vote for a reversal of the Third Committee recommendation. Of course, those supportive of the Third Committee decision were also active but proved unsuccessful at holding the position.



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## What role do political and regional groups play?

States are organised in regional, political and informal groups that have a profound effect on multilateral diplomacy at the UN, including the Third Committee. States form alliances, whether regionally or politically, and use tactics such as committing to vote as a bloc to further their common agendas.

The following outline of groups focuses on those most relevant to and active in the Third Committee.

### **Regional Groups**

The five regional groups were formed to facilitate the equitable geographical distribution of seats among the Member States in different UN bodies:

- Group of African States (54 Member States)
- Group of Asian States (53 Member States)
- Group of Eastern European States (EEG) (23 Member States)
- Group of Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) (33 Member States)
- Western European and Other States Group (WEOG) (28 Member States + USA)

The USA is not an official member of any group. They participate as an observer in WEOG meetings and are considered a member of WEOG for electoral purposes. Turkey is a member of both the Asian Group and the WEOG, and for electoral purposes is considered a member of WEOG only. The Holy See participates in WEOG meetings as an observer.

While the regional groups formally exist for electoral and ceremonial purposes, some also choose to coordinate on substantive issues. The Chairs of the regional groups rotate on a monthly basis.

### **Political groups**

Most States participate in political groups, which are formed specifically with the intention of coordinating on substantive issues.

#### *Group of 77 (G-77) and China*

Created in 1964, the G-77 and China is a grouping of developing countries designed to promote its members' collective economic interests and enhance negotiating capacity. It currently has 134 members and is chaired annually on a rotating basis by one of its members. The G-77 and China does not generally formulate common positions in the Third Committee and is less powerful as a bloc than it is in other committees. However, the group coordinates on some Third Committee items relating to economic and

development issues, and sponsors a handful of resolutions.<sup>17</sup> Given the size of the group, the issues dealt with by the Third Committee can easily expose the divisions within the group. But given that it is the largest group within the UN, its influence is significant when it does reach a common position. While China has never officially joined the G-77, it provides political and financial support.

#### *Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)*

Created in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed during the Cold War by countries that were not immediately involved in the conflict and did not consider themselves aligned formally with or against any major power bloc. The NAM currently has 120 members and 15 observers. The NAM co-ordinates on some Third Committee issues. Most significantly, the NAM has attempted to block action on country specific resolutions on the grounds that they violate the principles of universality, non-selectivity and objectivity.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)*

Created in 1969 to unite Muslim countries after the Arab-Israeli 1967 War, the OIC is comprised of 57 members. Its main strength has been the regional unity of political agendas and its political power has been far reaching as a result of a number of its members also being influential within other groups.<sup>19</sup>

#### *European Union (EU)*

The EU is an economic and political partnership between 28 European countries. The EU has its own diplomatic service and a permanent office in New York. Since 2011, the EU has enhanced observer status in the UNGA, which allows it to present common positions, make interventions, present proposals and participate in the general debate each September. The EU coordinates on the entire range of UN activities, including the Third Committee.

#### *Forum of Small States (FOSS)*

Created as an informal group in 1992, the FOSS is comprised of 107 countries and exists as a platform to allow small States to discuss and foster common positions on issues of mutual concern, such as environmental and economic vulnerabilities. The FOSS is not active on substantive issues in the Third Committee. However, it has sought in recent years to drive a discussion on improving the Third Committee's working methods, with an eye to addressing challenges faced in particular by small States that are overwhelmed with the workload, given their limited resources.

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17 For example, in 2014 these included the *Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (A/RES/69/143)*, and *A global call for concrete action for the total elimination of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (A/RES/69/162)*.

18 These no-action motions have generally failed to gain enough support in recent years though debates were successfully shut down as recently as 2006.

19 Rosa Freedman, *The United Nations Human Rights Council, A critique and early assessment* (Routledge 2013) 138.

### *JUSCANZ*

JUSCANZ, known by an acronym created from the names of its founding members, includes Andorra, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Switzerland, and the United States. It coordinates behind the scenes on a number of issues in the Third Committee. Occasionally, Australia, Canada and New Zealand coordinate as a subset known as CANZ.

### *The Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM)*

CARICOM is an organisation of 15 Member States and five Associate Members. CARICOM coordinates on a range of issues in the Third Committee. It has observer status at the UN and maintains a permanent office in New York. As several members have limited resources, they frequently burden-share, whereby one member provides other members with a steer on the negotiation of resolutions that not all can follow directly.

### *Mountain States*

The "Mountain States" is a term used informally to describe a grouping made up of Australia, Canada, Iceland, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland.

### ***Informal and other groups***

Occasionally, an informal group will form for the purpose of joint advocacy on a particular initiative. For example, during the 2011 Review of the Human Rights Council, a cross-regional group pushed for a number of negative proposals that would have weakened the Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).<sup>20</sup>

Some of these initiative- or theme-specific groups are more formal and long-standing. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) core group, for example, aims at ensuring a place for sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues on the UN agenda; promoting coordination and strategising across countries in the Global North and South; and raising awareness about grievous human rights violations against LGBT and intersex people. The LGBT Core Group is unique for its inclusion of NGOs and a UN agency among its members.<sup>21</sup>

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20 The group, led by Russia, comprised of Algeria, Bolivia, Belarus, China, Iran, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Syria, Venezuela, Vietnam and Yemen. The proposals included establishing Council oversight of the Special Procedures, and creating a supervisory relationship over OHCHR by the Council. As is often the case in negotiations, progressive proposals had to be traded off against these, resulting in very little substantive reform as a result.

21 The LGBT Core Group is currently composed of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, El Salvador, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Montenegro, The Netherlands, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Uruguay, the European Union and Albania (as observer), as well as OHCHR, Human Rights Watch and Outright Action International.



CHAIR

COMMITTEE SECRETARY

Y RECORDS

CABO VERDE

CAMBODIA

DJIBOUTI

DOMINICA

HUNGARY

ICELAND

### Introduction

Through the process of negotiating resolutions, States discuss and take action on issues that they deem important. While not legally binding, resolutions are an important basis for the development of global and national policy. Resolutions reflect majority opinion, whether adopted by a majority voting, or through consensus. Thus resolutions provide a snapshot of where opinion lies on an issue at national and international levels at a given time, and are frequently informed by the views of experts within the UN system, civil society, and NHRIs.

Many resolutions generally recur annually or biennially. The topic of a biennial resolutions at the Third Committee may be addressed by the Human Rights Council on the 'off' year. Several country situations have been addressed in resolutions by both bodies each year:

There are two broad categories of resolutions: thematic and country-specific. Thematic resolutions generally focus on a specific topic each year, for example the resolution on the Rights of the Child (led jointly by the GRULAC and the EU) which focused on migrant children in 2016 and on the right to education in 2015. An "omnibus" resolution refers to a thematic resolution that captures in one text several issues referred to in similar resolutions in the recent past.

A State or group of States can also introduce a draft resolution on a topic that has not been addressed by the Third Committee before. Recent examples of new topics include a resolution on 'Protecting children from bullying' sponsored by Mexico (first introduced in 2014, with a second resolution on the topic in 2016) and a new resolution brought by Ukraine in 2016 on the 'Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)'.

### CASE STUDY COUNTRY RESOLUTION

The Third Committee has traditionally considered resolutions on an annual basis on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), Iran, and Syria. After 25 years, the lead sponsors of a resolution on Myanmar decided not to introduce the text in 2016. They argued that support for the resolution was wavering as a result of improvements in the human rights situation in the country. They feared that a potentially reduced margin of support for the resolution would undermine continuing efforts to push

*continued on next page*

for human rights change in the country. Voices in favour of the continuance of the resolution argued that calls in the resolution had not been met. By discontinuing the resolution, they argued, vital attention on the human rights situation in the country - afforded by the General Assembly resolution - would be lost

At the March session of the Human Rights Council, however, the European Union introduced a resolution on the 'Situation of human rights in Myanmar' that, amongst other things, extended the mandate of the Special Rapporteur to that country.

## DRAFTING PHASE

### NEGOTIATION PHASE

- informals
- co-sponsorship

### ADOPTION PHASE

- tabling draft resolutions
- amendments
- introducing resolutions

### ACTION PHASE

- voting
- general statements and explanation of vote
- approval of budgetary implications

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## The drafting phase

Resolutions at the Third Committee start off as drafts sponsored by one or more lead States. These States are sometimes referred to colloquially as the 'pen holders'. In many cases, lead States (or main sponsors) are traditionally identified with the issue addressed in a resolution. For example, Norway is the main sponsor of UN resolutions on the protection of human rights defenders.

Lead sponsors of draft resolutions generally begin preparing their texts and building support several months ahead of the Third Committee session. As part of that process, some States will seek to engage with a range of stakeholders, including potential co-sponsoring States, NGOs, NHRIs and other UN entities, including the OHCHR. Outreach to OHCHR will include seeking clarification on international human rights standards and, in some cases, confirmation that any reference to OHCHR in the text will be of help to the agency. The UN Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) does not provide formal advice to States, although they may do so on an informal basis.

Occasionally, a main sponsor will circulate letters, notes or memoranda explaining the rationale behind their resolutions.

### PRACTICAL TIP ENGAGE EARLY

NGOs should plan on **engaging early** to influence the content of a resolution, whether new or long-standing. States frequently welcome input from civil society, in recognition of their expertise on an issue and their legitimate role as a relevant stakeholder. Some States are open to convening meetings with relevant civil society players on the topic during the development phase of a draft resolution. Some also welcome suggestions of new issues to address in a traditional resolution or new, potential areas for resolutions to focus on.

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## The negotiation phase

### *Informals*

In most cases, the lead State(s) sponsoring a resolution will convene negotiations on the text during the Third Committee session, known as 'informals'. These sessions are generally closed to NGOs. However, some lead States have developed a practice of opening their informals to NGOs – typically those they are in contact with – as observers. In some cases, lead State(s) choose not to open their text to informals, preferring to negotiate bilaterally<sup>22</sup>

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22 This is the case for most country resolutions and for the resolution on the Report of the Human Rights Council.



## PRACTICAL TIP INFLUENCING THE NEGOTIATIONS OUTSIDE OF INFORMALS

Although NGOs do not typically have access to informals, much of the negotiation on a text actually happens outside the room bilaterally or in groups, where NGOs are free to approach States. In this regard, it is key to coordinate, establish good contacts with the lead State(s) and seek out other States who are prepared to listen to your ideas and – potentially – integrate specific language proposals into the text.

The number of informals held on each text will depend on the number and degree of controversial issues it embraces and/or the amount of time a main sponsor of the text considers worth keeping to negotiate in a group (rather than bilaterally, for example). Between informals, main sponsors will often reach out to other States or groups of States bilaterally in a bid to reach agreement, both in New York and at capital level.

It is important to bear in mind that each resolution is being negotiated in the context of the rest of the Third Committee's work. Over 60 draft resolutions could be being negotiated at the same time. Sometimes negotiations on one text will have repercussions on others.

The negotiation process frequently leads to language in the draft resolution being removed, added, or modified. During negotiations, some language can be modified, dropped, or added in exchange for other additions, deletions or modifications. This 'trading' of language can be very frustrating for stakeholders, including NGOs, when, for example, it appears that language was included from the beginning as something to be bargained away in the context of negotiations. This has occurred repeatedly in regard to references to 'sexual orientation and gender identity'.

To move the negotiation process along, main sponsors may place the text under a 'silence procedure', whereby a text will be considered agreed to after a certain amount of time if no State expresses an objection privately to the lead sponsor. This does not remove the need for the resolution to be adopted formally by the whole Third Committee, of course, but it is a means of trying to test the level of support for a text and to move negotiations to a close.

Generally, States aim at building consensus around their texts. However, this isn't always possible. Some topics are known to divide States. As consensus can lead to a lowest common denominator outcome, sometimes States are only prepared to go so far in modifying their text in a bid for agreement. In other cases, texts that have historically been adopted by consensus can suddenly be put to a vote.<sup>23</sup> Approximately 70% of resolutions

were adopted by consensus between the 60th (2005) and 70th (2015) sessions. However, those figures do not necessarily point to significant agreement on human rights issues, as a consensus resolution might in fact be avoiding more ambitious language in favour of reflecting the very minimum that States can agree on.

### **Co-sponsorship**

States will generally seek to build wide, cross-regional support for their text ahead of the Third Committee. This can be indicated by co-sponsorship. Member States indicate their interest in co-sponsoring a draft resolution through an online sponsorship system managed by the Secretariat.

Co-sponsors can agree to support a text at any time from the beginning of the negotiation process to just ahead of a text being adopted. Both when the resolution is introduced and when action is taken on it, States have the opportunity to indicate their support from the floor.

Once a State has co-sponsored a resolution, the expectation is that it will be consulted before any further changes are made to the text in the context of negotiations. The lead State(s) will hold meetings with co-sponsors prior to and during the negotiation process to decide on and tweak their negotiating strategy.

Sometimes, States will consider it politically advantageous to make public the extent of co-sponsorship of a resolution early in the process. At other times, making co-sponsors known can be unhelpful, particularly if they are primarily or exclusively from one regional group.

States cannot become co-sponsors once a resolution has been adopted.

#### **PRACTICAL TIP** **THE VALUE OF ENGAGING CO-SPONSORS**

In addition to the main sponsor(s) or lead State(s), it can be very valuable to engage with co-sponsors of a resolution who also have the ability to influence the direction the negotiation of the text may take. Co-sponsors may be a means to influence the lead State over 'red lines' – ie unacceptable compromises on the content of the draft resolution during negotiations. During the negotiation phase, drafts of the resolution will be circulated among States and NGOs will often be able to get a copy of those drafts from the lead State(s) or other States.

23 For example, the resolution on human rights defenders was put to a vote for the first time in its sixteen year history in 2015.

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## The Third Committee adoption phase

### *Tabling draft resolutions*

Each item on the Third Committee's agenda has a specific deadline for the tabling of resolutions, which can be found in the calendar (for example here deadlines are indicated in orange: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/71/meetings\\_chart.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/71/meetings_chart.pdf)). By that deadline, the lead State(s) must 'table' a draft resolution to make public the text being negotiated.

The draft resolution may be building on an existing resolution. That existing resolution is then used as the base text for the new draft.

'Tabling' involves submitting a draft to the Third Committee Secretariat with a first list of co-sponsors, if any. The draft is then uploaded on to the Third Committee website, provided with an official "L-document number", e.g. A/C.3/71/L.46, and made public in all six official languages of the UN. A 3-day minimum notice is needed to process a draft resolution as an L-document, although documents are usually up within 48 hours. Further explanations on document numbers and symbols are provided in Chapter 5.

Negotiations continue, based on the tabled draft resolution (the L-document). States can submit revised versions of the draft resolution to the Secretariat. There is no limit to the number of revised versions that can be submitted. A deadline for revised versions is provided on the Third Committee calendar. The deadline is a week before the end of the session.

New versions of the draft are indicated by a "Rev number", e.g. A/C.3/71/L.46/Rev.1. Any change to the draft resolution made after the revised tabling deadline indicated in the calendar needs to be reflected orally.

While a group cannot formally table a resolution, a lead State can do so on behalf of a group. The draft resolution will name a main sponsor and indicate in a footnote that the resolution is tabled, for example, 'on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China'.

#### **PRACTICAL TIP HOW TO GET THE LATEST DRAFT**

There can be delays in the more recent versions of draft resolutions being uploaded and made public. If you are in contact with States during the process, you can always ask them to share a copy of the latest version with you. Copies of the updated versions of a resolution are also generally provided during informals.

## Amendments

At times, no agreement will be reached amongst all Member States on the full text of a resolution, even after several weeks of negotiations – including informals and other meetings.

### Written amendments

Beyond the informal negotiations, any State or group of States can formally propose a written amendment, which provides suggested changes to the draft resolution. An amendment can involve additions, deletions or modifications to the text.

Written amendments must be submitted to the Secretariat to be assigned a separate L-document number and uploaded to the Third Committee website. There is no deadline for submitting an amendment. At times, there can be a slight delay between the submission of an amendment and the moment that the relevant text is available on the UN website. It can take a few days for translation to be completed and the Secretariat to upload the documents.

### Oral amendments

An amendment can also be presented orally on the day that the Third Committee considers a draft resolution for adoption. While sometimes a State will make it known ahead of time that they plan to introduce an oral amendment, the introduction of oral amendments is frequently considered hostile, and known as such, as the State choosing to employ such a tactic is not providing other States with much time to establish a position. In the event that an oral amendment is introduced, any State can request a 24-hour period to consider the text. This allows States to formulate a position and in particular to seek 'instructions' from their colleagues in the capital as to whether they should support the amendment or not.

### CASE STUDY THE RESOLUTION ON THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

UN resolutions on the protection of human rights defenders had a tradition of being adopted by consensus. Then, for the first time in its sixteen year history, a vote was called on the Human Rights Defenders resolution at the Third Committee. After weeks of negotiations, 39 written amendments to the text were introduced by the African Group, China and Iran. The proposed amendments removed references to the legitimacy of the work of human rights defenders and proposed the deletion of whole paragraphs including one that spoke of the need to combat impunity for violations and abuses against defenders.<sup>24</sup>

*continued on next page*

<sup>24</sup> For the full list of the amendments see A/C.3/70/L.69-L.107: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/70/proplist.shtml>.

When the Third Committee considered the draft resolution, the main sponsor, Norway, presented a number of oral revisions that sought to accommodate some concerns that had been highlighted in the written amendments. In making these concessions, Norway called on the Third Committee to adopt the resolution by consensus to send a clear message of support to human rights defenders. On behalf of the African Group, Sierra Leone withdrew the proposed amendments.

Despite this, the Vice Chair of the Committee said a record vote had been requested by the delegations of China and the Russian Federation on the draft resolution as orally revised. The resolution was adopted with 117 in favour, 14 against and 40 abstentions. The General Assembly plenary adopted the draft resolution a few weeks later by an increased majority – 127 in favour, 14 against with 41 abstentions.

A few months later, the UN Human Rights Council considered its biennial resolution on defenders, where a small group of States led by China, Cuba, Egypt, Russia, and Pakistan introduced a raft of written amendments on the text, which were also rejected.

These experiences put in question the value of trying to secure consensus on resolutions. Whilst ultimately establishing consensus on an issue is the objective of the negotiation process, it cannot be done at the risk of setting the lowest common denominator or of not attempting to move a controversial issue forward due to the fear of revealing polarisation through a vote record.

### *Introduction of resolutions*

The lead State(s) can 'introduce' a draft resolution on an allocated date indicated in the Third Committee calendar. However, for the sake of time, States are discouraged from doing so. Approximately one third of draft resolutions are not introduced. Many of these are resolutions that essentially provide a technical update on a previous resolution.

Where States do choose to introduce a resolution, they generally speak to the motivation behind the preparation of the text, its content, the spirit with which the negotiation process was advanced, and the level of support the text enjoys in terms of co-sponsorship. The objective of introducing the text is generally to gain further co-sponsors. The Committee Secretary will then take the floor to inform the Third Committee of any additional co-sponsors that have joined since the resolution was tabled, and ask if any further States wish to join the list of co-sponsors.

### *The Third Committee takes action!*

The Third Committee will 'take action on' all of the proposed resolutions before the end of the session. In short, this is the point at which Member States will either adopt the resolution by consen-

sus or put it to a vote. States can also express opinions about the resolutions at that point through oral statements.

Action can be taken as late as the final day of the Third Committee session. Those resolutions for which lead sponsors are still seeking to consolidate support will often be considered as late as possible in the Third Committee schedule.

Contrary to the practice at the Human Rights Council where resolutions are introduced when the Council is to take action on them, the introduction (when it happens) and action take place on separate days during the Third Committee.

The lead State(s) might make a statement. If they introduced the resolution on a separate occasion, the statement on the day of action is likely to be similar to the resolution. The Committee Secretary will then name States that have joined as co-sponsors since the latest version was issued, and ask the room if any others wish to co-sponsor the resolution.

In the case of a country-specific resolution, the affected country has the right to reply. By convention, the concerned State can speak first or last, as it prefers.

A resolution can be adopted by consensus or vote. If there is consensus on the text it can be adopted at this point.

States sometimes choose to “disassociate from consensus”. They do this to express their disagreement with the text even though they did not challenge it by calling for a vote. Ultimately, this step is largely symbolic.

### **Voting**

Any State can call for a recorded vote on a draft resolution when it comes before the Committee for consideration. In that case, the support of a majority of present and voting States is required for a resolution to be adopted.

If an amendment has been introduced – either in writing or orally – it can either be accepted by the lead State, or a vote can be called for on the amendment. Following the introduction of an amendment, other States can make general statements in regard to the amendment. The support of a majority of present and voting States is required for an amendment to be adopted. In the event that the amendment is successfully adopted, the resolution is either adopted by consensus or voted on as revised.

When a vote is called, whether on a resolution or an amendment, States indicate their position through an electronic voting system. States can vote in favour, against, or abstain. States can also choose not to vote at all. In some cases, they physically leave the room intentionally, often in an effort to appease pressure from opposing

sides on the issue. In the case of very small delegations, sometimes they are absent at the time of a vote due to not being aware of the upcoming vote, or not having people available to attend.

If a State cannot send a delegate to a session to vote, they can designate someone from another mission to act as their proxy.

The result of the vote will be projected on a screen in the conference room and confirmed orally by the Secretariat. A printed record is circulated shortly thereafter in the conference room.

No State can change its vote or withdraw its co-sponsorship once the vote is taken. On rare occasions, States make mistakes in voting, and will usually request the floor to make this clear for the record. The Secretariat usually says that the explanation will be recorded in the report of the session. However, the voting record will reflect what they originally voted.

On occasion, main sponsors make final changes to the draft resolution on the floor prior to the vote, with the aim of accommodating different points of view and securing consensus. As all co-sponsors are considered 'to own' the text, these final changes are generally agreed between relevant States. On rare occasions, co-sponsors may withdraw their co-sponsorship when they disagree with the changes the lead State is making to the text.

#### PRACTICAL TIP

Although NGOs cannot take the floor to make a statement in any part of the Third Committee proceedings, they can interact with States during sessions. It can be useful to be in the room if the meeting is suspended and informal discussions take place.

#### *General statements and explanations of vote*

When a vote is called on a draft resolution, States have the opportunity to make a general statement before the vote.

Following general statements, States can choose to make an explanation of vote before the vote. They usually do so to explain the reasons behind their vote and to try to convince others to join them, sometimes by anticipating or countering the other side's arguments.

The distinction between 'general statements' and 'explanations of vote before the vote' is a little artificial. The tradition of providing two opportunities to intervene ahead of the vote was introduced to ensure that all States considered they had had the opportunity to speak.

In addition to making general statements or explanations of vote before the vote, there is an option to make an explanation of vote after the vote.

States that have proposed a resolution or an amendment cannot make explanations of vote on their own resolution or amendment, as they have had an opportunity to explain their position when introducing the text.

**What other procedures are available to State during the Third Committee?**

- 1/** A State can **raise a point of order** at any time during a session. The point of order could be to draw the Chair's attention to a technical problem – such as a faulty earpiece – or could relate to a political matter. A point of order requires an immediate ruling by the Chair. A State can challenge the Chair's ruling, although this is rare. If it wished to, a State could appeal the Chair's decision, at which point the matter would be decided by a majority vote in the Committee.
- 2/** A **right to reply** is an option open to States at the end of an agenda item. Frequently, States invoke the right to reply when they consider that they have been maligned by another State during the debate. A State can only invoke this right twice per day on the same agenda item. The first right to reply is of a maximum of 5 minutes, the second of 3 minutes.
- 3/** States can try **to adjourn or close debates**. Adjourning a debate (or requesting a **no action motion**) is a means to try to stop a debate. Closing a debate is a means to halt discussion and move directly to action on the agenda item. A State can call for an adjournment or closure of a debate at any time, at which point the proposal is put to a majority vote.

**CASE STUDY NO ACTION MOTION**

An unprecedented no-action motion was introduced during the Third Committee of the 71st Session of the UNGA. It was introduced on an entire agenda item relating to the country situations in Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Syria and Crimea. The objective of the no-action motion was to remove all resolutions under discussion from the agenda. Belarus argued that country resolutions were 'an arbitrary instrument of coercion' and counter-productive. The move was strongly rejected by other States, including Saudi Arabia who noted that the no-action motion deprived Member States of an 'important opportunity' to decide the merits of an individual resolutions. In a letter to States, NGOs had argued that if successful, the no-action motion would signal that the UN was not a place where freedom of expression was respected nor open debate encouraged. The no-action motion was rejected (102 – 32 with 37 abstentions) and all resolutions went on to be considered by the Committee.

### *The approval of any budgetary implications by the Fifth Committee:*

Third Committee resolutions and decisions frequently have financial implications. If the Committee decides to request a report, a meeting or the establishment of a commission of inquiry, resources will be required.

The financial implications need to be assessed and considered before decisions are made about approving resources. These are the steps in the process:

- 1/** The UN Secretariat identifies whether there are any budgetary implications arising from the draft resolutions of the Third Committee. If the Secretariat identifies costs that have not been included in the regular biennial budget (the 'programme budget'), a 'programme budget implication (PBI)' is prepared. An individual report outlining the PBI is issued for each resolution, in the name of the Secretary General.
- 2/** The individual report is sent to the Third Committee ahead of the Committee taking action on the relevant resolution.
- 3/** The report of PBIs is also sent to an expert Committee – the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions ('the Advisory Committee' or 'ACABQ') – for review.

**In addition to considering financial implications of Third Committee decisions, the ACABQ also considers those of the Human Rights Council. The estimated costs resulting from resolutions and decisions made by the Human Rights Council during its regular sessions and special sessions are included in a single report of the Secretary General. This report also goes to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ).**

- 4/** The ACABQ considers all reports it receives and then sends its observations, conclusions and recommendations to the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary Committee).

**If there is no financial implication arising from a resolution, or the costs are going to be 'absorbed' within resources already approved or funded from extra-budgetary resources, then it is likely that neither the ACABQ nor the Fifth Committee need to get involved. An oral statement is simply sent to the Third Committee and/or UNGA Plenary and the process concludes there.**

- 5/** The Fifth Committee starts its work immediately after the General Assembly's General Debate has concluded (mid-September). It considers the conclusions and recommendations of the ACABQ. On the back of its discussions, the Chair of the

Committee then draws up a draft resolution that the Committee will take action on.<sup>25</sup>

At least 48 hours are required before the Fifth Committee can take action on a draft resolution containing budgetary implications. 1st December is the last day such resolutions can be sent to the Fifth Committee. This allows time for the UN Secretariat (in name of the Secretary General) to prepare the PBI and for ACABQ to consider it.

The Fifth Committee generally endorses the recommendations of the ACABQ. However, it can decide not to approve a recommendation. For example, in 2016, an attempt was made to not approve funding arising from a Human Rights Council decision to create a new Special Procedure (see page 49), but this was rejected by the Committee when put to a vote. The Committee may also approve funding additional to the recommendations of the ACABQ.

**6/** The UN General Assembly Plenary meets after the Fifth Committee has finished its work to consider the report of the Fifth Committee, which contains its recommendations. The Plenary can meet just a few hours after the Fifth Committee concludes. The UN General Assembly Plenary session on Fifth Committee recommendations is often one of the last meetings held at the UN Headquarters before the UN closes for the holidays.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IF THE UNGA PLENARY DOES NOT APPROVE RESOURCES?**

If the UNGA Plenary doesn't approve new resources or approves a lower level of resources than requested, the Secretary General may be asked to redeploy existing resources; or the UN office responsible for executing the mandate may need to find resources by reprioritising existing activities. Some Member States also provide voluntary contributions – earmarked or not – to facilitate the funding of UN activities.

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24 For example, see A/C.5/71/L.19, December 2016



### *The General Assembly plenary adoption phase:*

In mid-December, the UNGA Plenary sits - usually for half a day - to consider the decisions made by each of its committees during the previous months. Consideration of the resolutions of each committee take place on different days. The Third Committee provides the Plenary with reports related to each of its agenda items. These reports contain relevant resolutions and decisions. The resolutions of the Third Committee are technically still 'drafts' until they are adopted by the Plenary. Third Committee resolutions are considered by the General Assembly at the earliest opportunity once the Third Committee report has been prepared.

Decisions to adopt draft resolutions by the Third Committee can be reversed and texts can be amended by the UNGA Plenary. In general however, the UNGA rubberstamps recommendations made by the Committee – particularly in regard to consensus resolutions. A State in the Plenary can call for a vote on any of the draft resolutions previously adopted by consensus by the Third Committee, but this is extremely rare.

Resolutions adopted by a vote in the Third Committee are generally voted on again at the Plenary session. The Third Committee decision is set out to the Plenary at which point they automatically move to a vote.

States cannot co-sponsor a Third Committee resolution at the General Assembly Plenary stage.

In the case of draft resolutions adopted by vote at the Third Committee, States can only explain their vote once – either at the Third Committee or at the Plenary. Most States choose to give explanations of vote at the Third Committee stage. However, if a State changes its vote at the Plenary stage, it can make a new explanation of vote, for a maximum of 10 minutes.

As is the case in the Third Committee, any State can table a written amendment to a draft resolution ahead of the Plenary meeting. This must be done at least 24 hours ahead of the Plenary meeting. An oral amendment can also be introduced when the Plenary is to take action on the resolution. However, action on the resolution can then be postponed for 24 hours if any State requests it, to allow States to consider the amendment and seek instructions. This request will be put to the vote.

Adoption of the Third Committee resolutions – contained in the Third Committee report – by the UNGA Plenary takes about three hours.

A few weeks after adoption, resolutions will be made public with the code: A/RES/(See Chapter 5).



Whilst the formal participation privileges provided to accredited NGOs at the Third Committee are fewer than those enjoyed at the Human Rights Council, there are still several ways to try to influence States throughout the process of the definition and adoption of resolutions at the Committee.

## WHY ENGAGE WITH THE THIRD COMMITTEE?

'The Third Committee provides an important opportunity for us to garner expressions of support for the importance of human rights by a large number of States. To have the whole General Assembly membership adopt a resolution, either by consensus or a vote, gives us a chance to get dozens of States on the record on issues that we care about.'

**Akshaya Kumar**

*Deputy United Nations Director  
Human Rights Watch*

'Due to the participation of all 193 States in Third Committee decisions, engaging with the Third Committee provides us with insights into regional dynamics on human rights issues that concern us. Through bilateral meetings with States, we're able to assess the appetite they have to make further progress on the implementation of international laws and standards related to LGBTIQ people. At the Third Committee, we also have the opportunity to build partnerships with other civil society organisations working on complementary briefs, which opens up potential for partnerships within intersecting movements. We can also share the workload of observing the Committee's work.'

**Siri May**

*United Nations Programme Coordinator  
Outright Action International*

## Lobby States on resolutions

States often acknowledge NGO expertise on a topic and their capacity to mobilise civil society partners in support of an initiative. States often welcome suggestions from NGOs on what future resolutions should focus on. Once States have decided on a focus for an upcoming resolution, they may accept suggestions of specific language and references to include in the draft.

## PRACTICAL TIP

If you seek to influence the content of a resolution, you should approach the lead State as early as possible. You can contact the lead States at their diplomatic mission, or at capital level. (See Chapter 5).

As the negotiation proceeds, the sponsors of the resolution may need to adapt sections of the text, or add language, and may welcome suggestions from NGOs. Be proactive in offering suggestions. Ensure your suggestions are succinct, clearly reference relevant international standards or 'agreed text', and are supported by a well-argued rationale. This approach will put States in the best position to accommodate your proposal if they wish, and to defend it during negotiations.

### *Lobbying in New York - Timing*

NGOs planning advocacy activities in New York at the Third Committee will need to ensure they have access to the UN Headquarters (see Chapter 5). Deciding when to be present in New York is also critical.

Due to the fact that most resolutions will be considered and then can be voted at both the Third Committee and then the UNGA Plenary session – a period of approximately two months – the time an issue is under consideration can seem very long and it can be challenging for NGOs to remain engaged. However, effective collaboration with other NGO advocates, as well as good planning can make the process easier to manage.

During the first three weeks of September, State representatives are likely to be very busy with the General Debate of the UNGA and high-level meetings. It can be hard to connect with State representatives from UN missions directly during that period. Many resolutions will also still be in the drafting stage, during which the foreign ministry may be involved, so it can be more useful for NGOs to advocate directly with foreign ministries during this period.

The Third Committee session will start in the first full week of October. The session usually runs for seven and a half weeks. Negotiations on resolutions will begin as early as the first or second week of the Third Committee session. Some negotiations will be concluded relatively quickly and adoptions will generally start in the fifth week of the session. Other more difficult negotiations will continue for longer. Resolutions can be adopted until the last day, which is usually the last Wednesday before the American Thanksgiving holiday (fourth Thursday of November). As a general rule, the more controversial the resolution, the longer the negotiation period will be, and the later the adoption will be, but this is not always the case.

## PRACTICAL TIP

Sometimes, a State will take different positions at the Human Rights Council and at the Third Committee, on resolutions on similar topics. There can be a lack of understanding by a delegation in Geneva or in New York on what is happening in the other human rights body.

If you find that a State delegation in New York is not responding positively to a human rights initiative when they have done so at the Human Rights Council, it may be useful to reach out to the State delegates in Geneva, and encourage them to contact their New York counterparts. Be aware, however, that there can be a certain ‘territoriality’ shown by State delegates in regard to the space where they operate. It can be worth getting advice from an NGO colleague well experienced in these spaces, as to whether outreach would be useful. Of course, pointing to inconsistencies in a State position on a certain issue in different human rights spaces, can be useful in encouraging them to vote positively.

### *Lobbying at the national level*

It is important to bear in mind that advocacy efforts related to UNGA developments are as important at national level as in person in New York.

Civil society networks that connect activists working nationally, regionally and internationally can be crucial. Activists engaging with the Third Committee in New York can feed information to partners around the world about how negotiations are progressing. National-level activists can then use the information to lobby national level actors and reach out to media outlets. This coordinated approach has proved effective when defending human rights gains in the Third Committee and UNGA Plenary (see text box page 49).

## PRACTICAL TIP MAKING CIVIL SOCIETY OPINION HEARD

Civil society positions presented in the name of a broad and deep coalition can be most persuasive. For example, a joint NGO letter can make evident the depth of concern on an issue and potentially be a tool for States to reference during an intervention at a Third Committee meeting.

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## Lobby States to engage during debates and interactive dialogues

Chapter 2 includes a description of both the general discussions and interactive dialogues with human rights experts, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the President of the Human Rights Council, all taking place during the Third Committee. In these cases, States will have the opportunity to make statements on the subject under discussion.

These are opportunities for NGOs to try to get issues of concern to them highlighted. NGOs can approach States to try and influence the content of a statement, or request States to ask a specific question of one of the human rights experts during the interactive dialogues. States frequently welcome concrete suggested wording that they can include in their interventions.

For statements to be made during general discussions, States are likely to prepare these early in September, respectively early October for statements during interactive dialogues with Special Rapporteurs, the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the President of the Human Rights Council. In both cases, these are often prepared in liaison with colleagues in relevant embassies and at capital level (for example, Foreign Ministries). NGOs can reach out to States at all levels.

### PRACTICAL TIP

If you want a State's intervention during an interactive dialogue with a Special Rapporteur to include a reference or recommendation important to you, timing is important. As soon as the Special Rapporteur's report is published, approach the State you wish to engage with. If the publication of the report looks to be delayed, approach the State directly.

Third Committee sessions can be very busy, but many State representatives will still make time to speak or meet with NGOs.

One way to reach out to a State is to call its mission and ask to speak to the Third Committee representative. However, many delegates spend a great deal of their time during the session at the UN Headquarters.

It is possible to catch an individual State representative in the conference room where the session is being held. It can be easiest to catch a representative as they are leaving or entering the hall. However, it is also possible to approach delegates at their seats. Of course be conscious of whether it is a good moment during the debate to talk to them.

### PRACTICAL TIP WHEN TO APPROACH A DELEGATE

Don't approach a State delegate who may be about to make a statement. In this regard, it can be helpful to consult the speakers' list, which you'll find pasted on the wall by the doors inside the conference room.

NGOs are not generally allowed to leave printed materials in the Third Committee room or on delegates' desks. Only UN documents and printed statements by speakers can be distributed in the conference room before, during or after a meeting.

### Hosting a side event

Side events can be a good way to bring the real world into the UN and try to influence the agenda. Otherwise discussions risk being abstract and divorced from reality. A side event can provide a platform for those affected by a situation under discussion to share their experiences and recommendations. It can help provide arguments for a position NGOs are advocating for, and can inspire diplomats to engage more energetically in negotiations.

Side events during the session are best held during the lunch hour in the UN building to encourage the greatest turn out. Over the lunch hour, rooms can be booked from 1.15-2:30pm.

Unfortunately, NGOs cannot organise a side event at the UN directly.<sup>26</sup> In order to book a room, your event must be sponsored by a State or UN entity – but States are given priority, so room bookings by UN entities could be cancelled if there is a shortage. The co-sponsor State will usually take care of the logistics. This could include booking the room, ordering special passes for those without a UN badge and organising necessary technical support – for example setting up name plates for speakers, web-casting and any other audio-visual equipment. A State sponsor could also organise refreshments to be served outside the room ahead of the event.

### PRACTICAL TIP COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH HOSTING A SIDE EVENT

Booking a room and arranging the technical aspects for a side event held at the UN carries a cost. It is worth discussing with a State sponsor if they would cover the costs, in full or partially.

<sup>26</sup> The exception is the Delegates Dining Room, for more information see <http://visit.un.org/content/delegates-dining-room>.

There may be people who want to attend the side event but don't have a UN badge. In this case, you can temporarily accredit a limited number with your own organisation if you have a badge yourself, or ask a State sponsor to organise 'special event passes' that can be distributed ahead of the event. States can also escort a limited number of people without passes into the UN building.

**Side events should be included in the UN Journal, which is the daily programme of meetings to be held at the UN Headquarters. The deadline to submit material for the Journal issue of the next day is 6:30pm, for the programme of meetings. The announcements to be published in the "Forthcoming other meetings" section should be sent before 6:00pm at least two days in advance. Requests must be made to the editor at [journal@un.org](mailto:journal@un.org).**

It is also possible to organise a side event outside of the UN building. NGO colleagues in New York may be able to suggest venues or meeting spaces in their offices that can be rented out. You should consider, however, that events held outside of the UN during the Third Committee session are likely to draw a far smaller crowd of diplomats than those held in the UN itself. Given the hectic schedule of meetings and informals, delegates can be reticent to attend meetings that require them to travel or even leave the UN Headquarters!

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### **Engaging with human rights experts**

Many human rights experts, including Special Procedures, commissions of inquiry, Treaty Body chairpersons and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General, come to New York to report to the Third Committee. They tend to come for a few days. NGOs based in New York frequently organise NGO meetings with relevant experts. Mainly because the opportunities for engagement with the Third Committee are less significant than at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, the space is much less crowded. As a consequence, NGOs may find that opportunities to meet with UN human rights experts while they are in New York to brief the Third Committee can be greater.

## CASE STUDY

### THE CREATION OF THE MANDATE OF THE UN INDEPENDENT EXPERT ON PROTECTION AGAINST VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY<sup>27</sup>

Following years of civil society efforts and the commitment of key States, in June 2016 the UN Human Rights Council voted to create a new independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Resolution A/HRC/32/2). A mandate-holder, Vitit Muntarbhorn, was nominated at the following session of the Council. Due to controversy around the creation of the new mandate, it was expected that an attempt may be made to challenge the Council's decision when it passed to the UN General Assembly for consideration.<sup>28</sup>

The decision of the Human Rights Council to create the mandate was included in the annual report of the Council to the Third Committee during the 71st session of the General Assembly. The African Group traditionally prepares a Third Committee resolution to adopt the report of the Council in its entirety. However, this time, the African Group included a paragraph in its resolution calling for deferral of consideration of and action on the Council decision to create the independent expert 'to allow for more time for consultations'.

On the day the African Group tabled the resolution, the Third Committee held an interactive dialogue with the Human Rights Council President. The President, Ambassador Choi Kyong-lim, made a forceful appeal to the Third Committee not to re-open decisions made by the Human Rights Council, warning that it would 'undermine the credibility of the Human Rights Council and of the UN system'.

The date of consideration of the resolution by the Third Committee had been set back a couple of times so, on 21st November 2016, expectations were high. Eight Latin American States – the majority being initiators of the original resolution at the Human Rights Council – introduced an amendment to the African Group resolution to remove the text seeking to postpone the creation of the mandate. The Latin American States' amendment passed by 84-77 (with 17 abstentions). The African Group resolution to adopt the report of the Council, stripped of language related to the independent expert, was then adopted after another vote.

With such a close vote at the Third Committee, it was assumed that a new attempt would be made when the Third Committee decisions and resolutions were considered by the UNGA Plenary. With a few weeks to go until the UNGA

*continued on next page*

27 For more on the background, see ISHR website <http://www.ishr.ch/news/lgbt-rights> section on 2016.

28 The Human Rights Council adopted resolution HRC/ 32/2 by a recorded vote of 23 to 18, with 6 abstentions.

Plenary would likely vote, States and NGOs continued to mobilise, with each side trying to shift 'swing' States towards their position. Arguments advanced were both substantive and procedural. 870 NGOs from 157 countries around the world signed a letter calling on States to defend the mandate.<sup>29</sup>

When the UNGA Plenary considered the Third Committee resolution, on 19th December 2016, the African Group put forward an amendment to reverse the change made to its resolution as proposed by the Latin American States, and decided on by the Third Committee. Once again, the African Group amendment was rejected, this time by 84 to 77, with 16 abstentions, while the resolution itself passed.

Whilst the independent expert position was now confirmed, there was still one more hurdle to overcome. Financial resourcing had to be secured.

The UNGA Fifth Committee – the Administrative and Budgetary Committee – had started to consider recommendations of its Advisory Committee (ACABQ) in its closed sessions. These recommendations included those related to Human Rights Council decisions, including the Independent Expert. With States already leaving New York for the Christmas holidays, there were concerns about there being sufficient States present to push back against any attempt made in the Fifth Committee to block funding of the work of the Independent Expert.

On 23rd December, Burkina Faso, speaking on behalf of the African Group, submitted an oral amendment to a UNGA Fifth Committee resolution which included an endorsement of funds for Human Rights Council resolutions and decisions.<sup>30</sup> The proposed amendment stated that the Committee 'decides not to approve any additional resources stemming from the adoption of resolution 32/2 by the Human Rights Council'. Argentina called for a vote on the African Group amendment on behalf of the eight Latin American States. The African Group amendment was rejected by a recorded vote of 82 against, 65 in favour, with 16 abstentions.

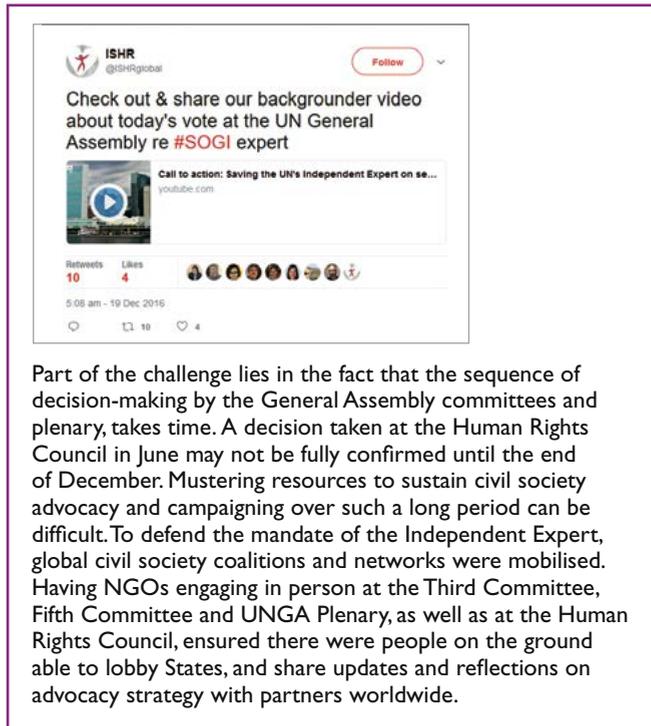
A final vote was then held – now late into the night – by the UNGA Plenary when they considered the decision of the Fifth Committee.

Ultimately, it took six separate votes, two at each of the UN Third and Fifth Committees and then at the UNGA Plenary to confirm the creation and funding of the new UN Independent Expert.

The creation of the mandate of the Independent Expert shows that NGOs need to be aware of the possibilities that human rights initiatives can be derailed when they cross over to New York.

29 NGO joint letter, See: [www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/joint\\_sogi\\_letter\\_listofsignatories12152016.pdf](http://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/article/files/joint_sogi_letter_listofsignatories12152016.pdf)

30 A/C.5/71/L.19 Part XV 'Revised Estimates resulting from resolutions and decisions adopted by the Human Rights Council at its thirty-first, thirty-second and thirty-third session and twenty-fourth special session.



## Reprisals

Everybody has the right to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies on issues related to human rights. In cooperating with or seeking to cooperate with the UN, no-one should face any kind of intimidation or reprisals. In spite of this, some people who have submitted information to the UN, met with UN experts or traveled to attend a meeting with a UN body, have experienced threats and attacks. Family members and colleagues have also been targeted.

States have a primary duty to ensure everyone can access and communicate with international bodies without being threatened or attacked. In addition - as subjects of international law - UN bodies may also be bound to ensure the same.

In the event you, a colleague or family member experience reprisals, there are several ways of informing the UN of what has happened. These include sending a communication to relevant Special Procedures, Treaty Body reprisals focal points, the President of the General Assembly, and the Assistant Secretary General in his capacity as senior official on reprisals at: [reprisals@ohchr.org](mailto:reprisals@ohchr.org). If you would like further information on how to seek to prevent, manage occurrences of and report reprisals, please contact ISHR at [info@ishr.ch](mailto:info@ishr.ch).



## CHAPTER 5 PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Getting Access to the UN Headquarters (UNHQ) in New York:

To get into the conference room where the Third Committee meets, an NGO will need a badge. The badge indicates that the NGO has been accredited. There are several accreditation options. Each accreditation option offers a specific level of access and participation privileges in UN human rights bodies. With regard to the Third Committee, each of the options outlined below will allow you access to the open sessions of the Committee and to meetings spaces in the UNHQ.

Options for accreditation:

- Association with the Department of Public Information (DPI)
- Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) accreditation or 'consultative status', which provides for a more permanent relationship with the UN.
- Temporary accreditation through an NGO partner

#### *Association with the Department of Public Information (DPI)*

Association with the DPI enables NGOs which work in communications and outreach about the UN to obtain grounds passes to the UN for three NGO representatives. Representatives can attend all 'open' UN meetings. Association with the DPI doesn't bestow privileges that NGOs with ECOSOC consultative status enjoy – such as the right to speak and circulate statements – in certain UN fora like the Human Rights Council.

Gaining association with the DPI is relatively straight forward. An NGO must have a record of work going back at least three years, a record of collaboration with the UN prior to association and be able to provide copies of their by-laws and recent budget. NGOs must have a communications programme that shares news and information about the UN. NGOs must go through a qualifying process to obtain association with the DPI, but it is a less political and lengthy process than the one to obtain ECOSOC consultative status.

**For detailed information on how to complete your application for association with the DPI, visit: <https://outreach.un.org/ngorelations/content/application>**

#### *ECOSOC accreditation*

Consultative status with ECOSOC enables an NGO to obtain grounds passes to the UN for seven annual passes in New York and nine temporary passes at one time (with a validity for anything between 1 day

and 3 months). As is the case with association with the DPI, NGO representatives with ECOSOC status can attend all 'open' UN meetings. ECOSOC status also enables NGOs to make oral statements and circulate written ones at certain UN meetings, including the Human Rights Council. NGOs with ECOSOC accreditation cannot submit written statements or make oral interventions at the Third Committee.

To obtain ECOSOC consultative status, an NGO needs to follow a two-step process of filling out a profile and an application form. This process is handled by the UN's NGO Branch of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Details can be found here: <http://csonet.org/?menu=83>. Applications for consultative status are then reviewed by the Committee on NGOs twice a year, with final decisions made by ECOSOC. The practice of the NGO Committee is criticised as being politicised and lacking transparency. The process of gaining ECOSOC accreditation can be troublesome and lengthy, particularly for human rights organisations.

**For more detailed information on the accreditation process, please review ISHR's handbook 'A practical guide to the UN Committee on NGOs' ([https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/ishr\\_ngo\\_handbook\\_2017\\_eng\\_web.pdf](https://www.ishr.ch/sites/default/files/documents/ishr_ngo_handbook_2017_eng_web.pdf)).**

#### *Accreditation through a partner*

An NGO representative can seek temporary accreditation for a period of 1 day – 3 months through a partner NGO that has ECOSOC status. To get temporary accreditation, the partner NGO will need to fill out a one-page form with relevant information. The request is generally considered within a couple of days.

#### *Badges and security*

After obtaining accreditation, NGO representatives can request a badge (or grounds pass) to access the UN Headquarters. Badges must be worn at all times at the UN facilities. NGO representatives will be required to show their badge at the security and screening area and all security control points. The pass guarantees access to certain parts of UNHQ, which is made up of several buildings. The Third Committee holds its sessions in one of the large numbered conference rooms in the Conference Building (usually Conference Room 1).

#### **THE UN PASS OFFICE**

Passes can be collected at the Pass and I.D. Unit of the United Nations Security and Safety Service, located at 320, 45th Street between First and Second Avenues.

##### **Office hours**

Monday through Friday 9:00 AM - 12:45 PM and 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM.

You will need to take certain supporting documents with you. For details on these, see: <http://csonet.org/?menu=86>

Whilst the process to collect a pass takes around twenty minutes, at busy times it can take considerably longer:

**Plan ahead!**

## Location and access

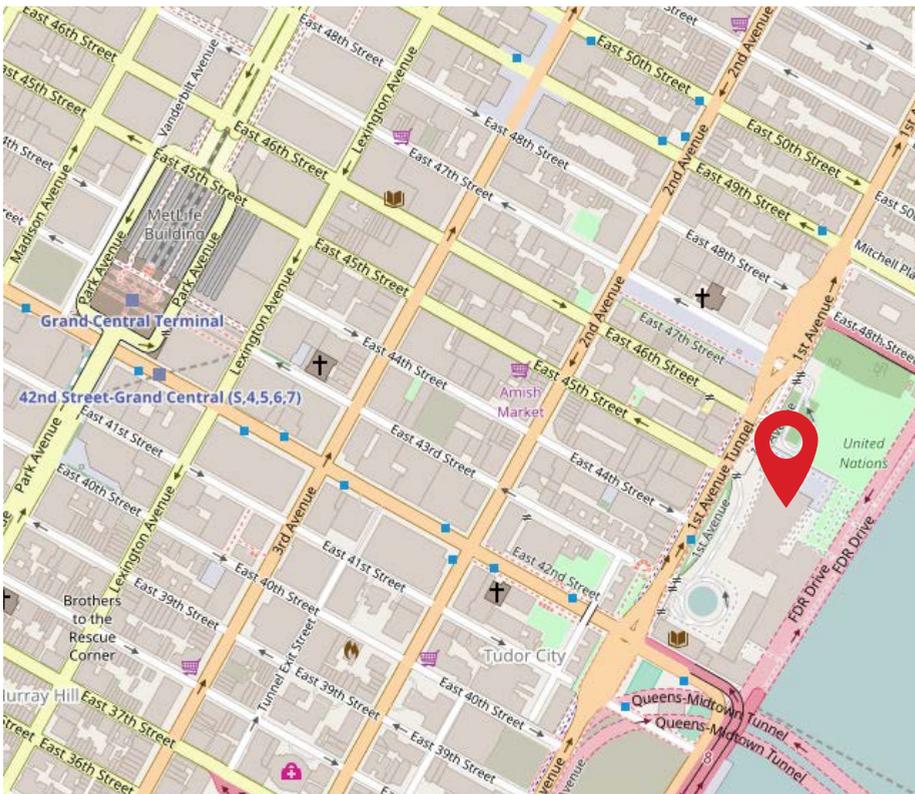
### Directions to the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ)

The United Nations Headquarters is located in the heart of New York City on First Avenue between 42nd and 48th Street, overlooking East River.

### How to get to the UNHQ?

There are no parking facilities at the UNHQ. The most convenient way to get there is by public transportation. Further information on how to get to the UN can be found here: <http://visit.un.org/content/location>

- **By subway:**  
Numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, or S trains to Grand Central Station; walk east on 42nd Street to First Avenue
- **By bus:**  
M15, M42
- **By car:**  
Private parking garages are available from East 45th Street to East 49th Streets, between First and Second Avenues



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## Entrance

NGO representatives who hold an annual UN grounds pass, a temporary pass or a special event pass can access the UN New York Headquarters through the Visitor's entrance located at 46th Street and First Avenue. Getting through the security check can take up to 30 minutes at busy times. Additional security measures are put in place during the high-level segment of the General Assembly.

### **United Nations Main Number**

**+1 212 963 1234**

## Getting around the United Nations Headquarters

### **1/ How to locate a room at the UN Headquarters?**

The UN Headquarters is a complex of interconnected buildings, including the UN General Assembly Building, the Conference Building and the Secretariat. The UN General Assembly Building is the first building you will reach after passing through security. You can get to rooms in the other buildings from there. There is an information point in the foyer of the UN General Assembly Building.

Many UN offices are located within the Secretariat building. All rooms in the Secretariat are preceded by the letter 'S'. There are also UN Offices across the road from the Headquarters. These are DCI (One, United Nations Plaza E 44th Street) and DC2 (Two, United Nations Plaza, 329 East 44th Street).

### **2/ How can I find where a Third Committee meeting is being held?**

1. Check the UN Journal (see page 58)
2. The Third Committee meetings are generally held in Conference Room 1, 2 or 3
3. Each meeting room has a screen outside showing the title of the meeting taking place. Some meetings will be labelled as 'closed', meaning that only delegates can attend. This will generally be the case with 'informals'.

### **3/ Inside the conference rooms:**

- **Seating:** Every conference room has a seating area designated for civil society. This area is generally located at the back of the room. Seats not designated for particular States or UN agencies are generally available to civil society.
- **Electrical sockets:** many of the civil society seats in Conference Rooms 1, 2 and 3 have sockets to charge computers or phones. These are 'recessed' so you may find you need an adaptor to be able to use them. Sockets that are flush with the wall can be found on the walls of the conference rooms and in some of the outside spaces.

- **Audio:** all open meetings of the Third Committee will be translated into all the UN official languages<sup>31</sup>.

#### PRACTICAL TIP

Whilst earpieces should be provided in the civil society section of the conferences rooms where the Third Committee meets, sometimes they are missing. The General Assembly Hall frequently lacks earpieces. Bring your own headphones to all meetings and side events. The audio settings are easy to use - just connect your headphones and select the channel of your preferred UN official language.

- **WiFi:** Internet is available throughout the building at 'UNHQ-WIFI'. No password is required.

#### PRACTICAL TIP

You can use computers with internet access just outside Conference Room 1 on level 1B. They don't require a password and there is no charge.

#### 4/ Places to meet

Diplomats or NGO partners will often suggest meeting at the Vienna Café on level 1B. This can be quite noisy and may not be ideal for all conversations. A much quieter option is the Qatar Lounge (East Lounge) on the First Floor behind the conference rooms.

Some delegates may suggest meeting at the Delegates' Lounge on the 2nd Floor. The 2nd Floor has restricted access for NGOs, so be aware that, for you to reach the Delegates Lounge a State representative will need to accompany you through the security point by the lifts on the 2nd Floor.

There are several cafés within the Headquarters, including the Vienna Café (General Assembly Building, first basement conference area - level 1B), the Visitor's Café (General Assembly Lobby, Visitors Area - level 1B), the Lobby Café (Secretariat Building, North Lobby) and the Café de la Paix (Secretariat Building, 1st floor basement). These are open from 8.00am to between 3-6pm, Monday to Friday.

#### 5/ Visitors' Area

On the lower ground floor of the UN General Assembly Building is the 'Visitors Area' where you will find a post office, gift shop, vending machines and an ATM machine (UNFCU Credit Union).

31 Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.

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## Resources and documents

### *UN Journal*

The UN Journal is the first place to go each morning to find out the schedule of meetings being held at the UN Headquarters. It is issued daily in English and in French. During the main part of the General Assembly session (September to December), it is also issued in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Spanish.

The Journal is available online at <http://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/journal-united-nations/>. It provides an overview of:

- the meetings being held, when and where, the topics being discussed, and the documents forming the basis of discussions
- a complete list of official documents issued that day
- a summary of the meetings of the previous day

### *UNGA and Third Committee Websites*

The homepage of the General Assembly <http://www.un.org/en/ga/> provides an overview of the current session, events and news. From there, you can access specific information related to the main committees and past sessions.

Documents related to the work of the Third Committee, such as resolutions, allocation of agenda items, calendar of meetings, list of Special Procedures mandate holders and other experts presenting reports to the Third Committee, draft proposals, reports to the Plenary, and voting records can be found here: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/71/documentation.shtml>.

To access the full list of resolutions per session of the UN General Assembly, follow this link: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/general-assembly-resolutions/index.html>.

The PaperSmart portal <http://papersmart.unmeetings.org/ga/third/> provides electronic access to meeting programmes, agendas, documents and statements. Note that not every statement will be uploaded, only those that have been submitted.

### *Decoding document symbols*

UN official documents can be identified by unique symbols composed of numbers and letters separated by slashes. The components of the document symbol identify the principal organ, the related subsidiary body, and the nature of the document. The chart below provides a comprehensive list of document symbols.

The basic format for General Assembly documents is: *A/session/sequential number*.

For example, the symbol for Resolution *70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is: *A/RES/70/1*.

COMPONENT	WHAT IT INDICATES	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE <sup>32</sup>
<b>First</b>	Principal organs	A= GA ST= Secretariat
<b>Secondary</b>	Subsidiary body or GA committee	C1-C6= Main Committees BUR= General Committee
<b>Special</b>	Nature of the document	L.= limited distribution RES= resolution PV.= verbatim record SR.= summary record INF= information series CRP= conference room paper
<b>Final</b>	Modifications to the original text	Add.= addendum Corr.= corrigendum Rev.= revision
<b>Session</b>	Session the document was issued	A/74/= 74 <sup>th</sup> regular session A/S-40= 40 <sup>th</sup> special session A/ES-20= 20 <sup>th</sup> emergency special session
<b>Sequential number</b>	Document number (within one document type)	Numeric 1-9999

### Searching for UN documents

The UN has several websites and research tools that can assist you with your document search.

If you know the document number you can simply:

1. Type the URL undocs.org
2. Type the symbol of the document, including slashes.  
For example: undocs.org/A/RES/70/1
3. Select the language and download the document

Alternatively you can search from the UN documents website [www.un.org/en/documents](http://www.un.org/en/documents). Here you will also find links to other useful search tools such as ODS, UNBISnet and UN-I-QUE: UN Info Quest (see below).

<sup>32</sup> Verbatim records or *procès verbal* consist in a word by word transcript of the meeting. These records are only available for Plenary Meetings and First Committee Meetings. Summary records (SR) consist in summaries of statements made during Main Committee meetings.

Finding voting records:

**THIRD COMMITTEE VOTING RECORDS**

[www.un.org/en/ga/third/71/votingsheets.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/ga/third/71/votingsheets.shtml)

Amend the number in accordance with the relevant General Assembly Session.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTING RECORDS**

Go to <https://www.un.org/en/ga/sessions/> and select the session. Go to resolutions. There is a chart with the meeting records symbol, the document number and the voting outcome. Click on the meeting records symbol to view the full discussion and voting list.

**FIFTH COMMITTEE VOTING RECORDS**

Go to <https://www.un.org/en/ga/fifth/71/resdec71.shtml> and select the relevant session. Voting records are contained in the relevant Fifth Committee report.

*Official Document System*

Adopted resolutions are published in all six official languages on the UN Official Document System (ODS) <https://documents.un.org/prod/ods.nsf/home.xsp>. The ODS is an online database that provides full text of documents from 1993 onward. General Assembly Official Records from 1946 to 1993 have been digitised and are also available.

*United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBISnet)*

The UNBISnet website <http://unbisnet.un.org> provides research tools and access to:

- bibliographic records such as the Catalogue of the United Nations, as well as documents and publications indexed by the UN Dag Hammarskjöld Library and the Library of the UN Office at Geneva, and full text resources in all official languages (including resolutions)
- voting records for all adopted resolutions
- index to speeches made in the General Assembly from 1983 onwards.

*UN-I-QUE: UN Info Quest*

The database at <https://lib-unique.un.org> was created by the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to respond to frequently asked questions and search for document symbols. It covers materials from 1946 onwards and focuses on publications of a recurrent nature. The information is presented in reverse chronological order. It does not provide links to the actual documents.

*UN Documentation Research Guide*

To access the UN Research Guide, follow this link: <http://research.un.org/en/docs>. This guide provides an overview of documents, databases and websites.

## PRACTICAL TIP RESEARCH TRAINING PROGRAMMES

Check the website of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library to register for their research training programmes and learn how to search the different online resources. NGOs can participate in these trainings. See <https://library.un.org/content/training>

### *Other useful links*

<https://www.un.org/press/en>

UN meeting coverage and press releases.

<https://www.un.int/node>

The Permanent Missions website has a link to the documents issued by the UNHQ per day, and the calendar of meetings.

<http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/unms/>

'UN Member States: On the Record' provides access to relevant documents and statements of Member States. Full text documents are linked to in all official languages.

<https://protocol.un.org/dgacm/pls/site.nsf/BlueBook.xsp>

The 'Blue Book' lists contact information for all the Permanent Missions to the UN in New York.

### *Records*

The General Assembly Official Records (GAOR) contain the definite reference for all resolutions and decisions adopted. The GAOR are published six months after the end of the session and contain the meeting records of the Plenary and the Main Committees as well as supplements and annexes. Meeting records are consecutively numbered. See: <http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/or>

## PRACTICAL TIP MEETING NUMBERS

The meeting number can be found in the UN Journal. Dates and numbers of meetings are key to finding records.

### *Coverage of UN sessions*

#### **I/ Webcasting**

Through resolution 66/246, the General Assembly approved the live webcasting of all open formal meetings conducted by the Main Committees.

If you cannot physically attend a meeting, formal meetings of the Third Committee are live streamed via UN TV (<http://webtv.un.org/>). Recordings are available in all official languages. Past meetings are also available.<sup>33</sup>

33 <http://webtv.un.org/meetings-events/general-assembly/main-committees/3rd-committee/>

## 2/ Press releases

The Department of Public Information publishes press releases for every formal GA meeting. Press releases are not official records but provide a summary of the meetings. They can be accessed two hours after the meeting on: <https://www.un.org/press/en>

Links to relevant press releases are included in the list of General Assembly resolutions adopted by the General Assembly: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/71/resolutions.shtml>

## 3/ PGA Summaries

Summaries of thematic debates or events can be found in the section on the President of the General Assembly: <http://www.un.org/pgs/71/>

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## Emergency information and updates

The UNHQ Emergency Information website offers the option to subscribe to e-mail, SMS and voice call alerts. You can also join UNHQ Emergency Information on Facebook.

Alerts and emergency bulletins are available at: <http://emergency.un.org>

### Emergency Information Hotline:

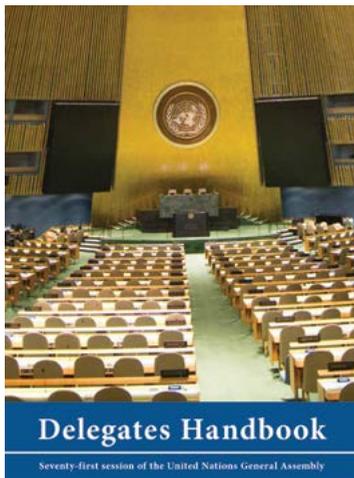
New York: 001 (212) 963-9800

US toll free: 001 (888) 986-8732

### Other Resources

#### The Delegates Handbook

Produced for State representatives each year by the UN Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. See the Delegates Handbook for the 71st Session: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/71/PDF/Delegates\\_Handbook\\_71st\\_session\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/ga/71/PDF/Delegates_Handbook_71st_session_EN.pdf)



# GLOSSARY

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## **Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)**

This Committee of experts provides the Fifth Committee with recommendations relating to UN finances.

## **Agreed language**

Agreed language is precise wording that has been agreed to and included in a prior resolution or decision. Including agreed language in a new text can be a means to integrate ideas and commitments from one text into another, and to limit what needs to be negotiated.

## **Amendment (oral, written, hostile)**

An amendment is a proposal for a modification to a resolution by withdrawing, adapting or adding language. An amendment is oral or in written form. A written amendment is introduced and made public ahead of the Third Committee considering the relevant resolution, whilst an oral amendment is made on the day itself. A 'hostile' amendment is a term used for proposals made orally or in written form where it is considered that the authors have not engaged positively in negotiations or are purposely trying to undermine a resolution.

## **Blue Book**

The online directory containing contact details for all Permanent Missions to the United Nations in New York, is commonly known as the Blue Book.

## **Country-specific resolution**

A resolution focusing on a specific country situation.

## **Disassociate from consensus**

States take this position when they do not want to call for a vote on a resolution but still wish to express their opposition to the initiative.

## **Experts**

The Member State diplomats who work at the Third Committee are known as 'delegates' or 'experts'.

## **Explanation of vote before the vote**

Prior to the Third Committee deciding whether to adopt a resolution, delegates can provide a brief explanation of the position they are about to take.

## **Explanation of vote after the vote**

Delegates have the option to provide an explanation of the position they took after a vote has concluded.

## **Fifth Committee**

The UN Fifth Committee considers and makes decisions related to administrative and budgetary matters.

## **General debate**

The general debate or 'high-level week' is the early part of the General Assembly session attended by heads of State and Government. During this period of time, a debate is held on a topic chosen by the President of the General Assembly.

## **General discussion**

A general discussion is held by the Third Committee on each agenda item of the session.

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**General discussion**

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**General statement before the vote**

A general statement before a vote at the Third Committee is an opportunity for a State to express its opinion on the initiative under consideration. There is very little practical difference between a general statement and an explanation before the vote.

**High level week**

Otherwise known as the 'general debate', the 'high-level week' is in the early part of the General Assembly session when heads of State and Government attend. A debate is held on a topic chosen by the President of the General Assembly.

## **Human Rights Council**

The UN body exclusively focused on the promotion and protection of human rights, based in Geneva and subsidiary to the UN General Assembly.

## **Informal**

An informal is a meeting held as part of the negotiation of a resolution. It is not a formal part of the Third Committee session and is usually closed to NGOs.

## **Interactive Dialogue**

A process of exchange between a human rights expert, UN official or other dignitary and Member States.

## **Introduction of proposals**

A main sponsor of a resolution has the option to introduce its resolution (or 'proposal') on a separate day to the day the Third Committee takes action on it.

## **L document**

A document marked (L) followed by a serial number indicates a document that is temporary in nature – such as draft resolutions and amendments to these documents.

## **‘To take note of’**

In a resolution, States may decide 'to take note of' a UN report, such as that of an independent expert. This indicates that the Committee has considered the report. 'To take note with appreciation' indicates greater support for the report.

## **Member States**

The countries of the world that are members of the United Nations.

## **National Human Rights Institution (NHRI)**

Independent human rights institutions working at national level, organised globally as the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI).

## **No-action motion**

A procedure whereby a State can request that no further consideration be given to an agenda item or part of an agenda item being considered by UN Members.

## **Non-governmental organisation (NGO)**

A not-for-profit organisation independent from the State.

## **Observer States**

States that do not enjoy full participation privileges within the United Nations.

## **Open meeting**

A public meeting, frequently webcast.

## **PBI**

The programme budget implication (or 'PBI') is the estimated cost of a proposed UN activity that has not been envisaged in the regular programme budget.

## **Plenary**

A gathering of the whole membership of the United Nations, or the opinion of the whole UN membership.

## **‘Provisional’ document**

A document is marked 'provisional' when it is submitted during a meeting and is needed urgently. A 'provisional' document is distributed in English only. It will be issued later with appropriate edits and in relevant translations.

**Red lines**

The point in negotiations where a participant is no longer willing to compromise on content.

**Report of the Human Rights Council**

The Human Rights Council, which meets in Geneva, provides the UN General Assembly with a report of the resolutions adopted and decisions made during the previous year.

**Resolution**

A document that is negotiated within the United Nations that expresses a policy position on a thematic issue or country situation. A resolution can be adopted by consensus or put to a vote.

**Side events**

A side event is held on the margins of the Third Committee session. Those held at the UN are sponsored by States, although NGOs can also sponsor and participate in them. Side events are designed to draw attention to an issue, frequently through first-hand testimony, and build support for a particular position.

**Silence procedure**

This is where a text will be considered agreed to after a certain amount of time if no State expresses an objection privately to the lead sponsor.

**Special Procedure**

A term used to describe UN human rights experts otherwise known as special rapporteur, independent expert, a working group or Special Representative of the Secretary General.

**Tabling deadline**

The date and time by which a resolution must be provided to the Third Committee Secretariat.

**'To take action on' a resolution**

An expression describing the process by which members of the Third Committee - for example – make statements in regard to a resolution and then to decide whether to adopt it or not (by consensus or by a vote).

**Thematic resolution**

A text adopted by the UN that focuses on a particular theme, for example the protection of human rights defenders.



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or any of the issues covered in this  
publication, please visit our website:

[www.ishr.ch](http://www.ishr.ch)

or contact us:

[information@ishr.ch](mailto:information@ishr.ch)



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