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**61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations  
General Assembly**

**Fact Sheet 4  
September 2006**

## **United Nations General Assembly Opens on 12 September 2006**

The General Assembly of the United Nations opens its sixty-first session on 12 September at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Following the opening, the General Assembly will hold a High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development on 14 and 15 September. This will be followed, on 18 and 19 September, by a High-level Meeting on the Least Developed Countries, which is a midterm review of implementation of the Programme of Action for the Decade 2001-2010.

The annual general debate, which usually features statements by dozens of Heads of State and Government as well as Ministers, will take place over a nine-day period beginning Tuesday, 19 September 2006. The sixty-first session as a whole, which is scheduled to run through mid-September 2007, is also expected to continue work on issues pending from the 2005 World Summit, in addition to other items on its regular agenda. Among the key issues the Assembly will address at the session are:

- Reform of the Security Council and the United Nations Secretariat, including the management reforms and review of mandates proposed by Secretary-General Kofi Annan;
- The work of the newly established Peacebuilding Commission and Human Rights Council;
- Appointment, on the recommendation of the Security Council, of the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations;
- Follow-up on measures to achieve internationally agreed development goals;
- Protection of the environment;
- An international convention on terrorism;
- Prevention of armed conflict;
- Revitalization of the Assembly.
- Forum for multilateral negotiation

The General Assembly, set up in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations, occupies a central position as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations. Comprising all 192 Members of the United Nations, it provides a forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter. The Assembly meets in regular session each year from September to December, and thereafter as required.

### **Functions and Powers of the General Assembly**

As set out in the Charter of the United Nations, the functions and powers of the United Nations General Assembly are:

- To consider and make recommendations on the general principles of cooperation for maintaining international peace and security, including disarmament;
- To discuss any question relating to international peace and security and, except where a dispute or situation is currently being discussed by the Security Council, to make recommendations on it;
- To discuss, with the same exception, and make recommendations on any questions within the scope of the Charter or affecting the powers and functions of any organ of the United Nations;

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- To initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international political cooperation, the development and codification of international law, the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms and international collaboration in the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and health fields;
- To make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might impair friendly relations among nations;
- To receive and consider reports from the Security Council and other United Nations organs;
- To consider and approve the United Nations budget and establish the financial assessments of Member States;
- To elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council and the members of other United Nations councils and organs and, on the recommendation of the Security Council, to appoint the Secretary-General.

Pursuant to its “Uniting for Peace” resolution of November 1950 (resolution 377 (V)), the Assembly may also take action if the Security Council fails to act, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member, in a case where there appears to be a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression. The Assembly can consider the matter immediately with a view to making recommendations to Members for collective measures to maintain or restore international peace and security (see “Special sessions and emergency special sessions” below).

While the Assembly is empowered to make only non-binding recommendations to States on international issues within its competence, it has, nonetheless, initiated actions -- political, economic, humanitarian, social and legal -- which have affected the lives of millions of people throughout the world. The landmark Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000, reflects the commitment of Member States to reach specific goals spelled out in the Declaration to attain peace, security and disarmament along with development and poverty eradication, to protect our common environment, to meet the special needs of Africa and to strengthen the United Nations.

### **The Search for Consensus**

Each Member State in the Assembly has one vote. Votes taken on designated important issues, such as recommendations on peace and security and the election of Security Council members, require a two-thirds majority of Member States, but other questions are decided by simple majority.

In recent years, a special effort has been made to achieve consensus on issues, rather than deciding by a formal vote, thus strengthening support for the Assembly’s decisions. The President, after having consulted and reached agreement with delegations, can propose that a resolution be adopted without a vote.

### **Follow-Up to the 2005 World Summit**

Five years after the 2000 Millennium Summit, in September 2005, Heads of State and Government gathered in record numbers for a three-day high-level meeting at United Nations Headquarters in New York, to review progress in implementing the Millennium Declaration and to consider additional measures in four key areas: development; peace and collective security; human rights and the rule of law; and strengthening the United Nations. On 16 September, the Assembly adopted the groundbreaking 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, taking decisive steps in each area, and requesting a number of follow-up actions. In the course of the sixtieth session, the Assembly has acted on several of those mandates, such as establishing a Peacebuilding Commission and a Human Rights Council. Some of the mandates, especially concerning the United Nations Secretariat and management reforms, as well as an institutional framework for environmental activities, are expected to continue to be considered at the sixty-first session.

### **Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly**

Over the past years, there has been an intensified effort to make the work of the General Assembly more focused and relevant. At the fifty-eighth session, it became a major priority. Resolutions 58/126 and 58/316, adopted on 19 December 2003 and 1 July 2004, respectively, set out concrete measures to reorder the work of the Assembly, streamline its agenda, improve the practices and working methods of the Main Committees and enhance the role of the General Committee. Resolution 59/313, adopted on 12 September 2005, assessed the implementation of those mandates

and found additional ways and means to further revitalize the work of the General Assembly, including the strengthening of the role and authority of the President. These efforts continued at the sixtieth session, including, additionally, examination of the role of the General Assembly in the selection of the Secretary-General.

### **Informal Meetings of the General Assembly**

At its fifty-second session, the Assembly initiated a new way of achieving consensus on issues by discussing the reform of the United Nations in informal meetings of the plenary of the General Assembly. The informal meetings were continued during subsequent sessions to discuss, in particular, issues related to the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, the special session of the General Assembly on HIV/AIDS, strengthening of the United Nations system and the revitalization of the Assembly. In the past few sessions, the practice has been further enriched by holding informal meetings more frequently as well as informal briefings of the General Committee, open to all Member States, as well as panel discussions and thematic briefings chaired by the President of the Assembly.

### **Elections for the President and Vice-Presidents of the General Assembly and Chairs of Main Committees**

As a result of the ongoing revitalization of its work, and pursuant to rule 30 of its rules of procedure (as amended by Assembly resolution 56/509 of 8 July 2002 and 58/126 of 19 December 2003), the General Assembly now elects its President, Vice-Presidents and Chairs of the Main Committees months in advance of the start of the new session in order to further strengthen coordination and preparation of work among the Main Committees and between the Committees and the plenary. This year, the President and Vice-Presidents, as well as the Chairs of four of the six Main Committees and their bureau members, were elected on 8 June, and the election process for all remaining Chairs and officers was completed by mid-July.

### **General Committee**

The General Committee, composed of the President and 21 Vice-Presidents of the Assembly and the Chairs of the six Main Committees, makes recommendations to the Assembly about the adoption of the agenda, the allocation of items and the organization of work. With the early election of the President and Vice-Presidents and the Chairs of the Main Committees for the sixty-first session, the General Committee for that session was thus fully constituted in advance.

### **Credentials Committee**

The Credentials Committee, appointed by the General Assembly at each session, reports to the Assembly on the credentials of representatives.

### **General debate**

The General Assembly will hold its annual general debate for nine working days, from Tuesday to Friday, 19 to 29 September 2006, providing Member States with the opportunity to express their views on major international issues. The sixty-first session will mark the second time that the general debate will be held with a theme proposed to Member States by the incoming President, as envisaged by Assembly resolution 58/126. The suggested theme for the sixty-first session is "Implementing a global partnership for development".

The Secretary-General will present his report on the work of the Organization immediately prior to the general debate, a practice that began with the fifty-second session.

### **Six Main Committees**

With the close of the general debate, the Assembly begins consideration of the substantive items on its agenda. Because of the great number of questions it is called upon to consider (160 agenda items at the sixtieth session, for example), the Assembly allocates items relevant to its work among its six Main Committees, which discuss them, seeking where possible to harmonize the various approaches of States, and then present to a plenary meeting of the Assembly draft resolutions and decisions for consideration. The Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee)

is concerned with disarmament and related international security questions. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) deals with a variety of political subjects not dealt with by the First Committee, as well as with decolonization. The Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) is concerned with economic questions. The Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee) deals with social and humanitarian issues. The Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee) deals with the administration and budget of the United Nations, and the Legal Committee (Sixth Committee) deals with international legal matters.

On a number of agenda items, however, such as the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, the Assembly acts directly in its plenary meetings.

### **Working groups of the General Assembly**

The General Assembly has, in the past, authorized the establishment of working groups to focus on matters of importance in more detail and make recommendations to the Assembly for action. A working group on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council, established by Assembly resolution 48/26 of 3 December 1993, remained active during the sixtieth session. Pursuant to Assembly resolution 59/313 of 12 September 2005, a working group on the revitalization of the General Assembly has been established in order to identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly. Both working groups may continue their work during the sixty-first session.

### **Regional Groups**

Over the years, various informal regional groupings have evolved in the General Assembly as vehicles for consultation and to facilitate procedural work. The groups are the African States, the Asian States, the Eastern European States, the Latin American and Caribbean States, and the Western European and other States. The post of President of the General Assembly rotates among the regional groups. For the sixty-first session, the President has been elected from the Group of Asian States.

### **Special Sessions and Emergency Special Sessions**

In addition to its regular sessions, the Assembly may meet in special and emergency sessions.

Over the years, the Assembly has convened 27 special sessions on issues that demanded particular attention, including the question of Palestine, United Nations finances, Namibia, disarmament, international economic cooperation, apartheid, drugs, the environment, population, women, social development, human settlements and HIV/AIDS. The twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly, held from 8 to 10 May 2002, was devoted to children.

Ten emergency special sessions have addressed situations in which the Security Council found itself deadlocked, namely, the Middle East (1958 and 1967), Hungary (1956), Suez (1956), the Congo (1960), Afghanistan (1980), Palestine (1980 and 1982), Namibia (1981), the occupied Arab territories (1982) and illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian Territory (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004). The Assembly also decided to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the Assembly to resume its meetings upon request from Member States.

### **Carrying on the Work of the Assembly**

The work of the United Nations derives largely from the decisions of the General Assembly and is carried out:

- By committees and other bodies established by the Assembly to study and report on specific issues, such as disarmament, outer space, peacekeeping, economic development, the environment and human rights;
- By the Secretariat of the United Nations -- the Secretary-General and his staff of international civil servants.