

Factsheet - The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group – Better Working Methods for today's UN Security Council

ACT is a cross-regional group of 25 small and mid-sized countries working to improve the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency of the UN Security Council. Launched in May 2013, ACT addresses both the Council's internal functioning as well as its relations to the broader UN membership. ACT recognises and commends efforts by the Security Council to improve its working methods but notes that oftentimes the implementation of measures adopted has proven to be unsatisfactory or inconsistent. We believe that additional measures are needed to enable the Council - in its present composition - to carry out its mandate with maximum efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy. ACT will therefore continue to offer concrete and pragmatic proposals to help improve the working methods of the Security Council, in dialogue with Council members as well as through building political momentum outside of the Council.

Objective: All UN Member States have a fundamental interest in the Security Council's decision-making process and its outcomes. After all, the Council "*acts on their behalf*" as stated in Article 24(1) of the UN Charter. In turn, the members are obliged "*to accept and carry out*" decisions of the Council in accordance with Article 25. Given the extensive authority of the Council and the impact of its decisions, it is legitimate for UN members to wish for a *well-functioning* Security Council and to expect to be *informed* as well as, to the extent possible, *involved* in the decision-making process of this important UN organ. A Security Council working in a *more transparent, accountable and inclusive* way - both within its own structure and in relation to the wider membership - is *more legitimate, coherent and efficient*. The ultimate objective is a Security Council carrying out more effectively its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Strategy: ACT focuses on the Security Council *in its present composition*. It seeks to improve present working methods through *concrete and pragmatic measures*. ACT is committed to working constructively with current members of the Security Council, as well as with the larger membership.

The group pursues its initiative *independently of the intergovernmental negotiations (IGN) on Security Council reform*. Whereas the IGN process addresses the issue of the broad reform of the Council, including its enlargement and composition, ACT's initiative intends to improve the working methods of the Council in its current composition. ACT shall therefore stay outside of the IGN process and does not want to prejudge the results in any way.

The group is organized in several teams working on different topics (multi-issues), on different tracks (multi-tiered) and advancing at different speeds (multi-speeds). ACT recognizes and commends past efforts of the Security Council in the domain of the working methods but considers that the current implementation of measures already adopted remains inconsistent and unsatisfactory. In addition further measures are needed to enable the Council to genuinely and efficiently carry out its mandate.

Topics: ACT requests the introduction or improvement of specific measures such as:

- *more public and open meetings* (currently about 30% of the meetings take place in "closed" consultations);
- *regular briefings of the wider membership* on the Council's consultations;
- *enhanced consultations* with the wider membership and/or particularly interested/affected states when *drafting, inter alia, resolutions*;
- *substantial wrap up sessions* (formal) and *interactive briefings* (informal) at the end of presidencies;
- *improved meetings / relationship with Troup/Police Contributing Countries (TCC/PCC)*;
- *standing invitation for the Chairs of the country-specific configurations of the Peace Building Commission* to the Security Council's consultations, when the country of their configuration is the subject of discussion;
- *more Arria formula meetings* (which are informal meetings organized by Council members with representatives of the civil society, the UN or other international and regional organizations, open or closed to non-Council members);
- *a fairer and more inclusive allocation of penholderships* (which is the leading role of one or more Council members in initiating and negotiating Council draft decisions);
- *a more inclusive and transparent process when electing the Chairs* of the Council's subsidiary bodies;

- a more pronounced conflict prevention perspective in the work of the Security Council, either through “Horizon scanning” meetings or other appropriate ways, in order to identify and discuss potential risks and to take action at an early stage;
- the suspension of the use of veto in cases of “atrocities crimes” (that is, when the Council’s action aims at preventing or ending genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity).

Current priorities: The current priorities of ACT are as follows:

- enabling the E10 to be fully involved in all Council business, e.g. in the drafting and decision-making procedures of the Council;
- due process with regards to targeted sanctions;
- the relationship of the Council with the Membership and other organs;
- improving substance as well as analytic quality of the Security Council annual report;
- advocate for the voluntary suspension of the use of the veto in cases of atrocities crimes.

Progress made: The working methods reform is an ongoing process. Nevertheless, ACT commends a number of important steps improving working methods:

- Since October 2016, incoming members were invited to observe closed Security Council meetings and consultations. We also welcome and encourage the active engagement of E10 in wrap-up sessions and interactive briefings regarding the monthly work of the Council.
- The relationship of the Council with the Membership and other organs has shown some positive developments over the years. There are now regular interactions between the Council and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, as well as the Peacebuilding Commission in its role as advisory body to the Council. We also note a trend whereby Members of the Council more often choose to speak in the open chamber, contributing to increased transparency.
- In recent years, the so called wrap up sessions and interactive briefings at the end of Security Council presidencies - sessions that are open to non-Council members - have become much more frequent. In general, the quota of open sessions of the Council (as opposed to closed consultations) has increased to 67% in 2018 (2014: 55%). This sets a trend towards more transparency and interactivity.

Since 2013 a number of documents specified the working methods of the Security Council:

- Presidential Note S/2017/507 (August 2017) containing a compendium of the Security Council’s working methods (<https://undocs.org/S/2017/507>).
- The Working Methods Handbook of the Security Council (“Green Book”) (<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/working-methods-handbook>).
- The first Presidential Statement S/PRST/2015/19 (October 2015) on the working methods of the Security Council, in which the later reaffirms its intent “to continue to hold annual open debate on its working methods and affirms its commitment to continue to keep its working methods under consideration in its regular work, with a view to ensuring their effective and consistent implementation.” (<https://undocs.org/S/PRST/2015/19>).

Membership: ACT comprises 25 countries from all continents: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Maldives, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Portugal, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and Uruguay. Switzerland is the coordinator of ACT.

Reference Documents:

- The UN Charter (<https://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>)
- The Provisional Rules of Procedures of the Security Council (<http://www.un.org/en/sc/about/rules/>)
- The measures listed in the Annex of the draft resolution L.42Rev.2 of May 2012 (<https://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3019489.64595795.html>)

For more information:

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