

Briefing by the Chairman of the First Committee
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Talking Points

- The 67th session of the First Committee was conducted in accordance with its established working methods, which has benefited from **rationalization and streamlining measures implemented in over 20 years**.
- Those measures, taken to improve the effectiveness of the Committee, within the context of revitalizing the General Assembly as a whole, have been guided by relevant Assembly resolutions such as resolutions **42/42 N; 48/87; 48/264; 49/85; 51/241; 58/126; 58/316; 59/95**; and **decision 52/416**, among others. Specific measures taken, many of which correspond to those called for by this Ad hoc Working Group, include:
 - the grouping or merging of related agenda items;
 - biennial and triennial consideration of some items;
 - ordering the items and sub-items before the Committee under seven broad topics or “clusters”;
 - the establishment of a deadline for the submission of draft resolutions and decisions;
 - the introduction of thematic debates for a more focused discussion of disarmament issues;
 - the streamlining of the stages of the Committee’s work; improved coordination of its meetings with those of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee); and
 - the establishment of a dynamic web portal.
- One unique feature of the Committee’s working methods developed over the years is three distinct stages of its work, namely the **general debate, thematic discussion and action on draft resolutions and decisions**.
- The first stage, **general debate segment**, covers the first two weeks of the Committee’s work.
- The second stage consists of **thematic debates for** the next two weeks, and envisages the participation of various stakeholders in the disarmament process, including Member States, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, United Nations disarmament entities, as well as experts and NGO representatives. During the sixty-seventh session, **Hurricane sandy** severely disrupted the thematic debate segment. Having lost three precious days of work, and with hundreds of delegates waiting to take the floor under three outstanding topics yet to be considered, the Committee faced an unprecedented challenge to make up the time lost. The Committee therefore adopted my proposal that all delegates inscribed in the list take the floor for just one minute to declare their agreement not to make a statement and to forward instead their prepared statements to be posted on the First Committee portal, **QuickFirst**. This approach, known as **the Sandy Formula**, was adopted without setting a precedent, and enabled the Committee to make up the three days lost to the storm and to conclude its work on 7 November, as originally scheduled.

- The third and final phase is for **action on draft resolutions and decisions** for one week, covering all draft resolutions and decisions submitted by delegations under any agenda item allocated to the Committee. The First Committee takes decision by vote more than any other Main Committee.
- Collectively, the various measures taken to rationalize the working methods of the First Committee **enabled it to develop greater organizational clarity, to be better focused in its deliberations, and to make a more efficient use of the resources allocated to it.** Allow me to end my presentation with a few observations:

1) First, it is incumbent on us Member States to continue to ensure that draft resolutions are “concise, focused and action-oriented” as called for by resolution 60/286 (annex, paragraph 23). In this regard I recall that the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs pointed out in the Committee last October that Member States’ response rate is very low to GA resolutions requesting the Secretariat to collect data and information from us - a point that resonates with our resolution 51/241 that says that “The number of reports requested shall be rationalized where possible so as to permit more focused consideration of issues” (annex, para. 32).

2) Secondly, the Committee’s deliberations during the thematic debate benefit from **dialogue and interaction among the representatives of Member States, the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the Chairs of the main disarmament entities, including the Conference on Disarmament, the UN Disarmament Commission, OPCW, CTBTO and the various groups of governmental experts.** This is in line with several provisions in resolution 58/316 (annex, paragraphs 3 (c) and (d)) ,and enables delegations to engage more on pressing disarmament issues, which will serve the Committee and the Organization better. In this regard, the Committee at its 66th session had a lively but inconclusive debate on the participation of NGOs.

3) I welcome initiatives by this Ad hoc Working Group to address the question of the rotation of Main Committee chairmanship among the regional groups. The current requirement to elect a Chairman at least three months before the opening of the session, and other officers by the end of the first week of the session, at the latest enables the Chair and Bureau to consult adequately with the various stakeholders, in order to begin early to negotiate agreement on contentious agenda items. The three months’ delay in electing the Chair and bureau for the 67th session set the Committee back in this regard.

4) With respect to modern technologies that the Ad hoc Working Group has been discussing, First Committee delegates are increasingly relying on its web portal, Quickfirst, as their main source of information. Gradually, we are seeing more use of electronic copies of documents rather than hard copies. A comprehensive database of delegates’ email addressees, compiled by the Secretariat, has proved indispensable, facilitating quick communication at all times. On the other hand, when the Committee considered a proposal for PaperSmart operation during the 66th session, put forward by the Chair at that time, no consensus was reached due to concerns raised by some delegations.