



CHAPTER FOUR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND COMMITTEES

Introduction

The General Assembly is the main deliberative policy-making body of the United Nations (UN) and is empowered to address all international issues covered by the Charter. In many ways, it acts as the central hub of the United Nations. Many UN bodies report to the General Assembly, but not all of these bodies are subsidiary to the GA. For example, the Security Council constantly updates the General Assembly on its work, but it is an independent body; its work does not require the General Assembly's independent approval. In contrast, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and is governed by General Assembly mandates. Other subsidiary bodies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), also have direct reporting relationships with the General Assembly.

The UN Charter assigns each of the main Committees of the General Assembly specific tasks and topics to discuss during each session. Because every Member State has a seat in every Committee, it is important to note that the points of discussion do not overlap; that is, even if two or more Committees are discussing a general topic area, each Committee is responsible for discussing a very specific point or aspect of that topic. For example, the Fourth Committee may discuss the Israeli-Palestine conflict with regard to its political components. However, issues concerning the legal, social, or economic components of the Israeli-Palestine conflict are left to other Committees, the General Assembly Plenary, or the Security Council. Therefore, Representatives in each Committee should take care not to expand the discussion of any topic beyond the limitations set by

their Committee's mandate and into another Committee's area of discussion. This is known as the Committee's purview.

A note concerning funding: The Fifth Committee makes financing decisions concerning only the UN's regular, annual budget, not those decisions dealing with voluntary contributions or new outlays. Even though AMUN will not be simulating the Fifth Committee, other Committees generally do not act unless sufficient funds are available for their proposals, thus financial questions should still be considered during the other Committees' deliberations. Therefore, if a Committee creates a new program or initiative, that Committee should specify how the program can or will be funded, and if the program falls within the UN's regular annual budget, that resolution should defer to the Fifth Committee to establish funding.

The purpose of the Combined Plenary session on the final day is to ratify the resolutions which passed in the four Main GA Committees and build consensus. While a small amount of additional debate is typical, it is expected that the work done by each Committee over the first three days of the Conference will be respected. It would thus be rare for significant changes to be made, or for a resolution to fail in the Plenary session after passing in Committee.

The following are brief descriptions of each Committee simulated at AMUN, along with the Committee's agenda, a brief purview of each committee, a brief background and research guide for each agenda topic, and the Committee's website address. Representatives should use this information as the first step in their research on the powers and limitations of their particular Committee in relation to the agenda topics.

THE CONCURRENT GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY

Purview of the Simulation

The General Assembly Plenary typically considers issues that several Committees would have the power to discuss, but which would best be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Likewise, the General Assembly Plenary is also responsible for coordinating work between the many different bodies of the United Nations. For example, the 60th General Assembly recently established a Peacebuilding Commission that will oversee the United Nations'

peacebuilding processes and coordinate the work of the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, and Member States emerging from conflict situations. Note that if the Security Council, which is given the primary task of ensuring peace and security by the Charter, is discussing a particular issue, the General Assembly (Plenary) will cease its own deliberations and defer to the Security Council.

Website: <http://www.un.org/ga/>

THE ROLE OF DIAMONDS IN FUELLING CONFLICT

Conflict diamonds, according to the United Nations, are rough diamonds used by rebel movements to finance their military activities, including attempts to undermine and overthrow legitimate governments. The United Nations has been central in advocating the position that promoting legitimate diamond trading will lead to peace, which will lead to development. Despite universally-acknowledged links between diamonds and conflict across Africa, consensus on how to resolve the problem has been difficult, and enforcement of international standards even more so. The language surrounding the issue is intensely political, in part due to the large number of stake-

holders and in part due to the vast wealth at stake. Stakeholders in the issue include governments, NGOs, the United Nations, the diamond industry, arms dealers and smugglers, finance companies, consumers, traders, as well as paramilitary and extra-governmental groups.

Civil wars and violent conflict have erupted throughout the 1990s and 2000s in Angola, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and most recently in Zimbabwe, where diamonds are frequently mined by rebel groups to use as capital to buy arms and foster civil conflicts. The diamonds from contested regions in Africa are less expensive than gems from other parts of the world, and many corporations have a vested interest in keeping diamond prices low, which has led some to charge the industry with complicity in the problem.

The cycle of trade between diamonds and arms increases the difficulty of successful government intervention and implementation of international standards. Governments are often unable to halt diamond mining by rebel groups. In states in conflict, areas run by rebel groups are difficult, if not impossible, to control. Standards and legitimacy are often non-existent in such situations and often governments themselves are dependent on minerals for their own export purposes. And once diamonds are in the marketplace, their origin is increasingly difficult to trace. After the diamonds are polished, they become unidentifiable.

The United Nations' attempts to restrict the trade in conflict diamonds began in 1998 with Security Council resolutions that placed an embargo on the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels, who profited by selling diamonds in order to facilitate civil war. The Security Council adopted similar schemes with respect to the governments of Sierra Leone and the DRC to deprive each country's rebel groups of income. Even after these Security Council resolutions, the rebels continue to mine and sell diamonds in order to purchase arms to continue the conflict.

In May 2000, in response to growing international concern, governments and industry officials gathered in Kimberley, South Africa, to develop a strategy for ensuring that diamond certification schemes have internationally recognized standards. The result was the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), which was signed by fifty-two countries by November 2002, and was fully implemented in August 2003. The Kimberley Process mandates that participating countries to export their diamonds in tamperproof containers with forgery-proof export certificates that are tracked in a universal database. The Kimberley Process has been widely embraced by the international community, but significant challenges remain. Many consider the most significant weakness of the Kimberley Process to be its emphasis on "voluntary self regulation" by the diamond industry to ensure that diamonds are not from conflict regions. Thus, there is no neutral, outside observer to ensure compliance; if an entity claims to abide by KPCS regulations, it is difficult to prove otherwise. Though it is widely believed that the KPCS has reduced trade in conflict diamonds, its effectiveness is both difficult to measure and admittedly imperfect. Independent experts in Sierra Leone, for example, estimate that illicit sales make up between 15-20 percent of total trade, while official estimates suggest trade in conflict diamonds has dropped to around 1 percent in the seven years since the KPCS's implementation.

The KPCS meets annually to review progress and discuss current issues, and the UN General Assembly frequently notes and comments on these meetings and broad international goals. In the June 2010 meeting in Tel Aviv, Israel, the worsening situation in Zimbabwe was at the top of the agenda, but the parties left the meeting without agreement. At issue is Zimbabwe's adherence to the minimum requirements of the KPCS, especially in relation to rough diamonds from the Marange mining area. The Zimbabwean inspector certified the country's compliance, while a report from Global Witness, an NGO stakeholder in the KPCS, called for a six-month suspension of Zimbabwe from the KPCS while compliance could be established and verified. The Tel Aviv meeting ended without consensus on the issue, and the situation in Zimbabwe will likely be at the center of future discussions about conflict diamonds generally and about the efficacy of the Kimberley Process in particular.

The problem of conflict diamonds is complicated by the complex relationship between the relevant UN organs, which include the General Assembly, the Security Council, and various UN missions. In addition to diamonds, the situation also brings into question issues of arms trading, labor, and violence directed toward communities and groups of people. How the various stakeholders, especially paramilitary and rebel groups without formal standing in the international system, relate to one another are critical issues for the United Nations to address. The General Assembly is also examining how it responds to these issues in cooperation with the Security Council and various UN missions in affected countries. It has called on states with significant interest in the issue to continue open discussions, and it has asked for further reports and considerations on technical issues. Future actions may include further study, funding, developing a new certification scheme, or altering the current one.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective include the following:

- Is your country a participant in the Kimberley Process? Why or why not?
- What is the appropriate role of NGOs and corporate or commercial actors in this process? Specifically, what is the role of the industrialized world, as the primary consumers of diamonds, in preventing conflict?
- What is the relationship between the General Assembly and the UN Security Council regarding rough diamonds and conflict?
- How can the relationship between poverty, underdevelopment and conflict diamonds be broken or its effects reduced?

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S/RES/1408 (2002)
S/RES/1385 (2001)
S/RES/1344 (2001)
S/RES/1295 (2000)
S/RES/1295 (2000)
S/RES/1176 (1998)
S/RES/1173 (1998)
S/RES/864 (1993)
SC/6886 (2000)
SC/6871 (2000)
S/2000/203

Additional Web Resources

www.globalwitness.org/campaigns/diamonds/ - Global Witness (NGO)
www.kimberleyprocess.com/ - Official Website for the Kimberley Process
www.un.org/peace/africa/Diamond.html - UN-related information on conflict diamonds
www.worlddiamondcouncil.com - The World Diamond Council
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/dark-side-of-natural-resources/diamonds-in-conflict.html> - Global Policy Forum, Diamonds in Conflict
Special note: for searching purposes in UN Documents, the word “fuelling” is spelled in the British fashion.

OUTCOME OF THE CONFERENCE ON THE WORLD FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

In 2009, years of unsustainable growth patterns and systemic weaknesses in the global economy came to a head, resulting in a financial and economic crisis the size of which had not been seen since the Great Depression. While the exact causes of the crisis are debatable, it is clear that each country has faced negative internal and external consequences, and the ramifications of the collapse were only dramatized by the speed of late twentieth-century globalization. The impact felt within developing nations is of particular significant concern, as economic repercussions threaten to curtail financial progress and could even reverse recent gains. Such was the consensus of the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development, held last year as a response to the crisis.

The financial and economic crisis’s effects on development were—and as of this writing, remain—severe. While the financial effects of

the crises have been noted worldwide, perhaps those countries most affected were the developing nations of Eastern Europe and Argentina. China’s historically insulated banking system has allowed it to largely sidestep the recession, while industrial economies such as the United States of America, Germany, and Japan have witnessed stock market declines, yet remain among the least affected. Burgeoning rates of unemployment and poverty have been noted in several countries, while industrialized countries have witnessed overall disenchantment with financial institutions. The trend toward increasing world trade has been reversed, and nearly every market has suffered reductions in investment and growth, leading to fears of protectionism and isolationism. Such trade measures have also taken a toll on already fragile economies as they caused markets to shrink and economic activity to decline.

The potential fragility of the international economic system was not unknown before the financial collapse. In 2002, the UN International Conference on Financing and Development met and produced the Monterrey Consensus, a document that underscored the value of the United Nations’ relationship with international financial institutions and outlined six areas that would require attention for international development. Additionally, it outlined steps that Member States could take at the national and regional level to ensure the highest level of global financial cooperation.

As the crisis developed, however, and came to a head Member States of the United Nations established—via the Doha Declaration at the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2008—a mandate for a summit to be held in June 2009. The Summit would involve heads of state as well as members of civil society with vested interests in the proceedings. What emerged from the roundtable discussions was a wide-ranging report, adopted by consensus, known as the Outcome Document. This document issued recommendations to counter the recession and to strengthen global cooperation and reform of global financial and economic institutions. It called for 1) a global stimulus that would work for both individual countries as well as regional blocs; 2) consensus on how to contain the effects of the crisis; 3) plans to cushion and prevent future global economic and financial stress; and 4) the improved regulation and monitoring of global institutions.

The final section of the Outcome Document called on various intergovernmental and UN bodies to increase the cohesiveness and soundness of international cooperation. It requested the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) act as a leader in this cause, establishing ways for ECOSOC to make recommendations to the General Assembly and promote and assess the strength of international policies related to the world’s financial and economic institutions. Though the Outcome Document is largely prescriptive in nature, suggesting international agenda topics and market reform, it lays forth concrete measures for international organizations to follow.

Following the Outcome Document, bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Inter-Parliamentary Union held meetings to continue addressing the need to revive the global economy. At the top of the agenda, alongside remedial payments to counteract immediate job loss and unemployment, is monetary assistance to those developing countries which have been hardest hit. While many countries have seen increasingly optimistic data surrounding economic growth and faith in financial institutions, the world is still reeling from the aftershocks of the collapse. The future prosperity of

all Member States lies in the hands of public policy experts at both local and international levels.

In August 2009, the General Assembly established an ad hoc open-ended working group to follow up on the issues brought forth in the June summit. The working group decided to hold a series of six meetings that ended in June of this year. This body and various other UN bodies and committees have discussed and offered measures to begin restructuring and/or countering the recession. These measures include, among other things, improving the liquidity of international funds, developing new lending agencies, and revising the dominance of developed nations in the Bretton Woods institutions. These meetings are expected to culminate in a report of the Working Group, to be presented to the General Assembly.

Perhaps the largest impediment to United Nations action in overcoming future economic and financial crises is Western opposition to large structural change within the UN. The mandate of the conference essentially split those countries present along developed and developing country lines. While the summit was convened to not only examine the current issue but also address the future of development, such Member States as the United States reported negative feelings toward reform of such things as reserve systems and global architecture and institutions. Developed countries also noted major disagreement in discussions of legitimate trade defense measures and the potential for an international reserve currency arose. This divide was further evident in disagreements about the relationship between the financial crisis and development, specifically in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. There is some fear, especially among developing nations, that the financial crisis may retard progress toward the MDGs while increasing unemployment, decelerating growth, growing deficits, and reducing access to credit.

Future actions and initiatives will require countries and institutions to work together to coordinate responses to the crisis. Measures will need to benefit as many of the involved parties as possible, with an emphasis on safeguarding economic progress that has already been made, guaranteeing adequate support for immediate action, and ensuring that long-term solutions are considered and implemented. It is also necessary to consider the human and social effects that the crisis has on vulnerable populations, including migrant workers, women and other impoverished groups. Additionally, future actions should be made with consideration towards a continued world-wide commitment to climate change and environmental sustainability. The General Assembly's role in this effort is twofold: first, it must work to coordinate efforts among various countries and institutions, and second, it must explore ways in which the United Nations itself can work to achieve these goals.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective include the following:

- What have been the adverse human costs related to the economic downturn? Does recent worldwide data reflect increasing trust in financial institutions, or does it suggest a bleaker outlook?
- What steps have been taken to address the crisis and what can be done to ensure that future measures are beneficial at both national and international levels?
- G20 countries: have you held up your financial commitments made at the London Summit in April of 2009? Developing countries: how has humanitarian action in your country shifted in light of the collapse? Has your country's focus on the Millennium Development Goals changed since the economic

downturn? What responsibility do states have towards one another when faced with extreme economic pressures?

- How can the UN ensure the implementation of the goals outlined in the Outcome of the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development?

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- A/CONF.198/11
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Additional Web Resources

- www.un.org/ga/econcrisissummit - United Nations Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis
- www.un.org/esa/ffd/index.htm - United Nations Financing and Development
- www.imf.org/external/index.htm - International Monetary Fund
- www.brettonwoodsproject.org - Bretton Woods Project
- www.globalpolicy.org/world-economic-crisis.html - Global Policy Forum, The World Economic Crisis