



CHAPTER FOUR

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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 United Nations 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 United Nations 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; 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 United Nations'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 United Nations'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.

PURVIEW OF THE CONCURRENT GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY

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 oversees the United Nations' peacebuilding processes and coordinates 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: www.un.org/ga/

EXTERNAL DEBT SUSTAINABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The 2007 financial crisis highlighted and exacerbated global economic imbalances. As the international community reeled from the destruction, a number of sovereign debt crises followed in the wake of the financial crisis. The recent Eurozone crisis and the current high debt loads of many developing states were just the latest round of global emergencies kicked off by sovereign debt. Total external debt of developing countries reached an estimated \$4.8 trillion in 2011; long-term debt represents nearly 70 percent of the total and is mainly held by private creditors. Debt sustainability and effective debt management are essential in helping countries meet their national development objectives and the Millennium Development Goals.

When countries are overly burdened by debt and debt payments, they face tough choices on how to allocate their yearly budgets. All countries need to make significant capital infrastructure investments—such as electricity generation and distribution, roads, airports and ports. Significant debt loads limit the resources available for these capital investments, frequently pushing governments to issue new debt to make infrastructure investments. This further limits resources in the future, especially Least Developed Countries (LDCs), who begin with more limited revenue. In the past, credit relief programs were also often creditor driven, taking into account the needs of the creditors over the needs of the borrowers. These policies frequently led to poor financial decisions that further hurt developing economies while doing little to address the long-term debt problems.

The first round of modern international debt crises came to a head in the 1990s when dozens of primarily developing countries faced unsustainable debt levels. In response, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other international financial institutions worked together to offer solutions. In 1996, the



IMF and the World Bank formed the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative, which offered eligible countries debt reduction in exchange for meeting certain benchmarks in setting sound financial policies and poverty reduction strategies. Since 1996, the HIPC Initiative has helped 36 countries reduce the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) devoted to servicing debt by an average of 1.5 percent. Additionally, in the 35 countries that have met all terms of the program, spending on public health and welfare has increased to five times that of debt spending. The IMF, World Bank and the African Development Bank have further agreed to the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), which grants full debt cancellation for countries that have met HIPC Initiatives. The HIPC initiative is estimated to provide a total of \$71 billion USD to 41 eligible countries, while MDRI is expected to provide an additional \$28 billion.

The General Assembly is an important forum for the international community to reflect collectively on the benefits, costs and strategies for managing external debt and its impact on development. Through the 1980s the United Nations reported on the increasing difficulty developing States had paying creditors and begun raising concerns about the adverse effects on development. In the early 1990s, the United Nations became worried by the continued growth in debt, the inability of some States to pay and the failure of previous debt reforms—especially as macroeconomic shocks in the 1990s and early 2000s led some heavily indebted States to default on their debts. The General Assembly was a crucial force urging the creation of the HIPC Initiative. The IMF and World Bank have also collaborated with the United Nations to help measure and track progress on several of the Millennium Development Goals. The technical expertise of the IMF and World Bank provide the United Nations valuable partners in efforts to address this topic.

In addition to the initiatives aimed at poorer countries, there are also positive developments for middle-income countries, most notably the Paris Club and the Evian Approach. The Paris Club is a group of creditor States who coordinate to find sustainable solutions for countries facing debt repayment difficulties. Traditionally, assistance has come in the form of shorter-term debt solutions such as rescheduling payments or granting forbearance. Since the adoption of the Evian Approach in 2003, the focus has shifted to first analyzing debt conditions and implementing changes based on the underlying issues, including options that focus on long-term debt sustainability.

There are still critical issues that need to be addressed. One major issue is that the programs described above only address debts owed to the creditors that are involved in the programs. Since 2000, the composition of external debt and debtors has shifted, and the share of long-term external debt owed to private creditors has increased. A number of countries are now facing aggressive litigation stemming from debt collection by commercial creditors and so-called “vulture funds.” These efforts have the potential to undermine poverty reduction benefits in developing countries. There is also concern over available funding for debt relief. Currently three countries—Somalia, Sudan and Eritrea—are positioning themselves to enter into the HIPC Initiative; however, the inclusion of any one of these has the potential to bankrupt the system.

Debt relief does not guarantee a financial recovery. Many HIPC countries still have fragile economies that can be devastated by conflict, natural disaster or global economic events. Much of the progress made in the early 2000s was threatened by the global economic recession of the past six years. The global recession has had a lasting impact on many of

the indebted countries in the developing world. The economic downturn has also renewed concerns over poor economic choices. One such concern is over sustainable development practices. As many countries try to stabilize their economies, they often gravitate to policies that generate quick revenue at the expense of the environment, health and welfare of citizens and other indicators.

Looking ahead, the General Assembly should consider several issues. First, the international community must consider how it can encourage and support domestic financing. Policymakers need to think creatively about how to provide investors with appropriate incentives to invest in sustainable development. Second, the General Assembly should consider how traditional development cooperation, and official development assistance in particular, can support economic growth and debt relief. Technical assistance to manage debt and address debt problems can be crucial for many countries, in particular the most vulnerable. Finally, the General Assembly might consider how it can address the challenges stemming from the marked increase in privately-held sovereign debt; integrating their concerns into debt relief negotiations, convincing them of the benefit of these programs, will be vital as their proportion of funding increases.

Questions to consider from your government’s perspective on this issue include the following:

- What should the international community’s response be to the growing role of private creditors in the external debt crisis?
- How can the General Assembly support and encourage Member States’ efforts to address external debt?
- How could future debt relief initiatives be integrated with other forms of development aid and financial assistance?

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PREVENTION OF ARMED CONFLICT

In 2001, the Ambassador of China to the United Nations stated, “In some sense, the United Nations itself has been a product of the prevention of armed conflict.” Founded in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the United Nations was conceived with the clear goals of promoting peace as well as preventing and ending armed conflict. While it pursues these goals through many means—social and economic development, economic integration and trade, and disarmament—one of the central pillars of the United Nations’ work has been to mediate or stop armed conflicts.

Many elements of the United Nations are involved in preventing and responding to conflicts. The Security Council is the central international body for addressing armed aggression and dealing with specific threats to the international peace. It may also authorize peacekeeping operations, which are managed by the Secretariat. The General Assembly focuses on addressing the systemic and institutional causes of armed conflict. The General Assembly Plenary has historically used its broad purview to take a comprehensive look at the causes of armed conflict, to include resource and geopolitical competition, ideology, poverty and political disenfranchisement, among many others.

Throughout most of its history, the United Nations has focused on reacting to conflicts through mediation efforts, interventions and declarations by the Security Council and the deployment of peacekeepers. Following the end of the Cold War, the United Nations increasingly faced complex conflicts: intrastate conflicts, civil wars and crimes against humanity. In many of these circumstances, the United Nations’ reactive toolkit was not well-suited to creating enduring solutions.

In 2000, the Security Council asked Secretary-General Kofi Annan to prepare a study and recommendations on the future of the prevention of armed conflict by the United Nations. Released in 2001, the report focused on shifting the United Nations from a reactive approach to conflict to a proactive or preventative approach. The Secretary-General made a number of recommendations, including recommended actions for States, the private sector, regional organizations and civil society. Moreover, he called upon the entire United Nations system to develop a culture of prevention.

Responding to the Secretary-General, the General Assembly passed a resolution on the prevention of armed conflict in 2003.

This resolution aimed to implement some of the Secretary-General’s recommendations. The resolution also sought to clarify the roles of the Member States, General Assembly, the Security Council and various private entities in the solution to and prevention of armed conflict. The hope was that these actions would help Member States achieve greater cooperation and finding solutions diplomatically before the conflict escalates to one of violence.

The General Assembly continually examines the underlying causes of armed conflicts. The goal is to develop solutions that achieve more than just the absence of conflict but the ability to have tools in place to solve problems prior to the escalation to violence. Prevention efforts are ideally focusing on ways to eliminate the need for aggression in the first place as opposed to controlling the used of arms during conflicts.

Since 2003, the United Nations has sought to implement the recommendations from the General Assembly and the Secretary-General. In many instances, these have met with great success, such as the creation of the Kimberly Process and other efforts at preventing the trafficking of conflict minerals and the formation of the United Nations’ Mediation Support Unit and Peacebuilding Commission. In 2006, the Secretary-General published a follow-up report, reviewing progress made since 2001. His report highlighted a growing culture of prevention, efforts to maximize the costs of wars to make them more unattractive, and key policy changes enabled by the international community’s activism on the issue. Throughout his report, the Secretary-General extolled progress in the understanding of the causes of armed conflict, acknowledging that any successful effort at conflict avoidance or mitigation must start with a firm understanding of the motivators of conflict.

The United Nations has increasingly made use of training and stabilization operations to prevent situations from decaying/devolving into violence. More specialized and technical agencies are including conflict prevention as a core element of their work, using their technical assistance and training mandates to address drivers of conflict. Member States are, in many cases, collaborating to address conflict. Yet these changes have not always worked. Despite extensive mediation efforts by the United Nations, the civil war in Syria is ongoing. The 2012 rebellion and coup d’état in Mali caught the international community off-guard and under-prepared. The situation was only stabilized following mediation efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and by a military intervention by the French armed forces on behalf of the interim government. Both ECOWAS and France continue their involvement in stabilizing the country. And in Asia, competing territorial claims in the South China Sea have become a major source of regional tension, drawing a number of States into a cycle of military and political maneuvering.

Following the numerous crises and conflicts over the last decade, the General Assembly now has an opportunity to assess how far the United Nations has come and how effective the recommendations from 2001 and 2003 have been. Since the Secretary-General’s report, the nature of conflict itself has changed. Many of the greatest conflicts of the last decade have been asymmetric, pitting States against non-state actors. Conflict between States increasingly makes use of unmanned aerial vehicles and cyberwarfare. The former pose a particular challenge because they reduce a primary deterrent of conflict: the loss of life on both sides. Over the last decade, many regional organizations have matured significantly—from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to



the League of Arab States and the African Union (AU). These organizations are increasingly playing a role in preventing armed conflict, particularly through mediation, though their full potential has yet to be realized. As the General Assembly looks ahead, it will need to consider what tools are necessary for Member States, civil society and other partners as they look to prevent armed conflicts in this time of great change.

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

- How well have the United Nations' efforts to prevent conflict worked? How can the United Nations, Member States and other actors work to better prevent future conflicts?
- What is the role of regional bodies and organizations in preventing armed conflict?
- How can the United Nations contribute to the prevention of new forms of conflict, such as cyberwarfare and the use of unmanned aerial vehicles?

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