

Security Council Open Debate on Working Methods

November 30th 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E Mr. Quinlan, Representative of Australia

I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this debate. We hope that these debates can be institutionalized by the Council. I will abbreviate what I have to say, and am circulating a longer statement.

As we all do, Australia supports a Security Council that better reflects the contemporary world and is responsive. Reform of the Council's composition is central, but so too, of course, is improving its working methods. The working methods of an organization can be the key to its performance. We have said here before that the basic mindset of the Council should be one of active accountability and deliberate transparency. The more transparently the Council undertakes its work, the more accountable it is; the more it shares information, consults and accepts input, the more effective it will be.

There have been good developments on working methods to welcome, but as we know there remains much to do. I will mention three issues.

The first relates to conflict prevention. As the security challenges facing the globe evolve, it is vital that the Council make best use of the tools already at its disposal to prevent conflict. To do so, it needs to be able to act in an informed manner. In this context, we join others in welcoming the practice of regular briefings by the Department of Political Affairs, with a focus on horizon-scanning and early warning. These should be maintained. We also commend the Council's willingness to consider complex thematic issues relating to some of the globe's most demanding challenges. The recent debate on climate change and security signalled responsiveness to challenges that affect small island States in particular.

Of course, the Council should not stray into the prerogatives of other organs, but the Council is of course responsible for maintaining international peace and security. We now understand that challenges to this can be complex and non-traditional. Having up-to-date information and analysis on new security challenges and discussion of their implications is essential to the Council's preventive role.

In order to enhance the Council's capacity for prevention, we support the suggestion of regular briefings from the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. We have also encouraged the Council to issue a standing invitation to the Executive Director of UN-Women and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

The second issue I want to raise is improving consultation with troop- and police-contributing countries. These are an important mechanism to ensure that peacekeeping mandates are informed by knowledge of ground realities, and that expectations are realistic and well understood. Such consultation is also important throughout the lifecycle of a mission and in planning transitions. Consultative meetings need to be structured and scheduled well in advance. We welcome the initiatives adopted in its presidential statement of 26 August (S/PRST/2011/17) to improve these processes. Mission-specific groups can also be an important conduit to the Council; the core group on Timor-Leste, of which we are a member, is a good example.

My third point concerns interaction between the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). While there has been good progress, there is much more that can be done to achieve a more dynamic and organic relationship between the two. We welcome the participation of the PBC Chair and the chairs of the country-specific configurations in Council meetings and informal dialogues. We believe that the Council could do more to draw on the expertise of the PBC, particularly during the renewal of mission mandates.

We endorse much of what has already been said by others, including about more open meetings; more information on the work of sanctions committees; more engagement with regional and subregional organizations, such as the African Union; more use of Arria Formula meetings and informal dialogues; making draft resolutions and presidential statements available to non-members at an early stage; and enhancing efficiency through the better harnessing of technology.

Of course, the Council's efficiency and effectiveness also depends in part on the performance of us, the non-members. It is necessary for us to take full advantage of the opportunities open to us; we should do so actively and dynamically, but above all we should have something to say. We would welcome reforms to make these debates less formulaic and more productive. They could include a better reflection, in the outcome of meetings and the Council's annual report, of what non-Council members say. We welcome Portugal's initiative in the recent meeting on new challenges to peace and security (S/PV.6668) of allowing the briefers a chance to respond to the comments from Council members.

To conclude, we have here a very simple linear equation. Increased transparency and consultation increase effectiveness and further enhance the legitimacy of this body in the eyes of all of us Member States. That, of course, strengthens the Council's pre-eminent role in global peace and security.