

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

ACT is a cross-regional group of 27 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 working methods here and now through concrete and pragmatic measures. ACT is committed to working constructively with 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 aims 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.

ACT members work in flexible constellations on different topics (multi-issues), along different tracks (multitiered) and advancing at variable speed. All initiatives have in common the objective of a more transparent, accountable and effective Security Council that carries out its mandate in an inclusive way.

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

- adequate percentage of public/open meetings in the overall programme of work;
- 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 Troop/Police Contributing Countries (TCC/PCC) ;
- more invitations to the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission by the Council to learn about the PBC's engagement with countries and issues on the Council's agenda; and standing invitations for the Chairs of country-specific configurations of the PBC to the Security Council's consultations, when the country of their configuration is the subject of discussion;
- Improved participation and access to the work of the Council (including increased involvement of civil society representation);
- the conduct of 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 for the distribution of the Chairs of the Council's subsidiary bodies and fairer burden-sharing among all Council members for these mandates;
- 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 atrocity crimes. In 2015, ACT proposed a "Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes," which calls upon all members of the Council (permanent and elected) to not vote against any credible draft resolution intended to prevent or halt mass atrocities.

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 of Council products and decision-making procedures of the Council;
- due process with regards to targeted sanctions;
- the relationship of the Council with the wider UN 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 atrocity crimes.

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

- Since October 2016, incoming members were invited to observe closed Security Council meetings and consultations.
- 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 and other regional organisations, as well as the Peacebuilding Commission in its role as advisory body to the Council.
- 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.

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

- Presidential Note S/2024/507 containing a compendium of the Security Council's working methods <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/507>
- The Working Methods Handbook of the Security Council ("Green Book") 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 27 countries from all continents: Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Gabon, Ghana, Hungary, Ireland, Jordan, Latvia, 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 and Links:

- Statements by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group <https://www.mission-newyork.fdfa.admin.ch/en/accountability-coherence-and-transparency-group2>
- The UN Charter www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter
- The Provisional Rules of Procedures of the Security Council www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/provisional-rules-procedure
- The measures listed in the Annex of the draft resolution L.42Rev.2 of May 2012 <https://undocs.org/en/a/66/l.42/rev.2>

For more information:

Jasna Lazarevic, Political Coordinator, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN (coordinator of ACT) jasna.lazarevic@eda.admin.ch