Security Council Pressed Ahead in 2020 with Mandate to Protect Civilians, Build Peace, as COVID-19 Infected 84 Million People Worldwide

Global Pandemic Devastated Economies, Laid Bare Humanity’s Starkest Inequalities

In a year rocked by the novel coronavirus that infected 84 million people, devastated economies and laid bare humanity’s starkest inequalities, the Security Council — working through peacekeepers, aid workers and logistics experts on the ground — pressed forward with its mandate to protect civilians and build peace in the world’s most complex conflict zones.

Working virtually from their homes in New York City and its environs, one of the early hotspots for the novel coronavirus — and, at times, seated between plastic barriers in the official chamber — the Council’s 15 members convened a total of 238 public meetings, adopted 56 resolutions and issued 13 presidential statements. In several instances, delegations diverged sharply over competing drafts or language that did not represent the views of all members, resulting in the rejection of seven proposed texts. Two of the Council’s five permanent members, China and the United States, repeatedly found themselves at odds over references to the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations specialized public health agency, in resolutions relating to COVID-19.

As morning dawned on 2020 — the seventy-fifth year of the United Nations — early discussions centred around the importance of upholding the Organization’s founding Charter amid mounting threats to the multilateral world order. Some delegations sounded the alarm over the rise of “unilateralist regimes” that paid mere lip service to global cooperation as they pursued narrow self-interests. However, expressions of multilateral commitment were soon tested in unprecedented ways, as humanity entered the unchartered territory of a modern-day pandemic that left no part of the world untouched.

Council members agreed, in late March, to adopt a set of “temporary, extraordinary and provisional” working arrangements amid the pandemic, aimed at allowing members to push forward with their most essential tasks, such as the timely renewal of peacekeeping mandates. Still deployed
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on the front lines of conflict — and now also confronting a pandemic virus about which little was known — the Council’s 13 peace operations and more than two dozen other missions faced extraordinary challenges in protecting civilians, supporting peace talks, delivering food and medical supplies across shuttered roads and borders, and even keeping their own personnel alive.

In June, with COVID-19 in full swing around the globe, the force commanders of several peacekeeping missions briefed the Council to report on swift operational changes taken in response to COVID-19, including strict quarantines, close coordination with host Governments and the temporary suspension of troop rotations. Despite some challenges and delays, each mission reported that continuity of operations had been maintained. Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, appeared before the Council in July to sound the alarm about the likely negative impact of COVID-19 on economies, development gains and social cohesion — as well as human rights — while emphasizing that United Nations efforts to tackle the drivers of instability had become even more urgent.

Experts agreed throughout 2020 that, while largely escaping the brunt of infection and death, fragile countries were experiencing the pandemic’s most severe indirect consequences — such as spiking food insecurity, massive economic shocks and the disruption of routine vaccination campaigns that put nearly 80 million infants at risk of death from preventable diseases. COVID-19 imposed similar strains on progress in implementing the Council’s women, peace and security agenda — first adopted in resolution 1325 (2000), which marked its twentieth anniversary in 2020 — with multiple countries reporting skyrocketing rates of gender-based violence as women around the globe found themselves “locked down” with their abusers.

In April, the heads of the Rome-based United Nations food agencies told the Council that food insecurity would probably double, affecting some 265 million people by year’s end, and spotlighted the looming threat of famine in regions from East Africa — which was also plagued by floods and locust infestations — to the Gaza Strip. The Organization’s senior official in Iraq said the country remained “in the eye of multiple storms” as oil revenues fell 50 per cent, currency values plummeted, and unemployment spiked amid COVID-19’s economic fallout. Addressing the pandemic’s impacts across multiple countries, Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, warned repeatedly about the heightened risk of political instability resulting from the erosion of public trust. Jean-Pierre LaCroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, said terrorist groups were increasingly exploiting the pandemic and stepping up attacks in such places as West Africa, with the potential to gain strength and expand into other regions.

“The pandemic is amplifying and exploiting the fragilities in our world,” Secretary-General António Guterres said in May, stressing that economies and communities already weakened by years of war were especially vulnerable to enormous harm from COVID-19. On 1 July, the Council
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adopted a landmark resolution embracing the Secretary-General’s appeal — first issued on 23 March — for all conflict parties around the globe to embrace a ceasefire and allow Governments to focus on combating the coronavirus.

Even as many regional and subregional organizations rose to the occasion, collaborating to impose preventative measures, cancel national debts and protect their most vulnerable populations, the Secretary-General expressed regret that global cooperation to stem the spread of COVID-19 continued to fall short throughout 2020. “The pandemic is a clear test of international cooperation — a test we have essentially failed,” he declared on 24 September.

Nowhere on earth was the fear of uncontrolled virus transmission more acute than in Yemen, where a brutal five-year-old conflict had produced the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. Following a lull in fighting early in 2020, both the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia and the opposition group Ansar Allah, also known as the Houthis, scrambled to combat COVID-19. While they were able to avert a large-scale outbreak, officials warned the Security Council in July that continued fighting, spiking food prices and a steep drop in foreign assistance were pushing Yemen to the brink of collapse. Amid those converging crises, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, announced that the “spectre of famine” had returned to Yemen, and by December 2020, officials across the Organization were warning that the number of Yemenis experiencing catastrophic levels of food insecurity could triple by June 2021.

Similarly, the scale of virus transmission among Syria’s exceptionally vulnerable displaced people — most of whom lived in crowded camps without running water or sufficient medical supplies — remained relatively low throughout 2020, though limited access to testing made it difficult to gauge the real toll. Several Council members raised concerns throughout 2020 that the delivery of humanitarian assistance had been complicated by the incremental closure of approved crossing points along Syria’s borders — a major source of contention among delegations, and the subject of four failed draft resolutions. Others spotlighted the economic damage being wrought upon Syria, and many other poor countries struggling to navigate the pandemic’s tumultuous waters, by economic sanctions maintained by wealthy Western nations.

Meanwhile, the Council’s efforts to end the 10-year-old Syrian conflict continued, with few tangible results even as the parties made modest political strides by launching the Constitutional Committee. January and February saw a marked escalation in the 2019 military offensive launched by President Bashar al-Assad in the opposition-held north-west region, with more than 115,000 people forced to flee their homes in a single week. By the time the fighting subsided, in early March, the United Nations and its partners had already been forced to turn their attention to the rapidly unfolding COVID-19 pandemic, working furiously to scale up medical capacity in a country where only half of the hospitals were functional after a decade of war.
In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a peace plan proposed by the United States early in 2020 was promptly rejected by the Palestinian Authority, European Union leaders and others as “failing to meet the minimum rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people”. One of its elements — a plan for Israel to annex parts of the West Bank long seen as likely parts of a future Palestinian State — was a particular source of concern for some Council members. However, the annexation plan was all but abandoned as Israel normalized diplomatic relations with several Arab States, including Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. World leaders largely welcomed those strides — also facilitated by the United States — and Nikolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, praised “exemplary cooperation” between Israelis and Palestinians in combating COVID-19, urging them to seize that new window of opportunity to resume direct political talks.

Elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa region, Libya entered 2020 on the heels of a decade of fragile State-building, marked by violence and ongoing foreign meddling that threatened to draw the country even deeper into proxy battles. Stakeholders agreed, during a January conference in Berlin, to end all interference in Libya’s affairs. However, Special Representative Ghassan Salamé — in one of his last briefings before resigning — told the Council that little was being done to implement those commitments. In the early weeks of COVID-19, both the Government and opposition forces responded positively to international calls for a “humanitarian pause”. With support from the newly appointed Special Representative, Stephanie Turco Williams, they finally agreed to a ceasefire in October and launched the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum on 9 November, setting up a potential bright spot on the Council’s 2021 agenda.

While regional organizations, such as the African Union and its subregional counterparts, continued to gain strength and capacity in 2020, parts of the African continent remained consumed by surging terrorist attacks fuelled by social tensions and funded by transnational organized criminal networks. The security situation in much of Central Africa, West Africa and Sahel regions continued to deteriorate, with Special Representative Mohamed ibn Chambas noting in January that Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger had seen deaths from terrorist attacks jump five-fold since 2016. Such attacks, some featuring the use of improvised explosive devices, also targeted United Nations peace operations across Mali, Nigeria and the Central African Republic, killing and injuring mission staff.

As the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the “Group of Five” for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) countries worked to scale up their response — amid continuing discussions among Council members on how best to provide financial support — communities across the region frayed even further under the cumulative strain of COVID-19-related lockdowns and the worsening impacts of climate change. Meanwhile, senior officials from a range of agencies and departments warned the Council that terrorist groups, including those affiliated with or pledging loyalty to Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Al-Qaida, would probably seek to exploit the pandemic’s new travel patterns and movement restrictions in an effort to regain their foothold.
During a high-level debate on cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union on 4 December, the Council adopted a presidential statement recognizing the continent’s exemplary leadership during the pandemic and encouraging stronger coordination “across a range of possible responses to conflict”. Members also convened their first-ever meeting on cooperation with the International Organisation of la Francophonie — representing 274 million people, mostly under the age of 30 — in the 54-nation French-speaking world.

Africa’s diplomatic prowess took centre stage in August, when a dramatic coup d’état unfolded in Mali. A military mutiny in the town of Kati led to the arrest and resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. Condemning the coup, ECOWAS quickly imposed sanctions and demanded a civilian-led transition aimed at restoring order. In the weeks that followed, the Council heard from Special Representative Mahamet Saleh Annadif that the region’s robust leadership had resulted in the prompt appointment of a new President, former Defence Minister Bah N’Daw, and the formation of a nascent transitional Government. Much to the relief of people across West Africa, ECOWAS lifted its sanctions, and the Special Representative urged the new leadership to continue to implement Mali’s 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. “The ball remains in the court of the Malian people,” he said.

Following the removal from office of long-standing President Omer Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir in 2019, Sudan’s democratic trajectory continued in 2020. Efforts by the country’s transitional leaders to reach peace deals with rebel groups began early in the year, yielding a patchwork of agreements widely viewed by the global community as positive. Improved relations between Sudan and neighbouring South Sudan were characterized by a newly launched political process, as Council members began to consider the planned drawdown of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) at the end of 2020. Despite delays caused by COVID-19, UNAMID’s mandate was successfully terminated on 31 December, and a new operation — the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan, or UNITAMS — was created as its successor.

Despite a profoundly tragic surge in terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, many of which targeted university students, that country also made significant political strides in 2020. Glimmers of hope emerged in the international community’s long-standing efforts to turn the page on decades of conflict, as a new peace deal between the United States and the Taliban enabled the start of intra-Afghan negotiations in September. However, their success remained uncertain amid political strife and the imminent impacts of COVID-19, which experts warned could be “extreme” in a country decimated by endless war. The Council closed out 2020 by renewing the mandates of both the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the team monitoring sanctions on those associated with the Taliban, as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative warned that the unabating surge in violence could jeopardize the country’s fragile political gains.
Tackling a range of other thematic issues throughout 2020, Council members reiterated concerns about the rise of an increasingly unipolar world and the re-emergence of nationalist ideologies. In debates on non-proliferation and the situation in the Persian Gulf, delegates differed over the utility of the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons — the most recently concluded United Nations nuclear agreement — while expressing hope for the fate of the upcoming conference to review the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Countries stood largely united in condemnation of the decision by the United States to unilaterally withdraw from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal.

Despite Washington, D.C.’s, withdrawal and Tehran’s subsequent breach of its commitments — including by bringing its enriched uranium stockpile to a level that surpassed the limits stipulated by the deal — officials emphasized that the deal remained the best way to ensure the peaceful nature of Iran’s nuclear programme. They urged all parties to adhere to its terms, citing encouraging remarks on that front by Joseph R. Biden, President-elect of the United States. In a similar vein, many Council members looked to 2021 — a year likely to be fraught with major global health, economic and logistical challenges as nations roll out a vaccination campaign of unprecedented scale — with a fresh wave of hope for the future of international cooperation.

Middle East

Syria

Meetings: 10 January, 28 January, 29 January, 6 February, 19 February, 27 February, 28 February, 30 March, 29 April, 29 April, 18 May, 19 May, 16 June, 29 June, 29 June, 7 July, 8 July, 10 July, 11 July, 23 July, 29 July, 19 August, 27 August, 10 September, 16 September, 18 September, 5 October, 27 October, 5 November, 25 November, 11 December, 16 December, 18 December.


The Council’s difficult deliberations on Syria — where the bitter civil conflict was entering its tenth year — continued in the early weeks of 2020, as a major humanitarian deadline loomed. In late 2019, members found themselves deadlocked over the question of cross-border aid deliveries, deemed crucial by many humanitarian experts for the survival of millions of Syrians. The cross-border delivery mechanism first authorized in resolution 2165 (2014) — allowing delivery of food and supplies through four authorized crossing points along Syria’s borders with Iraq, Turkey and Jordan — was due to expire on 10 January, leading to weeks of heated and high-stakes negotiations.
Meeting on 10 January, the Council adopted resolution 2504 (2020) by a vote of 11 in favour to none against, with four abstentions. By that text, members decided to renew for six months their authorization of the mechanism’s Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa crossing points on the border with Turkey while closing two others. With the loss of the Al Yarubiyyah crossing, in particular, raising concerns among some Council members, the text also called upon the Secretary-General to report by the end of February on the feasibility of alternative routes. Belgium’s representative, who voted in favour, deplored the lack of agreement on reauthorizing Al Yarubiyyah, which allowed medical assistance to reach 1.4 million people. Meanwhile, the Russian Federation’s representative, who abstained, questioned the need for any cross-border deliveries, noting that convoys from abroad lacked appropriate monitoring and rejecting “ politicization” by some Western members.

Experts briefing the Council largely agreed that progress made in 2019, especially in the initial meetings of Syria’s new Constitutional Committee, remained viable. However, early 2020 also saw a major escalation of military hostilities in and around the opposition-held city of Idlib in the north-west. That led Deputy Special Envoy Khawla Matar to warn on 28 January that spiking violence could stymie political strides before they even began in earnest. The Emergency Relief Coordinator echoed that alarm on 28 January, emphasizing the terrible suffering of civilians amid bombings and shelling. Some 115,000 people had fled Idlib in the previous week alone, he said, noting WHO’s prediction of a drop in available medical supplies following the closure of Al Yarubiyyah. Geir O. Pedersen, Special Envoy for Syria, joined him in a briefing on 6 February, declaring: “We are witnessing the humanitarian catastrophe that the Secretary-General has warned of.”

Providing an update on 19 February, the Special Envoy reported that more than 900,000 people had been displaced in the Idlib area since December 2019. Syria’s representative and several Council members stressed the need to combat terrorism — including in its Idlib stronghold — and pledged to liberate the city. The Council met on 27 February to consider the Secretary-General’s report on feasible alternatives to the Al Yarubiyyah crossing, with Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, calling upon Damascus to adopt a simplified approval process aimed at expediting aid deliveries. On 28 February, in the bloody final days of fighting in Idlib, Secretary-General Guterres and Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo detailed a “very meaningful escalation”, including fresh air strikes by Government forces and their Russian partners, a Syrian attack on Turkish troops — which killed and wounded dozens of soldiers — and a significant counterattack in Idlib by non-State armed groups.

The near-year-long Idlib offensive launched by Damascus and its supporters in April 2019 finally ended in March, but the ensuing calm was quickly shattered as the eyes of the global community — including those monitoring the situation in Syria — moved to the COVID-19 pandemic, which many experts feared could have devastating consequences for the world’s most vulnerable nations. The Council held its first virtual meeting on Syria on 31 March, with the
Emergency Relief Coordinator noting that 10 cases of COVID-19 had so far been reported in the country. Stressing that only half of Syrian hospitals were functional after a decade of war, he added that WHO-led support efforts — focused on reinforcing early warning systems and pre-positioning equipment — were already under way.

As partners worked furiously to scale up Syria’s medical capacity, a tenuous peace prevailed on the ground. Parties largely adhered to the Idlib ceasefire, as well as another agreement reached by the Russian Federation, Turkey and the United States in north-east Syria. The Special Envoy reiterated his appeal for calm on **29 April**. During a subsequent meeting the same day, the Emergency Relief Coordinator warned that “tragedy beckons” if the virus — a major challenge for even the world’s wealthiest nations — should begin to spread uncontrolled in Syria’s crowded refugee camps. The Special Envoy took the opportunity afforded by the continued lull in hostilities to call, on **18 May**, for a return to dialogue by both Syrian actors and international stakeholders.

The issue of cross-border aid appeared on the horizon again as 2020 neared its midpoint, with the expiry of the mechanism’s six-month renewal looming. On **19 May**, the Emergency Relief Coordinator cited an alarming spike in food insecurity — as well as a dramatic devaluation of the Syrian pound and other pandemic-related economic shocks — while urging the Council to promptly renew its cross-border delivery authorizations. Members heard similar pleas on **16 June**, when Noura Ghazi, a Syrian human rights lawyer, spotlighted the plight of thousands of unjustly detained non-violent activists. The Emergency Relief Coordinator appeared again on **29 June**, reporting that Syria now had 256 cases of COVID-19 — a four-fold increase since his last briefing — and issuing another clarion call for the extension of cross-border relief.

Meeting on **7 July** and again on **8 July** and **10 July**, the Council ultimately failed to adopt four separate draft resolutions on reauthorizing the cross-border mechanism. The competing drafts, tabled by delegations with diverging views on Syria’s humanitarian situation, differed over which crossings to reauthorize and for how long. Several texts also sought to introduce language about the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures — commonly known as sanctions — imposed on Syria. Following days of voting, vetoes and heated explanations of position, members finally adopted resolution 2533 (2020) on **11 July**, by 12 votes in favour to none against, with three abstentions (China, Dominican Republic, Russian Federation). By that text, the Council renewed its authorization of the Bab al-Hawa crossing — but not that of Bab al-Salam — for another year, further reducing the number of approved cross-border delivery points from two to one.

Members considered conditions in Syria more broadly on **23 July**, as the Special Envoy detailed the increasing hunger, high unemployment amid the COVID-19 pandemic and “vastly insufficient” progress on the release of missing and detained persons. On **29 July**, Amany Qaddour of the non-governmental organization Syria Relief and Development, spotlighted the difficulties her group faced in delivering humanitarian assistance — including medical supplies such as ventilators.
and personal protective equipment — following the closure of Bab al-Hawa. On the political track, Council members heard from the Special Envoy on 19 August that plans for the next meeting of the Constitutional Committee’s “Small Body” — a steering group comprising 15 members from each of the main stakeholder groups — were well under way.

As 2020 progressed, a range of experts briefed members on the impact of COVID-19 and other matters. On 27 August, Ramesh Rajasingham, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, reported 2,440 officially confirmed cases of the virus, while stressing that actual cases probably far exceeded that number. On 10 September, Izumi Nakamitsu, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, provided an update on progress made by her office towards confirming the elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons programme, as mandated in resolution 2118 (2013), marking the first time in the year that the chemical weapons file was addressed in an open meeting. The Emergency Relief Coordinator confirmed on 16 September that Syria was seeing community transmission of COVID-19, with more than 3,600 confirmed cases and little testing capacity to gauge the real toll.

With relative calm still prevailing and the need to alleviate humanitarian suffering all the more urgent, the Special Envoy called on 18 September for accelerated political progress, outlining the limited strides made at the recent Small Body meeting. The High Representative briefed again on 5 October, noting that the work of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in Syria continued to progress despite pandemic-related restrictions. The Special Envoy relayed fresh efforts to reconvene the Constitutional Committee on 27 October, to be followed by yet another open Council meeting on the chemical weapons file, on 5 November.

On 25 November, Deputy Special Envoy Matar announced that the Constitutional Committee would hold its fourth session from 30 November to 4 December, and a fifth session in January 2021. Meanwhile, OPCW Director-General Fernando Arias told the Council on 11 December that Syria’s initial chemical weapons declaration could still not be considered “accurate and complete” — due to unresolved gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies — and pledged to push forward with those efforts. Rounding out 2020 in a final briefing on 16 December, the Special Envoy called for broader peace efforts by the international community in 2021, underlining the need to focus on a Syria-wide ceasefire, substantive constitution-drafting and “step-for-step” confidence-building measures among the parties.

On a separate matter, the Council adopted resolution 2530 (2020) on 29 June, extending the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) — tasked with maintaining the ceasefire between Israeli and Syrian troops and supervising the “areas of separation of limitation” — for six months. On 18 December, members adopted resolution 2555 (2020), further extending the mandate of that long-standing Force until 30 June 2021.

Yemen

Resolutions: 2505, 2511, 2534.


The Security Council met 14 times in 2020 to consider the situation in Yemen, where limited but steady progress was registered in the previous year towards ending the protracted civil conflict in the country. Adopting resolution 2505 (2020) on 13 January, members renewed the mandate of the United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) — established early in 2019 to oversee a peace agreement between the Government and the Houthis in that critical port city — for a period of six months. Martin Griffiths, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, briefed the Council on 16 January amid a lull in military clashes, describing the week as the “quietest” since 2015. Citing a dramatic drop in the number of air strikes, he said Yemeni and regional leaders were still adhering to de-escalation commitments reached in 2019 and exercising notable restraint.

The situation had shifted by 18 February, however, as renewed fighting in Al-Jawf, Sana’a and Ma’rib displaced some 35,000 people and put recent political gains in peril. The Special Envoy reported that the condition of the moored oil tanker Safer — which had undergone no maintenance since it fell under Houthi control in 2015, and now sat poised to spill more than a million barrels of crude into the Red Sea — was rapidly degrading and required urgent international inspection to avert an environmental disaster.

On 25 February, the Council adopted resolution 2511 (2020), renewing the asset freeze and travel ban previously imposed on those threatening Yemen’s peace, security and stability, as well as an arms embargo imposed on the Houthis. Joining the Special Envoy as he briefed on 12 March, a senior official of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that more than 180 people were killed or wounded in February, a 20 per cent rise over the previous month. That situation was further complicated by the onset of COVID-19, as both Houthi militias and the coalition forces led by Saudi Arabia scrambled to avert an outbreak of the virus.

The coalition announced a unilateral two-week ceasefire on 8 April, leading the Special Envoy to stress that there could be “no better moment” for the parties to return to a peaceful trajectory, during the Council’s first virtual meeting on Yemen, on 16 April. He outlined a three-pronged plan — proposed to the coalition and the Houthis — known as the United Nations-facilitated Joint Declaration, which encompassed a nationwide ceasefire, humanitarian and economic measures to combat COVID-19, and the urgent resumption of political negotiations.
The parties were still weighing that proposal on 14 May, when the Special Envoy told the Council that a ceasefire was “within reach”. The Council adopted resolution 2534 (2020) on 14 July, once again renewing the UNMHA mandate, this time for a full year. On 15 July, members were briefed by Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), who painted a dark picture of the looming environmental catastrophe should experts fail to gain swift access to the ageing — and now leaking — oil tanker Safer.

No agreement had yet been reached on that matter, or on the proposed Joint Declaration, by 28 July, when the Special Envoy warned that continued violence, spiking food prices and now the uncontrolled spread of COVID-19 were pushing Yemen to the brink of collapse. Joining him on 15 September was the Emergency Relief Coordinator, who warned that the “spectre of famine” had once again returned to Yemen amid converging crises. Despite several hopeful events late in 2020 — including a large-scale prisoner swap among the parties reported by the Special Envoy on 15 October — senior officials underlined, on 11 November, the need for the Council and the wider global community to scale up relief financing for Yemen.

The Council issued six press statements on Yemen in 2020. On 30 January, members expressed serious concern about — and underlined their disappointment with — the return to violence and its impact on civilians, saying it threatened to undermine the progress made during the recent period of de-escalation. On 10 April, they endorsed the Secretary-General’s call for an immediate end to hostilities amid COVID-19, welcoming the Government’s positive response and calling upon the Houthis to make similar commitments. Condemning the declaration of a Southern Transitional Council on 29 April, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to Yemen’s unity, sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, warning that the declaration could distract from efforts to secure a ceasefire.

On 29 June, members condemned recent attacks on Saudi Arabia — via unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles — as well as escalating violence on the ground. In a final statement on 16 October, the Council urged the parties to urgently endorse the United Nations-facilitated Joint Declaration proposed by the Special Envoy, while underlining the need for a transitional agreement by which power is shared among a diversity of political and social groups. On 13 December, members condemned yet another military escalation in Ma’rib, Hudaydah and Taiz late in 2020, while at the same time strongly rejecting a November attack by Houthi militants on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia.

Iraq

Meetings: 3 March, 12 May, 29 May, 15 June, 26 August, 18 September, 24 November, 10 December.
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Resolutions: 2522, 2544.

Press Statements: SC/14184 (13 May), SC/14365 (24 November).

On the heels of a year marked by political strides and peaceful popular uprisings, 2020 dawned in Iraq with the news that Prime Minister Abdul Mahdi had decided to resign his post. In her first briefing of the year, on 3 March, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), outlined a range of challenges that could be exacerbated by the political vacuum resulting from the Prime Minister’s resignation, including rampant corruption, the threat posed by affiliates of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh), lack of criminal accountability and other lingering impacts of decades of war.

After weeks of infighting among Iraqi leaders, the Council met on 12 May to welcome a newly formed Government led by Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. Members agreed that combating the spread of COVID-19 must now top the list of priorities for both the Government and UNAMI. On 29 May, they adopted resolution 2522 (2020), extending the Mission’s mandate for one year. Meanwhile, progress continued in the investigations led by the United Nations Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da’esh/Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD). Briefing the Council on 15 June, one official reported that more than 2 million call–data records obtained from Iraqi cell phone service providers had yielded new information about crimes committed against the Yazidi community in 2014.

As in many other parts of the world, however, Iraq’s focus in 2020 remained on COVID-19 and its broad social and economic repercussions. On 26 August, Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert outlined positive steps by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, while warning that Iraq continued to operate in “the eye of multiple storms”. Joblessness had spiked 10 per cent amid the economic fallout from the pandemic, oil revenues had fallen by 50 per cent, gender-based violence had doubled and one third of the population now lived below the poverty line, she said, urging the Government to prioritize the needs of the people.

Following its adoption of resolution 2544 (2020) on 18 September — by whose terms the Council renewed UNITAD’s mandate for another year — the Council heard another update on Iraq’s economic woes from Ms. Hennis-Plasschaert on 24 November. She said addressing the country’s fiscal challenges and building domestic resilience remained the best defence against external actors who sought, once again, to turn Iraq into an arena for foreign Power struggles. As 2020 drew to a close, Council members heard another UNITAD briefing on 10 December, with officials describing the innovative online tools — including translation and facial-recognition software — which had allowed the team to continue recording victim testimonials throughout the pandemic.
The Council issued two press statements on Iraq in 2020. The first, on **13 May**, welcomed the formation of the new Government, as well as its pledge to address COVID-19 and deliver meaningful reforms on economic opportunity, good governance, political participation and electoral legislation. On **24 November**, the Council welcomed recent progress in the long-standing search for Kuwaiti and third-country nationals missing since Iraq’s 1990 invasion of the neighbouring State — including the repatriation of human remains believed to be of Kuwaiti citizens from the Government of Iraq to the Government of Kuwait on 16 September 2020 and on 8 August 2019 — and praised UNAMI’s logistical support.

**Lebanon**

Meetings: **28 August**.

Resolutions: **2539**.

The Council’s single meeting on the situation in Lebanon took place on **28 August**, three weeks after a series of devastating explosions in the capital, Beirut, claimed more than 200 lives, flattened vital infrastructure and levelled countless surrounding neighbourhoods. Adopting resolution 2539 (2020), members decided to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for one year, while reducing the maximum number of its troops from 15,000 to 13,000. They also authorized the mission to take temporary special measures to support Lebanon and its people in the aftermath of the explosions. The Council requested that the Secretary-General assess the impact of the blasts on mission personnel, capacities and operations, and recommend measures to maintain UNIFIL’s continuity and effectiveness.

**Africa**

**Sudan and South Sudan**

Meetings: **11 February, 4 March, 12 March, 30 March, 24 April, 28 April, 14 May, 29 May, 4 June, 4 June, 9 June, 10 June, 23 June, 15 September, 16 September, 25 September, 22 October, 12 November, 8 December, 10 December, 11 December, 15 December, 22 December**.

Resolutions: **2508, 2514, 2517, 2519, 2521, 2523, 2524, 2525, 2550, 2559**.

Press Statements: **SC/14089** (29 January), **SC/14137** (4 March), **SC/14143** (12 March), SC/14323 (9 October).

In the wake of long-time President Omer Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir’s removal from office in 2019, Sudan saw 2020 dawn amid a rapidly shifting political landscape. Efforts by the country’s transitional leaders to forge peace deals with various rebel groups began early in the year, yielding a
patchwork of agreements widely viewed internationally as a significant step forward. Relations between Sudan and neighbouring South Sudan also improved, characterized by a newly launched political process. Meanwhile, Council members began looking to the planned drawdown of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) at the end of 2020, which — like much else — was dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Members voiced their views on the utility and relevance of long-standing sanctions on Sudan, as they adopted resolution 2508 (2020) on 11 February, extending the mandate of the related Panel of Experts for another year. Several delegates pointed out that the situation in Darfur had finally stabilized, and that the 15-year-old restrictions had accomplished their purpose. Also by that text, members expressed their intention to review the sanctions in light of the evolving situation on the ground. They took similar action on 31 March, adopting resolution 2517 (2020), by which the Council maintained UNAMID’s current troop levels with the intention to “decide a course of action” by 31 May for the responsible drawdown and ultimate exit of the mission. However, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations, warned on 24 April that plans to close UNAMID were suffering significant delays amid the pandemic and the challenges posed by the rainy season.

In light of those developments, the Council convened on 29 May to adopt resolution 2523 (2020) — a technical rollover text maintaining UNAMID’s mandate during a final week of negotiations — followed by resolution 2525 (2020) on 4 June. By the latter text, members decided to renew the mission’s mandate until 31 December, and pushed back all decisions around its drawdown and exit to that date. Also on 4 June, the Council adopted resolution 2524 (2020), establishing a new political mission to support Sudan’s progress. The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) was tasked with providing good offices for peace negotiations, as well as scalable support for the implementation of any future peace agreements, if so requested.

The impact of COVID-19 in Sudan remained a focus throughout 2020. On 9 June, the Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to Council resolution 1591 (2005) concerning Sudan briefed members on the body’s latest report, noting that peace talks continued between the Transitional Government and armed groups despite the many pandemic-related challenges. However, he also cautioned that the virus could spread rapidly amid the country’s 1.8 million displaced persons, warning again, on 15 September, that the security environment in Darfur remained volatile and had even deteriorated in some places. On 25 September, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo called upon the global community to help Sudan weave its patchwork of new peace agreements into a “single, unfractured vision of the future”. She said efforts to ease the economic and humanitarian challenges wrought by COVID-19 must be central to such support.
Reiterating those points on **8 December**, during the Council’s first briefing on the transition from UNAMID to UNITAMS, she noted that recent political progress included a constitutional amendment expanding Sudan’s Sovereign Council and further defining representation in the legislature. In another briefing, on **11 December**, the Chair of the 1591 Sanctions Committee reported that dynamics in Darfur were becoming more favourable to the peace process, thanks in part to the impact of the sanctions. Finally, on **22 December**, the Council adopted resolution 2559 (2020), terminating UNAMID’s mandate on 31 December. By that landmark text, members agreed to withdraw all the mission’s uniformed and civilian personnel, other than those needed for its liquidation, by 30 June 2021.

Fatou Bensouda, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, briefed the Council twice in 2020, on developments related to Sudan. Addressing members on **10 June**, she reported that Ali Kushayb — a senior Janjaweed commander and key fugitive wanted by the Court for his alleged part in crimes against humanity in Darfur — was finally in custody following his surrender in the Central African Republic. She described the arrest as a “clear signal” that accountability will be ensured, no matter how long it takes. On **10 December**, she updated members on Mr. Kushayb’s case and outlined improving relations between her office and Khartoum, stressing that, despite judicial delays caused by the pandemic, “15 years after the referral of the situation in Darfur to the International Criminal Court, the victims of crimes finally have a chance to see justice”.

The situation across the border in South Sudan, which continued to struggle with its own civil conflict, also evolved in 2020. On **4 March**, Council members cautiously welcomed a new power-sharing agreement between President Salva Kiir and Riek Machar, leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-In Opposition–(SPLM–IO) and its associated Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), who had agreed to take up the post of First Vice-President. Amid those encouraging developments, the Council adopted resolution 2514 (2020) on **12 March**, renewing the mandate of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) for one year. On **29 May**, it renewed until 21 May 2021 the arms embargo and targeted sanctions it had previously imposed on the country, adopting resolution 2521 (2020). However, the Council expressed its readiness to consider adjusting or lifting those measures in light of progress made towards implementing the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement.

Taking up COVID-19’s effects on South Sudan on **23 June**, the Council heard from David Shearer, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative, that the virus could cause the country’s already-fragile health-care system to collapse. The pandemic’s impact itself would likely be dwarfed by the potential number of deaths resulting from disruptions of routine vaccinations, maternal health services and treatments for such diseases as malaria, diarrhoea and pneumonia, he said, also warning that violence in South Sudan was escalating. Officials briefing the Council on **16 September** were joined by the head of one South Sudanese civil group, who described a worsening situation marked by flooding, locust infestations, rising cases of COVID-19 and a serious
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spike in intercommunal clashes. On 15 December, the Special Representative commended the country’s political progress in 2020, while cautioning the myriad challenges still facing South Sudan.

The Council dedicated several meetings to the situation in the contested region of Abyei, on the border between Sudan and South Sudan. On 28 April, Under-Secretary-General Lacroix said that, despite improving relations between the two countries, progress on determining Abyei’s final status remained stalled amid a tense security situation, continued violent clashes and widespread challenges posed by COVID-19. He urged the Council to renew the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) for six months, saying the mission continued to play a stabilizing role. Agreeing, the Council did so on 14 May, adopting resolution 2519 (2020). Even as the rapprochement between Sudan and South Sudan continued, little progress was registered on the question of Abyei throughout the final months of 2020, with the Under-Secretary-General reporting on 22 October that UNISFA staff had recently suffered four violent attacks. Against that backdrop, he urged the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan to leverage their bilateral relations for the sake of progress on the sensitive issue of Abyei. On 12 November, Council members adopted resolution 2550 (2020), renewing UNISFA’s mandate until 15 May 2021.

The Council adopted four press statements on Sudan, South Sudan and Abyei in 2020. On 29 January, it condemned in the strongest terms recent violence between the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities in Abyei — which resulted in the death of some 30 civilians — while welcoming reports that the Governments of Sudan and South Sudan had committed to de-escalating tensions and jointly investigating the violence. On 4 March, members welcomed encouraging developments in South Sudan’s peace process, including the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, and welcomed the spirit of compromise from which it resulted. However, they continued to respond to security incidents which lingered across the region, condemning on 12 March an attack on the convoy of Sudan’s Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok in Khartoum. In a statement on 9 October, Council members welcomed the signing of a critical peace agreement by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan Revolutionary Front and Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi armed groups.

Guinea-Bissau

Meetings: 14 February, 28 February, 10 August.

Resolutions: 2512.

Press Statements: SC/14138 (5 March), SC/14240 (1 July).

On the heels of presidential elections in November 2019 and a subsequent run-off poll on 29 December, the Council heard on 14 February from Rosine H. Sori-Coulibaly, Special
Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Guinea-Bissau (UNIOGBIS), who reported the victory of Umaro Sissoco Embaló, candidate of the Movement for Democratic Change. She pointed out, however, that the results — and a court-ordered recount — were legally challenged by a rival candidate from the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde.

Stressing that political stability was unlikely in that context, she said Guinea-Bissau’s fragile post-election period would continue to require strong support from the Council and donors. Against that backdrop, members adopted resolution 2512 (2020) on 28 February, extending the mandate of UNIOGBIS until 31 December — as it continued its phased drawdown — and stating their intention to review in six months the sanctions first imposed on Guinea-Bissau in 2012. The Special Representative reiterated that point on 10 August, warning of escalating political tensions and a looming “financial cliff” after the departure of UNIOGBIS. Noting that the mission’s tasks were being progressively handed over to the United Nations country team and other partners, she said the highly charged atmosphere had been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council issued two press statements on Guinea-Bissau in 2020. On 5 March, members expressed deep concern over the country’s post-electoral and institutional crisis, calling upon the parties to respect the legal and constitutional frameworks, as well as the democratic process. On 1 July, the Council took note of the recognition by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) of Mr. Embaló’s victory. It also welcomed the regional group’s continued engagement, as well as that of the African Union, Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries, European Union and the United Nations.

Central African Republic

Meetings: 31 January, 20 February, 22 June, 28 July, 19 October, 12 November.

Resolutions: 2507, 2536, 2552.


Following significant progress in 2019 towards easing the tense, complex political situation in the Central African Republic — including the adoption by the Government and 14 armed groups of the landmark Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation — 2020 saw a series of incremental improvements on the road to critical presidential, legislative and local elections, slated to be held in December. On 31 January, the Council adopted resolution 2507 (2020), extending its arms embargo on the country for seven months, with several humanitarian and related exemptions. On 20 February, Mankeur Ndiaye, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the
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United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), emphasized that, despite challenges, the now-one-year-old Political Agreement remained the only viable path forward. Under-Secretary-General Lacroix, alongside Smail Chergui, the African Union’s Commissioner for Peace and Security, echoed that point on 22 June, while urging national actors to remain focused on fighting COVID-19 and resurgent attacks by armed groups.

The Council extended its sanctions again for another year on 28 July, adopting resolution 2536 (2020), while also renewing the mandate of the Panel of Experts tasked with assisting that regime. By the terms of the resolution, members also requested that the Secretary-General assess, by mid-2021, the Central African Republic’s progress on meeting key benchmarks for lifting the arms embargo. The Special Representative briefed members on election preparations, among other matters, on 19 October, spotlighting a newly drafted electoral code, a computerized and reliable voter roster and the registration of some 2 million voters — 46 per cent of whom were women. “Central Africa is very well on its way to holding successful elections,” he said. Against that backdrop, the Council adopted resolution 2552 (2020) on 12 November, extending MINUSCA’s mandate with priority tasks including supporting the peace process and election preparations, and protecting civilians. As violence escalated in the final days of 2020, voting went ahead as scheduled on 27 December, with announcement of the results expected in early 2021.

The Council issued four press statements on the Central African Republic in 2020, the first on 27 February, when it welcomed progress in implementing the Political Agreement, one year after its signing. However, members voiced concern over delays in pushing forward some of its key provisions and urged all the signatories to fully respect their commitments. They also issued three statements condemning in the strongest terms deadly attacks on MINUSCA peacekeepers, one by anti-Balaka elements on 16 March; another by members of the Return, Reclamation and Rehabilitation (3R) group on 14 July; and two others against Mission staff in Kémo Prefecture on 28 December.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Meetings: 25 June, 25 June, 6 October, 7 December, 18 December.

Resolutions: 2528, 2556.


The Council’s efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2020 centred around supporting the newly formed coalition Government of President Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, especially in combating the spread of COVID-19 and ongoing violence in the east of the
country. Convening two separate meetings on the situation on 25 June, the Council heard first from Leila Zerrougui, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Outlining challenges facing the country — all exacerbated by COVID-19 — she called for continued international support as the Mission worked towards a potential phased withdrawal in December. Members then adopted resolution 2528 (2020), renewing for another year the sanctions regime imposed on individuals and entities designated by the Council.

On 6 October, the Special Representative described MONUSCO’s successful pivot amid the pandemic, noting that the Mission was able to maintain the continuity of its operations while simultaneously implementing measures to prevent it from becoming a vector of transmission. Among other things, it had enhanced screening capacity, quarantined personnel returning from abroad and temporarily halted regular troop rotations. Stressing that the Democratic Republic of the Congo was still experiencing political tensions and attacks by non-State armed groups, she called for international support in helping the country preserve recent gains and create the conditions needed for the responsible exit of MONUSCO.

To that end, she briefed the Council on 7 December concerning the components of the new Joint Strategy on the Progressive and Phased Drawdown of MONUSCO, developed with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and circulated to the Council in October. Among other things, it provided for the progressive consolidation of MONUSCO’s footprint in the Provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri, which were most affected by conflict. Council members formally endorsed the Joint Strategy on 18 December, adopting resolution 2556 (2020), by which they also decided to extend the mandates of MONUSCO and its Force Intervention Brigade for another year.

The Council issued one press statement on the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2020, on 23 June, in which it strongly condemned an attack on MONUSCO the previous day, which resulted in the death of one peacekeeper.

Libya

Meetings: 30 January, 11 February, 12 February, 5 May, 19 May, 5 June, 8 July, 2 September, 15 September, 2 October, 10 November, 19 November.

Resolutions: 2509, 2510, 2526, 2542, 2546.

Press Statements: SC/14339 (27 October).
Libya entered 2020 after nearly a decade of fragile State-building — characterized by high levels of violence, poverty and political strife — as well as ongoing foreign intervention that, at times, entangled the country in the bloody proxy battles of major Powers. The most recent escalation, in April 2019, was an advance on the capital, Tripoli, by forces loyal to General Khalifa Haftar. Clashes between his LNA troops and the internationally recognized Government of National Accord, continued into 2020. A truce reached on 8 January between two significant foreign actors, the Russian Federation and Turkey, was followed by an international conference on the situation, held in Berlin on 19 January. Marking a major development, participants in the latter agreed to end all foreign interference in Libya and to uphold the arms embargo intended to stem the unrelenting violence.

In its first meeting on 30 January, however, Ghassan Salamé, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), told the Council that, despite the nod towards peace, little was being done to implement the Berlin Conference commitments. In fact, actors both inside and outside the country were doubling down on military escalation, he added. Meanwhile, the Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 1970 (2011) on Libya reported that its Panel of Experts had expressed concerns over non-implementation of the arms embargo. On 11 February, the Council adopted resolution 2509 (2020), thereby renewing until 30 April 2021 its restrictions on the illicit export of Libyan crude oil and other petroleum products. On 12 February it adopted resolution 2510 (2020), endorsing the outcome of the Berlin Conference.

In the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, both the Government of National Accord and the LNA responded positively to international calls for a “humanitarian pause” intended to curb the spread of the coronavirus and afford civilians a much-needed respite from the fighting. However, by 5 May — when International Criminal Court Chief Prosecutor Bensouda briefed the Council on developments in Libya — high levels of violence and attacks against civilians had resumed. She noted that, despite challenges posed by COVID-19, her team was forging ahead with critical efforts to hold accountable those responsible for atrocity crimes in Libya. Following Special Representative Salamé’s decision to step down, the newly appointed Acting Special Representative, Stephanie Turco Williams, briefed the Council for the first time on 19 May, expressing deep concern over the continuing clashes. “Just when we think that the bottom has been reached in Libya, we somehow manage to achieve new depths of violence, heartlessness and impunity,” she said.

The Council met on 5 June to adopt resolution 2526 (2020), renewing for 12 months its authorization for Member States to inspect vessels on the high seas off Libya’s coast suspected of violating the country’s arms embargo. As the situation on the ground devolved even further, the Secretary-General warned members on 8 July of an alarming military build-up around the city of Sirte. He stressed that a negotiated solution was needed more urgently than ever amid shifting front lines, surging foreign intervention, tens of thousands of people fleeing their homes and the looming
threat of COVID-19. Seeking to draw the parties back from the precipice, Acting Special Representative Williams outlined a series of practical proposals on 2 September, including the establishment of a demilitarized zone in Sirte and the creation of a joint ceasefire monitoring mechanism tasked with overseeing the tenuous stand-off around the city. When the Council renewed UNSMIL’s mandate in resolution 2542 (2020) on 15 September, it decided to task the Mission not only with security and good offices functions, but also with supporting a ceasefire agreement, once the parties formally agreed on one.

On 2 October, the Council adopted resolution 2546 (2020), condemning migrant smuggling and human trafficking off the Libyan coast and renewing for another year its authorization for Member States to inspect vessels suspected of participating in those illicit activities. Following much negotiation under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva, the parties finally reached a ceasefire agreement on 23 October, then moved to capitalize on that momentum by launching the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum in Tunisia on 9 November. On 10 November, Chief Prosecutor Bensouda once again addressed the Council, welcoming those remarkable developments and emphasizing the need to bring the perpetrators of Libya’s worst crimes to justice. Recalling that her office deployed two missions to Libya in 2020 to collect evidence — ultimately discovering mass graves in Tarhunan and south of Tripoli — she nevertheless cited the failure by States to arrest and surrender wanted fugitives as a “major stumbling block” impeding her work.

In a final meeting on 19 November, Council members saw the year end on a high note, with the Special Representative reporting that the Political Forum had agreed to form a unity Government and adopted a road map to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2021. “Ten years of war cannot be solved in one week of political talks, but we hear more now the language of peace rather than the language of war,” she said.

Issuing a single press statement on Libya, on 27 October, the Council welcomed the permanent ceasefire agreement signed by the parties in Geneva and called upon them to implement the accord in full. Members also welcomed the launch of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and called upon Member States to respect and support implementation of the ceasefire agreement.

Mali

Meetings: 15 January, 7 April, 29 June, 31 August, 8 October, 15 October, 17 November.

Resolutions: 2531, 2541.

Dramatic events — including an August coup d’état and the subsequent formation of a new Government — unfolded in Mali in 2020, even as national stakeholders largely remained committed to implementing the 2015 Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. Under-Secretary-General Lacroix told the Council on 15 January that security conditions, which had already been extremely precarious for several years, were again worsening. Terrorists were proliferating in Ménako and Gao, and improvised explosive devices were injuring peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) on a near-daily basis. Against that backdrop, he underlined the urgent need to redeploy units of the national defence and security forces to the north of Mali, while outlining MINUSMA’s plans to establish a “mobilization task force” with additional air mobility.

Mahamet Saleh Annadif, Special Representative and Head of MINUSMA, briefed the Council on 7 April, recounting the first successful redeployment of national troops to the north, as well as several other positive developments. However, he also warned of persistent terrorist acts and several cases of COVID-19 — including among Mission staff. On 29 June, the Council adopted resolution 2531 (2020), extending MINUSMA’s mandate for another year. On 31 August, it adopted resolution 2541 (2020), renewing for 12 more months a set of sanctions — including a travel ban and asset freeze on spoilers impeding Mali’s peace process — first imposed in 2017.

In a shocking turn of events, a military mutiny erupted in the town of Kati on 18 August, followed by the arrest and resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta. Quickly condemning the coup, ECOWAS imposed sanctions and demanded a civilian-led transition that would restore order. In the tumultuous weeks that followed, on 8 October, the Special Representative told the Council that the regional group’s robust leadership had resulted in the prompt appointment of a new President, former Defence Minister Bah N’Daw, and the formation of a nascent transitional Government. ECOWAS lifted its sanctions, much to the relief of people across the region, he said. “The ball remains in the court of the Malian people,” he added, urging the new authorities to continue to implement the 2015 Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. On 15 October, the Council formally welcomed the transitional arrangements in presidential statement S/PRST/2020/10. On 17 November, it heard its annual briefing by the Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 2374 (2017).

The Council issued four press statements on Mali in 2020, the first on 17 January, in which members noted some progress in implementing the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, while expressing concern about delays in executing many of its provisions. On 11 May, they condemned in the strongest terms an attack on a MINUSMA convoy in Aguelhoc, in which three peacekeepers were killed and four others injured. In a statement on 19 August, the Council expressed its deep
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The year 2020 saw a continuation of the recent escalation of terrorist attacks perpetrated by non-State armed groups across much of West Africa, Central Africa and the Sahel region, including those affiliated with or pledging loyalty to ISIL/Da’esh. Meeting on 8 January, the Council heard an update from Mohamed ibn Chambas, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Spotlighting the crucial role played by that Office, he reported that deaths resulting from terrorist attacks in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger jumped five-fold in recent years. In Burkina Faso alone, casualties had surged from 80 in 2016 to more than 1,800 in 2019, he noted, emphasizing that ECOWAS was steadily scaling up its response. The subregional group had recently adopted a new action plan to eradicate terrorism, he added, pledging to mobilize $1 billion internationally.

Council members crystallized their concerns about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in presidential statement S/PRST/2020/2, on 11 February. They noted that violence in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin regions was fuelled by terrorism, transnational organized crime — especially criminal acts committed at sea — conflict between farmers and pastoralists, illegal exploitation of natural resources and the trafficking of persons, arms and drugs. Adding to those challenges, Under-Secretary-General Lacroix told the Council on 5 June, COVID-19 had added a layer of complexity to the situation, with terrorists exploiting the pandemic to undermine State authority and step up their attacks. However, he also highlighted positive momentum in the counter-terrorism operations conducted by the joint force comprising troops from the “Group of Five” for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) countries — Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

Special Representative Chambas appeared before the Council again on 9 July, when he echoed many of the Under-Secretary-General’s concerns, describing the situation as “extremely volatile”. He noted that some communities had resorted to organizing their own self-defence militias, with questionable implications for human rights. The Council again expressed its concern...
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about those matters — as well as the potential of COVID-19 to further undermine the region’s development, exacerbate humanitarian threats and harm the most vulnerable — in presidential statement S/PRST/2020/7 of **28 July**. On **17 September**, Peter Maurer, President of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), told members that communities in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin region were walking “a tightrope of survival” amid the cumulative pressures of conflict, climate change and worsening environmental degradation.

Briefing again on **16 November**, Under-Secretary-General Lacroix said G5 Sahel joint force counter-terrorism operations had intensified, despite the many challenges posed by COVID-19, and announced his intention to assess, early in 2021, the support provided to those efforts by United Nations peacekeepers currently stationed in Mali. “We should be mindful of the disastrous implications for the security situation for the rest of the West African region if the situation in the Sahel is not adequately addressed,” he emphasized. François Louncény Fall, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), reported on **9 December** that the threat posed by to the subregion in Central Africa by Boko Haram and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) armed groups were exacerbating challenges in West Africa and other subregions.

The Council issued three press statements on events in West Africa and the Sahel in 2020, each condemning in the strongest terms deadly attacks against civilians committed by terrorist groups. On **1 April**, members condemned a “heinous and cowardly” attack on 23 March in Boma, Chad — which left at least 98 people dead and 47 others wounded — as well as an attack on military vehicles near Goneri, Nigeria, which killed at least 47 people. On **16 June**, the Council condemned multiple attacks in Nigeria on 9 and 10 June, including one against a United Nations humanitarian facility, which together resulted in at least 120 deaths. Then, on **30 November**, it condemned an attack in north-east Nigeria on 28 November, in which many civilians were reportedly killed and others injured and abducted.

**Great Lakes**

Meetings: **22 April, 13 October, 4 December**.

Presidential Statements: **S/PRST/2020/12**.

The Council met three times in 2020 to address developments related to Africa’s Great Lakes region, comprising Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. It heard on **22 April** from Huang Xia, the Secretary-General’s Special Envoy, that the COVID-19 pandemic was already hampering efforts by countries still struggling from decades of conflict to implement the landmark Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. While the capacity of States
to contain the virus differed, their approaches to limiting its spread were similar — including restrictions on movement, quarantines, curfews, suspension of international flights and widespread border closures. While largely successful, those measures — coupled with reallocation of resources to address the pandemic — were likely to weaken already-fragile economies, he cautioned, calling for steadfast international support.

Briefing again on 13 October, the Special Envoy outlined recent diplomatic developments across the region. Among other things, he welcomed the peaceful transfer of power in Burundi following general elections in May; an October visit by the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Foreign Minister to Burundi; commitments by Rwanda and Uganda to continue normalizing their relations; and the increasing use of diplomatic channels and regional mechanisms to resolve disagreements peacefully, as evidenced by the recent resolution of a border dispute between Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Noting that the security situation in the latter’s eastern districts remained worrying, he went on to note that he recently submitted to the Secretary-General a new United Nations strategy for the consolidation of peace, prevention and resolution of conflicts in the Great Lakes region.

Concerning the improving security situation in Burundi, the Council adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2020/12 on 4 December, ending mandatory reporting on the country and encouraging international partners to pursue dialogue towards resumed development assistance.

**Somalia and Horn of Africa**

**Meetings:** 24 February, 27 February, 30 March, 21 May, 29 May, 22 June, 29 June, 20 August, 28 August, 28 October, 12 November, 4 December.

**Resolutions:** 2516, 2520, 2527, 2540, 2551, 2554.

**Press Statements:** [SC/14133 (28 February)](https://www.un.org/disarmament/)

In 2020, Somalia prepared to hold its first popular elections in almost half a century, with a new “one-person, one-vote” model widely praised by the global community, while simultaneously grappling with unabated attacks by the brutal Al-Shabaab terrorist group. On 24 February, several briefers — including James Swan, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM), and Francisco Caetano José Madeira, African Union Special Representative and Head of the Council-mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) — said the elections planned for November and December would be a “historic milestone” on Somalia’s long road back to security. On 27 February, the Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 751 (1992) concerning Somalia briefed members, describing the sanctions overseen by that body as critical to stemming the flow of weapons to non-State criminal actors. In
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Contrast, Somalia’s representative underscored the growing capability of his country’s own security forces to handle such tasks, while reiterating his call for the full lifting of the Council’s arms embargo.

With the Council’s deliberations turning virtual as the coronavirus gained strength, members adopted resolution 2516 (2020) on 30 March, a technical rollover of UNAMID’s mandate for one month until more substantive in-person discussions could be held. COVID-19 soon began to feature prominently in the Council’s discussions, and by 21 May, Special Representative Swan was warning of its potential consequences for Somalia’s long-awaited elections. While the country had only 1,500 confirmed cases, he said, the actual number — as in many of the world’s poorest nations — was projected to be much higher. He also cited unabating terrorist attacks, floods, a plunging economy and a severe locust infestation — which was also wreaking havoc in neighbouring countries — as major threats facing Somalia.

On 29 May, the Council adopted resolution 2520 (2020), reauthorizing AMISOM’s deployment for nine months and laying out a series of security tasks related to the scheduled elections. With in-person deliberations still impossible, members agreed on yet another technical rollover of UNSOM’s mandate, adopting resolution 2527 (2020) on 22 June. This time, it extended the mandate until 31 August. Meanwhile, the Council turned to developments in the broader Horn of Africa region on 29 June, when Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo said that agreement could soon be reached among Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan on the nearly completed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, spanning one of the region’s most critical transboundary water sources.

As the widespread implications of COVID-19 came into sharper focus, however, the Council’s attention turned back to Somalia, with Special Representative Swan reporting on 20 August that the pandemic had pushed the country’s election plans off track and sparked significant political tensions. Against that backdrop, members met on 28 August to renew UNSOM’s mandate for another year, adopting resolution 2540 (2020). Among other things, the Council tasked the Mission with coordinating United Nations support for “free, fair, timely, peaceful, transparent, credible and inclusive elections”, while calling for a direct voting component that would enable as many citizens to vote as possible.

On 28 October, the Chair of the 751 Sanctions Committee returned to brief the Council on matters including Al-Shabaab’s financing schemes, the efficacy of bans on charcoal and components of improvised explosive devices. In a related matter on 12 November, members adopted resolution 2551 (2020), thereby extending the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Somalia until 15 December 2021, renewing the partial lifting of the arms embargo on the country’s security forces and urging the Government curb terrorist financing and illicit exports. On 4 December, the Council adopted resolution 2554 (2020), renewing for one year its authorization for States and regional organizations fighting piracy off Somalia’s coast. One-person, one-vote elections had still not been
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held by year’s end, with regional mediators working to avert violence and unravel yet another political impasse.

In its single press statement on Somalia, on 28 February, the Council noted progress made in preparing for national elections in late 2020 or early 2021, while welcoming the role of the Federal Government of Somalia, the Somali Federal Parliament and the National Independent Election Commission. Reiterating their expectation that the election would be based on the principle of one-person, one-vote, members also emphasized that any delay in holding the elections could pose risks to Somalia’s political stability.

**Western Sahara**

Meetings: 30 October.

Resolutions: 2548.

The Security Council met once on the question of Western Sahara, on 30 October, extending for one year, in resolution 2548 (2020), the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and calling upon the parties to the dispute over that territory to resume negotiations without preconditions and in good faith.

**Asia**

**Afghanistan**

Meetings: 10 March, 31 March, 3 September, 15 September, 17 December, 18 December.

Resolutions: 2513, 2543, 2557.

Press Statements: SC/14147 (26 March), SC/14185 (13 May), SC/14237 (30 June), SC/14271 (5 August), SC/14338 (27 October), SC/14329 (5 November).

Early in 2020, Council members saw glimmers of hope emerge in their long-standing efforts to turn the page on decades of conflict in Afghanistan. Meeting on 10 March, they adopted resolution 2513 (2020), hailing “significant steps” towards ending the war and opening the door to intra-Afghan negotiations, enabled by a new peace agreement signed by the United States and the Taliban. However, those strides were soon beset by deep uncertainty amid political strife, delays in re-starting the peace process and the imminent impact of COVID-19. On 31 March, Ingrid Hayden, Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), briefed the Council on an electoral dispute between President Ashraf Ghani — recently inaugurated again after being declared the winner of an election held in September 2019 — and his rival, Abdullah
Abdullah. She also described the risk posed by the pandemic as “extreme”, calling for a reduction in violence to help the Government and fragile health system focus on battling the looming crisis.

With the situation continuing to devolve in the following months and the formal launch of peace talks in Qatar imminent, Deborah Lyons, the newly appointed Special Representative and Head of UNAMA, said on 3 September that near-record levels of violence threatened to derail political progress. Noting that clashes continued to kill hundreds of people each week, she exhorted the parties to place a humanitarian ceasefire atop the agenda. Peace talks went ahead on 12 September, and on 15 September, the Council adopted resolution 2543 (2020), welcoming the negotiations and extending UNAMA’s mandate for another year. Providing an update on 17 December, the Special Representative cautioned once again that the unabating surge in violence was threatening future progress and required urgent international attention. On 18 December, the Council adopted resolution 2557 (2020), extending for 12 months the mandate of its team monitoring sanctions against individuals and entities associated with the Taliban while emphasizing its serious concerns about the ongoing violence.

The Council’s six press statements on Afghanistan focused largely on a spate of deadly terror attacks that claimed more than 120 innocent lives throughout 2020. On 26 March, members condemned in the strongest terms an attack at the Dharamshala Sikh Temple in Kabul, which resulted in at least 25 people killed and many others wounded. On 13 May, they condemned attacks at a Kabul clinic run by Médecins sans frontières — in which at least 20 civilians, including women and children, were killed — and at a funeral in Nangarhar Province, which took at least 24 civilian lives. The terrorist group known as Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant–Khorasan Province, or ISIL-K, claimed responsibility for all the attacks.

Striking a different tone in a press statement on 30 June — following a briefing by Special Representative Lyons and several other senior officials — the Council welcomed steps taken so far by the Government and the Taliban towards the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, while reaffirming the importance of international support. Violence against civilians continued, however, and on 5 August, the Council condemned yet another terrorist attack at a Jalalabad prison complex which killed at least 29 people. They also condemned an “atrocious and cowardly” attack at the Kabul Education Centre, which claimed the lives of at least 24 people, in a statement on 27 October, and another at Kabul University, which killed 22 people, in a statement on 5 November.

Americas

Colombia

Meetings: 13 January, 14 April, 14 July, 25 September, 14 October.
Four years after the signing of Colombia’s historic peace agreement, which formally ended half a century of civil strife between the Government and rebel forces, the Security Council continued to push for the accord’s full implementation and for an end to lingering attacks against community leaders and human rights activists. Briefing Council members on 13 January amid a fresh surge in violence, Carlos Ruiz Massieu, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia, emphasized the importance of preserving and building on hard-won gains, including improved security conditions and new opportunities for former combatants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) opposition group. The need for cooperation became particularly acute amid the spread of COVID-19, he said on 14 April, stressing that the pandemic could not be allowed to derail strides towards peace.

As 2020 progressed, Special Representative Ruiz sounded the alarm on 14 July, citing escalating attacks against community leaders, human rights defenders, former combatants and women. The Government and the newly formed FARC political party were pressing forward with peacebuilding despite challenges of COVID-19, he said, adding that former fighters faced grave threats in Colombia’s remote rural areas. On 25 September, the Council adopted resolution 2545 (2020), extending the mandate of the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia for another year. Taking stock of progress on 14 October, the Special Representative said that, while some of the elements of the 2016 Peace Agreement had been realized, others — including the reintegration of former fighters into society — remained “under construction”. Despite suffering attacks and stigmatization, the majority of former FARC combatants were committed to the peace process, and many were working alongside their communities to withstand the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. He went on to provide an update on Colombia’s Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Repetition, saying it was building momentum.

The Council issued three press statements on Colombia in 2020. On 15 January, members reiterated their full and unanimous support for the peace process and welcomed both parties’ continued commitment as it entered its fourth year. They also welcomed the inclusive and comparatively peaceful local and departmental elections, held in October 2019 with participation by the FARC political party. Underlining its strong support again on 17 April, the Council welcomed the Government’s launch of an action plan intended to safeguard women leaders and human rights defenders. In a final statement on 19 October, members voiced their deep concern over the persistence of threats, attacks and killings targeting community and social leaders — including women, former combatants and leaders of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities — while strongly condemning the multiple killings witnessed in recent months.
Haiti

Meetings: 20 February, 19 June, 5 October, 15 October.

Resolutions: 2547.


Following the 2019 closure of the Organization’s long-standing peacekeeping operation and the transition to the United Nations Integrated Office in Haiti (BINUH), 2020 dawned on the Caribbean nation amid ongoing political deadlock, chronic insecurity and poor living conditions that still affected some 4 million citizens. Helen La Lime, Special Representative and Head of BINUH, told the Council on 20 February that Haiti could only surmount its multifaceted crisis through a combination of strong national will and steadfast international support. Among other things, she urged key actors to settle on a way to designate a Prime Minister and form a new Government. On 19 June, Jacques Létang, President of the Haitian Bar Federation and member of the Human Rights Office in Haiti, said COVID–19 was testing his country’s sorely limited institutional strength, with working-class neighbourhoods transformed into lawless zones and public services all but failing.

Briefing again on 5 October, Special Representative La Lime cautioned against even more widespread disorder, emphasizing: “Haiti’s contemporary history has demonstrated time and again that acute political polarization and weak State institutions constitute catalysts for violence.” The Government must build capacity for fledgling institutions, allowing for the steps needed to restart the economy, hold free and fair elections and put Haiti back on a positive development trajectory. On 15 October, the Council voted to extend BINUH’s mandate for another year, adopting resolution 2547 (2020) with no changes to the original mandate. The representatives of China and the Russian Federation abstained, with the former voicing regret that the text failed to address the dire situation unfolding in Haiti. The representative of the Russian Federation echoed those concerns, adding that his delegation would have preferred a resolution that specifically mentioned the escalation of violence, encroachments on human rights and the need to respect Haiti’s Constitution.

In the Council’s single press statement on Haiti in 2020, on 8 January, members expressed concern over the ongoing political impasse while reiterating the need for stakeholders to engage in an inclusive and open dialogue, and to form a Government without further delay. They also emphasized the urgent need for coordinated action to address deteriorating humanitarian conditions, and for the Government to address the underlying causes of instability and poverty. In addition, they urged all stakeholders to refrain from violence and stressed the importance of ensuring that those responsible were held to account.

Venezuela
Meetings: 20 May.

In the wake of significant political turmoil in 2019, the Council convened only one meeting, on 20 May, concerning what Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo described as “a protracted crisis that only [Venezuela’s] people can resolve”. Briefing members on the contents of a letter from Caracas to the Council, she cited the document as stating that, on 3 and 4 May, mercenaries and terrorists — “organized, trained, financed and protected” by Colombia and the United States — illegally entered Venezuela with the aim of assassinating senior Government officials, including President Nicolás Maduro. While Colombia and the United States rejected the charges, 47 people were arrested in connection with the incident, she said, going on to noted that, despite international facilitation efforts, attempts to reach a negotiated political solution in Venezuela — all the more critical amid COVID-19 — had so far borne no fruit.

Europe

Meetings: 18 February.

Six years into the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the Council met to address the issue on 18 February, as the parties continued to grapple with the provisions of the landmark 2015 Minsk Agreements. Several briefers, including Halit Çevik, Chief Monitor of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission, agreed that the coming months will be crucial in deciding the future direction of the conflict. Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo expressed optimism that peace could be achieved through political will, continued good-faith negotiations and international support. However, she also voiced concern about a flare-up in Donbas — involving more than 2,500 separate explosions — and said that the United Nations humanitarian response plan in eastern Ukraine remained severely underfunded.

Cyprus

Meetings: 30 January, 28 July, 9 October.

Resolutions: 2506, 2537.


Meeting three times on Cyprus in 2020, the Council adopted resolution 2506 (2020) on 30 January, renewing the mandate of its more than 50-year-long presence on the island — the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) — until 31 July. By that text, members expressed serious concern about the increasing number of violations of the military status quo along
Security Council Pressed Ahead in 2020 with Mandate to Protect Civilians, Build Peace, as COVID-19 Infected 84 Million People Worldwide | Meeting

...the ceasefire lines. They urged UNFICYP, through its liaison role, to submit proposals for a new military contact mechanism, and hailed the Secretary-General’s efforts to draft terms of reference that would serve as a starting point for phased negotiations.

Renewing UNFICYP’s mandate for another six months on 28 July, the Council adopted resolution 2537 (2020), which spotlighted the now-ubiquitous impacts of COVID-19, calling upon the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders to cooperate in responding to the pandemic. Following Turkey’s announcement of its plan to open the coastline of Varosha, a city on the eastern edge of Cyprus, the Council met on 9 October to issue presidential statement S/PRST/2020/9, in which it expressed concern over that development and called for its reversal. Members reiterated that no actions related to Varosha should be taken that were not in accordance with relevant Security Council resolutions.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Meetings: 6 May, 5 November.

Resolutions: 2549.

Meeting twice over the course of 2020 on the situation in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Council heard on 6 May from High Representative Valentin Inzko that lingering corruption and political tensions still hindered progress 25 years after the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace, commonly known as the Dayton Accords. Noting that the country had so far avoided significant loss of life to COVID-19, he cautioned that no functional coordination mechanism had yet been created to deal with the crisis or its economic consequences. He urged Member States contributing to the multinational stabilization force on the ground to keep that crucial international presence in place. The Council met again on 5 November to extend for one year its authorization of States contributing to the multinational force — known as EUFOR-ALTHEA — adopting resolution 2549 (2020).

Kosovo

Meetings: 24 April, 21 October.

The pandemic was the focus of two meetings on the situation in Kosovo in 2020, including one on 24 April, when Council members heard from Zahir Tanin, Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), that political leaders should take a cue from health-care workers jointly fighting the virus and engage in a fresh round of negotiations. Outlining preventative measures implemented by the authorities, he warned that Kosovo remained particularly vulnerable due to its thinly stretched resources. Positive developments
later in the year seemed to bear out those calls for cooperation in extraordinary times. The Special Representative reported on 21 October that Kosovar leaders in Pristina and their Serbian counterparts in Belgrade had concluded an agreement on economic cooperation, mediated by the United States, while also agreeing to resume European Union-facilitated peace talks.

Cooperation with Regional Organizations

African Union

Meetings: 4 December.


Ahead of a high-level debate on cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union on 4 December, the Council issued presidential statement S/PRST/2020/11, in which it encouraged stronger coordination “across a range of possible responses to conflict”. With President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa, Council President for December, presiding, the statement commended the African Union’s efforts to enhance its peacekeeping role and that of African subregional organizations. Secretary-General Guterres said the partnership between the two organizations was anchored in the principles of complementarity and respect for African leadership, while noting the continent’s exemplary leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission, reiterated the bloc’s demand for a permanent seat on the Council, pointing out that 70 per cent of its agenda focused on the continent.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Meetings: 30 January.

The Council met on 30 January to explore cooperation between the United Nations and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with the heads of both organizations emphasizing that the relationship is vital to combating such global threats as climate change and the spread of terrorism. Secretary-General Guterres noted that, since its formation in 1967, ASEAN had been involved in many regional initiatives entailing quiet diplomacy, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in conflict situations. Meanwhile, Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN, said South-East Asia had been able to evolve into a diverse community providing opportunities for all. Several Council members expressed concern about the plight of Rohingya refugees, urging the Government of Myanmar to create the conditions for their safe, voluntary and dignified return. Others urged ASEAN and China to forge a code of conduct to manage maritime and territorial disputes in the South China Sea.
International Organisation of La Francophonie

Meetings: 8 September.

Convening its first-ever meeting on cooperation with the International Organisation of la Francophonie — which represents 274 million people in the 54-nation French-speaking world — on 8 September, the Council heard from Louise Mushikiwabo, the grouping’s Secretary-General, and from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, in his capacity as Chair of the Ministerial Conference of la Francophonie. They emphasized that the organization was uniquely placed to reinforce United Nations conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts. Bintou Keita, Assistant Secretary-General for Africa, described cooperation between la Francophonie and the United Nations as rich and varied. Among other things, she noted, the two organizations had recently joined forces to support elections in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Comoros, Gabon, Central African Republic, Madagascar, Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She also praised the contribution of la Francophonic members to peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts across Africa.

Europe

Meetings: 6 February, 28 May.

In considering its cooperation with European States, the Council met on 6 February with Prime Minister Edi Rama of Albania in his capacity as OSCE Chairman for 2020. He cited respect for agreements and the pursuit of dialogue as hallmarks of the organization’s approach to tackling tensions — including protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria — and described the crisis in eastern Ukraine as the most pressing security issue facing the continent. Taking a broader view on 28 May was Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who warned that COVID-19 was sorely testing the global system, including a Security Council still paralysed by vetoes and in-fighting. Noting that the European Union’s 27 member States were collectively the largest contributor to the United Nations budget, he said the bloc remains a staunch supporter of the Organization as the beating heart of the multilateral system, “even as others may be backing away”.

International Justice

International Criminal Tribunals

Meetings: 28 February, 8 June, 25 June, 14 December, 18 December, 21 December.

Resolutions: 2529.
As COVID-19 upended judicial proceedings around the globe, the Council heard several briefings in 2020 by Carmel Agius, President of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals — successor to the now-closed International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda — as well as Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz. On 28 February, the Council issued presidential statement S/PRST/2020/4, requesting that the Mechanism present by 15 April a report on progress towards the completion of its functions, as well as detailed schedules for the proceedings currently under consideration.

Mr. Agius and Mr. Brammertz provided in-person updates on 8 June, outlining a major breakthrough in the Mechanism’s work. Félicien Kabuga, a high-profile fugitive alleged to have been a leading figure in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, had been captured and arrested in France after more than two decades on the run, Mr. Agius reported. However, he also cited COVID-19-related delays in much of the Mechanism’s work, noting that some cases previously expected to conclude by the end of 2020 were now likely to continue into 2021. On 25 June, the Council adopted resolution 2529 (2020), renewing the mandate of the Chief Prosecutor for two years and reappointing Mr. Brammertz. Providing another update on 14 December, the President and Chief Prosecutor said that in-court proceedings were largely back on track, and the Mechanism was likely to conclude most of its pending caseload by May 2021.

Council members also heard from Justice Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf, President of the International Court of Justice, on 18 December. Spotlighting the strong relationship between the Council and the Court, he nevertheless urged the former to better utilize the latter’s advisory opinions to strengthen the rule of law in matters of international peace and security. Among other things, he said the Council could periodically call on States to accept the mandatory jurisdiction of the Court, as it last did in 2012. So far, only 74 Member States had made declarations accepting that jurisdiction, including only one permanent Council member, he noted. Moreover, the organ had only once recommended that parties refer a dispute to the Court, in 1947, and had only once requested an advisory opinion, in a matter concerning Namibia and South Africa, in 1974, he added. Days after that briefing, on 21 December, the Council issued presidential statement S/PRST/2020/13, in which it reaffirmed its ongoing commitment to fostering interaction with the Court.

Non-Proliferation

Meetings: 26 February, 30 March, 30 June, 14 August, 22 December.


On 26 February, the Council turned its attention to the upcoming conference to review the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, which marked the fiftieth anniversary of its entry into force in 2020. High Representative Nakamitsu said the meeting would be a chance not only to celebrate the Treaty’s many achievements, but also to ensure that it remains the lynchpin of the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Acknowledging the instrument’s contribution to international peace and security, Council members broadly agreed on the need to stay focused on nuclear developments in Iran and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. However, they differed over the way forward, with nuclear-weapon States reiterating their opposition to the most recently concluded international nuclear agreement, the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Adopting resolution 2515 (2020) on 30 March, the Council extended until 30 April 2021 the mandate of the Panel of Experts helping to oversee sanctions against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, imposed in response to that country’s nuclear and ballistic missile tests. Turning to Iran’s nuclear programme on 30 June, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo expressed regret that the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action — commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal — was now facing numerous challenges after the United States withdrew in 2018 and Tehran’s subsequent breach of the agreement’s provisions. The deal remained the best way to ensure that Iran’s nuclear programme remained peaceful, she emphasized, recalling that, in a recent letter to the Secretary-General, Tehran had outlined the ways in which United States sanctions were constraining its response to COVID-19.

In that connection, the Council failed, on 14 August, to adopt a draft resolution tabled by the United States, which would have extended arms-related United Nations restrictions on Iran that were set to expire in October under resolution 2231 (2015). Only two delegations voted in its favour. On 22 December, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo urged Iran to refrain from deviating any further from its commitments under the Plan of Action, voicing regret that it had recently brought its enriched uranium stockpile to a level that surpassed the deal’s stipulated limits. In the ensuing debate, several Council members underlined the need for all parties to return to the Agreement, with some highlighting encouraging remarks on that front by United States President-elect Joseph R. Biden.

The Council issued one press statement on non-proliferation in 2020, on 26 February, in support of the upcoming conference to review the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Members underscored the viability and mutually reinforcing character of all the commitments under the Treaty and the need for its full implementation, especially in light of “current international geopolitical challenges”.

Peacekeeping Operations
Several years into a wide-ranging reform effort intended to render the 13 United Nations peace operations more effective and efficient, the Council met several times in 2020 to discuss such issues as relations with host countries, gender parity in missions and the safety of “Blue Helmets” working in the world’s most complex security environments. On **30 March**, members adopted resolution 2518 (2020), emphasizing the importance of peacekeeper safety and requesting that host States fulfil their obligations vis-à-vis access and freedom of movement for peacekeepers, including casualty and medical evacuation.

On **4 June**, with the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing around the globe, the force commanders of missions in Mali, South Sudan and the Golan Heights appeared before the Council to report on operational changes — such as strict quarantines and the temporary suspension of regular troop rotations — they had been forced to undertake. Tage Dennis Gyllenspore, MINUSMA’s Force Commander, said the Mission was coordinating closely with the Government on restrictions to keep both civilians and staff safe. “Notwithstanding these measures, I have made it clear that this is not the time for the force to take a step back,” he stressed.

The Council heard a briefing on **7 July** by Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who sounded the alarm about the impact of COVID-19 on health, societies, economies and development gains around the globe. Addressing rights violations as warning signs of conflict was even more crucial in the COVID-19 era, she emphasized, pointing out that the pandemic had made United Nations efforts to tackle the drivers of instability even more important. Turning to the role of women in peace operations — increasingly regarded as critical to their success — the Council adopted resolution 2538 (2020) on **28 August**, calling for action to bolster the role of both uniformed and civilian women at all levels of peacekeeping. Also by that text, the Council encouraged Member States to develop strategies to increase the deployment of women to peace operations, including by sharing best practices on recruitment, retention, training and deployment.

The Secretary-General’s 2018 “Action for Peacekeeping” initiative took centre stage on **14 September**, as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix told the Council that the flagship programme would soon shift to its second phase. Citing tangible progress in the last two years, he outlined new priorities to make peace operations more coherent and fit for purpose. “Aiming for short-term stability is not enough,” he said, stressing: “Our missions should be vectors for inclusive, responsive and transformative futures for the people we serve.” Echoing those points on **4 November**, Alexandre Zouev, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions, said the deployment of more women police officers was key to more effective peace operations. United
As the United Nations began its seventy-fifth anniversary year, the Council convened a ministerial-level debate on 9 January, focusing on the crucial need to uphold the Organization’s Charter in today’s complex world. Members adopted presidential statement S/PRST/2020/1, reaffirming their commitment to the Charter. They called upon States to comply with its purposes and principles and recommit to multilateralism and the central role of the United Nations. Those lofty pledges were soon made concrete in unprecedented ways, as the planet spiralled into the uncharted territory of COVID-19. On 1 July, following significant negotiation, the Council adopted resolution 2532 (2020), endorsing the Secretary-General’s 23 March appeal for a global ceasefire, aimed at facilitating delivery of humanitarian assistance and helping nations funnel their resources into combating the virus. Also by that text, the Council demanded a “general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda” and called upon all belligerents to engage in a durable humanitarian pause for at least 90 consecutive days.

The following day, 2 July, members considered the pandemic’s concrete impact on peace and security around the globe. Secretary-General Guterres pressed the Council to use its collective influence to protect the millions of people affected by conflict and already facing acute vulnerabilities, warning of diverse risks as grievances and vulnerabilities became more entrenched and the risk of violence — including domestic abuse — spiked. ICRC President Maurer described conflict zones as “the sharp end” of the pandemic, where shocks would likely be catastrophic. In a distinct but related meeting on 14 July, the Council adopted resolution 2535 (2020), recognizing the unique and essential role of young people in conflict and post-conflict situations, especially in preparing for, and responding to, natural hazards and public health challenges.

In a briefing on 9 September, senior officials emphasized that the most fragile and conflict-affected countries would be those worst affected by COVID-19 in the medium and long term. “Woefully inadequate economic and political action will lead to greater instability and conflicts in the coming years […] and more crises will be on this Council’s agenda,” Emergency Relief
Coordinator Lowcock warned, citing the more than 26 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 860,000 deaths globally. He went on to stress that the pandemic’s indirect consequences — such as rising food insecurity and the disruption of vaccination campaigns that put some 80 million infants at risk of preventable diseases — were “dwarfing the impact of the virus itself”. Meanwhile, Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo highlighted the increased political risks resulting from the erosion of public trust. Under-Secretary-General Lacroix called for the Council’s support as the world continued to grapple with pandemic’s effects.

Regional cooperation to combat COVID-19 took centre stage on 24 September, as Secretary-General Guterres declared that countries had not cooperated sufficiently at the global level to stop the spread of the coronavirus. “The pandemic is a clear test of international cooperation — a test we have essentially failed,” he said. A post-pandemic paradigm would require stronger alliances, united to address such challenges as the climate crisis, cybercrime and rising inequality. African Union Commission Chair Faki agreed that humanity’s brief experience with COVID-19 had called its systems into question. In many countries, resources that could have helped fight the virus were tied up in addressing conflict, he said, explaining the establishment of the African Special Fund for COVID-19 and citing regional efforts to suspend, reduce or cancel debt.

During the Russian Federation Presidency, on 20 October, the Council held a debate on long-term conflicts, terrorism and sectarian tensions in the Persian Gulf region. Opening the meeting, Secretary-General Guterres called for greater unity among Council members in addressing those challenges, especially in light of the region’s strategic import and emotional resonance. Also briefing were Robert Malley, President and CEO of the International Crisis Group, and Vitaly Naumkin, Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Tackling two additional matters towards the end of 2020, the Council adopted resolution 2553 (2020) on security sector reform on 3 December, adding new provisions to a previous resolution aimed at addressing implementation gaps in fragile and post-conflict States. It heard an annual update from the chairs of its subsidiary bodies on 16 December. Among other things, the outgoing chairs — dealing with nuclear disarmament in the Middle East and the Korean Peninsula, the situation of children and armed conflict, as well as arms and travel embargoes in Africa — emphasized that, while the sanctions they oversee remain a key tool for promoting peace and stability, Member States “must not lose sight of their humanitarian impact”.

**Threats to International Peace and Security**

Meetings: 7 February, 11 March, 6 August, 24 August, 31 August, 9 December, 29 December.

Despite recent progress in regaining territory held by ISIL/Da’esh, the Council heard a range of experts tell the Council on **7 February** that the group’s chokehold persisted in parts of the Middle East, even as it sought new affiliates from West Africa to Asia. Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, urged the global community to work closely together to prevent the resurgence of ISIL/Da’esh and the rise in splinter groups around the world. As many as 27,000 foreign terrorist fighters who travelled to Iraq and Syria could still be alive, he said, adding the group was thought to have access to $300 million in illicit funds. Also briefing were Michèle Coninsx, Executive Director of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and Mona Freiji, an English teacher and civil society activist, who shared her experiences in her hometown of Raqqa, Syria.

On **11 March**, the Council considered terrorism in the context of Africa, where much of the North-Western and Sahelian regions had been consumed by deadly asymmetric attacks for several years. In presidential statement S/PRST/2020/5, members underlined the importance of prompt and effective implementation of its resolutions dealing with terrorism — including sanctions aimed at ISIL/Da’esh, Al-Qaida and their affiliates — while asking the international community to consider mobilizing more sustainable and predictable resources and expertise to strengthen the counter-terrorism capacity of African countries. Under-Secretary-General Voronkov briefed again on 6 August, during a debate on challenges in countering terrorism during a global pandemic, alongside Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). She warned that terrorists and organized crime groups would likely attempt to capitalize on and exploit new vulnerabilities amid the pandemic.

Reiterating those points on 24 August, Under-Secretary-General Voronkov reported new data showing that COVID-19-related restrictions, such as lockdowns and travel limits, seemed to have reduced the immediate risk of terrorist attacks in non-conflict zones. However, the reverse was true in Iraq and Syria, where more than 10,000 ISIL/Da’esh fighters were believed to be active and moving freely. Future threats to the international community could increase as the group gained strength and further exploited pandemic-related disruption, he warned. On 31 August, the Council failed to adopt a related draft resolution — owing to a veto cast by the United States — by which it would have reiterated previous calls for measures to prosecute, rehabilitate and reintegrate foreign terrorist fighters. In their final resolution of the year, resolution 2560 (2020), adopted on 29 December, members encouraged States to engage more actively with its committee overseeing sanctions on individuals and groups related to ISIL/Da’esh and Al-Qaida, in order to keep its list reliable and up to date.

**Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace**
The Council took up a range of matters related to post-conflict peacebuilding, as well as its broader “sustaining peace” agenda, in 2020. During a far-reaching 13 February debate on transitional justice, more than 60 speakers representing countries from Colombia to Ireland to Rwanda shared their experiences of truth commissions and other reconciliation instruments, highlighting lessons learned. Yasmin Sooka of the Foundation for Human Rights in South Africa, and the Chair of South Sudan’s Commission on Human Rights, called upon the United Nations to assist fragile post-conflict States that may lack the means to carry out reconciliation initiatives.

Citing examples of quests for justice, High Commissioner Bachelet pointed to the recent overthrow of President al-Bashir in Sudan and Guatemala’s successful truth commission, which documented more than three decades of brutal human right violations.

As the coronavirus began to strain medical facilities and hobble economies around the globe, it had a particularly devastating impact on the decimated institutions of countries embroiled in conflict or recently emerging from it. Secretary-General Guterres told the Council on 12 August that COVID-19 threatened to exacerbate existing wars and create new ones, including by eroding public trust. He warned that the perception of authorities mishandling the crisis or lacking transparency was particularly dangerous, as was the risk that pandemic–related restrictions could be exploited to narrow civic and democratic freedoms. At the same time, he noted that COVID-19 was also creating new opportunities for peace. Some warring parties had responded positively to his 23 March appeal for a global ceasefire, which the Council endorsed in July, but more work was needed to translate those early gains into action.

Members heard again on 3 November that the pandemic, alongside climate change, had become one of the world’s foremost drivers of poverty and an exacerbator of conflict. Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed warned that those twin challenges were exacerbating cross-border insecurity, while deepening inequality, grievances and mistrust, and stoking violent extremism. Ibrahim Mayaki, Chief Executive Officer of the African Union Development Agency, said the coronavirus had plunged millions more people into dire food insecurity. More than 82 million jobs could be directly affected by mobility restrictions amid the pandemic, as preventive health measures altered the livelihoods of workers. As for possible solutions, he proposed programmes to eradicate chronic food vulnerability, support for the informal agricultural sector and harnessing border strategies as policy levers.

In a final peacebuilding meeting on 21 December, the Council adopted resolution 2558 (2020), expressing grave concern about the devastating impact of COVID-19, especially in conflict-affected countries, while also welcoming strides made since 2016 in advancing
the priorities of the United Nations peacebuilding agenda. Members adopted the text in concert with a similar resolution by the General Assembly, calling for a further comprehensive review of United Nations peacebuilding in 2025. Observing that financing remains a significant challenge, the Council noted General Assembly plans to convene a high-level conference to “advance, explore and consider options for ensuring adequate, predictable and sustained financing for sustainable peace”.

**Civilians in Armed Conflict**

Meetings: 12 February, 21 April, 29 April, 27 May, 23 June, 10 September, 17 September.


Press Statements: SC/14224 (23 June).

The Council held several meetings throughout 2020 on the wide-ranging and often devastating repercussions that conflicts on its agenda wrought on civilian populations. On **12 February**, it issued presidential statement S/PRST/2020/3, in which it reiterated its strong condemnation of illegal recruitment and use of children by parties to armed conflict, as well as the killing, rape and abduction of children. Announcing the launch of a set of practical guidelines intended to help mediators protect children, Secretary-General Guterres emphasized: “Children simply have no role in conflict.” Also briefing the Council were Smaïl Chergui, African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, and Jo Becker of Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

Council members also considered the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable civilians, especially those already living through armed conflict or in areas impacted by natural disasters and other emergencies. They heard on **21 April** from Qu Dongyu, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), that acute food insecurity was on the rise and could reach “biblical proportions” without international action. David Beasley, Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), warned that COVID-19 could push an additional 130 million people into starvation by the end of 2020, bringing the global total to 265 million. The Council spotlighted the link among conflict-induced food insecurity, violence and the threat of famine in presidential statement S/PRST/2020/6 — issued on **29 April** — while calling on all parties to respect humanitarian principles and comply with their international legal obligations regarding the production of, and access to, food.

“The pandemic is amplifying and exploiting the fragilities in our world,” Secretary-General Guterres stressed on **27 May**, noting that economies and communities already weakened by years of war were especially vulnerable to the enormous damage that COVID-19 was wreaking across the globe. Meanwhile, civilian protection had become even more challenging amid curtailment of access to safety and services, and as some leaders exploited COVID-19 to adopt repressive measures. ICRC
President Maurer described the pandemic as an opportunity for parties to recommit to humanitarian principles, a chance to release detainees, regularize non-documented migrants and adopt unilateral ceasefires.

On **23 June**, the Council heard a briefing by Virginia Gamba, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, who said that, despite the adoption of more than 30 national child protection plans in 2019, grave violations against minors remained unacceptably high. On **10 September**, members issued presidential statement S/PRST/2020/8, in which it expressed grave concern about the significant rise in attacks against schools. They urged States to develop effective measures to prevent and address such attacks, and to take concrete steps to deter the use of schools for military purposes. Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock sounded the alarm about another spike in COVID-19-related hunger — and even the potential for famine — on **17 September**, as WFP Executive Director Beasley outlined the largest scale-up in his agency’s history. While thanking countries for responding to his pleas for more funding, which would allow WFP to reach 138 million people by year’s end, he warned: “We’re not out of the woods.”

The Council issued one press statement on civilians in armed conflict on **23 June**, marking 15 years since the adoption of resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict.

**Women, Peace and Security**

Meetings: 17 July; 29 October.


The Council’s women, peace and security agenda — conceived in the landmark resolution 1325 (2000) — marked its twentieth anniversary in 2020. Members considered one of the agenda’s main pillars — combating sexual violence in conflict — on **17 July**. Pramila Patten, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, warned that sexual violence was still in widespread use as a tactic of war and a tool to dehumanize, destabilize and forcibly displace populations. Updating the Council on the Secretary-General’s latest report on sexual violence in conflict — which had documented nearly 3,000 verified cases over one year — she recounted recent examples from the Central African Republic, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Bosnia and Herzegovina, while spotlighting the challenge of underreporting.

Secretary-General Guterres, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN–Women), as well as goodwill ambassadors and gender advisers in peacekeeping missions, were among a diverse range of briefers during a debate on **29 October**, marking the anniversary of resolution 1325 (2000). Echoing Special Representative Patten, the Secretary-General said that, despite much progress, sexual
violence was still rampant in conflict zones and women’s leadership in peace processes was sorely lagging. He thanked the Council for making a strong link between COVID-19 — and the global ceasefire needed to counter it — and the 1325 agenda, as they continued to spotlight the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on women.

Following that debate, the Council convened briefly to take up a draft resolution put forward by the Russian Federation. Amid diverging views, the text — which would have had the Council voice concern over barriers to resolution 1325 (2000)’s implementation and recommit to facilitating women’s “full, equal and meaningful inclusion and participation” in negotiating and monitoring peace agreements — was rejected by a vote of 5 votes in favour (China, Indonesia, Russia, South Africa, Viet Nam) to none against, with 10 abstentions.

Working Methods

Meetings: 15 May.

Letters by Presidents of the Security Council on working arrangements amid the COVID-19 pandemic: 31 March, 6 April, 7 May, 3 June, 2 July, 4 August, 3 September, 2 November, 3 December.

As COVID-19 unfolded — with New York City, home to United Nations Headquarters, hard hit in March and April — the Council was forced to shift its working methods to a virtual format. For the first time in the organ’s history, members explored options for “temporary, extraordinary and provisional measures”, agreeing to hold informal video conference meetings that mirrored the Council’s public meetings and consultations. While the question of how to vote on draft resolutions proved somewhat more complex, delegates stressed their duty to keep staff safe while still carrying out their most essential tasks, such as the timely renewal of peacekeeping mandates.

Arrangements for remote voting — aimed at ensuring the same legal status for virtual resolutions as those agreed in the Security Council Chamber — were first laid out in a 31 March letter from the representative of China, Council President for the month, and were reintroduced by succeeding Presidents each month thereafter. It established a 24-hour voting period which culminated, 12 hours after its completion, in a public videoconference meeting to announce the results. Those arrangements, the videoconference meeting format and the newly launched United Nations webcast interpretation in all six official languages, were maintained throughout 2020. Members were also intermittently able to return to in-person meetings — erecting plastic dividers between their seats to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 droplets — amid fluctuating infection rates in New York.
The Council met on 15 May to consider the broader question of how its working methods impacted the situations on its agenda. Karin Landgren, Executive Director of the not-for-profit organization Security Council Report, stated: “The global pandemic has forced new tools on all of us [and] this is an opportunity not to return to business as usual.” Edward C. Luck, professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University, raised the long-standing question of representation, asking how the 92 per cent of Member States not seated on the Council could gain a voice. In the ensuing debate, several Council members praised the new arrangements, stressing that, by pivoting, the Council had demonstrated its resilience and flexibility.

⚠️ For information media. Not an official record.