



General Assembly First Committee

Committee Mandate

The General Assembly (GA) is the main deliberative body and one of the principal organs of the United Nations. It was established in 1945 by Chapter IV of the *Charter of the United Nations* and is comprised of all 193 UN Member States. The GA's broad membership enables it to engage in unique high-level diplomacy and the *Charter* allows the GA to consider and take action on almost any topic, including political, economic, humanitarian, social, and legal issues.¹ The GA expresses the will of the international community in the form of written resolutions that, while not legally binding, set the policy direction for the UN as an organization and can influence Member States and regional organizations. These resolutions sometimes take direct action, but it is far more common that they lay out a set of policies or, in the case of legal resolutions, international norms. The development of these resolutions takes a significant amount of time, as disagreements on policy are common, so the work of the GA is broken up into six subsidiary committees.

The General Assembly First Committee

The General Assembly First Committee is the Disarmament and International Security committee of the GA. First Committee is tasked with addressing issues of disarmament and international threats to peace and security.² Unlike the UN Security Council, which addresses specific individual threats or situations requiring action by the international community, First Committee addresses general disarmament and peace and security concerns at a high level. Also unlike the Security Council, resolutions from First Committee are not legally binding and focus on policy recommendations for Member States and UN bodies rather than taking specific and immediate action. First Committee is also the only committee that can keep verbatim records of its formal proceedings due to its contentious and highly political work.³ Despite the nature of First Committee's topic area, the committee strives for consensus, adopting many of its draft resolutions without a recorded vote.⁴ This is challenging because, as a main committee of the GA, First Committee is comprised of all 193 UN Member States, each having a single vote. No Member State receives special veto authority or extra weight due to monetary or other contributions.

Reporting

First Committee has special relationships with the United Nations Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament, both of which report annually to the GA. The Disarmament Commission has a narrow focus and only meets for a few weeks each year to discuss a specific

¹ "Functions and powers of the General Assembly," United Nations General Assembly, accessed on July 17, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>.

² "First Committee," United Nations General Assembly, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>.

³ "First Committee," United Nations General Assembly, accessed July 17, 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/first/>.

⁴ "First Committee Sends 69 Texts to General Assembly, Concluding Session by Approving Drafts on Chemical Weapons, Improvised Explosive Devices," United Nations Department of Public Information, November 2, 2016, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2016/gadis3567.doc.htm>.

disarmament topic.⁵ The Conference on Disarmament also meets annually with the goal of negotiating specific disarmament agreements.⁶ First Committee itself works to develop working papers which can then be adopted as a draft resolution by majority vote of the committee. Draft resolutions are then passed on to the General Assembly Plenary. Some Member States lack adequate staff to have representatives at every committee session or informal debate; more Member States review and vote on draft resolutions in plenary sessions than in committee sessions. Draft resolutions that receive majority support in plenary session are adopted as resolutions and then represent the will of the majority of the international community on a given issue.

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⁵ "United Nations Disarmament Commission," United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, accessed July 17, 2017, <https://www.un.org/disarmament/institutions/disarmament-commission/>.

⁶ "An Introduction to the Conference," United Nations Office at Geneva, accessed July 17, 2017, [http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/BF18ABFEFE5D344DC1256F3100311CE9?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/BF18ABFEFE5D344DC1256F3100311CE9?OpenDocument).