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# General Assembly

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Sixty-seventh General Assembly  
HIGHLIGHTS

### **WITH WORLD BESET BY UNPRECEDENTED 'SERIES OF RUPTURES', GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT**

### **URGES MEMBER STATES TO SHOW 'TENACITY OF PURPOSE, WILL TO OVERCOME DIFFERENCES'**

#### **Assembly, 'Grand Pantheon of Hope for World's People', Spotlights Peaceful Dispute Settlement, among other Vital Issues for Sixty-Seventh Session**

Against a backdrop of unravelling socio-political landscapes in Africa and the Middle East, weather-related and natural disasters wreaking havoc across virtually all regions, and uneven progress on the Millennium Development Goals — telltale signs the world in 2012 was becoming more unpredictable and dangerous — the General Assembly, during the main part of its sixty-seventh session, tackled a range of the year's most critical international issues.

"We are beset by a series of ruptures that seem to be building in intensity ... [and whose] effects can barely be kept in check," said Assembly President Vuk Jeremić of Serbia as he opened the 193-member body's 2012 general debate. Rarely had it been more necessary for the world to draw closer together, he stressed, adding that "it is to that endeavour that I believe we should devote the full scope of our resources".

The General Assembly, as "the grand pantheon of hope for the peoples of the world", had a major role to play, he said, in navigating an increasingly complex international landscape, which was marked, in particular, by the repositioning of States, the rising influence of non-State actors and new quests for empowerment by populations around the globe.

While some recent calls for self-determination had engendered peaceful transitions of power and the rise of new, democratic Governments — several of whose newly-elected leaders addressed the Assembly for the first time in 2012 — Mr. Jeremić noted concerns that the Arab Spring might have had a number of unintended consequences. Among those were the reawakening of sectarian loyalties and ethnic, as well as tribal tensions, many of them long suppressed. "The legacy of the grand, noble quest of the peoples of the Middle East for empowerment hinges on how these and other dangers are going to be dealt with," he stressed.

Indeed, he said later in the session, with the onset of globalization, "what happens in one part of the world invariably affects us all". It was with that in mind that he had chosen "bringing about adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations by peaceful means" as the session's overarching theme, he said, adding that the enormity of the challenge was evident. "Let us bring to bear on the problems that we face a renewed spirit of cooperation, a tenacity of purpose and a will to overcome differences," he stressed, calling on Member States to find the courage to master the many challenges that lie ahead, and, in so doing, reassert the pre-eminence of justice.

"This is a time of turmoil, transition and transformation", agreed Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his address to the general debate. Warning that "time is not on our side", he presented a sobering snapshot of a world in which people were struggling to cope with numerous hardships, from economic inequality to intolerance and fallout from conflict in places such as Syria and Mali. They needed ideas, leadership and results, "now, not in the distant future", he declared, urging political leaders to overcome divisions and "wilful blindness" before it was too late to tackle such global challenges as widespread insecurity, deepening inequality, Government waste and the impacts of climate change.

Bookended by bloody conflicts in Syria and the Gaza Strip — and punctuated by several others — the session saw Member States sharply divided over how to react to such crises. Regarding Syria, many delegates, speaking in particular during the Assembly's annual debates on the work of the United Nations and on the Assembly's own revitalization, focused on the inability of the Security Council — the main body responsible for international peace and security — to act to prevent further tragedy, and called on the Assembly to play a complementary role.

Meanwhile, a number of delegations at those meetings emphasized that the peaceful settlement of any dispute — including that in Syria — must be framed within the purposes of the United Nations Charter, including the principles of non-intervention, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the threat or use of force. Still others noted that responses to the Syrian crisis must not be one-sided, as all conflict parties had equal responsibility to protect human rights.

In that vein, speakers on a number of matters throughout the session voiced concern about the escalating crisis in Africa's Sahel region, in particular in northern Mali, where armed groups, some of which were reportedly associated with Al-Qaida, had taken political control and were committing human rights violations. While that matter had been referred to the Security Council, many States expressed the need for stronger international action to combat terrorism, with the Assembly leading the way.

One of the session's most galvanizing moments came on 29 November, traditionally the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, as the Assembly voted overwhelmingly to accord Palestine an upgraded status at the United Nations — that of a non-member observer State. With 138 States voting in favour to 9 against, with 41 abstentions, the Assembly decided to alter the status of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, which had been recognized as an observer entity since 1974. The vote came a year after Palestine had submitted an unsuccessful bid for full membership in the United Nations, a move which had ultimately been blocked in the Security Council.

While some delegations questioned the wisdom of the upgrade, calling the move "counterproductive" and noting concern that such a "unilateral" move at the United Nations would further hinder stalled peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, many of those addressing the Assembly's annual two-day debate on the Question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East expressed strong support for the measure. Speakers noted recent improvements in Palestine's governance and institutional structure, and said that an upgraded status at the United Nations could pave the way for full statehood. In addition, many heralded the Assembly's vote as the long-overdue completion of what, some 65 years earlier, had been intended as the creation of two independent States — Israel and Palestine — on the contested territory.

Moreover, said Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas as he addressed the Assembly, "the rope of patience is shortening and hope is withering", he asserted, referring to the peace negotiation "which has lost its objectivity and credibility". Palestine's request to change its status was intended not to bypass those negotiations, he said, but to "breathe new life" into them. Yet, Israel's representative said that rather than advance peace, the "one-sided" measure had instead pushed the process backward. "There is only one route to Palestinian statehood. There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes," he said. The route to peace ran through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah.

Also garnering much attention throughout the session was what many delegations warned were the already-clear repercussions of climate change. Discussions, in particular during the general debate, focused on how best to accelerate efforts to achieve, by 2015, the targets set out by the Millennium Development Goals, with States warning that such efforts not be abandoned as the deadline neared.

Following the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Brazil in June, many also hailed the year as an unprecedented one for the advancement of economic, social and environmental development. There was wide support among delegations for elements of the conference's outcome document — known as "The Future We Want" — including the request for States to elaborate a set of new Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 era. However, the particular composition of a geographically balanced Open Working Group, to be mandated with that task, ultimately emerged as one of the most contentious issues of the sixty-seventh session.

As for the work of the Assembly's main subsidiary bodies, the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) was addressed this year by High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane, who declared that advancing priorities common to all States advanced the interests of each State and had the potential to revitalize faltering global disarmament efforts. The Committee, as well as the rest of the United Nations disarmament machinery, she insisted, would regain its momentum and advance disarmament norms once Member States recognized that harmony among global interests would benefit individual States in turn. Towards that aim, the Committee approved 59 draft resolutions

and decisions on its range of complex concerns, from finalizing an arms trade treaty to formulating a common position to not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against State that did not have them. Finding ways to break the persistent deadlock in the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament was broadly viewed as the way to negotiate such matters.

The substantive session of the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) centred, in large part, around the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of United Nations operational activities for development. The Committee ultimately recommended 36 draft resolutions and 3 draft decisions to the Assembly, 34 of which were adopted by consensus, and five of which were voted upon. Follow-up to the Rio+20 Conference also figured heavily in the Committee's deliberations. Among other things, a special event special event was held with the aim of informing the discussions of the Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals. In a related measure, the Committee forwarded a text by which the Assembly would declare the period 2014-2024 the United Nations Decade of Sustainable Energy for All.

Some 60 Special Procedure mandate holders and other United Nations experts addressed the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) throughout its substantive session, which recommended 58 draft resolutions to the Assembly at its conclusion. Topics tackled by those texts ranged from the human rights situation in Myanmar, to female genital mutilation to a moratorium on the death penalty, while relevant discussions heard calls for more resources for the Organization's underfunded human rights machinery. In that regard, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay herself urged for stronger support, citing, among other things, increased invitations from States, support for 57 field presences, a new country office in Yemen, and support to 48 special procedures, who had carried out 82 country visits in 2011 alone.

Resolutions in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) on the Arab-Israeli conflict assumed even greater significance in November as international concern mounted over the outbreak of violence in Israel and Gaza. In line with its work programme, the Committee approved a series of texts, by which it asked the Assembly to condemn all acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force by Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, particularly in the beleaguered enclave, and to voice grave concern at the firing of rockets in Israeli civilian areas. The Committee's consideration of items across its broad spectrum of political and scientific concerns produced a raft of texts on decolonization underpinned by the right of Non-Self-Governing Territories to shape their destinies. Drafts on atomic radiation and peaceful uses of outer space were also forwarded to the Assembly.

During a session devoted to administrative and management reform, the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) argued fiercely over how to best institute sound financial management without jeopardizing the United Nations mandate. Finally, delegates agreed on texts that retained the current formula for assessing Member States' dues to the Organization and its peacekeeping operations, raised the retirement age to 65, and lifted the freeze on the annual post-adjustment pay rise for staff. They also approved a revised plan for streamlining business practices, as well as funds for the criminal tribunals, special political missions and renovation of the New York Headquarters. However, they deferred until next March action on any changes to such contested issues as the practice of adjusting the Organization's budget after the first year of its biennial cycle, the Secretary-General's staff mobility and career development initiative, and arrangements for funding and backstopping peacekeeping operations.

The 2012 session of the Sixth Committee (Legal) immediately followed a special high-level General Assembly meeting on the rule of law — the first of its kind — which was held in the lead up to the Assembly's general debate in September. The event and its resulting Declaration, affirmed by Heads of State from across the globe, set the stage for the Committee's debates, which intertwined the importance of upholding the rule of law with the multiple legal topics on the session's agenda. Among other things, delegations throughout the session underscored the strong relationship between the rule of law and development. Emphasizing the integral role that justice systems played in upholding the rule of law and recalling the recent convictions of former Liberian President Charles Taylor and the infamous warlord Thomas Lubanga, speakers also commended the Secretary-General for encouraging all countries to accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court.

### Plenary

Tackling the theme of its sixty-seventh session, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the Assembly's high-level meeting on the rule of law, held ahead of the general debate on 24 November, brought together world leaders and civil society representatives, who reaffirmed through an outcome Declaration their commitment to the principle as the foundation of equitable State relations and as the basis on which just and fair societies were built. Delegates also rededicated themselves to supporting efforts to uphold the sovereign equality of all States, to respect their territorial integrity and political

independence, to refrain from the threat or use of force and to uphold the peaceful resolution of disputes, in conformity with the principles of justice and international law.

Opening the “milestone” meeting, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded delegates that the wider body of international law developed at the United Nations provided the basis for peacefully resolving conflicts and the means to ensure there was no relapse into fighting. The universal standard-setting power of the General Assembly, the enforcement power of the Security Council and the judicial power of the International Court of Justice all provided indispensable tools to deepen the rule of law, he added, urging all States to commit themselves to the equal application of the law at the national and international levels, to uphold its highest standards in their decision-making, and to accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Those sentiments were echoed during the general debate itself, in particular as delegates zeroed in on the deadly fighting that continued to rage across Syria. Speakers expressed great sadness at the loss of human lives in the war-torn nation and worried about the potential spill over effects to neighbouring countries, while many issued staunch support for the mission of Joint Special Representative Lakhdar Brahimi to find a swift and peaceful political solution to the crisis. Speakers were divided over the appropriate course of action in Syria. Some expressed frustration over the stalemate on the matter in the Security Council and the lack of action on the part of the international community. Others, meanwhile, stressed the need to respect Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to allow Syrians to reach their own solution to the crisis.

Similarly, a number of Heads of State and Government during the general debate focused their attention on the rash of violence across the Middle East and North Africa following the release on the Internet of a widely criticized anti-Islamic video. Many cited the violence as the spark that set off a terrorist attack against the United States’ consulate in Benghazi, Libya on 11 September, killing Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three others. Again, States differed in their response to the tragedy. While many speakers condemned any speech that targeted a religious group or incited violence, some — including a number representing States emerging from conflict — expressed their countries’ dedication to the concept of free speech, noting that unimpeded self-expression was the basis for a tolerant, modern society.

On the pressing issues of sustainable development and climate change, the leaders of some of the world’s smallest and most vulnerable nations addressed the general debate, warning, in particular, of the severe consequences of political apathy and States’ inability to reach a post-Kyoto Protocol climate deal. After a year in which Member States had anticipated meaningful progress at Rio+20, predicted a robust and legally binding arms trade treaty, and embraced popular home-grown calls for political change, a number of small island delegates said that global optimism on such matters was actually “in scarcer supply” than ever.

Global structures, including the United Nations, were faced with changes of a scope, scale and rapidity that substantially outpaced their ability to react, and demanded a level of courage not sufficiently matched by political will, they stressed. Indeed, entire nations might cease to exist as a result of the international community’s inaction and political cowardice in the area of climate change. In that vein, many speakers made reference to “The Future We Want”, and, in some cases, to its perceived shortcomings, with a few expressing that they would have hoped to see the Rio summit achieve more than it had.

As its substantive work got under way, the Assembly considered a wide array of issues, ranging from Security Council reform to the work of the Assembly’s war crimes tribunals to the need to incorporate Africa’s development priorities in the United Nations’ post-2015 agenda. In October, as the Assembly considered the Secretary-General’s annual report on the work of the Organization, discussions centred around the looming 2015 deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, and on the need for greater equity between developed and developing countries before and after those targets had expired.

Some delegates stressed that the conclusion of the Rio meeting had ushered in a “new era of sustainable development”, but, in that context, warned against the dire consequences of the ever-expanding gap between the world’s “haves” and “have nots”. Speakers worried that the original Millennium Development Goals had not yet been met in many parts of the world, with many representatives noting with concern the recent unprecedented decrease in official development assistance (ODA) and the rise of trade protectionism. Several deficiencies of the Millennium Goals were also cited, including the insufficient representation of developing countries at the highest levels of global decision-making, while many speakers stressed the urgency of addressing such challenges in the post-2015 era.

The Assembly's debate on its own revitalization — which President Jeremić said was held earlier than usual in order to “set the tone” for the session — saw similar calls for an improvement of the United Nations' working methods. Many speakers pointed to encroachment by the Security Council, a body that they stressed was less representative and less democratic, on the Assembly's prerogatives. In particular, some were concerned by the Council's practice of establishing legal norms and definitions, while ignoring the responsibility of the Assembly to develop international law and ensure its codification.

During that debate, President Jeremić himself warned against an ever-widening gap between the Assembly's duties and its capabilities, and spotlighted the need for “bold action” to keep step with an increasingly globalized — and volatile — world. “The speed of the changes taking place outside these walls is increasingly outpacing the tempo of changes we are able to agree upon in this building,” he said in that regard, urging Member States to have the courage to make the changes that were necessary.

As the Assembly took up its annual debate on the Middle East and the Question of Palestine, Member States voted, by an overwhelming margin, to accord Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. Coming just over a year after Palestine had submitted an unsuccessful bid for full membership in the Organization, the move — which upgraded Palestine's status from that of observer entity, which it had held since 1974 — was described by many participants in the two-day debate as a “historic” action which would set the stage for the full participation of Palestinians in multilateral affairs, and for the end to the long-standing Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and other territories of the Middle East.

#### First Committee

Urging that a “business as usual” approach would not solve the problems of disarmament and international security, especially nuclear disarmament, High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane cautioned the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) against becoming “just another arena” for the competitive advancement of one State's interests over another. Recalling that *wēijī* — the Chinese word for crisis — combined two characters, representing “danger” and “opportunity”, she encouraged delegations to convert the known dangers of the disarmament crisis into an opportunity for progress. Seeking to embrace that spirit, delegations sent a range of disarmament and non-proliferation draft resolutions and decisions to the General Assembly, but 42 separate recorded votes were required for the approval of the 59 texts.

Throughout thematic debates leading up to the submission of drafts, delegations underscored the need to harmonize the policies and priorities of Member States to keep up with a global security environment very much in flux. Considerable emphasis was on political will as the much-needed component of progress in the disarmament realm; its presence or absence would shape, not just the work of individual organizations, but also the future of international peace and security, the Committee was told.

It was high time to start asking when and how the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world would be achieved, Brazil's representative asked the Committee during debate. Advocating a spirit of “cooperation over confrontation”, she said that while restraining horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons had been relatively successful, there was a “compliance deficit” on the nuclear disarmament side of the non-proliferation regime. She urged nuclear-armed States to withdraw any reservations about granting negative security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States.

While the international community had managed to “push the genie of nuclear testing back in the bottle”, asserted Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization Tibor Tóth, that bottle was “still not sealed”. Eight countries required for the Treaty's entry into force remained outside it, and until the international community drew that irrevocable line in the sand, the world would have no insurance policy. Instead, it was protected only by voluntary moratoriums, which history had shown to be inadequate.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Jarmo Sareva, said that the absence of consensus on how to address the four core issues before the Conference — nuclear disarmament, negative security assurances, a weapons-free outer space, and banning the production of weapons-grade fissile material — had scuppered progress since the body's last success, the elaboration of the Test-Ban Treaty in 1996. He noted that certain States were pressing for alternative negotiating processes, with improvised ad hoc arrangements outside the United Nations framework. That would be “a dangerous step backwards”, he warned.

Once again, the subject of vigorous debate was the United Nations disarmament machinery, as delegates called for ways to revive the languishing institutions. Deploping the deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament, now entrenched for 16 years, they voted for the establishment of an open-ended working group to develop proposals to take forward nuclear disarmament negotiations. Another

text called for the creation of an open-ended working group on the Fourth Special Session of the General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament to advance preparations.

The scope and pace of nuclear disarmament also informed debate and action as the Committee approved 16 draft resolutions in that cluster, and, with voting machines locking in their familiar pattern, just four without a vote. Those texts centred on, among other concerns, missiles; treaties on nuclear-weapons-free zones, including the quest to establish one in the Middle East; and security assurances for non-nuclear-armed States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

Greater consensus was found in the conventional weapons cluster. Highlighting warnings by several delegations that such weapons were wreaking similar havoc in some States as that associated with weapons of mass destruction, the Committee approved six texts, four without a vote, on: tackling the illicit arms trade; assisting States to curb such trafficking; the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons; and problems arising from accumulated ammunition stockpiles. Requiring recorded votes were drafts on the Mine-Ban Convention and on finalizing the text of an arms trade treaty.

The First Committee Bureau comprised Jarmo Viinainen ( Finland), Chair; and Amr Aljowaily ( Egypt), Mohammad Almutairi ( Kuwait), and Ayesha Borland ( Belize), as Vice-Chairs. Archil Ghoghechkori (Georgia) served as Rapporteur.

### Second Committee

The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of United Nations operational activities for development, and implementation of the outcome document of the Rio+20 Conference, were among the most prominent concerns of the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) during its sixty-seventh session.

Recommending 36 draft resolutions and 3 draft decisions to the General Assembly, 34 were adopted by consensus, with five passed by recorded vote. Of great significance to delegations was the adoption of a draft resolution on the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. Despite what the United States representative called "complex and often difficult" negotiations, the final text provided clear and constructive guidance to the United Nations system on the need to increase its efficiency, transparency and cost effectiveness.

Follow-up to Rio+20 also figured heavily in the Committee's deliberations. As well as a special event that aimed to inform discussions of the High-level Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Committee acted on a total of 18 texts in that cluster. Delegates discussed improved implementation of the environmental pillar of sustainable development alongside the economic and social. Several resolutions dealt with small island developing States, with sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea, and the International Year of Small Island Developing States prominently featured. Other texts dealt with the challenges posed by desertification, land degradation and drought, and with the need for continued substantive consideration of disaster risk reduction.

Continued global economic turmoil also touched a large amount of the Committee's deliberations. In the globalization and interdependence cluster for example, delegations voted on a text titled "Towards a New International Economic Order". Another resolution in that cluster that considered the issue of migration was also approved by a vote, with the issue of accreditation of non-governmental organizations at a High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development on 3 and 4 October 2013 proving the main sticking point in negotiations.

As developing countries had been the worst hit by the economic crisis, many texts sought to address their disadvantages. One resolution called on States to address youth unemployment by developing and implementing specific strategies to promote decent and productive work for young people, while other texts pointed to the positive impacts of a manufacturing and industrial sector and of a focus on building ecotourism. On macroeconomic policy questions, the emphasis was on promoting balanced and sustainable approaches to promoting inclusive and equitable growth, with external debt considered in both a draft text and in a special event.

Though the Committee recognized the heightened impact of the crisis on developing countries, deliberations also sought to address specifically the "special situations" faced by some countries. As well as the drafts dealing with small islands, least developed countries were considered in a text calling for full implementation of the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action and another focusing on the issue of graduation from the least developed country category. Another text reaffirmed the rights of landlocked developing countries to sea access and transit through the territory of transit countries was also passed. Further, the specific concerns of middle income countries were also addressed in a special event focusing on their needs.

As in previous sessions, the Assembly voted on a text requiring Israel to compensate Lebanon and Syria for the costs of repairing environmental damage caused by the Israeli Air Force's destruction of oil storage tanks near Lebanon's El-Jiyeh electric power plant, and on another demanding that Israel stop exploiting, damaging, depleting or endangering the resources of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and of the population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The Second Committee Bureau includes Chairperson George Wilfred Talbot ( Guyana); Vice Chairpersons Tauhedul Islam ( Bangladesh), Stefano Stefanile ( Italy), and Modest Jonathan Mero (United Republic of Tanzania); and Rapporteur Aida Hodžić ( Bosnia and Herzegovina).

### Third Committee

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) recommended 58 draft resolutions to the Assembly, including nearly 50 approved without a vote, during a session that heard briefings by 60 special procedure mandate holders and other United Nations experts, who set the stage for action on texts on issues ranging from the human rights situation in Myanmar, to female genital mutilation to a moratorium on the death penalty. The spirited debate on sensitive issues was accompanied by calls for more resources for the Organization's underfunded human rights machinery.

Throughout the session — which ran from 8 October to 28 November — the question of finances surfaced amid others about balancing more mandates against the budgeting constraints and report backlogs that had hampered the work of treaty bodies. One of the strongest appeals came from High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, who cited increased invitations from States, support for 57 field presences, a new country office in Yemen, and support to 48 special procedures, who had carried out 82 country visits in 2011 alone. "While we will continue to endeavour to fulfil such work, without sufficient resources, we are being compelled to do less with less," she said.

Against that backdrop, the Committee pressed ahead in its work, approving four consensus draft resolutions to further the advancement of women. Among them was its first-ever text aimed at ending female genital mutilation, concluding a determined effort by African States that was praised as historic by many delegations. By its terms, the resolution urged States to take all measures to protect women and girls from that "form of violence" and to end impunity. The three other drafts centred on eliminating violence against women, combating trafficking in women and girls, and ending obstetric fistula.

An annual omnibus text on rights of the child, approved by consensus, contained a section devoted to indigenous children. By its terms, the Assembly would call on States to take measures to protect the rights of indigenous children against all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and exploitation. In his briefing to the Committee, Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Anthony Lake called indigenous children's lack of opportunity and susceptibility to exploitation more than an "unconscionable" human failure. "It is a terrible waste of their human potential," he said.

As in years past, country-specific human rights resolutions provoked debate, with delegates arguing that the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review was the appropriate forum to consider such questions. In two significant "firsts", the Committee approved its annual text on the situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea by consensus. Its draft on Myanmar — also passed for the first time by consensus — welcomed that country's positive transformation over the last year. Myanmar's delegate noted an "unprecedented" flexibility in amending the text, signalling to his Government that its annual tabling would end next year. Drafts on the human rights situations in Syria and Iran were passed by recorded vote.

In other notable action, the Committee advanced its call to suspend the use of the death penalty with the passage — by recorded vote of 110 in favour, to 39 against, with 36 abstentions — of a draft calling on States to establish a moratorium on executions, with a view to abolishing the practice. Its approval followed the failure of five amendments which reflected positions taken during intense consultations. It was the fourth such text approved since 2007. The Committee also approved the convening of a high-level meeting in 2013 to assess progress in the fight against human trafficking. On social development, the Committee approved six texts, three of which covered the rights of older persons.

Chairing the Third Committee this year was Henry Mac-Donald ( Suriname), with Fatima Alfeine ( Comoros), Dragana Šćepanović ( Montenegro) and Georg Sparber ( Liechtenstein) serving as Vice-Chairs, and Suljuk Mustansar Tarar ( Pakistan) as Rapporteur.

### Fourth Committee

The usual divisions persisted in the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) following its typically vigorous debate on how best to advance decolonization, assist Palestinian refugees, and reform Israeli practices, leading to recorded votes on more than half of the 28 draft texts it forwarded to the General Assembly. Consensus once again emerged on guarding outer space from the dangers of an arms race, improving dissemination of the United Nations message, and shaping special political missions as an outgrowth of peacekeeping operations.

Noting that only one country had been decolonized in the previous decade — Timor-Leste — Committee delegates, beginning their annual debate on the subject on 8 October, lamented “the virtual halt” in decolonization. They voiced unswerving support for the primacy of self-determination and territorial integrity, but a divergent view was expressed by the representative of the United Kingdom, who questioned the continued need for the Special Committee, asserting that the Overseas Territories it administered had a large measure of self-government and, thus, should have been de-listed long ago.

Still, the overwhelming majority of delegations denounced what the representative of Nigeria, a colony until 1960, called the “great injustice” of colonization, emphasizing that the denial of freedom and the right to self-determination “could not be justified under any pretext or argument”. In all, the Committee approved 10 draft resolutions and one draft decision on the issue, including an omnibus draft text that stressed the need to expedite the decolonization of a number of Territories, as well as resolutions aimed at avoiding economic and other activities that might adversely affect the interests of the peoples of the Territories and enhancing the information provided to them.

The Committee’s consideration of the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli practices affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian Peoples took place during the sharp escalation of violence in the region, making more germane an already timely and impassioned debate. In its report on that grim situation, the Special Committee concluded that Israeli practices “might amount to a strategy to either force the Palestinian people off their land or so severely marginalize them as to establish and maintain a system of permanent suppression”.

Characterizing the ensuing discussion as a “theatre of the absurd”, Israel’s representative said the Committee “turned a blind eye” to the culpability of Palestinians, who had launched more than 1,000 rockets and mortar shells against Israeli towns and villages in the past year alone. Israel was a vibrant democracy, the delegate said, with a highly respected judiciary system accessible to all — citizens and foreigners alike. Furthermore, the country was committed to a “permanent peace agreement” with the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, in light of what all agreed was a dire refugee problem in the region, the Fourth Committee heard its annual briefing by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), who said “tiptoeing away from UNRWA was not an option”. He urged delegates for a “quantum and sustained leap” of commitment to resolve the Agency’s dire funding needs. The Committee concluded its agenda item on the Middle East with approval, by recorded votes, of nine draft resolutions, five on the work of the Special Committee on Israeli Practices and four on UNRWA.

Peacekeeping, the Committee was told when it took up the issue, “actually works”, said Under-Secretary-General for the department of Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous in his briefing, pointing out that the resources used for that flagship activity of the United Nations were a very small part of global defence expenditures. Stressed during the discussion was the need to ensure that the flexibility of the design and configuration of the operations given their dynamic character. Delegations urged that “triangular cooperation” be stepped up, reimbursements to troop contributors be made more timely, and that missions maintain their impartiality and deepen their knowledge of the local culture which they aimed to serve. Review of the item concluded with approval of a text on special political missions.

The Committee’s examination of outer space issues heard calls from several delegations for comprehensive international regulations of activities in that realm. The debate was capped by a presentation by a Permanent Court of Arbitration Judge on “a voluntary and comprehensive dispute resolution procedure”, crafted by that court and tailored towards arbitrating disagreements on outer space activities. The Committee, acting without a vote, approved a text on international cooperation in that field. A draft decision on increasing the membership of the Outer Space Committee required a recorded vote following the rejection of a proposed amendment to exclude one of the countries.

The Department of Public Information, tasked with disseminating the message of the United Nations, was working in an evolving media and communications landscape, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal informed the Fourth Committee. Emphasizing that public information and communications should be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the United Nations and that a culture of communications and transparency should



permeate all levels of the Organization, the Committee approved a two-part draft resolution and one draft decision on that topic.

In addition to Committee Chair Noel Nelson Messone ( Gabon), other members of the Fourth Committee Bureau are Vice-Chairs Maratee Nalita Andamo ( Thailand), Ayesha Borland ( Belize), Dimitrios Felopoulos ( Greece), and Rapporteur Zulfi Ismaili (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

#### Fifth Committee

In a session devoted to administrative and management reform, the Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) approved texts that retained the current formula for assessing Member States' dues to the Organization and its peacekeeping operations, raised the retirement age to 65, and lifted as of February the current freeze over the annual increase in the post-adjustment payment for staff.

The Committee also approved a revised enterprise resource planning strategy intended to streamline business practices and boost efficiency system-wide, as well as \$566.48 million to keep the United Nations' 33 special political missions operating next year.

During its three-month session — 4 October to 24 December — delegates argued fiercely over whether fine-tuning the scale of assessments would better reflect each Member States' capacity to pay. Finally, they agreed on language to keep in place existing factors for measuring the scale — such as base period, a country's gross national income and its population size — and asked the Assembly to review the methodology for potential improvements during its sixty-eighth session, to begin in mid-September 2013.

Though not tasked this session with setting the Organization's multi-billion-dollar biennial budget, delegates were at loggerheads over the "recosting" exercise of adjusting the budget in the first year of the biennial cycle to account for such things as inflation, shifting exchange rates, and unforeseen expenses and policy-making decisions. Some pressed for the recosting, which typically added million of dollars to the original budget, to be scrapped; others accused the Secretariat of breaking its established rules. In the end, they opted to revise expenditures upwards by \$243.26 million for the current 2012-2013 cycle.

The Committee also moved to continue the overhaul of the Organization's system of administering justice, which comprised informal and formal mechanisms to resolve disputes for tens of thousands of staff worldwide, as well as to approve funds for the Capital Master Plan, the multi-year makeover of the United Nations historic New York Headquarters, slated for completion in mid-2014.

In other consensus texts, the Committee approved funding to implement the sustainable development goals and other outcomes of last June's Rio+20 summit, facilitate the arms trade treaty conference next March, and maintain operations of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT), Special Court for Sierra Leone and the international tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, among other activities.

But after days of protracted, often night-long, negotiations that continued until early 24 December, the Committee failed to reach agreement on the Secretary-General's staff mobility and career development initiative, conditions of service for retired staff and consultants, the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the review of arrangements for funding and backstopping special political missions. Those items, among others, were deferred to the first part of the Committee's resumed sixty-seventh session in March.

The Fifth Committee Bureau includes Committee Chairperson Miguel Berger ( Germany); Vice-Chairpersons João Augusto Costa Vargas ( Brazil), Anna Reich ( Hungary) and Bilal Taher Muhammad Wilson ( Saudi Arabia); and Rapporteur Justin Kisoka (United Republic of Tanzania).

#### Sixth Committee

At a time when calls for the rule of law could be heard from all corners of the world, States required effective international support to meet those resounding demands, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson told the Sixth Committee (Legal) as deliberations on the topic commenced. New Governments, such as those in Somalia and Timor-Leste, had looked to the United Nations for assistance with constitution-making, reforming justice and security institutions, and dealing with atrocities. In South Sudan, as well, international judicial bodies had helped to broker independence.

Lucius Caflisch, Chair of the International Law Commission, said later in the session the Commission's work, centred on advocacy for the rule of law, was demonstrated in its cooperation with the International Court of Justice and other organs, and its contribution to the promotion of comprehensive international rights. Although the Committee's annual debate of the Commission's report was delayed when tropical storm Sandy forced a three-day shut down of Headquarters, delegates were able to consider a truncated discussion of its contents, including, among others, the 32 newly adopted draft articles on the expulsion of aliens, protection of persons in event of disasters, and the immunity of State officials from foreign criminal jurisdiction.

When the Committee turned to the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, delegates recalled that the Declaration from the Assembly's recent high-level meeting on the rule of law had committed States to investigate violations of international humanitarian law through international mechanisms. As non-State actors engaged more and more in armed conflicts, laws had to be applied in a way that met contemporary challenges. Also noted was the diverse set of armed conflicts that were producing alarming rates of malnutrition and loss of livelihood, as in Africa, for example, which was now home to half of the world's displaced people.

Regarding non-State actors committing terrorist acts, the Committee also addressed in its discussions the surge of attacks in recent years of diplomatic and consular missions and representatives. Such attacks threatened the cornerstone of international relations. Paying tribute to Christopher Stevens, the United States Ambassador who was recently killed during an attack on his country's mission in Libya, discussions focused on the balance between a host country's responsibility to protect such personnel and premises, and the necessity to abide by the host State's laws and security measures.

In the debate on measures to eliminate international terrorism, delegations encouraged the rule of law and human rights to be respected and observed in all efforts to combat the scourge. Further, for the Organization's Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy to be successful, terrorism's root causes, such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities and the oppression of women, had to be addressed. However, the Global Strategy alone could not be the basis for fighting international terrorism, and speakers pushed for the imminent conclusion of the draft comprehensive convention on the matter.

As a body that assisted States reform their international trade laws and develop legal texts and model laws to guide those reforms, delegates described the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) as essential to upholding the rule of law. Great strides had been made in UNCITRAL's recent session, with its adoption of the Guide to Enactment of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Public Procurement, and the launch of the first UNCITRAL Regional Centre in the Republic of Korea. Proposals were made to open three additional regional centres in Singapore, Russian Federation and Kenya.

The role of the United Nations Programme of Assistance in the Teaching, Application and Dissemination of International Law could not be underestimated in promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels, said delegates. Thus, they appealed to Member States to guarantee the Programme a future by offering voluntary contributions to support its activities, and to advocate for the Programme's funding needs to be included within the regular budget of the United Nations.

Lamenting the Programme's vulnerable financial situation, Virginia Morris, Principal Legal Officer of the Codification Division, said that despite progress, regional courses planned for Ethiopia and Thailand would not be held this year. Additionally, no regional courses were being planned for the Asia-Pacific or Latin American regions in 2013. Also plagued by insufficient funds were the Audiovisual Library and the Historic Archives. The demand for international law training, she stressed, could not be met in the twenty-first century without the support of all Member States.

The Sixth Committee Bureau includes Chairperson Yuriy Sergeyev ( Ukraine); Vice-Chairpersons Martin Huth ( Germany), Gonzalo Bonifaz ( Peru) and Ismail Chekkori ( Morocco); and Rapporteur Pham Quang Hieu ( Viet Nam).

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