

Committee of Permanent Representatives
Subcommittee Meeting
Thursday 1 October 2020
2:00 p.m. – 5: 00 p.m. (EAT)
Online Meeting

Agenda Item 2: Consultation on the timing and format of UNEA-5 in view of COVID-19.

This document serves as a background document for agenda item 2 Consultation on the timing and format of UNEA-5 in view of COVID-19. It outlines measures and decisions taken by the UN General Assembly on the conduct of meetings of the General Assembly in September and October 2020.

Member States are invited to consider the measures undertaken by the UN General Assembly and provide further guidance to the Secretariat.

NOTE ON MEETINGS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2020

1. The purpose of this Note is to provide a brief on the conduct of meetings of the General Assembly in September and October 2020, that may prove informative for the purposes of upcoming meetings of UNEP's governing bodies and the governing bodies of Multilateral Environment Agreements ("MEAs").
2. In summary, in person meetings of the General Assembly have resumed subject to certain restrictions that are explained below.
3. As far as the high-level meetings between 21 September to 2 October 2020 are concerned, General Assembly Decision 74/562 confirms that they will be constituted as what UNEP understands to be a "hybrid meeting", with delegates present in-person but with pre-recorded statements being made by high-level dignitaries who are not attending in-person. The Decision requires that before any pre-recorded statement can be made, the high-level dignitary be introduced by a delegate who is physically present in the General Assembly Hall. Representatives of international organizations that have a standing invitation to attend meetings of the Assembly as observers will be seated in separate conference rooms at UN Headquarters and will be able to provide pre-recorded statements. Civil society representatives will participate in the September high level events by viewing the webcast proceedings and will not have access to UN Headquarters.

In-person meetings of the General Assembly that are currently being held

4. In-person plenary meetings of the General Assembly resumed on 3, 4, 11 and 14 September 2020 pursuant to letters from the President of the General Assembly ("President") dated 28 August and 9 September respectively. The President's letter of 28 August (attached) made clear that any opening of the General Assembly Hall would be subject to a risk assessment by occupational safety experts and the preparation of mitigation measures in order to minimize the risks to staff and delegates. The President informed delegates that the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) team of the UN Secretariat concluded that the proposed meetings are at low risk and thus the meetings have proceeded. Pursuant to the letter of the President of 14 September 2020 (attached), these arrangements applied to the closing plenary meeting of the 74th session on 15 September and the opening of the 75th session that took place immediately after the closure of the 74th session.
5. The President put in place the following precautionary measures in consultation with OSH that are currently applicable to in-person meetings of the General Assembly: (i) Access to the United Nations complex during these plenary meetings is restricted; (ii) to ensure the effectiveness of physical distancing in the General Assembly Hall, only one delegate per Member State and a delegate each from the Holy See, the State of Palestine

and the European Union is allowed in the Hall; (iii) upon arrival at UN Headquarters, one ticket will be issued by the Safety and Security Service per Member State and for the Holy See, the State of Palestine and the European Union; (iv) access to the General Assembly Hall will require a regular delegate's pass and the ticket; (v) the seating plan has been amended to ensure physical distancing; (vi) the proceedings of the meetings are webcast live allowing representatives of intergovernmental organizations and other entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers to do so through webcast; (vii) all statements are made by delegations from their national seats; and (viii) departure from the General Assembly Hall is in a staggered manner administered by the Secretariat.

6. Additional protective measures were attached to the President's letter and included guidance on face coverings and physical distancing. These protective measures indicated, inter alia, that all delegates and UN staff are required to wear facemasks except when addressing the meeting and are required to maintain physical distance, including through refraining from any physical contact.
7. The President, when opening the meetings of the General Assembly on 3, 4, 11, 14 and 15 September respectively reminded delegations of the mitigation measures that had been put in place.

High-level meetings of the General Assembly in September and October 2020

8. On 22 July 2020, the General Assembly adopted Decision 74/562 entitled, "High-level meetings of the General Assembly in September 2020" (the L. document is attached).
9. By that decision the General Assembly decided that "(a) without setting a precedent for future general debates and mandated high-level meetings planned for future high-level weeks, that each Member State, observer State and the European Union can submit a pre-recorded statement of its Head of State, Vice-President, Crown Prince or Princess, Head of Government, Minister or Vice-Minister, which will be played in the General Assembly Hall during the general debate of the Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, the high-level meeting to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and [other] high-level meetings after introduction by their representative who is physically present in the Assembly Hall." (Emphasis added).
10. The other high-level meetings to which these restrictions apply are set out in the Decision and are: (i) the summit on biodiversity, (ii) the high-level meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, (iii) and the high-level plenary meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. All these meetings will be held in September and October.

11. The General Assembly also decided that the President of the General Assembly will circulate as a document the pre-recorded statements made by high level dignitaries in the general debate and the high-level meeting to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations (these are held as formal meetings of the plenary).
12. The Secretariat subsequently issued on 24 August 2020 an Information Note on Arrangements for the high-level meetings and the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly (A/INF/75/4). The Information Note addresses protective measures concerning COVID (paragraphs 9-13). As far as the high-level meetings are concerned, the Note provides in paragraph 15 that “physical access and presence in the General Assembly Hall will be limited to one representative per Member State and observer State and for the European Union. If, nearer the time of the high-level week, the situation allows, the number may be increased to two representatives. In that case, the information will be communicated in a timely manner.” Annex I to the Note also sets out Audio Video Guidelines for the making of pre-recorded statements. Access to the General Assembly Hall will require a regular delegate’s pass and a secondary colour-coded access card. The access cards are transferable among members of a delegation only.
13. Paragraph 20 clarifies that the list of speakers for the high-level meeting is open for inscription. Member States, observer States and the European Union are invited to inscribe on the list of speakers on-line. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 73/299, the list of speakers will be determined in line with the rules of procedure and established practice of the Assembly.
14. Representatives of international organizations that have a standing invitation to attend meetings of the Assembly as observers will be seated in separate conference rooms at UN Headquarters but will be able to make statements by video. Civil society participation in the seventy-fifth session is expected to be online only. Special tickets for the General Assembly Hall for non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and special event tickets for civil society and non-governmental organizations will therefore not be distributed (paragraph 95). Consequently, civil society organizations will not have access to the UN Headquarters.
15. Finally, as far as credentials are concerned, only scanned copies of credentials will be accepted and should be submitted on-line through the e-deleGATE portal established by the Secretariat. While the original hard copy of the credentials would normally be submitted to the Office of Legal Affairs, owing to the restricted access to the United Nations Headquarters complex, the Office is unable to receive the original hard copies until further notice.

Annexes:

1. [UN General Assembly High Level Draft Decision, A/74/L.75](#)
2. [UN General Assembly Information note, INF.75/4: Arrangements for the high-level meetings and the general debate of the seventy-fifth session of the General Assembly](#)
3. [Letter from President of General Assembly, dated 14 September 2020](#)
4. [Letter from President of General Assembly, dated 28 August 2020](#)