



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.australia-unscc.gov.au

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

11 February 2021

Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly - General Debate

**Statement on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand,
delivered by H.E. The Hon. Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and
Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations**

Distinguished Co-Chairs.

I have the privilege to address this Assembly today on behalf of CANZ – Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia.

At the outset, CANZ would like to thank the co-chairs, Ambassadors Mlynár and González for convening this debate and for outlining a tentative program of work for the Ad Hoc Working Group in the resumed part of the 75th session.

As noted in your letter dated 2 February, enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the General Assembly is of ‘considerable political significance’.

The United Nations remains the world’s premier intergovernmental body and the General Assembly its most representative forum. It is a place where all states, big and small, can come together to address shared challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most immediate of these challenges, but it is far from the only one.

Thankfully, while difficult, this last year has demonstrated our capacity for change.

The ‘hybrid’ format in which we gather today is proof that our ways of working, largely unchanged for 75 years, can be adapted – reform and revitalisation are possible.

Co-Chairs.

CANZ would like to use today’s debate to outline three issues we believe will help improve the efficiency, equity and effectiveness of this Assembly in 2021.

First, the General Assembly and its six main committees must make every effort to streamline, rationalise and bring an operational focus to their decisions and resolutions.

The pandemic has made our working environment more difficult. Virtual meetings, travel restrictions and, in some cases, home schooling responsibilities have required each of us to focus our attention and prioritise more than ever before.

We should seize on this spirit of pragmatism and prioritisation to biennialize or sunset longstanding resolutions that have a limited impact on the lives of the people we serve, in particular the most needy or impoverished.

Second, greater support for multilingualism in our working methods.

Almost a year into the COVID-19 pandemic there remains little, if any, ability for member states to meet, consult or negotiate in all six official languages of the United Nations. This is not the case in Geneva or Vienna, it should not be the case in New York.

Multilingualism isn’t just about enhancing equity across states, it’s also about inclusiveness. We must remove barriers – including language barriers – that prevent those in the field from engaging in our work, be they civil society representatives or humanitarian briefers.

Third, in the year ahead, the work of the General Assembly should be guided by agreed overarching priorities – such as those outlined in the UN75 declaration.

These include:

- responding to the health, economic and humanitarian impacts of COVID;

- delivering on the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind;
- protecting our planet through climate action;
- promoting peace and preventing conflict; and
- encouraging respect for human rights and international law.

This doesn't mean the UN should stop its other critical work, achieving results that only the UN can deliver. But it does mean that, in 2021, member states should seek to focus and limit themselves to new activities in these areas only.

Co-Chairs.

CANZ welcomes the move to a virtual format and the four thematic debates, which we trust will allow for a more informal discussion and a frank exchange of views.

Our delegations are particularly pleased to see a debate on the SG selection process.

The more transparent and inclusive SG selection process of 2016 is one concrete example of the meaningful reform possibilities offered by the GA revitalisation agenda. We must ensure those same principles guide the process this year, regardless of incumbency.

CANZ also looks forward to the Secretary-General's analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the work of the General Assembly and the briefing scheduled for March. A thoughtful consideration of lessons learned is in the interests of all members.

Co-Chairs, colleagues – CANZ encourages all delegations to seize the momentum and pragmatism of the last few months and collectively progress key issues within the mandate of GA revitalisation.

For our part, we stand ready to work constructively and collaboratively with all members throughout the 75th session.

Thank you.

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