

are thus largely ratification sessions for decisions previously reached.

Formal meetings are called by the president. Once a date has been fixed, the responsibility for convening the meeting falls on the Secretariat. The SG communicates the provisional agenda to SC members. The official requirement is for the agenda to be circulated three days in advance. However, under urgent circumstances, the agenda can be communicated simultaneously with the notice of the meeting. These requirements are to some degree academic, since the agenda for a formal meeting is invariably approved in advance in informal consultations of the whole. The SC's Provisional Rules of Procedure apply to formal meetings. It should be noted that these rules remain provisional, reflecting the SC's preference for discretionary "marge de manoeuvre", and could be changed by the SC at any time.

There are several types of formal meeting, including: public meetings; private or closed meetings; orientation debates; and thematic debates.

a) Public Meetings

- Almost always held in the Security Council Chamber (although may be held in another location away from headquarters);
- Non-members of the SC may request permission to participate (without vote); such requests are rarely denied;
- Verbatim records are issued by the Secretariat in all six official UN languages overnight.

b) Private Meetings

- An increasingly rare practice which has been superseded by informal consultations of the whole.
- May be called when discussions during a public meeting become acrimonious. The decision to reconvene in private is taken by consensus after a poll by the president.
- Provide a mechanism for non-SC members to participate in a formal meeting on a confidential basis (since informal consultations are closed to non-members).

c) Orientation Meetings

These meetings were initiated in response to concerns about the lack of transparency of informal consultations. Orientation meetings occur early in the consideration of an issue by the SC and serve as a "public face" to informal consultations. They are open to all UN members, but only SC members may speak. The SC decides on a case-by-case basis to hold such meetings.