

BASIC GUIDE TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

FOREWORD

This guide to the United Nations Security Council (SC) is intended to assist members of DFAIT who will be working on Council issues during Canada's two-year mandate. It draws on the academic work in "The Procedure of the UN Security Council," by Sydney Bailey and Sam Daws (Oxford, 1998), and the official "Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council" (S/96/Rev.7, 1982).

I BACKGROUND

Role and Mandate:

The UN Charter gives the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. To discharge this function, the SC is endowed with a number of powers and instruments, ranging from persuasive to coercive, the most important of which is its ability enforce its decisions through the authorization of the use of force. In contrast to the UN General Assembly, a resolution of the SC is legally binding under international law on all UN member states.

Membership:

The Security Council consists of 15 members: five permanent (the "P-5") and ten non-permanent or elected members. The Permanent members are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. These states have a tight grip on Council procedure and decision-making because of their uninterrupted service, their increasingly close consultations, their veto powers and their global political influence.

The non-permanent members are elected for two-year terms on the basis of regional rotation systems. There are five seats for African and Asian states; two for Latin American and Caribbean states; one for Eastern Europe; and two for the West European and Others Group (WEOG) to which Canada belongs. Each year, five of the non-permanent seats come up for election. Canada joined the Council on January 1, 1999 with Argentina, Malaysia, Namibia, and the Netherlands. Bahrain, Brazil, Gabon, Gambia and Slovenia have already served one year and will complete their terms on December 31, 1999.

The Presidency of the Security Council:

The presidency of the SC rotates monthly on the basis of English alphabetical succession. It is an onerous responsibility. Canada will assume the presidency on February 1, 1999; our second Presidency will occur sometime in the spring of 2000. The president is responsible for managing the Council's workload for the month. One

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