

Canada in the United Nations

September 1989

Canada on the Security Council: 1989-1990

Canada's term on the Security Council is for two years: from January 1, 1989 to December 31, 1990.

Canada's representative to the Security Council is Ambassador Yves Fortier, Canada's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Mr. Philippe Kirsch, Minister and Canada's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, is his Deputy. There are, as well, Alternate Representatives who are officers of Canada's Permanent Mission to the UN. The Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for External Affairs may also represent Canada at any time.

The Security Council consists of five permanent Members (China, France, the U.S.S.R., the United Kingdom and the United States of America) and ten non-permanent Members, five of which are elected each year by the General Assembly for a term of two years. In 1989 the ten non-permanent Members of the Council are: Algeria, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Finland, Malaysia, Nepal, Senegal and Yugoslavia. (In 1990 Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Finland and Malaysia will serve their final year on the Council and five new non-permanent Members will be elected).

The ten non-permanent Members should be elected according to the following pattern: five from African and Asian States; one from Eastern European States; two from Latin American States; and two from Western European and other States.

Functions and Powers of the Council

Each Member of the Council has one vote. Decisions on matters of procedure are made by an affirmative vote of at least 9 of the 15 Members. Decisions on substantive matters also require nine votes,

including the concurring votes of all five permanent Members. A negative vote by a permanent Member on a non-procedural matter, often referred to as the "veto," means rejection of the draft resolution or procedure even if it has received nine affirmative votes. This is the rule of "great-power unanimity." If a permanent Member does not support a decision but has no desire to block it through a veto, it may abstain; an abstention is not regarded as a veto.

Under the Charter, all Members of the United Nations agree to accept and carry out the decisions of the Council. While other organs of the United Nations make recommendations to Governments, the Council alone has the power to take decisions which Member States are obligated under the Charter to carry out. The Council has the right to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to friction between two or more countries. When a complaint concerning a threat to peace is brought before it, the Council's first action is usually to recommend that the parties try to reach agreement by peaceful means. In some cases, the Council itself undertakes investigation and mediation. It may appoint special representatives, or request the Secretary-General to use his good offices. In certain cases it may set forth principles for a peaceful settlement.

When a dispute threatens to erupt in, or leads to, active conflict, the Council's first concern is to bring this to an end as soon as possible. Over the decades since its establishment, the Council has issued many cease-fire directives which have been instrumental in preventing wider hostilities in various parts of the world. The Council may decide on enforcement measures, economic sanctions (such as trade embargoes) or collective military action. It also sends United Nations peacekeeping forces to help reduce tensions in certain troubled areas and keep opposing forces apart.

Responsibilities

Under the terms of the Charter, the responsibilities of the Security Council are:

- to maintain international peace and security in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations;
- to investigate any dispute or situation which might lead to international friction;
- to recommend methods of adjusting such disputes or the terms of settlement;
- to formulate plans for the establishment of a system to regulate armaments;
- to determine the existence of a threat to peace or act of aggression and to recommend what action should be taken;
- to call on members to apply economic sanctions and other measures not involving the use of force in order to prevent or stop aggression;
- to recommend the admission of new Members and the terms on which States may become parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice;
- to exercise the Trusteeship functions of the United Nations in "strategic areas";
- to recommend to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary-General and, together with the General Assembly, to elect the Judges of the International Court;
- to submit annual and special reports to the General Assembly.

Also, under Articles 5 and 6 of the Charter, a Member State against which preventive or enforcement action has been taken by the Security Council may be suspended from the exercise of the rights and privileges of membership by the General Assembly upon recommendation of the Council. A Member State which has persistently violated the principles contained in the Charter may be