

INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

The United Nations General Assembly formed an Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism after the Munich massacre of Israeli athletes in 1972. This Committee ended its work in 1979 after the General Assembly failed to agree on common measures to combat terrorism. In 1985, the General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 40/61, through which, for the first time, it unequivocally condemned terrorism. After UNGA 42, the Syrian Government proposed the convening of an international conference to define terrorism and to lay down the demarcation line separating it from the "struggle of peoples for their just cause and the liberation of their territories" (UN Document A/42/58 of 18 December 1986). This proposal was endorsed by the Arab League and the Islamic Conference. The East European Group also presented a proposal (Document A/42/416 of 24 July 1987) that called, inter alia, for a revival of the Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism.

At UNGA 42, Syria succeeded in having its proposal inscribed on the General Assembly's agenda. While the matter was introduced in plenary it was assigned to the Sixth Committee. After much behind-the-scenes negotiations a compromise draft resolution was passed which, inter alia, reaffirmed the unequivocal condemnation of terrorism contained in Resolution 40/61. It also requests the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on ways of combatting terrorism including the convening of a UN conference on terrorism which would among other things, examine the rights of "peoples under colonial and racist regimes" to self determination.

The draft resolution (42/159(b)) was also voted upon in plenary where it was passed overwhelmingly with only the USA and Israel voting against and Honduras abstaining.

Canada regards the adoption of earlier Resolution 40/61 as a major accomplishment. Instead of convening an international conference or reviving the Ad Hoc Committee, Canada favours the functional approach that has been followed in the various counter-terrorist conventions adopted under UN auspices. This approach involves identifying a particular form of terrorist act (e.g. highjacking, hostage taking, terrorist attacks at airports) and subjecting it to suppression and punishment according to the "extradite or prosecute" principle.