

## Voting

Voting on *important questions*, such as recommendations on peace and security, election of members to the main organs, admission, suspension and expulsion of members, trusteeship questions and budgetary matters, is by two-thirds majority.

Voting on *other questions* is by simple majority.

Each member of the General Assembly has one vote.

In determining two-thirds or simple majorities, only "yes" and "no" votes are counted, not abstentions. However, in UN practice an abstention has come to be a respected and widely-used method of indicating a government's position on issues on which a variety of conflicting factors come into play and where a simple "yes" or "no" vote would not be an accurate reflection of the attitude of a government. Quite often explanations of a vote are made before or after the vote.

## The General Assembly session

The General Assembly meets once a year in regular session for about three months, commencing on the third Tuesday in September. Special sessions may also be convened at the request of the Security Council, a majority of the UN members, or one member if the majority of members concur. An emergency special session may also be called within 24 hours of a request by the Security Council on the vote of any nine members of the Council, by a majority of the UN members, or by one member if the majority concur.

Sessions are opened by the President of the previous session (or the chairman of his country's delegation) and the first task on the agenda, after the appointment of the Credentials Committee, is the election of a new President for the next 12 months. The convention is firmly established that he should not be a representative of a great power. The President is elected by secret ballot, but normally private arrangements are made before the session opens to find a candidate for whom an impressive majority of the votes can be mustered.

The President's powers are limited, but able officials have done a good deal through their personal influence to smooth the work of a session and maintain the interests of the organization against the sectional pressures of the membership.

At the side of the new President will sit the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Under-Secretary General for Assembly Affairs who, in his capacity as Secretary of the General Assembly, will act as would a parliamentary clerk to the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Following the election of Vice-Presidents and committee chairmen (which are the next items on the agenda), the Secretary-General proceeds to "notify" the General Assembly of "any matters relative to the maintenance of international peace and security which are being dealt with by the Security Council".

After the adoption of the agenda itself, there follows the general debate. This "debate" will often last more than three weeks, and it is the occasion for nearly all member states to present the principle policy objectives of their governments in the form of a *tour d'horizon* of significant world affairs.

The general debate is followed by reports from the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Trusteeship Council, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These are followed in turn by the elections of members to various UN councils, boards and commissions whenever such elections are due.

All the remaining agenda items are related to specific issues. Some have become very familiar over the years, and are carried over from one year to the next. Others evidence the UN's continuing concern for tackling current problems and are added to the agenda at the request of the Secretary-General, a principal organ of the UN, or a member state.