

Introduction

Mexico in the U.N. Security Council, 2021-2022: Background and Work Program

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The first time that Mexico served as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council was in 1946, just after the organization was established. Thirty-four years passed before the country next participated, in 1980-1981, and then 21 years before the subsequent occasion, in 2002-2003. After this, our elections to the Council became more frequent, in 2009-2010 and in 2021-2022.

The favorable outcomes for our country, especially following the latest experiences on the Security Council, put an end to the notion that it did not suit Mexico to be a member of this body, so as not to put at risk or strain bilateral relations with some of its permanent members (P5).¹ The suitability of Mexico participating in the body in charge of maintaining international peace and security must be clearly established on the basis of its prestige, its diplomatic experience and its regional and international leadership. In fact, Mexico's participation on a regular and frequent basis in the Security Council should be a policy of the Mexican State.

The process of our most recent participation in the Security Council (2021-2022) began in 2011. After finishing our fourth term, Mexico's candidacy was registered with the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Group

¹ China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

(GRULAC), and in June 2019, with a view to the start of the corresponding campaign, support was formally requested and obtained unanimously on the part of GRULAC.

From that moment on, the campaign to obtain support from other regions was developed in parallel with the preparation of issues and selection of candidates to reinforce the team of the Permanent Mission of Mexico in New York. The identification of priority issues was made based on our previous experiences and in accordance with our constitutional principles of foreign policy: the self-determination of peoples, non-intervention, the peaceful resolution of disputes, the prohibition of the use or threat of use of force, legal equality of States, international cooperation for development, promotion and protection of human rights, and the fight for international peace and security.

During the campaign for election by the General Assembly, Mexico committed to defending international law, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. A humanist thesis was defined as the central axis of its actions: ensuring respect for human dignity and the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, with emphasis on prevention and a cross-cutting gender approach. The need to improve the working methods of the Security Council and coordination between the main bodies of the United Nations was also upheld.

To promote the campaign, the famous phrase of President Benito Juárez was identified as a motto, “Among individuals, as among nations, respect for the rights of others is peace,” while its graphic identity was inspired by the mural *Fraternity* by Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo, which is located at the visitors’ entrance to the U.N. building in New York.

After a campaign that was very modest in terms of cost (it was financed with the regular budget of the Mission and some donations in kind), but successful in its outcome, on June 17, 2020, Mexico was elected by the General Assembly with 187 votes. It should be noted that of the five countries that were elected on that occasion (India, Ireland, Kenya, Norway), Mexico was the country that obtained the most votes, also exceeding its own historical maximum. Once the election was concluded, new team members were incorporated, some replacing those who went on to occupy new responsibilities, while others joined to cover specific topics and functions that were not previously met.

In October 2020, Mexico began its period as observer of the Security Council. From then on, the Mexican delegation was able to witness the closed-door sessions in addition to the public debates. Negotiations also began in order to take on tasks and responsibilities within the Council. At this point it became clear that some of the Council's working methods are entirely discretionary, and that the P5 maintain careful control of the distribution of functions among subsidiary bodies. Despite having reached an agreement on this distribution among the five newly elected members (E5), it was rejected by the P5 until almost the beginning of 2021.

That was Mexico's first successful negotiation. From the outset, there was interest in chairing the 1540 Committee (non-proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons), the Children in Armed Conflicts Committee (CAAC), the Mali Sanctions Committee, the Informal Group of Women, Peace and Security, and to serve as focal point or liaison with the International Criminal Court. There were reasons for all this, including previous experiences or other factors, such as the adoption of a feminist foreign policy. Except for the CAAC, which Norway ended up presiding over, the others were formally assigned to our country.

In January 2021, Mexico, India, Ireland, Kenya and Norway began their mandate, joining Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam as elected members (E10). When the latter concluded their mandate, Albania, Brazil, the United Arab Emirates, Gabon and Ghana joined in 2022. It is clear that the composition of the Council has direct consequences for the dynamics of its discussions and work. For example, the priorities of India and Kenya focused on conflicts that directly affect them, such as Afghanistan and Somalia, respectively, as well as issues related to terrorism. Meanwhile, Ireland and Norway were particularly reactive to the conflict in Ukraine, following the guidelines of the European Union or NATO, and favored the protection of civilians agenda and gender issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the working dynamics. Since the outbreak in March 2020 and practically until May 2021, a large part of the sessions had to be held virtually, enabling the work of the Council not to stop. This also facilitated the participation of heads of state and government, as well as ministers, in some debates, since it was neither necessary nor feasible to travel to New York. However, various decision-making processes were affected. Voting on resolutions, instead

of being by show of hands, was done through written notes. Given Russia's opposition to virtual meetings being considered formal meetings, it was not possible to hold procedural votes, which affected the work dynamic. Nor could the trips that the Security Council traditionally makes to some of the countries that are on its agenda take place.

The war in Ukraine was, without a doubt, the situation that had the greatest impact and visibility, further polarizing a Council that was previously divided. Prior to the invasion, in February 2022, the topic of the situation in Ukraine was limited to a "footnote" in the work program and discussions centered around the implementation of the Minsk agreements. Once the war began and until the end of our mandate, the Council met 37 times to address this situation. In general, these sessions were used to take a position on the conflict, but not to try to find a solution. In addition to having condemned the invasion of Ukraine, Mexico presented, through Minister of Foreign Affairs Marcelo Ebrard, the mediation initiative proposed by President López Obrador. Similarly, our country, together with France, drafted the resolution on providing humanitarian aid to the civilian population, which had to be sent for adoption to the General Assembly in March 2022 due to the threat of a veto by Russia and, together with Norway, worked on a text to support the good offices of the Secretary General. This document was approved by the Security Council in May 2022 as a presidential statement and was, until December 2022, the only statement issued by the Council on this major crisis.

Other important events that marked our period in the Council were the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, as well as the breakdown of the constitutional order in a number of African countries and in Myanmar, and an increase in the number of ballistic and intercontinental missile launches by part of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

After our participation in the Security Council in 2009-2010, issues derived from the "Arab Spring" such as Libya, Syria and Yemen, as well as others related to the deterioration of the humanitarian and security situations in Mali, Central African Republic and South Sudan, were incorporated into the Council's security agenda. A number of conflicts that have not been resolved for many years remain on the agenda, such as those in the Middle East, Western Sahara, Cyprus, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, or the nuclear programs of the DPRK and Iran, among others.

Mexico assumed the responsibility of taking a position on all the issues that were on the Council's agenda, which means that our country spoke out publicly and privately on more than 440 occasions, and participated in the negotiation of draft resolutions, presidential statements, and press statements. During 2021 and 2022, 111 resolutions, 31 presidential statements, and 128 press statements were approved.

The work leading the subsidiary bodies was also intense. The 1540 Committee was established in 2004 by a resolution whose objective is to prevent non-State actors, including terrorist groups, from gaining access to weapons of mass destruction, that is, nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. This is therefore an issue of great importance for a country with a long diplomatic tradition in matters of disarmament and non-proliferation. Mexico also served as a chair of that Committee in 2010. On this occasion, in addition, it was time to conduct the so-called "comprehensive review," during which all U.N. member States have the opportunity to express themselves on the issues related to the implementation of the corresponding resolution and which serve as a basis for defining the future work of the Committee. This type of well-attended meetings take place every five years. Both the review and the resolution that allowed the Committee to be renewed for another 10 years were successful.

The Mali Sanctions Committee also had its degree of difficulty. In 2020 and 2021, Mali saw two coups d'état. Its location as part of the Sahel further complicated the panorama, as it is a region that has been affected by the advance of terrorism, violence between communities, rapid climate change, and a serious humanitarian crisis. The Committee is responsible for monitoring compliance with sanctions against individuals whose actions have posed a threat to the peace, security and stability of Mali.

In line with its feminist foreign policy, Mexico assumed, together with Ireland, the responsibility of co-chairing the Informal Group of Experts on Women, Peace and Security. The group's goal is to advance this agenda on all issues addressed by the Security Council. The actions deployed concerned regions where the situation of women is very precarious, notably Afghanistan.

In light of Mexico's authority with regard to the promotion of and respect for international law and accountability, the States parties to the Rome Statute members of the Security Council entrusted it with the responsibility

of serving as their focal point on issues related to the International Criminal Court. The Court is called on to play a fundamental role in examining the commission of possible war crimes in Ukraine.

One of the greatest responsibilities assumed by Mexico was the presidency of the Security Council in November 2021. During that month, in addition to discussing the topics on the agenda, Mexico organized three flagship debates. The first focused on corruption, inequality, and social exclusion as underlying themes of many armed conflicts. The debate was chaired by President López Obrador. This was the first occasion on which a Mexican Head of State presided over the highest body in charge of maintaining international peace and security. The second debate focused on preventive diplomacy and the work of the main bodies of the United Nations. The third was chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard, and addressed a fundamental issue for Mexico: the trafficking and diversion of arms. As a result of the first two debates, two presidential statements were adopted. Regarding the third, after long negotiations, a resolution was adopted that strengthens measures against the trafficking and diversion of arms.

Another fundamental aspect that strengthened Mexico's presence in the Security Council was that it succeeded in becoming co-drafter of resolutions concerning Latin American issues on the Council's agenda, that is, Colombia (along with the United Kingdom) and Haiti (together with the United States), as well as on the Mali sanctions regime (together with France). The above was no small achievement, since the established practice is that the permanent members—particularly the so-called P3—are the ones who exercise this function and they do not tend to share this task with the elected members.

Being a resolution drafter implies, in a sense, having the final say on the projects that are submitted to the Security Council. That is why this issue is a constant subject of debate within the framework of the General Assembly's discussions on the reform of the Security Council, and of course, within the Council itself. It is plain to see that within the Council there is no equitable distribution of responsibilities.

Before concluding its mandate, Mexico presented another draft resolution on a new topic for the Security Council, concerning the mental health of personnel deployed in peace operations. After tense negotiations, this

body, for the first time, unanimously recognized the need to pay greater attention to the mental health of peacekeepers before, during and after their deployment.

With the adoption of this latest resolution, Mexico consolidated itself as the elected member that presented the most resolutions during 2021-2022, either as author or co-author of the adopted texts. In December 2022, having fulfilled the commitments we had set out, our participation in the body in charge of maintaining international peace and security concluded. Mexico's balanced positions, based on its foreign policy principles, enabled it to have a serious and respectful dialogue with the P5, while bringing us closer to many other countries.

This participation made clear, once again, the appropriateness of being an actor in and not just an observer of multilateral decisions taken to prevent or put an end to international conflicts. The need for a reform of the Council to allow it to properly fulfill its mandate was also clear.

Since the creation of the United Nations, Mexico has opposed the so-called "right of veto" reflected in the Charter. The permanent members have exercised this prerogative to block decisions that do not suit either their interests or those of their closest allies. During the two years of our membership, five vetoes were recorded: two on the war in Ukraine, one on the DPRK missile launches, one on the humanitarian situation in Syria, and one on the effects of climate change. All these cases show that the veto or the threat of exercising it is the main reason why the Council has its hands tied when reacting to situations that put international peace and security at risk. This leads to the prolongation of armed conflicts and other situations that increase human suffering. The paralysis of the Council in the face of the war in Ukraine is the most recent example. This is why Mexico must more actively promote a comprehensive reform of the Security Council, one that increases its effectiveness, makes it more representative and democratic, and ensures adequate accountability to all U.N. member States.