

Mexico's Presidency: Flagship Events, Deliberations, Controversies, and Resolutions

La presidencia de México: eventos insignia, deliberaciones, controversias y resoluciones

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Abstract

The article describes the priorities of the Mexican Presidency of the U.N. Security Council in November 2021. It highlights the three flagship events organized by Mexico and their outcomes, highlighting the main challenges faced, particularly by the escalation of tensions in Ethiopia and differences regarding the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It presents an overview of the conflicts examined throughout the month and provides details of the decisions adopted during this time. It also describes the main responsibilities of the country exercising the presidency of the body entrusted with maintaining international peace and security.



Resumen

El artículo relata las prioridades de la presidencia de México del Consejo de Seguridad en noviembre de 2021. Destaca los tres eventos insignia organizados por México y sus resultados, así como los principales retos, particularmente, por la escalada de tensiones en Etiopía y las diferencias en torno a la situación en Bosnia y Herzegovina. Hace un recuento de los conflictos analizados durante el mes y detalla todas las decisiones adoptadas durante este periodo. Describe las principales responsabilidades del país que preside el órgano encargado del mantenimiento de la paz y la seguridad internacionales.



Keywords

United Nations, Mexico, security, multilateralism, diplomacy, conflicts



Palabras clave

Naciones Unidas, México, seguridad, multilateralismo, diplomacia, conflictos

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The rotation of the monthly presidencies of the Security Council is established based on the alphabetical order (in English) of its members. During this most recent participation of Mexico, it fell to it to assume this responsibility in November 2021.

Exercising the presidency of the Security Council implies a high level of responsibility. It is important to clarify that this position does not empower the country that exercises it to impose its national agenda, but it does provide the opportunity to imbue the process with a particular approach and promote the discussion of certain issues of national interest.

The monthly work programs are predetermined above all by the “mandated” meetings, that is, sessions that must be held in compliance with previous decisions by this body. Thus, for example, during the two years of our participation, monthly sessions on the Middle East (Israel/Palestine), Syria and Yemen were scheduled. Prior to its adoption, the presidency must consult and negotiate the work program individually with all members of the Council, since it must be endorsed by each of its members so that it can be adopted at the beginning of each month to ensure the issues are addressed.

In addition to mandated meetings, the presidency may suggest holding specific debates on topics of particular interest, which are known as flagship events. Mexico proposed three such events in the form of a debate.

Any member of the Council may request that additional meetings be held besides those approved in the work program. These are usually held in response to extraordinary events that have an impact on international peace and security. During our presidency, the rapid deterioration of the situation in Ethiopia warranted holding such a meeting, which was not originally planned.

The presidency also has the power to propose the format of the meetings. Mandated meetings can be scheduled as open briefings, private meetings, or closed consultations. The format of the meeting can impact how the topic is addressed. Open briefings are public and therefore representatives tend to stick to pre-prepared scripts, while both private meetings and closed consultations involve greater interaction. For this reason, the Mexican presidency proposed that two of the topics addressed monthly, Syria and Yemen, be treated only in the format of closed consultations.

All debates are public. However, these may be limited to the Council members only, or open to the participation of all members of the United Nations. Mexico opted for its three flagship events to be open debates.

The presidency is also responsible for presenting a preliminary list of briefers who are invited to make presentations to the Council on the various topics addressed in both briefings and debates. These are people who have access to what is happening on the ground. Briefers may be members of the United Nations Secretariat itself, officials of other international organizations, or members of civil society. In the case of Mexico, in accordance with our commitment to promote the women, peace and security agenda, we proposed female representatives of civil society for all open meetings convened during our presidency. Subsequently, other countries continued the practice established by the “trio” (Ireland, Kenya, Mexico). In addition, along the same lines, Mexico also proposed that the annual session on the work of the United Nations Police (UNPOL) focus on the role of women police officers.

It is customary for the presidency in turn to organize an informal meeting between the secretary-general and the members of the Council to discuss the issues that, in its opinion, merit the attention of the permanent representatives. These are *off-the-record* meetings of great informative and interactive value. During our presidency the issues addressed were Ethiopia and Sudan, which were experiencing critical situations.

By November 2021, many of the restrictions adopted by the United Nations against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic had already been eliminated or relaxed. In line with this development, we returned the consultations to the smaller meeting room designed for these purposes. In recent years, some presidencies had chosen to significantly reduce or eliminate the number of consultations held in closed sessions, and sought to discuss issues in open sessions, for the sake of “transparency.” Mexico committed to maintaining a balance between open and closed meetings, considering that both are useful and relevant, as appropriate.

Flagship events

Three flagship events were scheduled. The first focused on “corruption, inequality, exclusion and armed conflicts” and was chaired by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. This was the first time that a Mexican Head of State had presided over the U.N. Security Council. In this context, the president outlined the aspects of his proposal for a Global Alliance for Wellbeing.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres, and Ms. Lourdes Tiban Guala, renowned lawyer and leader of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, also participated in this debate. For Mexico it was important that the Council listen to the voices of indigenous peoples.

Based on the healthy debate that the issue generated, it was clear that as long as inequalities are not addressed, the risk of violence will continue. The discussion on the underlying causes or catalysts of the conflicts resulted in the adoption of a statement by the Council presidency¹ which recognizes that both exclusion and inequality can become precipitating or aggravating factors in situations dealt with by the Council. It should be noted that for these declarations to be adopted, the unanimous support of the 15 members of the Council is required. As a result, the topic and debate gave rise to an official product of the Security Council.

¹ S/PRST/2021/22, November 9, 2021.

The second debate focused on preventive diplomacy and the work of the main bodies of the U.N. In addition to the secretary-general, the presidents of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) took part. The need was highlighted for better coordination between the principal bodies of the United Nations and to prioritize preventive diplomacy through mediation and attention to the underlying causes of conflicts. As a result of the discussions, another presidential statement was adopted² as an official product.

The third flagship event was chaired by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marcelo Ebrard, and addressed a fundamental issue for Mexico: the trafficking and diversion of small arms and light weapons. It was necessary for the Security Council to make progress in the search for global solutions to combat the unrestricted flow of weapons that aggravate conflicts. The Foreign Minister emphasized the need to cooperate at the bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels to curb the illicit trafficking of these weapons and underlined the importance of addressing the problem with a preventive approach. The over 60 participating delegations discussed the negative and destabilizing impact of the illicit transfer and accumulation of weapons in conflicts, which also undermine humanitarian efforts and sustainable development.

The debate led to several weeks of negotiations, mainly due to the opposition of Russia and the reluctance of China and India for the Council to issue a formal position on this issue. However, in December 2021 resolution 2616 (2021) was adopted with 12 votes in favor and co-sponsored by 74 countries, in which the Council expressed its concern about the threat to international peace and security posed by the illicit transfer, diversion and misuse of small arms and light weapons. This resolution encourages the strengthening of regional cooperation on land, sea and air to detect and prevent violations of arms embargoes imposed by the Council, and calls for appropriate registration measures in order to locate and trace the origin of such weapons.

² S/PRST/2021/23, November 16, 2021.

Deliberations and controversies

During Mexico's presidency, the Council held mandated meetings on Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Myanmar, Libya, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, as well as the situations in the Middle East and the Sahel. Likewise, a private meeting was held with the president of the ICJ and an election to fill a vacancy on the Court. This election is carried out in parallel in the General Assembly and the Security Council. It is necessary that the results in both bodies coincide. A retreat was also held with the members of the Council and the five elected members (Albania, Brazil, Gabon, Ghana and United Arab Emirates) organized by Finland, in order to familiarize them with the themes and work dynamics of the Council.

Since the adoption of the work program, all sessions have proceeded as planned. The participation of the high representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the session on that country was controversial, as it placed at risk the renewal of the authorization for the operation of the multinational stabilization force EUFOR ALTHEA. However, in the end it was adopted unanimously, thus ensuring the continuity of that mission.

Another delicate moment was when, given the advance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) towards Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian Council of Ministers declared a state of emergency throughout its territory. As a result of this situation, Ireland and the three African members of the Council: Kenya, Niger and Tunisia, as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (the so-called A3+1) circulated a draft press statement in which the Security Council expressed its deep concern about the scale of military clashes in northern Ethiopia, as well as the humanitarian consequences of the conflict and the stability of the region, and called for a cessation of hostilities by all parties to the conflict. However, Russia opposed the statement referring to "all parties".

Given the increasingly serious situation in Ethiopia (to date, more than 600 000 people have died), Mexico, in its capacity as president, as well as the A3+1 and Ireland requested that a Security Council meeting be held urgently. A few hours before it began, China and Russia asked for it to be postponed, arguing that mediation efforts were underway. Meanwhile, differences persisted that prevented an agreement on the press release, which paralyzed the Council. We agreed to postpone the meeting for only

one hour. Finally, an agreement was reached, and for the first time since the conflict began, the Council issued a statement regarding the serious situation in Ethiopia.

After several days of negotiation, the meeting on Ethiopia was held. The Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs reported directly on the intensification of violence in the country, as well as the obstacles the U.N. was facing in delivering humanitarian aid. The former President of Nigeria and High Representative of the African Union for the Horn of Africa region described efforts to establish dialogue between Ethiopian authorities and urged that unrestricted humanitarian access be permitted.

Throughout the month, other unforeseen topics arose that were discussed in closed consultations. Any member of the Council may request to discuss topics under “other matters” without needing to seek the endorsement of the members of the Council, even when the topic is not scheduled on the agenda. The topics addressed were Israel’s designation of six civil society organizations as terrorist groups, and the announcement of 3100 new housing units in Israeli settlements. Likewise, the situation of migrants stranded on the border of Belarus with European Union countries (Poland and Lithuania) was discussed. Since the immigration issue is a priority for Mexico, our position on the matter was reiterated.

Other products

In addition to the resolutions referred to, three other resolutions were adopted during Mexico’s presidency that renewed the mandates of the Sanctions Committee and the Group of Experts on Somalia, of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). The Council also approved a presidential statement on Libya that welcomed the results of an international conference and expressed support for holding elections.

During our presidency, eight press statements were also agreed upon, condemning the terrorist attack against a military hospital in Kabul, the assassination attempt against the Prime Minister of Iraq, and the Houthi

intrusion into the compound previously occupied by the embassy of the United States in Sana'a. Likewise, through press statements, the Council shared the results of a mission it carried out at the end of October 2021 in Mali and Niger, expressed its concern about the violence in Myanmar and called for an immediate cessation of violence, and congratulated the Government of Iraq on the elections that took place in October 2021. On the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the Colombian peace agreement, the Council issued a press statement recognizing the progress made and urging the parties to address the remaining challenges.

At the conclusion of the presidency, a report was presented to all member States of the United Nations on the work of the Security Council in November. With this, and having effectively worked through all the points included in the work program, the delicate responsibility of presiding over the main U.N. body in charge of maintaining international peace and security was concluded.