

ARTICLE 20

CONTENTS

Text of Article 20	<i>Paragraphs</i>
Introductory Note	1
I. General Survey	2-5
II. Analytical Summary of Practice	6-26
A. Regular annual sessions	6-17
1. Date of meeting	6
a. Postponement of opening date	7
**b. Change in opening date	
2. Adjournment and resumption of session	8-10
3. Place of meeting	11
4. Duration of session	12
5. Closing date of session	13-17
B. Special sessions	18-22
1. Procedure for summoning	18
a. By the General Assembly	19-22
**b. At the request of the Security Council	
**c. At the request of Members	
2. Emergency special sessions	23-26
a. Procedure for summoning	23
**b. Question of the legality of convening the emergency special session	
c. At the request of Members	24-26

ARTICLE 20

TEXT OF ARTICLE 20

The General Assembly shall meet in regular annual sessions and in such special sessions as occasion may require. Special sessions shall be convoked by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council or of a majority of the Members of the United Nations.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

1. During the period under review, the General Assembly held four regular sessions, one special session and one emergency special session.

I. GENERAL SURVEY

2. In accordance with the provisions of Article 20 of the Charter and rules 1 and 3 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly,¹ the Assembly held its twenty-first to twenty-fourth regular sessions inclusive from 1966 to 1969, at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York.
3. The twenty-first, twenty-third and twenty-fourth sessions were completed before the end of the year in which they began. The twenty-second session was adjourned in

December 1967 and reconvened in mid-April 1968; it was adjourned again in June and reconvened in September.

4. In addition to the regular sessions, the General Assembly held one special session and one emergency special session, both in 1967.
5. The following table shows the opening and closing dates and the approximate length of the sessions held during the period under review:

<i>Regular sessions</i>	<i>Opening date</i>	<i>Closing date</i>	<i>Approximate duration</i>
Twenty-first session	20 September 1966	20 December 1966	13 weeks
Twenty-second session resumed	19 September 1967 24 April 1968	19 December 1967 12 June 1968	13 weeks 7 weeks } 20 weeks
Twenty-third session resumed	23 September 1968	23 September 1968	1 day
Twenty-fourth session	24 September 1968 16 September 1969	21 December 1968 17 December 1969	13 weeks 13 weeks
<i>Special sessions</i>			
Fifth special session	21 April 1967	13 June 1967	7½ weeks
<i>Emergency special session</i>			
Fifth emergency special session	17 June 1967	18 September 1967	5 weeks
	(The session was adjourned on 21 July 1967 and reconvened for 1 day on 18 September 1967).		

¹ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.74.I.6.

II. ANALYTICAL SUMMARY OF PRACTICE

A. Regular annual sessions

1. DATE OF MEETING
6. There was no amendment to rule 1 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, which provides that the Assembly "shall meet every year in regular session commencing on the third Tuesday in September".

a. Postponement of opening date

7. A postponement of the opening date occurred at the twenty-third session. By a telegram dated 16 July 1968, the Chairman of the Afro-Asian Group proposed that the opening date of the twenty-third session be postponed by one week until 24 September. By a *note verbale* dated 16 July 1968, the Secretary-General informed the permanent representatives of the request. By a *note verbale* dated 26 July 1968, the Secretary-General informed the permanent

representatives that a majority of the Members had agreed to the postponement of the opening date and that the session would convene on 24 September. There was no discussion of a constitutional character, nor was there any proposal for amending rule 1 of the rules of procedure.

***b. Change in opening date*

2. ADJOURNMENT AND RESUMPTION OF SESSION

8. At the twenty-second session, on 20 December 1967, the General Assembly, on the proposal of its President,² decided to adjourn the session and to resume it when the President, after consultation with Member States and with the Secretary-General, believed that conditions were favourable for the consideration of any of the three items remaining on the agenda. The session was resumed on 24 April 1968.

9. On 12 June 1968, the General Assembly, on the proposal of the President,³ decided to adjourn the session and to resume it when the President, after consulting Member States and the Secretary-General, determined that conditions were appropriate for the consideration of the item remaining on the agenda. The session was resumed and closed on 23 September.

10. At the fifth special session, on 23 May 1967, the General Assembly, on the proposal of the President,⁴ decided to adjourn the session until 6 June. The Assembly subsequently decided to adjourn until 13 June 1967.⁵

3. PLACE OF MEETING

11. All the sessions held during the period under review met at the Headquarters of the United Nations in accordance with rule 3 of the rules of procedure.

4. DURATION OF SESSION

12. In its report to the General Assembly submitted in 1963, the *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Improvement of the Methods of Work of the General Assembly suggested that the normal duration of the regular session should not exceed 13 weeks.⁶ That suggestion was endorsed by the General Assembly when it approved the recommendations submitted by the *Ad Hoc* Committee.⁷ As shown in the table appearing in paragraph 5 above, that duration was exceeded at the twenty-second session.

5. CLOSING DATE OF SESSION

13. The dates for the closing of the session recommended by the General Committee and approved by the General Assembly were observed only at the twenty-first session.

14. At the twenty-second session, the decision taken by the General Assembly on the General Committee's recom-

mendation⁸ to close the session on 19 December 1967 was superseded as a consequence of the Assembly's decision to adjourn the session and resume it.⁹

15. No date was set for the end of the session, which was resumed on 24 April 1968, adjourned again on 12 June and officially closed on 23 September 1968.

16. At the twenty-third session, the General Committee's recommendation¹⁰ that the session should close on 20 December 1968 was approved by the General Assembly on 27 September.¹¹ On 18 December 1968, however, the General Committee decided without objection to recommend¹² that the closing date should be postponed until 21 December in order to give the Secretariat more time to prepare all the remaining reports of the Main Committees. The recommendation was adopted without objection by the General Assembly.¹³ The session closed on the scheduled date.

17. At the twenty-fourth session, the date originally recommended by the General Committee¹⁴ and approved by the General Assembly¹⁵ was 16 December 1969. On 16 December, however, the General Assembly, on the suggestion of the President,¹⁶ decided that the closing date be postponed until 17 December in order to allow more time for the preparation of the last report of the Fifth Committee. The session closed on 17 December.

B. Special sessions

1. PROCEDURE FOR SUMMONING

18. Article 20 of the Charter provides that special sessions "shall be convoked by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council or of a majority of the Members of the United Nations". Rule 7 of the rules of procedure provides that the General Assembly may fix a date for a special session.

a. By the General Assembly

19. One special session—the fifth—was held during the period under review. The fifth special session was summoned by the General Assembly at its twenty-first session.

20. By resolution 2145 (XXI) of 27 October 1966, the General Assembly, *inter alia*, established an *Ad Hoc* Committee for South West Africa "to recommend practical means by which South West Africa should be administered, so as to enable the people of the Territory to exercise the right of self-determination and to achieve independence, and to report to the General Assembly at a special session as soon as possible and in any event not later than April 1967".

21. By resolution 2220 (XXI) of 19 December 1966, the General Assembly decided "to refer the report of the Special Political Committee on the comprehensive review of

² G A (XXII), Plen., 1642nd mtg., paras. 282-285.

³ *Ibid.*, 1672nd mtg., paras. 167-169.

⁴ G A (S-V), Plen., 1522nd mtg., paras. 161, 162 and 174

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1523rd mtg., para. 2.

⁶ G A (XVIII), Annexes, a.i. 25, A/5423, para. 22.

⁷ G A resolution 1898 (XVII). See also United Nations publication, Sales No. E.74.I.6, annex IV.

⁸ G A (XXII), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/6840, para 4.

⁹ See paras 9 and 10 above.

¹⁰ G A (XXIII), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/7250, para 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Plen., 1676th mtg. paras. 3 and 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, Annexes, a.i. 8, A/7250/Add.5, para. 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Plen., 1749th mtg., paras. 1 and 2.

¹⁴ G A (XXIV), Annexes, a.i. 8, A/7700, para. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Plen., 1758th mtg., paras. 3 and 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1836th mtg., paras. 81 and 82.

the whole question of peace-keeping operations in all their aspects to the General Assembly at its fifth special session, to be held not later than 30 April 1967" and requested "the Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations to continue the review of the whole question of peace-keeping operations and to report to the General Assembly at its fifth special session"

22. In compliance with the decisions set forth in those resolutions, the Secretary-General, by a *note verbale* dated 7 March 1967, informed the permanent representatives that the fifth special session would convene on 21 April.

****b. At the request of the Security Council**

****c. At the request of Members**

2. EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSIONS

a. Procedure for summoning

23. A detailed analysis of the procedure for summoning an emergency special session appears in Supplement No. 2.¹⁷

¹⁷ See *Repertory, Supplement No. 2*, vol. II, under Article 20, paras. 17-21.

****b. Question of the legality of convening the emergency special session¹⁸**

c. At the request of Members

24. One emergency special session—the fifth—was held during the period under review and represented the first case in which an emergency special session was summoned at the request of a Member State.

25. By a letter dated 13 June 1967,¹⁹ the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics requested the immediate convening of an emergency special session of the General Assembly to consider the question of liquidating the consequences of Israel's aggression against the Arab States and the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops behind the armistice lines.

26. By a telegram dated 16 June 1967, the Secretary-General informed the permanent representatives that a majority of the Members had concurred in the request and that the fifth emergency special session would convene on 17 June.

¹⁸ See in this *Supplement*, under Article 12, paras. 39-42.

¹⁹ G A (ES-V), Annexes, a.i. 5, A/6717.