# Article 21

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text of Article 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introductory note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. General survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Analytical summary of practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Adoption and amendment of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sixth Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. General Assembly (resolutions adopted without reference to a Main Committee)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Open-ended informal working group on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Elections of the President of the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Text of Article 21

The General Assembly shall adopt its own rules of procedure. It shall elect its President for each session.

Introductory note

1. During the period under review, the General Assembly amended its rules of procedure and the annexes thereto. Relevant discussions of the Assembly (including its subsidiary bodies) are summarized in section II.A. The practice of the Assembly concerning the elections of its President is found in section II.B.

1 See General Assembly resolutions 45/45, 47/233 and 48/264.

I. General survey

2. During the period under review, the General Assembly continued its efforts aimed at the rationalization of its work and procedures. The rules of procedure of the Assembly were amended. Several bodies were involved in relevant discussions. In some cases, recommendations regarding the preparation of potential future amendments to the rules of procedure of the Assembly were made. Relevant activities involved the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and its Working Group, the Sixth Committee and the open-ended informal working group on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly established by the Assembly.

3. As a result of the accession of Namibia (formerly the Territory of South West Africa) to independence on 21 March 1990, annex III to the rules of procedure, entitled “Procedure for the examination of reports and petitions relating to the Territory of South West Africa”, was no longer applicable and was removed.

2 See paras. 4-6 of the present study.

4 See para. 7 of the present study.

5 A/520/Rev.15/Amend.1.

II. Analytical summary of practice

A. Adoption and amendment of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly

1. Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization

4. In 1988, during its forty-third session, the Assembly requested the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization to keep the question of the rationalization of the procedures of the United Nations under active review.

5. During the 1989 session of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization, the Special Committee and its Working Group had before


7 The Special Committee on the Charter met at United Nations Headquarters from 27 March to 14 April (see GA (44), Suppl. No. 33, para. 1).
them documents regarding the rationalization of procedures of the United Nations: A/AC.182/L.43/Rev.3 (the text included texts provisionally accepted at the 1988 session as well as changes to the 1987 draft to reflect suggestions made in 1988)8 and Rev.4, submitted by France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and document A/AC.182/1989/CRP.1, submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and directed towards increasing the effectiveness of the activities of the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies.9 After an exchange of views in the Working Group, it was agreed to consider the proposals contained in documents A/AC.182/L.43/Rev.4 and A/AC.182/1989/CRP.1 together.10 Following the consideration of the proposals in the Working Group and after an extensive round of consultations, it was indicated on behalf of the co-sponsors of document A/AC.182/L.43/Rev.4 that they would submit a revised version of the working paper at the Committee’s next session.11 The General Assembly, in its resolution 44/37, took note of the report of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization and requested it to keep the question of the rationalization of the procedures of the United Nations under active review.12

6. At its 1990 session,13 the Special Committee, as requested by the General Assembly, kept under active review the question of the rationalization of the procedures of the United Nations, having before it another revised working paper submitted by France and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland contained in document A/AC.182/L.43/Rev.5, the proposal submitted by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as set out in paragraph 101 of the report of the Special Committee at its 1989 session, and document A/AC.182/L.67, submitted by the Chairman following informal consultations.14 The Committee completed the draft document and submitted it to the General Assembly for consideration and adoption.15

2. Sixth Committee

7. In 1990, during the forty-fifth session of the General Assembly, the Sixth Committee, at its 34th meeting, adopted draft resolution A/C.6/45/L.4, entitled “Rationalization of existing United Nations procedures”, sponsored by France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and recommended it to the General Assembly for adoption.16 In resolution 45/44, the General Assembly expressed its satisfaction at the completion of the work on the draft document on the rationalization of existing United Nations procedures.17 The General Assembly, by its resolution 45/45, approved the conclusions of the Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations and on the Strengthening of the Role of the Organization concerning the rationalization of existing United Nations procedures, contained in the annex to the resolution, and decided that they should be reproduced as an annex to its rules of procedure.18 These conclusions pointed out that, inter alia, informal consultations should be carried with the widest possible participation of Member States; a roll-call vote should as far as possible not to be requested; the General Committee should consider drawing up its observations on the organization of the work of the session before the end of each session of the Assembly; the agenda of the Assembly should be simplified by grouping or merging related items and by setting an interval of more than a year between the discussion on it; as regards the allocation of agenda items, the General Committee should ensure the best use of the expertise of the Committees; before establishing subsidiary organs, the Assembly should give careful consideration as to whether the subject matter in question could be dealt with by existing organs; the dates and length of the sessions of bodies of the Assembly that meet intersessionally should be determined as soon as possible and overlapping meetings of bodies that deal with subject matter of a similar nature should be avoided; informal consultations about the work of bodies of the Assembly that meet intersessionally should continue to be held in advance of their sessions;

8 GA (44), Suppl. No. 33, para. 84. See also in this connection Repertory, Supplement No. 7, vol. II, under Article 21, paras. 4 and 5.
9 GA (44), Suppl. No. 33, paras. 101-103.
10 Ibid., para. 103.
11 Ibid., para. 118. See also in this connection Yearbook of the United Nations 1989, p. 846.
12 GA resolution 44/37, paras. 1 and 4.
13 The Special Committee on the Charter met at United Nations Headquarters from 12 February to 2 March 1990 (see GA (45), Suppl. No. 33, para. 1).
14 GA (45), Suppl. No. 33, paras. 10 and 83-86.
15 Ibid., para. 86.
17 GA resolution 45/44, fourth preambular paragraph.
18 GA resolution 45/44, paras. 1 and 2 and annex.
Chapter IV. The General Assembly

observations from States and reports by the Secretary-General should be requested insofar as they are likely to facilitate the implementation of the resolutions or the continued examination of the question. These conclusions were reproduced in annex VII to the rules of procedure of the Assembly. 19

3. General Assembly (resolutions adopted without reference to a Main Committee)

8. In 1993, during its forty-seventh session, the Assembly adopted resolution 47/233 on the revitalization of its work, in which it, inter alia, decided to rationalize its Committee structure to respond better to the requirements of the new phase of international relations. 20 Thus, the Assembly decided that its Main Committees shall be as follows: Disarmament and International Security Committee (First Committee); Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee); Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee); Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee (Third Committee); Administrative and Budgetary Committee (Fifth Committee); and Legal Committee (Sixth Committee). 21 It also decided on the representation of groups of States in the chairmanship of the six Main Committees at the forty-eighth session. 22 It further recommended that, pending further consideration of the revitalization process, the agenda items allocated at that time to the Special Political Committee and to the Fourth Committee be allocated at the forty-eighth session to the new Special Political and Decolonization Committee. 23 The Assembly also decided to amend accordingly rules 31, 38 and 98 of its rules of procedure. The Assembly pointed out in the annex to the resolution that rule 31 should read as follows: “The General Assembly shall elect a President and twenty-one Vice-Presidents who shall hold office until the close of the session at which they are elected. The Vice-Presidents shall be elected, after the election of the Chairmen of the six Main Committees referred to in rule 98, in such a way as to ensure the representative character of the General Committee”; indicated that the first sentence of rule 38 shall read as follows: “The General Committee shall comprise the President of the General Assembly, who shall preside, the twenty-one Vice-Presidents and the Chairmen of the six Main Committees”; and amended rule 98 according to paragraph 1 of its resolution 47/233, which listed the Main Committees of the Assembly. 24 By resolution 47/233, the Assembly also decided to establish, at the forty-eighth session, an informal open-ended working group to continue consideration of the revitalization process and to make proposals on questions relating to, inter alia, the rationalization of the agenda, the reports of the other principal organs and the reports requested of the Secretary-General. 25

4. Open-ended informal working group on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly

9. The working group that was established by resolution 47/233 26 began its work on 27 January 1994 and successfully completed its mandate on 8 July 1994 with the adoption by consensus of draft resolution A/48/L.61, which was adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session as resolution 48/264. 27 By the resolution, the Assembly adopted the Guidelines on the Rationalization of the Agenda of the General Assembly set forth in annex I to the resolution, to be embodied as an annex to the rules of procedure of the Assembly. 28 It also decided to replace paragraph 4 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 33/138 with the text contained in annex II to resolution 48/264 concerning the pattern of election of the six Chairmen of the Main Committees 29 and decided that the arrangement concerning the above pattern of elections should take effect at its forty-ninth session and would be reviewed at the fifty-third session. 30 The Guidelines on the Rationalization of the Agenda of the General Assembly contained in annex I to the resolution, inter alia, outlined the role of the plenary meetings of the Assembly; established what kind of agenda items should be considered by the Assembly in plenary meetings; provided for periodic reviews of the agenda; and encouraged the Main Committees to continue with the

19 A/520/Rev.16, Introduction, para. 43. See also in this connection Yearbook of the United Nations 1991, p. 842.
20 GA resolution 47/233, eighth preambular paragraph.
21 Ibid., para. 1.
22 Ibid., para. 3.
23 Ibid., para. 4.
24 Ibid., paras. 1 and 2 and annex; see also A/520/Rev.15/Amend.2.
25 GA resolution 47/233, para. 6.
26 See also in this connection para. 8 of the present study.
28 GA resolution 48/264, para. 9.
29 Ibid., para. 10.
30 Ibid., paras. 11 and 12.
review of their respective agendas so as to rationalize their work.31

**B. Elections of the President of the General Assembly**

10. At the beginning of the forty-fourth, forty-fifth, forty-seventh, forty-eighth and forty-ninth sessions, only one candidate was nominated for the presidency of the General Assembly, and in each case the President was elected by acclamation, taking into account the provisions of paragraph 16 of annex VI to the rules of procedure.32 At the forty-fourth session, Mr. Joseph Nanven Garba (Nigeria) was elected President; at the forty-fifth session, Mr. Guido de Marco (Malta); at the forty-seventh session, Mr. Stoyan Ganev (Bulgaria); at the forty-eighth session, Mr. Samuel Insanally (Guyana); and at the forty-ninth session, Mr. Amara Essy (Côte d’Ivoire).

11. At the beginning of the forty-sixth session, however, there were three candidates for the presidency of the General Assembly. In accordance with rule 92 of the rules of procedure, the Assembly proceeded to elect the President by secret ballot.33 Having obtained the required majority, Mr. Samir Shihabi (Saudi Arabia) was elected President of the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

---

31 Ibid., annex I, paras. 1-5.
32 GA decision 44/302; A/44/PV.1, pp. 4 and 5; GA decision 45/302; A/45/PV.1, pp. 4 and 5; GA decision 47/302; A/47/PV.1, p. 6; GA decision 48/302; A/48/PV.1, p. 2, paras. 10-15; GA decision 49/302; and A/49/PV.1, p. 2.
33 GA decision 46/302 and A/46/PV.1, pp. 7-15.