

# [Here's what happens at the UN General Assembly, when the leaders have gone home](#)

After the world media spotlight fades on the [General Assembly's](#) annual high-level debate, the work of the Assembly, the UN's primary deliberative body, shifts to its so-called Main Committees, where the bulk of the Organization's work get done.

While the six-day "[general debate](#)" grabs headlines for its political and policy speeches from Queens, Kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers, the Assembly's committees seldom make the news.

Their prosaic names – the First through the Sixth Committee – tell you nothing about what actually goes on when they meet.

But, by taking on matters from disarmament to decolonization; from economic growth to humanitarian aid, these committees work away each week, far from the limelight, translating the policies unveiled by political leaders and senior UN officials into action to be implemented in the real world.

In this feature series over the next few weeks, *UN News* will be giving you an informative glimpse inside the day-to-day the world of the General Assembly's main committees.

## **What do these committees do?**

Because of the sheer volume of work to get through, the bulk of the General Assembly's efforts get channelled into the Main Committees.

Here, the issues are discussed, a common response formulated – by vote, if necessary – and recommendations are then sent back to the Assembly Plenary of all 193 Member States, for its consideration.

Some agenda items such as the question of Palestine are only discussed in the General Assembly Plenary.

There are six Main Committees of the General Assembly:

- [First Committee](#) – Agenda items related to disarmament and international security
- [Second Committee](#) – Economic and financial matters
- [Third Committee](#) – Social, humanitarian, human rights and cultural agenda items
- [Fourth Committee](#) Also known as the "Special Political and Decolonization

Committee”, deals with political subjects not covered under the First Committee

- [Fifth Committee](#) – UN administration and...the budget
- [Sixth Committee](#) – Matters relating to international law

Each Committee is a [Committee of the Whole](#), consisting of all 193 Members of the General Assembly. Each member of the Committee has one vote.

According to the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure, decisions of committees are made by a majority of the members present and voting. Committee members may also come to decisions by consensus.



UN Photo/Loey Felipe

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, chairs the General Assembly meeting to appoint members of the Credentials Committee.

Alongside the Main Committees, the General Assembly also includes the nine-member Credentials Committee, which handles the official credentialing of Member States’ representatives; the General Committee, which oversees the Assembly’s progress overall; and a number of other subsidiary bodies. These subsidiary entities may not be made up of all UN Member States.

### **Who does what – committee officials**

The bureau of each Main Committee consists of a Chair, three Vice-Chairs, and a Rapporteur – who produces the official Committee report. They may be elected on the day of the election of the President of the General Assembly, or at the first formal meeting of the Committee.

According to the Assembly’s Rules of Procedure, no Member State can serve

both as Vice-President and Chair of a Main Committee during the same session. Furthermore, the Chair of a Main Committee cannot cast a vote, but another member of their delegation may vote in their place.

The Main Committee Chairs are also members of the General Committee, which is chaired by the President of the General Assembly.



UN Photo/Kim Haughton

Conference officers hold up empty ballot boxes before delegates cast their votes in the General Assembly's meeting of its six Main Committees to elect members of their respective bureaux.

### **Many kinds of meeting (a UN speciality)**

The Committees, as with its parent General Assembly, hold formal or informal meetings.

The formal meetings can consider only those items on a particular Committee's agenda. Furthermore, decisions – in the form of a draft resolution or decision – for the Plenary's consideration, can only be taken at a formal meeting.

An informal meeting can be held for a variety of reasons. Such meetings may include briefings by Secretariat officials or technical experts, interactions with civil society, consultations or negotiations. No Committee decisions can be taken in informal meetings. Informal meetings also generally do not have translation services, which are, obviously, a vital part of reaching agreement.

In addition to formal and informal, meetings can be open or closed.

Open meetings, as the name suggests, are open to all Member States and Observers, UN entities, civil society, media and the general public (security needs and seating availability, may limit the space open to curious

bystanders). These meetings may be broadcast, covered by the media, and meeting records published.

On the other hand, different levels of restrictions apply to closed meetings. Generally, only Member States, Observers or invited participants may attend these meetings. On any given day, the Journal of the UN indicates which meetings are open and which are closed. However, a decision to close an open meeting can be taken during the meeting.

**In the weeks ahead, we'll take you inside each committee, to see how day-to-day diplomacy really works on your behalf, inside the busy maze of UN Headquarters.**

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## **UN chief 'deeply troubled' by Saudi confirmation of Jamal Khashoggi's death**

In a [statement](#) released on Friday, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said that he is “deeply troubled” by the reported confirmation of the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

A tweet posted by the Saudi Foreign Ministry on Friday states that the missing Saudi journalist, a columnist with the Washington Post newspaper, was killed, claims reportedly echoed on Saudi State TV.

The tweet says that “discussions that took place with the citizen Jamal Khashoggi during his presence in the Consulate of the Kingdom in Istanbul...did not go as required and escalated negatively which led to a fight...which aggregated the situation and led to his death.”

The Secretary-General extended his condolences to Mr. Khashoggi's family and friends and stressed the need for a prompt, thorough and transparent investigation into the circumstances of Mr. Khashoggi's death and full accountability for those responsible.

Mr. Guterres's comments are the latest in a chorus of concern and condemnation over Mr. Khashoggi's disappearance from UN officials and independent UN human rights experts.

Over the last few days, statements regarding the Khashoggi disappearance have been released by the offices of UN human rights chief [Michelle Bachelet](#), the Chair of the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances, [Bernard Duhaime](#), and the Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, [Dante Pesce](#).



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## Children separated at border, suffering alarming and prolonged effects: UN rights experts

Separating children from their undocumented parents is a traumatic violation of their rights, UN independent experts said on Friday.

The group of experts said in a statement that the treatment of migrants as criminals, provokes intolerance and xenophobia, in addition to posing a danger to their well-being.

Criminalizing irregular migrants and addressing irregular migration through harsh border control measures “is disproportionate to migration governance, contributes to rising intolerance and xenophobia, and the social exclusion of migrants,” said Chair of the Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers ([CMW](#)), Ahmadou Tall.

Ms. Renate Winter, who chairs the Committee of the Rights of the Child ([CRC](#)), elaborated on the repercussions for children who are separated from their parents, explaining there are “long-lasting effects” on their health.

She emphasized that for migrants, trauma and stress often begin in their countries of origin, and this is further exacerbated when governments inhumanely separate families.

Children are left vulnerable without their parents, risking exposure to gender-based violence and leaving young girls to fall prey to serious human rights violations, said Ms. Dalia Leinarte, Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)).

The experts called on UN [Member States](#) to fulfill the human rights of all persons, regardless of immigration status, expressing concern for those in detention who sometimes face violence, overcrowding, poor sanitary facilities and inadequate mental and physical care.

Ms. Winters added that the treatment of children should be based first and foremost on their identity, regardless of migration status or nationality.

States should fully cooperate to address the root causes of irregular migration, and work to make accessible, safe migration paths more available, the experts said.

They concluded that with the coming into force of the [Global Compact on Migration](#), which seeks to investigate and address migration concerns, States will benefit from hearing the voices of migrants themselves to ensure their

full respect and protection.

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## [UN rights experts stand with businesses protesting Saudi journalist's disappearance](#)

Independent UN human rights experts are praising business leaders who have decided to pull out of a high-level investment conference taking place next week in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, over concern for the fate of dissident Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi.

In a statement issued on Friday by the UN human rights office (OHCHR), Chair of the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, Dante Pesce, said the decision by corporations and top executives to withdraw “underlines how companies can use their leverage to address human rights concerns.”

Among those who have reportedly pulled out, are the HSBC banking group, ride-share giant Uber, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Around 30 delegates and firms are said to have withdrawn from the event.

The US Treasury Secretary, and UK International Trade Secretary, have also said they will not be going, though many business sponsors and other companies are still scheduled to attend.

“Business leaders need to take a strong interest in keeping civic space open wherever they operate,” said Mr. Pesce. “It is only in an environment where journalists and human rights defenders are able to speak freely that businesses can effectively identify and prevent negative human rights impacts.”

Mr. Khashoggi was last seen on 2 October, entering the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul, and there is no evidence that he ever left the building.

Other UN rights experts demanded a probe into Mr. Khashoggi's case earlier this week, and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has [pressed](#) the Saudi Arabian and Turkish governments to ensure that a prompt, thorough, effective, impartial and transparent investigation takes place.

UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) has repeatedly demanded that the truth be established, and his Spokesperson told reporters on Thursday that the Saudi and Turkish joint investigation needed to play out, before any UN-led international investigation could take place, “if all the parties involved request it, or if there's a legislative mandate from a UN body.”

The Working Group on Business and Human Rights presented a [report](#) to the UN General Assembly earlier this week, which highlighted practical steps businesses need to take to avoid eroding human rights. These principles are echoed in this year's [United Nations Forum on Business and Human Rights](#), and the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).

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## [Mali: UN Peacekeeping chief 'extremely concerned' over insecurity, regrets peace deal delays](#)

After commending the “overall peaceful” climate in which the Malian elections were held in July, the United Nations peacekeeping chief said on Friday that he is “extremely concerned” over the increasing number of attacks by armed insurgents, against a backdrop of continued delays in implementing the 2015 peace agreement.

Briefing the Security Council, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, noted recent positive developments, including the successful presidential vote, which highlighted the “political maturity of the Malian people as well as the commitment of the political leaders to the democratic process”.

He regretted however the continued delays in getting interim authorities up and running, advancing the National Reconciliation Charter, implementing key institutional reforms – such as changes in the security sector or the constitution – and moving ahead with the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process.

Conflict in northern Mali started in 2012, but the security situation remains volatile with an increased number of incidents in 2018, in particular in the central parts of the country. On Thursday again, five peacekeepers from Chad were injured during attacks, and MINUSMA has for many months now, been the most dangerous place in the world to serve as a ‘blue helmet’.

“I want to share with the Security Council that I am extremely concerned with the security situation,” said Mr. Lacroix, noting that July, August and September were the [deadliest months](#) since the peacekeeping operation, [MINUSMA](#), was established in 2013. Close to 300 civilians died in targeted attacks.

In addition to limiting humanitarian access, violence has also worsened the living conditions of millions of women, children and men. According to the [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#), about 5.2 million people – one in four Malians – are now estimated to be in dire need of

assistance.

As the country prepares for parliamentary elections, Mr. Lacroix said this will be “a new test” to measure the “cohesion of political leaders and Malian society and an important step for the consolidation of democratic institutions.”

“I call on the Government and the opposition to engage in constructive political dialogue, based on inclusivity, keeping in mind the national interest,” he said, adding that he hopes these upcoming elections will provide an occasion to “build a more representative parliament by promoting candidacies of young people and women”.

He commended the composition of the new administration which, in line with Malian law, is composed of 30 per cent women.