



UN Monitor: COVID-19 Round-Up on UN General Assembly High-level Meetings – 04/09/2020

The 75th session of the UN General Assembly (GA) will open on 15 September and its first weeks will see a number of high-level meetings: the first annual “SDG Moment” launching the Decade of Action, the High-level meeting to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the UN, the Biodiversity Summit, the High-level meeting on the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +25) and the High-level meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

The timetable and modalities have been adapted in light of COVID-19 restrictions and are outlined below.

On 22 July, the GA agreed on several measures to adapt to the reality of COVID-19 at its September High-level meetings. The enabling resolution, [A/74/L.75](#), was adopted under silence procedure in order to outline the new format of a mainly virtual GA as well as amend the dates of meetings in order to limit the number of individuals physically present in the UN Headquarters building in New York City.

Modalities

Member States have committed to keeping the modality of the High-level meetings “essentially” the same but with necessary changes to adapt to these “exceptional times”. These changes include a limit of one in-person representative per delegation allowed in the building, a written compilation of all statements to be released following each High-level meeting along with video recordings of each meeting. The resolution notes that meetings will be held with simultaneous interpretation and a speakers’ list will be determined prior to each session.

Perhaps the biggest departure from years prior will be the acceptance of pre-recorded videos for the general debate portion of each of the High-level sessions. Each pre-recorded video will have a time limit of 15 minutes after being introduced by the designated representative physically present in the GA Hall. In an [explanation of vote](#), El Salvador noted that designated representatives “are to be understood as Permanent Representatives or designated officials of Permanent Missions based in New York”. The President of the GA is encouraging video statements be made by Head of State, Vice-President, Crown Prince or Princess, Head of Government, Minister or Vice-Minister.

The resolution specifies that this decision is taken “without setting a precedent for future general debates and mandated High-level meetings planned for future High-level weeks”. As such, it is likely that in-person modalities are expected to return when the global health situation and the health infrastructure of the host country improve.

The President of the GA [made a further clarification](#) that for the entirety of each meeting, “the level of representation will be determined by that of the pre-recorded statement”. In this case, priority on the speakers’ list (apart from the general debate) will be given based on the level of representation in the video message.

Meetings

The closing of the 74th Session and opening of the 75th Session of the GA will take place on [15 September](#). Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria will complete his term as President of the 74th session and Volkan Bozkir of Turkey is the incoming President for the 75th session.

SDG Moment

The [first annual SDG Moment](#) will take place on Friday, 18 September as 2020 marks the first year in the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs. It will feature a three-hour meeting at which “the vast majority of the contributions from Heads of State and stakeholders will be made virtually”. 20 speakers will be selected, based on gender and geographic parity considerations, giving priority to countries that have presented multiple Voluntary National Reviews and demonstrate active plans and actions intended to be taken over the course of the Decade of Action.

The UN has also announced three other initiatives as part of the SDG Moment:

“First, a global broadcast event will bring the essence of the SDG Moment to the widest possible global audience.

Second, the UN development system together with partners will hold national and regional dialogues to bring the Decade of Action closer to local decision-makers and communities.

And third, a virtual, interactive SDG action zone during High-level week will provide dedicated space for a full range of stakeholders to delve deeper into what is needed to deliver the Goals by 2030.”

High-level Meetings

The first of the High-level meetings to take place on 21 September will be the High-level meeting to commemorate the UN 75th anniversary at which Member States will formally adopt

a Political Declaration. The meeting will also hold a general debate on the theme “The Future We Want, the UN We Need: Reaffirming our Collective Commitment to Multilateralism”. On the following day (22 September) the General Debate will commence. Unlike the opening of the General Debate and the adoption of the Political Declaration, the following meetings have been rescheduled to comply with COVID-19 building restrictions.

The [Biodiversity Summit](#) will be held on Wednesday, 30 September under the theme: “Urgent Action on Biodiversity for Sustainable Development”. As per [A/74/L.75](#), statements for the plenary session and leaders dialogues will be pre-recorded. This meeting was originally scheduled 22-23 September but was changed due to COVID-19. The event will consist of an opening session, plenary, two leaders’ conversations, and a closing session.

The [High-level meeting of the GA on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women](#) (Beijing +25) will be held on Thursday, 1 October. Permanent Representative of New Zealand, Craig John Hawke, and Permanent Representative of Qatar, Sheikha Alya Ahmed Saif Al-Thani, were appointed to hold consultations on the organizational matters of this meeting. The theme will be: “Accelerating the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls”. The virtual and pre-recorded video statement modality will also apply to this meeting. [Additional details have been released](#) on the opening, plenary, and closing segments including a list of speakers and thematic discussion questions.

The High-level meeting to commemorate and promote the [International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons](#) will take place on Friday, 2 October in a “primarily virtual format” with pre-recorded statements. The agenda will include an opening session with statements from the President of the GA and the UN Secretary-General, followed by two sessions of general debate.