General Assembly Begins First Special Session Since 2016 to Discuss COVID-19 Pandemic Chairs of Six Main Committees for Upcoming Seventy-Fifth Session Also Elected

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UN Press Release

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The General Assembly on 10 July opened its thirty-first special session on the COVID-19 pandemic, the first special session convened in four years, with a general debate envisioned and questions remaining about the format and modalities for holding formal meetings on a virtual platform.

The Assembly has held 30 special sessions between 1947 and 2016, the first on the question of Palestine and the last on the global drug problem.

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the Assembly holds special sessions “as occasion may require”, convoked by the Secretary-General at the request of the Security Council or a majority of United Nations members.  Assembly President Tijjani Muhammad Bande (Nigeria) is presiding over the thirty-first special session, with the vice-presidents and presidents of its commissions to be elected.

In two related decisions taken under its silence procedure, the Assembly decided that, in accordance with rule 28 of the rules of procedure, the Credentials Committee of the thirty-first special session should have the same membership as that of the Assembly’s seventy-fourth regular session, namely:  Barbados, Botswana, China, Mauritius, Nepal, Russian Federation, San Marino, United States and Uruguay.

In its second decision, the Assembly took note of a 1 July letter from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly (document [A/S-31-2](https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N20/170/23/pdf/N2017023.pdf?OpenElement)), stating that Comoros, Sao Tome and Principe, Somalia and Venezuela are in arrears under Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations.

[Under Article 19, a member of the United Nations in arrears in the payment of its financial contributions to the Organization shall have no vote in the General Assembly if the amount of its arrears equals or exceeds the amount of the contributions due from it for the preceding two full years. The General Assembly may, nevertheless, permit such a Member to vote if it is satisfied that the failure to pay is due to conditions beyond its control.]

In other business, on 12 June, the Assembly elected the Chairs of its six Main Committees for its seventy-fifth session:  Agustín Santos Maraver (Spain), First Committee (Disarmament and International Security); Amrit Bahadur Rai (Nepal), Second Committee (Economic and Financial); Katalin Annamária Bogyay (Hungary), Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian, Cultural); Collen Vixen Kelapile (Botswana), Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization); Carlos Amorín (Uruguay), Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary); and Milenko Esteban Skoknic Tapia (Chile), Sixth Committee (Legal).

Under decision 74/544, “Procedure for taking decisions of the General Assembly during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic”, adopted on 27 March, the Assembly President is authorized to circulate, after consultation with the General Committee, its draft decisions to all Member States under a silence procedure of at least 72 hours.  If the silence is not broken, the decision should be considered adopted.  On 15 May, through decision 74/555 (document [A/74/L.65](https://undocs.org/A/74/L.65)), the silence procedure was extended until the end of June.  On 18 June, the procedure was extended again until 31 July (document [A/74/L.72](https://undocs.org/A/74/L.72)).  (See also Press Releases [GA/12244](https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12244.doc.htm) of 14 May, [GA/12245](https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12245.doc.htm) of 20 May and [GA/12251](https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12251.doc.htm) of 18 June.)

The final version of decisions adopted during the resumed part of the General Assembly’s seventy-fourth session will be contained in the organ’s official record (document A/74/49 (Vol. III)) after editorial review.