



The Arria Formula

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The Arria Formula is an informal arrangement that allows the Council greater flexibility to be briefed about international peace and security issues. It has been used frequently and assumed growing importance since it was first implemented in March, 1992.

The Arria Formula assumed special importance because under long standing Council practice, only delegations, high government officials (of Council members) and United Nations officials could speak at regular Council meetings and consultations. The Arria Formula enables a member of the Council to invite other Council members to an informal meeting, held outside of the Council chambers (traditionally in posh Conference Room 7), and chaired by the inviting member. The meeting is called for the purpose of a briefing given by one or more persons, considered as expert in a matter of concern to the Council.

The formula is named for Amb. Diego Arria of Venezuela who devised it. In 1992, during the crisis in former Yugoslavia, a Bosnian priest came to New York and asked to meet with various Council members individually. Only Ambassador Arria agreed to meet him. Ambassador Arria was so impressed with the priest's story that he felt all Council members should hear it too. Obviously, it was impossible to get the Council to agree to hear this testimony in its official sessions. So Arria simply invited Council members to gather over coffee in the Delegates' Lounge. Many attended, the meeting was a great success and the Arria Formula was born.

Today, Arria Formula meetings take place virtually every month, sometimes more than once. Attendance is typically at a very high level -- the permanent representative or deputy. Only rarely do individual members fail to attend. The meetings are announced by the Council president at the beginning of each month or whenever organized, as part of the regular Council schedule. And the meetings are provided with full interpretation by the Secretariat. No Council meetings or consultations are ever scheduled at a time when the Arria Formula

meetings take place. So the Arria system is an interesting mixture of informality and formality. It allows the Council to sidestep its hide bound Rules of Procedure and open itself in a very limited way to the outside world.

Most UN member states support the Arria Formula and see it as a positive development. In fact, the "Razali Proposal" for Security Council reform, developed by General Assembly President Razali Ismail and made public on 20 March 1997, proposed "greater use" of the formula "to facilitate consultations between members and non-members of the Council." The formula has also been supported in various speeches in the General Assembly.

Beginning in 1996, some elected members of the Council sought to broaden the use of the Arria Formula, to include NGOs and other non-state representatives. Unfortunately, some delegations, notably the UK and Russia, insisted on continued restricted use. No permanent member supported change. They preferred to use the Formula to hear only the points of view of heads of state and other officials. They opposed briefings to hear NGOs and other non-official voices. Elected members argued that such voices are precisely the reason the Arria Formula was invented, since officials can address the Council at its formal meetings.

The first clash over the Arria Formula came in the fall of 1996, when Ambassador Juan Somavía of Chile sought to organize a meeting for Council members with several humanitarian NGOs. When resistance developed over the use of the Arria Formula, Somavía negotiated another formula for such a meeting, which came to be known as the Somavía Formula. The Somavía Formula included members of the ECOSOC bureau and the bureaus of the General Assembly Second and Third Committees and it was chaired by the head of the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs. It was put into practice on February 12, 1997, when three humanitarian NGOs -- Oxfam, Doctors without Borders, and CARE -- briefed the Council. But this formula was not been used again, largely because delegations not on the three bureaus objected to being excluded. Instead, interest returned to reviving the Arria Formula.

In August and September of 1997, a dispute arose in the Council over a proposal by Portugal to invite Amnesty International Secretary General Pierre Sané to give an Arria briefing. As a result of pressure by Permanent Members, Portuguese Ambassador Antonio Monteiro of Portugal arranged a "modified" version of the Arria formula. The meeting with Sané, finally held on September 15, was called an "ad hoc" event, since some delegations refused to agree to it being accorded Arria status. About the same time, according to reliable reports, the Secretariat list of past Arria briefings was deleted from the UN computer -- presumably at the insistence of powerful delegation(s)!

Because the previous agreements about Arria briefings had been reached in Consultations and in any case were informal, there was no official record as to what Arria briefings were supposed to be and what their rules. Behind closed doors, the Council began discussing the issue, at times somewhat acrimoniously. Portugal, in an effort to boost the broad interpretation of Arria briefings, organized an Arria Formula briefing with Arria himself in mid-October. This allowed for a full discussion of the issue. The [liberals' interpretation](#) was put forward forcefully, supported by Arria himself. They argued in part that heads of state and other officials could and should be heard by the Council in its regular sessions, as provided for in the Charter, while Arria Formula meetings should be used for a broad range of different voices. But the meeting did not resolve the issue. After the meeting with Sané there were no further briefings by NGOs and unofficial voices for well over two years.

Finally, as the Council began to adopt more open procedures and more flexible meeting arrangements in the fall of 1999, the possibility of arranging an NGO briefing under the Arria formula arose again. Sentiment had shifted among Permanent Members, notably in the UK delegation, where a new ambassador and new government were considerably more favorable to consultations with NGOs. On April 12, 2000, the Council held its first regular Arria Formula briefing in several years with NGO leaders, once again with leading humanitarian NGOs. During the year, the Council held two additional briefings with NGOs and it would seem that the way is open for regular use of the formula for this purpose.

The Arria Formula evolved in yet another important way in 2000. For the first time ever, the Council permitted other member states to attend Arria Formula meetings. This arrangement did not permit other members states to speak, but it gave them important access to information. They could attend the briefings on condition that they wrote to the President of the Council asking for permission to attend.

Some feel that the Council should be able to invite all parties to provide briefings in its regular sessions. In the future, this may become possible. In the meanwhile, the Arria Formula has provided a very valuable and flexible instrument for the Council to obtain information and to hold dialogues with important parties in the international community.