Increasing the Transparency and Accountability of the Security Council
An NGO Briefing Paper

Prepared by Global Policy Forum & the World Federalist Movement
For a meeting between NGOs and Delegations
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Though the Security Council is the United Nations' most powerful body, it functions largely behind closed doors and with very little accountability to the organization's general membership or to the larger public. For four years, there has been an intense debate within the UN about how to increase the openness and accountability of the Council. NGOs have increasingly been drawn into this debate, as they have recognized the importance of the Council in their own work.

The meeting on November 25 will focus on the immediate issue of GA-Council relations and dialogue, rather than reform issues like the veto, whether or not there should be more Permanent Members, etc. The issues under discussion fall more into "Cluster II" of the reform discussions - that is, procedures, working methods and relations with member states. NGOs have an interest in this, because more openness to the General Assembly means more openness to NGOs and to the general public.

Annual Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly

The Security Council submits a report annually to the General Assembly, usually in late October. The General Assembly then considers the report in a plenary debate in early November. Though the submission of the "Report of the Security council to the General Assembly" provides an important occasion to review the Council's work and to consider the issues of openness and accountability of the Security Council, currently the report is not very substantive and the General
Assembly has traditionally only "taken note" of the report, as opposed to more substantive actions. Many member states now see this process as problematic.

The General Assembly will consider the Report \textit{[Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly covering the period 16 June 1995 to 15 June 1996 (A/51/2)]} on Tuesday, 26 November. The 25 November meeting between NGOs and governments offers an opportunity for NGO input on these issues.

In 1994 and 1995, close to thirty governments made statements during the consideration in the General Assembly plenary. Most speeches criticized the Report for offering very little information to inform the GA and promote dialogue between the two bodies. Many speakers called for an improved report and they made suggestions for new procedures, such as more open meetings of the Council (as opposed to closed consultations), more general orientation debates of the Council (in which a new subject is being considered and non-members are invited to participate), better information and openness on sanctions, and more consultation with the General Assembly.

Over the last few years, some non-permanent members of the Council have apparently proposed different approaches to the reporting process. Some ideas included proposals that the Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly contain more substantive information on views put forward and trends in informal consultations of the Council, actions proposed or adopted by the Council, oral statements and briefings, meetings held with troop contributors to peace-keeping operations, and informal meetings of the subsidiary organs of the Council, such as sanctions committees. Some proposals also called for the Council to prepare special reports under special circumstances, such as when the Security Council establishes a peace-keeping operation or changes the mandate of an existing operation, authorizes a State or group of states to undertake a military operation on its behalf, decides to impose sanctions, or is unable to discharge its responsibilities in maintaining international peace and security (particularly when it is due to a veto by a Permanent Member).

Applying some of these proposals were endorsed in 1996 by the 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council but was met with resistance by some Permanent Members. However, the issue remains on the table, and a great majority of member states support changes of this type.
NGOs have raised parallel questions regarding the transparency of the work of the Security Council. NGOs have increasingly affirmed their compelling interest in the Council and its decision-making process. The Council's work directly affects core programs of a large number of NGOs. NGOs have important expertise and experience that relates to the Council and its work. And both the UN and member states are increasingly turning to NGOs as partners and service contractors, in emergency and post-emergency situations under the Council's authority.

The NGO Working Group on the Security Council has organized meetings and consultations over the past two years that discussed these and other issues. A short time ago, a group of humanitarian NGOs met with a group of Council members informally at the Chile Mission. Recently, humanitarian NGOs directly and publicly addressed the Council. On November 12, a group of 18 major NGOs expressed their dismay at the lack of adequate response by the Council to the humanitarian emergency in the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

NGOs were particularly alarmed this year regarding the secrecy of the reporting procedures of the Security Council in relation to the escalating conflict and humanitarian emergency in East Africa. Many humanitarian organizations have criticized the Security Council for the secrecy and evasiveness in its deliberations on a response to the current crisis in Zaire. In early November, many member states and NGOs were outraged to learn of an unpublished Security Council report dated 28 October (the Third Report of the International Commission of Inquiry of Rwanda) concerning arms flows to former Rwandese government forces based in neighboring countries, particularly Zaire, Tanzania, and Kenya, in violation of an international arms embargo. On November 12, Human Rights Watch issued a statement calling on the Security Council to release the report, which it stated "illustrates how members of the international community enlarged the conflict in Central Africa by supplying arms to, and failing to impede the rearming of, perpetrators of the 1994 genocide", and contains several important recommendations; the organization charged, "Suppressing this essential report on the role of the arms trafficking in Central Africa at exactly the moment when the region is going up in flames suggest that the Security Council is less interested in promoting international security than in covering its own failures." Other human rights organizations have also issued similar criticisms. These initiatives have drawn attention to the secrecy of the Council's deliberations and the negative effect this secrecy may have in urgent humanitarian crises.
25 November Informal Meeting between Delegations and NGOs

The NGO meeting on November 25th will allow NGOs to express concerns to delegations, and provide an important opportunity to explore ways that NGOs and delegates can work together to press for more Council openness, particularly in the current context of the upcoming consideration of the Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly in the General Assembly Plenary.

Some proposals that NGOs have discussed include:

Proposals on the Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly

- A new format and content of the Report of the Security Council to the General Assembly that would discuss the issues, the problems and the orienting thinking of the Council, as well as including information on informal consultations, briefings, and statement made in the Council and its subsidiary organs.

- A better framework for the debate in the General Assembly plenary considering the Report, including means whereby the General Assembly is allowed to pose questions to the Council, and the Council is required to answer as an institution.

- A formal or informal means for NGOs to comment on the Report.

Other means to improve transparency and relationships with the Security Council

- Requiring the Council to issue special reports on deliberations when it takes important actions, such as establishing a new peacekeeping mission or changes the mandate or term of an existing one, authorizes a State or group of States to undertake a military operation on its behalf, impose sanctions, or is unable to discharge its duties maintaining international peace and security because of lack of unanimity among the Permanent Members.

- A formal and informal means for NGOs to have input on issues currently before the Council. NGOs might propose occasional briefings by the Council President, informal NGO consultations with groups of Council members, and (eventually perhaps) a more formal consultation process within a Council subsidiary body.
• A shift in Council meetings - towards fewer (closed) consultations of the whole and more (open) formal meetings, including more frequent general orienting debates.

• Improved means for the Council to keep the public informed about the rationale for Council actions, including the setting up of a "spokesman" and a World Wide Web information site that would provide the status of new peacekeeping operations, the imposing and lifting of sanctions, and the response (or non-response) to specific emergencies.

NGOs must press vigorously for improvements in the transparency, accountability, and relationships of the Security Council. So far, the member states of the UN have made little progress. NGOs can bring a new and alternative voice. But we will have to put forward some clear proposals and convincing rationales. And we will have to build a strong and broad NGO network to press our ideas.