

[Editor's Note: This article appeared on the netizenblog on Jan. 29, 2017.]

Channel for Individuals or NGO's to Send Communication to the UN Security Council

by Ronda Hauben

Since the early days of the UN Security Council, there has been a procedure for private individuals and non-governmental organizations to be able to send communications to the Security Council on matters of which it is seized.¹ The procedure has been referred to by its library classification symbol which is S/NC.

I first came across this procedure when an NGO in South Korea had been accused of being unpatriotic to the South Korean government because that NGO (and others as well) sent a critique to the Security Council about something the South Korean government was presenting to the Security Council.²

It seemed particularly inappropriate for the South Korean government to accuse an NGO of disloyalty because of a letter sent to members of the Security Council as there is a long tradition from 1946 to the present for private individuals or NGO's to write to the Security Council. Security Council documents show that there are lists of probably thousands of such communications.

In doing some research at the UN into the background of this procedure of the UN I came to realize that in the early days of the Security Council, lists of such communications were issued by the Secretariat on a frequent basis. The procedure is described in the Appendix of the Provisional Rules of Procedure of the Security Council. It states:

Provisional Procedure for Dealing with Communications from Private Individuals and Non-Governmental Bodies

A. A list of all communications from private individuals and non-governmental bodies relating to matters of which the Security Council is seized shall be circulated to all representatives on the Security Council.

B. A copy of any communication on the list shall be given by the Secretariat to any representative on the Security Council at his request.

The lists published by the UN Secretariat of the communications received by the Security Council from individuals or non-governmental entities included the name and organization of the sender, the date of the communication, the city or town and country of the sender, and originally whether the communication was a telegram, letter, petition etc. The communications were grouped by the Security Council agenda item that the communication referred to.

If a Security Council member saw some communication on a list that was of interest, the Security Council member could request a copy of the communication from the Secretariat.

From 1946 and for several years afterwards, lists were issued on a frequent basis. By the mid 1990's the lists would be issued on a quarterly basis by the UN Secretariat. Then for some reason not yet understood, starting from the 2000 list, lists by the Secretariat would only be issued once a year, around April.

Along with the less frequent issuing of the lists of communications sent to the Security Council, there appears to be no publicly available information indicating how or where an individual or non-governmental entity can send a communication to the Security Council.

Recently when asking some Security Council members if they were aware of this procedure, only one indicated he remembered seeing some correspondence from individuals or NGO's sent to the Security Council. Others appeared to have no knowledge of this process. While this brief survey was only based on a small sample, it demonstrated a breakdown in one of the few publicly available channels of communication between members of the public and members of the Security Council.

In 2010 some NGO's and some academics who were scientists attempted to send communication to the Security Council about a matter being considered by the Security Council. They sent email to all the member states then on the Security Council. None of these communications, however, appeared on the annual S/NC list published by the UN Secretariat for 2010.

More recently, during the press conference marking the beginning of the Russian Federation's Presidency of the Security Council for the month of October 2016, Ambassador Vitaly Churkin responded to a question raised by a journalist. He said that he would support, "the greater involvement of women" in line with Security Council Resolution 1325 to help address the high level of tension on the Korean Peninsula.

In response to his statement, Christine Ahn, the International Coordinator for the NGO "Women Cross DMZ" wrote to the Security Council asking that several recommendations the group proposed be raised at the Security Council Debate on Resolution 1325 planned for October 25, 2016.

When she tried to find where to send her letter to have it considered as a communication to the Security Council, however, there was no clear information publicly available about where an individual or NGO should send their communication. A press inquiry demonstrated that such information was not easy to locate.

Similarly, a press inquiry to some Security Council members yielded little help with how to find such information. It was only a month later, at the press conference held by the Spanish Ambassador on the occasion of assuming the Presidency of the Security Council for the month of December 2016, that there was an offer of help to find the answer to the mystery.

Ambassador Román Oyarzun Marchesi, the Spanish Ambassador to the UN, welcomed the question on how to send communication to the Security Council saying that his delegation "really believed in the participation of civil society." He promised that if information was sent to him documenting the problem, "I'll do my best . . . I'll see what I can do."³

An inquiry by his press secretary led to a response from the Secretariat. The email from the Office of the President of the Security Council in the UN Department of Political Affairs in the Secretariat stated that if an email or surface mail on a topic being considered by the Security Council is sent to the email address given in the UN Journal for communications for UN member nations to send their communication to the Security Council, or to the postal address provided, it will usually be informally circulated by the Security Council President via their "political coordinators' network."

If the document "falls under one of the agenda items seized by the Security Council, it gets listed and published as a Security Council document under S/NC [year]/1." Then it will appear on the list that is published for that year by the Secretariat.⁴

Looking at the earliest S/NC lists, one is impressed by the fact that there are communications from individuals and groups around the world. For example some of the earliest lists present communication received "Concerning Franco Regime in Spain."

Looking at the names of those who are listed as sending communication to the UN Security Council from 1946 to the present, one gets a sense of the UN existing in bigger world in a way that is different from what is conveyed when one just watches the workings of, for example, the Security Council. It would appear that more serious attention should be paid to making the address for sending communication to the Security Council publicly available.

Also more frequent publication of the lists would make it possible for Security Council members to make timely requests for copies of the communications that interested them. That could help broaden the perspectives of Security Council members to enable them to be better able to find peaceful ways to resolve difficult conflicts.

Notes:

1. The term “seized” as used at the UN indicates, “that, while the Security Council is seized of a matter, no other organ of the United Nations may legally take it up, as under Article 12 of the UN Charter.” See:

https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/be_seized_of.

2. Ronda Hauben, “S. Korean Gov’t Urged to End Criminal Investigation of NGO for Questions on Cheonan Sent to UN,” *taz.de/netizenblog*, June 26, 2010.

3. Román Oyarzun Marchesi (Spain), President of the Security Council for the month of December 2016 – Press Conference. See “1 Dec 2016 – Press Conference by H.E. Mr. Román Oyarzun Marchesi, Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for the month of December 2016, on the Security Council Programme of work for the month” at: <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1c/k1cgrjce9a>. (watch starting at 23:20.) (No Longer Available.)

4. Communication from private individuals, NGO’s or other entities which relate to the work of the Security Council can be sent to the e-mail address listed in the UN Journal,

dpa-scsb3@un.org or mailed to:

United Nations Security Council

405 East 42nd Street

New York, NY 10017
