

EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSIONS

CLAIRE-MARIE BEYET for the International Rule of Law Initiative

LEGAL BASIS

Pursuant to the Charter of the United Nations, Chapter V, the UNSC holds primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security (Article 24), and its decisions are binding on UN members (Art. 25). The UNGA does not have the same level of authority; it is instead empowered to discuss and make recommendations relating to international peace and security (Arts. 10, 11)..

Following the adoption of Resolution 377 (Uniting for Peace) on 3 November 1950, a new mechanism was introduced to recognize that the UNGA indeed maintains a secondary responsibility for peace and security, complementary to the UNSC's primary jurisdiction. Part A of the resolution states that, "if the Security Council, because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in any case where there appears to be a threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression, the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately". An "emergency special session" of the UNGA may be convened within 24 hours if the body is not sitting.

Sources: <https://www.un.org/en/ga/sessions/emergency.shtml>
<https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/chapter-v/index.html>



TO DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN 10 EMERGENCY SPECIAL SESSIONS:

1st session	Middle East [Convened by the Security Council on 1-10 November 1956]
2nd session	Hungary [Convened by the Security Council on 4-10 November 1956]
3rd session	Middle East [Convened by the Security Council on 8-21 August 1958]
4th session	Question of Congo [Convened by the Security Council on 17-19 September 1960]
5th session	Middle East [Convened by the Security Council on 17-18 June 1967]
6th session	The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security [Convened by the Security Council on 10-14 January 1980]
7th session	Question of Palestine [Convened by Senegal on 22-29 July 1980; 20-28 April 1982; 25-26 June 1982; 16-19 August 1982 and 24 September 1982]
8th session	Question of Namibia [Convened by Zimbabwe on 13-14 September 1981]
9th session	The situation in the occupied Arab territories [Convened by the Security Council on 29 January to 5 February 1982]
10th session	Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (reconvened 17 times)

Source: https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/remergency_table_en.htm

The *Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, A/520/Rev.18*, laid down several rules pertaining to emergency special sessions.

Rule 8(b) – Summoning at the request of the Security Council or Members

Emergency special sessions may be convened by a vote of nine members of the Security Council, or a majority of United Nations Member States. These sessions must be convened within 24 hours of any votes.

Rule 9(b) – Request by Members

Allows any Member State of the United Nations to request the Secretary-General to convene an emergency special session.

Rule 10 – Notification of session

Requires the Secretary-General to notify Member States, at least 12 hours in advance, of the opening of an emergency special session convened pursuant to rule 8(b).

Rule 16 – Agenda

States that the provisional agenda of an emergency special session shall be communicated to Member States simultaneously with the communication convening the session.

Rule 19 – Additional items

During an emergency special session, additional agenda items may be added for consideration by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

Rule 20 – Explanatory memorandum

Requires any item proposed for inclusion in the agenda to be accompanied by an explanatory memorandum.

Source: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/520/Rev.18&Lang=E