



Background

- Background
- XII Summit, Durban
- XIII Ministerial Conference, Cartagena
- XI Summit, Cartagena
- Ministerial Meetings
- Related Documents
- Statements
- Reports
- Resolutions

The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History

The Non-Aligned Movement is a Movement of 115 members representing the interests and priorities of developing countries. The Movement has its origin in the Asia-Africa Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. The meeting was convened upon the invitation of the Prime Ministers of Burma, Ceylon, India, Indonesia and Pakistan and brought together leaders of 29 states, mostly former colonies, from the two continents of Africa and Asia, to discuss common concerns and to develop joint policies in international relations. Prime Minister Nehru, the acknowledged senior statesman, along with Prime Ministers Soekarno and Nasser, led the conference. At the meeting Third World leaders shared their similar problems of resisting the pressures of the major powers, maintaining their independence and opposing colonialism and neo-colonialism, specially western domination.

Following this meeting a preparatory meeting for the First NAM Summit Conference was held in Cairo, from 5-12 June 1961. Where the invitations for Bandung were on a regional basis, the invitations for the first Summit were based on each invited country's commitment to a set of shared principles.

At the Cairo preparatory meeting the participants discussed in detail the principal aims and objectives of a policy of non-alignment. These were adopted as criteria for membership as well as for the invitations to the First Summit Conference.

The criteria are the following:

1. The country should have adopted an independent policy based on the coexistence of States with different political and social systems and on non-alignment or should be showing a trend in favour of such a policy.
2. The country concerned should be consistently supporting the Movements for National Independence.
3. The country should not be a member of a multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts.
4. If a country has a bilateral military agreement with a Great Power, or is a member of a regional defence pact, the agreement or pact should not be one deliberately concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts.
5. If it has conceded military bases to a Foreign Power the concession should not have been made in the context of Great Power conflicts.

The above criteria and principles of NAM, adopted at the Cairo preparatory meeting, have been reaffirmed by the Heads of State or Government during the XI Summit in Cartagena. (Also see Criteria for Admission under Methodology.)

The first Conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State or Government, at which 25 countries were represented, was convened at Belgrade in September 1961, largely through the initiative of Yugoslavian President Tito. At that stage his biggest concern was that an accelerating arms race might result in war between the Soviet Union and the USA.

POLITICAL ISSUES

Since its inception the Movement therefore attempted to create an independent path in world politics that would not result in Member States becoming pawns in the struggles between the major powers. This resulted in a large part of its history being influenced by the global tension of the Cold War between the two super powers. The Movement therefore this issue as a priority item on its agenda and its work. However, the Cold War was not the sole or only critical issue on the agenda of the Non-Aligned Movement. A cursory glance at the history of the Movement reveals three basic elements which influenced the approaches of the Movement to international issues. These are the right of independent judgement, the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism, and the use of moderation in relations with all big powers.

In the present day context the Movement not only remains focussed on the above areas but also works towards the restructuring of the international economic order.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

Because of great power rivalry during the Cold War Era many economic projects were set up in developing countries as part of the rivalry but suffered as a result of the quest for influence. During the years the focus of Non-Aligned Summits therefore shifted away from essentially politically issues, to the advocacy of solutions to global economic and other problems. The Jakarta Summit in 1992 was a turning point in Non-Aligned history since this was the first Summit after the end of the Cold War. It allowed the Movement to shift its focus in a direction that also enabled It to work across to groupings such as the G-7 and the EU. South Africa assumed the position as the Chair at a time when this transitional phase was still ongoing.

ADMINISTRATION

The founders of the Non-Aligned Movement and their successors recognised that the Movement would probably be best served if it operated without a formal constitution and a



permanent secretariat. The practice of a rotating Chair was instead created which at the same time place the onus of an administrative structure on the country assuming the Chair. The Summit Conferences are the occasions when the Movement formally rotates its Chair to the Head of State or Government of the host country of the Summit. The Foreign Ministry and Permanent Mission in New York of the Chair at the same time assume the responsibility of the administrative management of the Movement.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE NAM CHAIR

The Chair is at the same time delegated certain responsibilities for promoting the principles and activities of the Movement. To facilitate the Chairs' responsibilities a number of structures aimed at improving the co-ordination and functioning of the existing mechanisms of the Movement were created. (Also see Cartagena Document under Methodology.) Of these mechanisms the most important is the Co-ordinating Bureau (CoB) at the United Nations in New York, which forms the focal point for co-ordination. Since the Non-Aligned countries meet regularly at the UN and conduct much of their work there, the Chairs' Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York functions as the Chair of the CoB. The Bureau reviews and facilitates the harmonisation of the work of the NAM Working Groups, Contact Groups, Task Forces and Committees.

The Heads of State or Government entrusted the Co-ordinating Bureau with the task of intensifying its action to further strengthen co-ordination and mutual co-operation among Non-Aligned countries, including unified action in the United Nations and other international fora, on issues of common concern.

Another important mechanism is the Troika of past, serving and future Chairs. This concept is operationalised at the discretion of the incumbent Chair and can act as a clearinghouse for solutions of problems and issues confronting developing countries on which the Movement must take a position.

The Methodology of the Movement was reviewed at a Meeting of the Ministerial Committee on Methodology in Cartagena, Colombia in 1996 and the decisions taken there is reflected in the [Cartagena document on Methodology](#).



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