

In Fourth Reform Meeting, Countries Discuss Size and Working Methods of the Security Council

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Member States met on 7 and 8 April to discuss the size and working methods of the Security Council. It was the fourth of five meetings devoted to a number of key issues involved in an overall reform of the Council.

After last week's meeting on regional representation in the Security Council, countries spent two days discussing the size and working methods of the Council. The closed meeting was the fourth of five in a first round of general talks on reform. The round is aimed at allowing states to express their respective perspectives on the issues, rather than reaching definite solutions. A second and more focused round is expected to follow some time in May.

Size

Overall, the first complex issue of size revealed that most countries favor a Council of the size of some 20-30 members. However, opinions differ largely on the categories of seats.

Whereas the Italians and the rest of their allies in the Uniting for Consensus group (mainly Argentina, Mexico, Canada, Malta, Turkey, Spain, and South Korea) only wants to add non-permanent members, the Group of Four (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) seeks to add at least six more permanent and four non-permanent seats to the Council.

The African group apparently wants to add around 10 members, with two permanent and five non-permanent seats allocated to Africa.

UK and France advocate expanding the Council with four non-permanent and some four to six permanent members, including India, Germany, Japan, Brazil as well as countries from Africa. France added that an Arab state should also be considered for a permanent seat.

Reportedly, the rest of the current permanent members of the Council (China, Russia and the US) appeared reluctant to add more than a total of five or six new seats, with China and Russia against the idea of adding more permanent seats.

Jamaica, speaking on behalf of the 14 countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), did not give a specific number, but noted that "In any computation or provision for new seats, strong recognition and careful consideration and support must be given to the African position." The ambassador added that CARICOM is "in favor of dedicated SIDS [small islands developing states] representation," on a reformed Security Council.

A large number of countries only noted that they supported enlargement in both permanent and non-permanent categories, with special attention given to the current under-representation of Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa in the Council, but refrained from giving a specific number.

Working Methods

On the issue of the working methods of the Security Council, many countries reportedly came with concrete suggestions on how to improve the transparency and access to the Council, including adopting set rules of procedure.

Perhaps most vocal among the speakers were the ambassador from Switzerland who was speaking on behalf of a group called the Small Five (S5). The group, which is devoted to reforming how the Council works, consists of Switzerland, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Costa Rica and Singapore. Among other, the Swiss ambassador said that "If the Council expects member states to be real partners in the sharing of this burden, it should be ready to become more transparent, accessible and accountable to nonmembers and further enhance the adherence to standards of rule of law and due process in its decision making." He added that his delegation had already circulated a number of concrete proposals, and hoped that the current members of the Security Council would review these as soon as possible.

Reportedly, several current permanent members of the Security Council noted that it is not for the General Assembly to adopt or decide on how the Council should conduct its internal business.

Notes

Overall, aside from the often very vocal main groups noted above, it is fairly difficult to ascertain the exact number of countries supporting each position. Although the groups often claim to be backed by large numbers of states, many countries in reality only deliver vague statements and remain fairly non-committed. It is thus very difficult to adequately predict the outcome of an eventual vote.

On another note, CARICOM, long a staunch supporter of adding permanent members, apparently also supported adding a new group to the five established regional groups on the current Security Council; Small Island and Developing States. At present, 51 small island developing states and territories are included in the list used by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and the CARICOM statement appears to be somewhat of a hybrid between the G4 and African proposals to add permanent, national seats to the Council and the Uniting for Consensus suggestion to reform the regional groups that currently underpins the structure of the Council, opening up for other organizations to be represented on the Council.

The next meeting on the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council is scheduled for sometime around 20 April 2009.

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