



Countries Welcome Work Plan as Security Council Reform Process Commences New Phase

by Lydia Swart
24 February 2009

At the UN, in a meeting held on Thursday 19 February 2009, Member States approved a work plan outlining the rules of procedures and the structure of the upcoming negotiations on Security Council reform. The approval indicates that the process towards reform can move from discussions on procedure to more substantial negotiations.

Following the first meeting of the intergovernmental negotiations in the informal plenary of the General Assembly on 29 January 2009, the President of the General Assembly, together with the Chairman of the intergovernmental negotiations, Afghan Ambassador Zahir Tanin, announced that they would provide Member States with a work plan, which would include a schedule of meetings as well as provide clarity on the framework and rules of procedures of the upcoming intergovernmental negotiations, in time for the meeting on 19 February.

Since the end of the last General Assembly session in September 2008, the issue of rules of procedure had evolved into a major bone of contention between countries, especially between the Group of Four (G4) and the Uniting for Consensus (UfC), as different rules of procedure could ultimately allow for different outcomes.

Germany, Japan, Brazil and India in the Group of Four (G4), who seek permanent seats for themselves, argued that the rules of procedure of the General Assembly should apply to the intergovernmental negotiations. The G4 has long claimed to have a majority of Member States behind them, and using GA rules of procedure would enable them to put their claim to the test in case their regional rivals stall the process in the informal plenary.

The Uniting for Consensus faction (UfC), with Italy, Pakistan, South Korea, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Turkey, Canada and Malta as its core members, which opposes adding new permanent members on the Council - and especially their regional rivals among the G4 - is generally viewed as constituting a numerical minority in the General Assembly. The group has vocally argued that decision-making in the informal plenary should be based on consensus, with some observers speculating that they are nervous of losing out in the event of a vote. It should be noted, however, that both claims are difficult to verify as many Member States remain undecided on the issue (for a tentative overview of Member States' positions, please see Security Council Reform - An Overview of Member States' Positions, 8 December 2008).

For the GA President and his Chairman, the main challenge at the 19 February meeting was therefore to come up with a compromise plan to enable Member States to start actual negotiations on a commonly agreed basis.

Work Plan is Released and Member States Meet

The much anticipated work plan was released on Wednesday 18 February 2009 by the GA President. According to the work plan, the rules of procedure of the General Assembly will not apply to the informal plenary but "When the time comes to take action, we will move to a formal meeting of the General Assembly, whereupon the rules of procedure of the General Assembly will take effect." According to some insiders, this implies that Member States cannot ask for a vote while the intergovernmental negotiations are ongoing. The plan also outlines a meeting schedule for the upcoming process, with meetings on five key issues - categories of membership, the veto, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council, and working methods, as well as the relationship

between the Council and General Assembly - scheduled to begin on 4 March and running through late April. A second round is scheduled to follow thereafter.

The day after the release of the work plan, on 19 February, Member States convened a closed all-day meeting at the United Nations headquarters to discuss the plan. In his opening statement, Chairman Ambassador Zahir Tanin told Member States that with the work plan "we at long last leave the antechamber of reform and walk into the negotiation room." While praising the day as 'historic,' he said that "The plan is the result of a painstaking and diligent exercise of deduction. From that exercise," he continued "we concluded that this is the work plan that emanates from Decision 62/557. What is more," he noted "the plan [sets] out how to negotiate and when to negotiate."

Following the opening statement, almost 50 countries reportedly took the floor to share their views on the plan:

The G4 immediately expressed their support for the work plan, although especially India and Germany continued to support the idea of calling for a vote if negotiations stall. The G4 countries and many of their supporting countries (Solomon Islands, Czech Republic, South Africa, Armenia, Nigeria, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Romania, Uruguay, Guyana) also asked for a "composite paper" to be compiled by the Chairman before the first meeting in March. Such a paper would include all known positions on the five key issues and would serve as a starting point for negotiations.

The Uniting for Consensus group also expressed their support for the work plan as a basis for further negotiations, and especially with the rules of procedure. Italian Ambassador Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata said in his statement that the work plan represented a "...significant achievement," which would enable "us all to move forward in this process." However, on the idea of a composite paper, the ambassador noted that "...my delegation is very reserved on ideas which have been mentioned, of keeping as the basic reference for negotiations a single proposal or a single scheme, [...] or some equivalent composite paper for the negotiation." These sentiments were supported by Pakistan, Canada, Malta, South Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Spain, Colombia and Indonesia. Turkey, expressing their support for the UfC group, said that the work plan "...represents an important milestone in the long and painstaking process of Security Council reform," but also expressed doubt over the usefulness of a composite paper.

The permanent members of the Security Council also took the floor. While stressing their support for the work plan as well as the candidacies of the G4 countries as well as Africa, the United Kingdom noted that "Today marks the beginning of a new phase." France supported this perspective, adding that they support "together with the United Kingdom, [...] a step-by-step progression towards an interim reform of the Security Council."

Newly appointed US Ambassador, Susan Rice, said in a much anticipated statement that the moment was "important." She further underlined that the United States would not link Security Council reform with other UN reform efforts, such as management reform. The move constitutes a significant break with the policies of the previous administration, and is notable as it could imply more US leadership on the issue of Security Council reform. Ambassador Rice also noted that "we support expansion of the Security Council in a way that will not diminish its effectiveness or its efficiency. And finally" she said, "the United States will take into account the ability of countries to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, and the other purposes of the United Nations." Interestingly, the US did not voice its support for a permanent seat for Japan, as was customary during the Bush administration. Reportedly, Russia and China also spoke.

Senegal, speaking on behalf of the Africa group, reportedly said that the work plan was "interesting" to Africa, but that they reserved judgment until the group had studied the plan further. Lastly, Senegal noted the African group's steadfast insistence on two permanent seats with veto as well as five non-permanent seats for Africa as set out in the Ezulwini-Consensus.

While noting their appreciation of the work plan Switzerland, Jordan, Singapore and Liechtenstein, in the so-called Small Five group (which also includes Costa Rica), spoke consistently for an improvement as well as a reform of the working methods of the Security Council. "In contrast to enlargement" Swiss Ambassador Peter Maurer said, "reform in working methods suggests immediate and meaningful advantages to the wider membership. It must take place on a regular basis and as part of an ongoing process. Such improvements are not subject to a Charter amendment. They have to be pursued independently of progress in the negotiations on enlargement," he said. Finally, the ambassador suggested that an intermediate compromise solution involving the creation of a third category of seats, renewable and for a longer period, could be a way forward.

From Scandinavia, Norway stated their support for the work plan, and said that although they would support an expansion in both categories, "it is also important to guarantee that smaller states have the opportunity to serve as members of the Security Council." They further stressed the importance of improving the working methods of the Council. Iceland also supported the plan and remarked that "voting on an issue of such vital concern to many should only be regarded as an option of last resort."

From the Caribbean, the Ambassador of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines delivered - as one of the only countries - some criticism of the work plan. Although he accepted the work plan as a basis for further negotiations, he called it both confusing and disappointing. "Member States are again reiterating broad principles in general statements that cannot, even by the most generous standards, be considered negotiation." The ambassador suggested that the Chairman submit a composite paper to kickstart negotiations.

The Dutch Ambassador, Frank Majoor, lauded the work plan, while noting that the so-called intermediary model could be a possible and workable compromise solution to break the stalemate. And he remarked that "Improving the Council's working methods remains an important part of this exercise."

In a short closing statement, Chairman Ambassador, Zahir Tanin, said that "I will carefully study the many suggestions brought forward today, including the drafting of a composite paper."

He added: "let's speedily continue with intergovernmental negotiations in good faith, with mutual respect and in an open, inclusive and transparent manner [...] seeking a solution that can garner the widest possible political acceptance by Member States."

After the Meeting

Following the deliberations, Ambassador Tanin explained to reporters gathered outside the conference room ([link to video](#)) that the process was now in a different stage. He added that "all Member States supported the work plan. We have an agreement on how to move forward, which includes when and how to negotiate. This is not," the Chairman underlined "negotiations on negotiations anymore, but the start of negotiations on substance."

And German Ambassador Thomas Matussek said to the Associated Press that he believes prospects for a compromise agreement "are better than they were before because against the backdrop of the international financial and economic crisis everybody talks about global governance."



In general, the broad acceptance of the work plan means that Member States now have agreed on a common basis for the upcoming negotiations. This, some observers note, constitutes an unprecedented and important first step towards further progress.

Countries will meet on 4 March 2009 to discuss the first of the five key issues.

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