

Member States Meet to Discuss Report of the Task Force on Security Council Reform

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Member States met on 17 June 2008, in a closed meeting of the "Open-Ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council," to discuss the report of the Task Force. At the meeting, some 40 countries delivered statements, expressing differing views on the way to move forward. The GA President is expected to present a status report to the GA in mid-July on the work of the Working Group, possibly with a view to beginning intergovernmental negotiations.

The Task Force on Security Council reform was appointed in December 2007 by GA President Sgrjan Kerim to act as focal point for communication with Member States, to help identify elements of the negotiables and with finding a compromise solution to the issue of Security Council reform. It consists of Ambassadors Ismat Jahan of Bangladesh, Heraldo Muñoz of Chile, Roble Olhaye of Djibouti, João M. Guerra Salgueiro of Portugal and GA President Kerim.

The report was a result of extensive consultations with the membership, with the purpose of reaching out to all Member States, through their regional groups, in major interest groups or individually, and to listen to their concerns and recommendations on how to move the negotiations forward at this stage.

The report concludes that none of the written contributions received from Member States currently offer sufficient support as a basis for launching intergovernmental negotiations. Entrenched positions continue to haunt the process, despite expressions of flexibility and a general recognition of the need to compromise.

Overall, the main positions of the different regional groups and major interest groups remain far apart, with the main source of disagreement centering on the category of new seats; while some argue in favor of adding more non-permanent seats to the Council, others support the inclusion of additional permanent members.

As a result, the report suggests a compromise solution called the "timeline perspective."

"...that is, to identify what may be achievable in the short term, during the remaining sixty second session, or during the following one, and what would be left to revisit in a number of years through a mandatory review (in 10,12 or 15 years, for example). [...] That solution would keep avenues open to all preferred options to be reconsidered at an agreed moment in the future."

GA President Sgrjan Kerim Opens Meeting

In his opening remarks, GA President Sgrjan Kerim confirmed that Security Council reform is a joint venture involving all Member States and that the Open-ended Working Group remains the principal body for discussions thereon. Furthermore, Kerim reaffirmed that Council reform is an integral part of overall UN reform. "In this context, I would like to emphasize that we continue to make progress on Management reform, Mandate Review, System-wide Coherence and in other areas."

In addition, Kerim said that "...there is also a growing recognition of the possibility of pursuing an intermediary approach as the highest common denominator option at this stage of the Security

Council reform process.” And he warned against “no reform options” and a looming sense of apathy.

Finally, he stated that if Member States decided to agree on the final report of the Working Group, the necessary preconditions – along with the report of the Task Force and sub-paragraphs (c) and (d) of GA decision 61/561 – would be fulfilled to begin intergovernmental negotiations.

“To this end, by mid July, I intend to present the report of the Open Ended Working Group to Member States including a draft decision to be adopted by the General Assembly.”

Statements Delivered by Member States

Following the remarks of the GA President, some 40 Member States delivered statements, with positions largely falling into the following categories:

First, a group of states, headed by Germany, Brazil and Japan, voiced general concern over the slow pace of the deliberations. Although they supported the timeline approach, overall, the countries felt that the potential of the Working Group was exhausted and that the moment warranted a move away from the Working Group and into intergovernmental negotiations, preferably in a plenary of the General Assembly. In that regard, they noted with appreciation that the President of the General Assembly had taken concrete steps towards intergovernmental negotiations.

Among others, Germany said that “In order to identify the stakeholders’ ‘red lines,’ in order to sound out possible compromises and in order to arrive at a result that will obtain the necessary support by Member States we need to enter into a negotiation process.” And the delegate added that the direct outcome of the Working Group’s meeting should be intergovernmental negotiations as soon as possible and preferably during the summer. “We do have a suitable basis for intergovernmental negotiations: The annex of the Vice-Chairpersons’ report provides very useful material. And you have also received the Cyprus paper...” he said.

The Japanese Ambassador, Yukio Takasu, added that although there is no single list of negotiables, intergovernmental negotiations can take place on the progress achieved so far as well as the positions of and proposals made by Member States; in a give-and-take negotiation with all positions on the table. The Ambassador stated that Japan supports a move away from the Working Group and into negotiations at a General Assembly plenary as soon as possible.

Other countries in support of the timeline approach and of launching intergovernmental negotiations as soon as possible included; Singapore, Belgium, Greece and Switzerland (the latter also noted the importance of a reform of the working methods of the Security Council).

Secondly, a group of Member States, usually included in the Uniting for Consensus faction (UfC) and generally opposed to adding more permanent seats to the Council, stated their support of a timeline approach, but cautioned that Member States have to agree on a framework and modalities on eventual negotiables before negotiations can start. In this context, they did not consider the negotiables, as laid out in report of the Task Force, sufficient as they include almost all positions ever voiced in the Working Group.

Among other, Pakistan recirculated a UfC letter to the GA President sent on 5 March 2008 outlining their preferred approach to a future framework. The letter proposes a clear framework and parameters for opening negotiations.

Furthermore, several countries noted with disappointment omissions of what they considered important issues in the report of the Task Force. Among these, Argentina, Mexico (in Spanish), Indonesia, South Korea and Pakistan stated their discontent over the lack of any mentioning of the issue of regional representation. Furthermore, they stated that the Working Group should be the only forum for discussions on Council reform, and any “unilateral” move, such as formation of overarching processes, should be avoided. Egypt agreed with the above views and asked “...have we really agreed on a set of negotiables? We must before proceeding to intergovernmental negotiations.” As chair of the African group, the Ambassador also confirmed that group’s principled support for the Ezulwini Consensus (two permanent seats for Africa with the right of veto).

Mauritania, on behalf of the Arab group, stated that any future enlargement of the Security Council must have permanent Arabic representation, as the Arab states comprise 11% of the UN membership. They also agreed that a framework, a model and terms of reference must be determined before inter-governmental negotiations can begin.

Thirdly, the delegate from Liechtenstein, Mr. Stefan Berriga, delivered a rather downbeat statement in regard to changing the composition of the Council noting that “...we see little promise and no new ideas on the issue of enlargement...” Instead, he urged the membership to focus on the issue of reforming the working methods of the Council, “...where progress is both necessary and feasible.”

Fourthly, among the permanent members of the Security Council, the United States said that they remain open to an expansion of the Council, and support the inclusion of Japan as a permanent member. However, they cautioned that any expansion should be modest, noting that adding 50% more seats is not a modest expansion. Furthermore, the United States stated that an enlargement is not possible without a comprehensive reform of the overall UN system, and said that it is counter-productive to adopt a timeframe for negotiations, as the lowest common denominator could be the end-result of the solutions reached.

China said that a reform of the Council requires further consultations, and noted that there does not seem to be sufficient common ground to begin inter-governmental negotiations at this stage. In this context, they underlined that reform requires patience and consensus, and that Member States should refrain from actions that might exacerbate existing problems. Finally, China stated that any increase in the membership of the Council should include more seats for Africa.

France and the UK stated their support for the aspirations of the Group of Four (G4) and urged Member States to begin intergovernmental negotiations expeditiously.

Next Step

The GA President and his Task Force will now return to their work on the final status report to the General Assembly on the work of the Working Group. The report is scheduled for publication in mid-July, and is expected to include a draft resolution, which - the GA President told the Working Group - possibly could be used to initiate a starting point for intergovernmental negotiations.

In the meantime, it will be left to Member States to influence the outcome of the Task Force’s work and intense consultations between all major interest groups and the Task Force is expected to take place.

In general, though, the GA President’s apparent willingness to pursue intergovernmental negotiations must have been exciting news for Germany, Japan and Brazil. The countries have so desperately sought movement and leadership by Kerim and his statement must have been a cause of great relief.



The Uniting for Consensus faction on the other hand appear forced to show initiative or risk losing the momentum.

As always, questions remain about the African group. Some insiders speculate that a large number of African states are warming up to the idea of negotiating the Ezulwini Consensus, although those speculations remain unconfirmed.

It is still unclear if the relatively new demands for permanent representation from the League of Arab States will have any effect on the negotiations.

Apparently an Indian draft resolution is already circulating among Member States. A press report from New Delhi confirmed that India, together with 35 countries, have been working on some sort of draft resolution in recent weeks. Some European delegates called the draft an updated version of the Indian L69-draft from last year, with an option of the right of veto for new permanent members added, which was apparently included in an effort to secure African votes. Other members of the G4 have refrained from taking a position on the draft, and it is still too early to say if or when the draft will be introduced.

In another turn of events, US presidential hopeful, John McCain announced in a newspaper article that he would support a permanent Brazilian seat on the Security Council if elected.

All in all, the intense consultations expected during the next three weeks should reveal much more.

** This article is meant as an analysis and as an update of some of the main ideas discussed during the meeting and does not represent a complete and official account of all positions expressed by Member States. Unless attributed to a specific source, all expressions of opinion in this analysis are those of the author. The Center for UN Reform Education does not endorse any particular reform proposals.*