Fifty-sixth General Assembly
Plenary
36th Meeting (AM)

MORE DELEGATES URGE RESTRICTION OF SECURITY COUNCIL VETO,

AS GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONCLUDES REFORM DEBATE

Other Changes in Working Methods also Called for
As Needed Response to Changing International Situation

Further calls for restriction or elimination of the right of veto in the Security Council were heard in the General Assembly this morning as the Assembly ended its current consideration of the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Council and related matters.

Delegates also urged greater transparency in the Council’s working methods and an increase in its permanent and non-permanent membership, as they expressed frustration at the lack of progress achieved in the last eight years by the open-ended working group set up to review the issue.
The Council must be reformed or it would face “more Palestines and more Afghanistans”, and international security would be totally destroyed, the representative of Iraq said. Permanent membership of the Council should be abolished, ensuring the true equality of all Member States and preventing certain States to use the Council as a tool for their foreign policy.

The representative of Israel said the Council must adapt itself to face new geopolitical and economic realities while at the same time maintaining its effectiveness. Increased membership in the Council, which he supported, must be balanced between the need to ensure that the Council embodies the larger will of the Organization, and the need to maintain its ability to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter. He said Israel should have the same eligibility for Council membership as any other State; otherwise its status in the United Nations would remain unequal.

Kazakhstan’s representative said the great majority of Member States supported the expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. Echoing some other speakers, she said she favoured the inclusion, as permanent Council members, of three developing countries from the Asian, African and Latin American and Caribbean regions, as well as two industrialized countries. Expansion of non-permanent membership should observe the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

The representatives of Romania, Paraguay, Ethiopia, Venezuela, Botswana, Sudan and Grenada also spoke.

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The Assembly will meet again at a date and on a subject to be announced in the Journal.
Background

The General Assembly met today to conclude its consideration of the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters.

(For additional information see Press Release GA/9942 of 30 October.)

Statements

ALEXANDRU NICULESCU (Romania) said the dramatic events of 11 September had proved once again the crucial nature of the Security Council. Nevertheless, the recent and mostly critical debates in the General Assembly on the Council’s yearly report showed that reform of this body was needed more than ever. The time-consuming debates on language nuances should be left behind, to make way for a serious analysis of the existing models for an expanded and more effective Council. Perhaps debates, at least in the most controversial issues, should be upgraded to the level of the political leadership of countries.

Romania supported the enlargement of the Security Council in both categories of membership to reflect changed global realities. There should be five more permanent seats, both for developing countries and for the most industrialized countries. With regard to the rotating category, his delegation continued to favour the addition of new seats for countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. It was very important for the Eastern European Group to get an additional non-permanent seat.

He said Romania had no problem with the application of the veto by future permanent members. His country was aware of some of the concerns expressed by various Member States, but felt the veto remained
an essential tool for the Security Council’s capability to preserve international peace and security. Periodic reviews of the structure and functioning of the Security Council would be an important piece in the reform mechanism.

RIGOBERTO GAUTO VIELMAN (Paraguay) said that at the Millennium Summit heads of State had issued an appeal to introduce broad reform in the Security Council. The world was confronting new threats to international peace and security. The Council must bring its structure in line with demands of new realities. Close interaction between the Council and the Organization’s membership was therefore necessary.

He said Council reform must be comprehensive, with more equitable representation and transparency, in order to establish a better political balance. He supported an increase in both categories of membership, permanent and non-permanent, including developed and developing countries, bearing in mind that the developing world had been under-represented, even though its role in international relations had considerably increased. Reform must also include improvement in the Council’s working methods, greater transparency and participation by the rest of the United Nations membership and the gradual elimination of the veto.

He said eight years had gone by since the establishment of the working group. The extent of the debate reflected the complexity of the situation and the need for reform. Some progress had to be shown on specific measures based on consensus. He hoped next year, the tone of statements could be changed, and progress would have been achieved that could be applauded. A political decision on the subject could not be indefinitely postponed.

MOHAMMED ALDOURI (Iraq) said the relationship between the Security Council and Iraq was in reality nothing more than a relationship between his country and two permanent members of the Council. As such, it had violated an important principle of the United Nations Charter, which stipulated that the Council acted on behalf of its Members States, rather than according to the wishes of certain actors who dominated Council decisions in accordance with their own interests. Such selectivity
was not only evident in its relationship with Iraq, but in the scandalous position of the Council towards crimes committed against the Palestinian people for the past 50 years.

The Council wanted its relationship with Iraq to set a precedent that would frighten and deter other States, he said. It had achieved that by adopting political measures under a legal guise, but in truth they had little legal basis. The Council did not heed international law, and that reflected negatively on it with respect to humanitarian issues in Iraq. Questions about Iraq were considered in the Council behind closed doors and Iraq was prevented from attending any discussions. The same applied to the Council Committee established under resolution 661 regarding the Iraq people — their food, medicine and humanitarian needs. The Iraqi representative had to wait outside with others, such as journalists, to find out anything.

He said the Council must be reformed or it would face more Palestinians, more Afghanistsans, and international security would be totally destroyed. More than 1.5 million Iraqis had been killed, with the blessing of the Council, and Iraq’s whole infrastructure had been destroyed. Destruction in Afghanistan was now taking thousands of lives and the Council had remained silent. Council reform should include restriction of the use of the veto and then its abolition. Further, it should adopt rules of procedure that would ensure transparency and the rights of States. Council membership should be expanded to ensure democratic representation, and permanent membership should be abolished.

ABDUL MEJID HUSSEIN (Ethiopia) said that international peace and security today called for a more representative Security Council reflective of existing realities. The Council should not be feudal in nature and undemocratic in character, in an organization calling for a transparent and democratic world order. Ethiopia was longing for a Council that truly represented and heard the international community, not a Council that dictated. Ethiopia believed that the Council, as it now stood, lacked the necessary moral stature it was expected to have.

The decision-making process within the Council needed to be more transparent, he continued. The lack of transparency and
accountability in the Council had a lot to do with the prevailing question of representation and procedural reform. The Council must become truly representative of the general membership of the United Nations, on the basis of equitable geographical distribution, in particular taking into account the urgent needs of the developing world.

He stressed Ethiopia’s full endorsement of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and Non-Aligned Movement positions on the issue. As Chairman of the African working group on reform of the Security Council, Ethiopia believed that Africa should have permanent rotating seats with the same privileges enjoyed by the permanent members. Proportional representation in non-permanent members from Africa also needed due consideration in any debate and formulation on the reform issue. Moreover, as most of the problems being dealt with in the Council were related primarily to the African continent, Africa’s representation in the Council would undoubtedly strengthen the Council’s capacity to resolve, effectively and appropriately, the daunting challenges ahead of it.

MILOS ALCALAY (Venezuela) said the majority of Member States were frustrated by the lack of progress on reform of the Council. At the Millennium Summit, heads of State and government had expressed the wish to double efforts for Council reform. One aspect of reform was the question of the veto. The veto was an anti-democratic practice nowadays, even though it had been justified in the past. He supported elimination of the veto in accordance with the principle of the sovereign equality of States.

While the veto issue was of vital importance, he continued, the process of reform should be undertaken in a comprehensive manner and should include expansion of Council membership and improvement of Council working methods, guided by the principles of sovereign equality of States, and States’ rights of representation in organs of limited membership. He appreciated the efforts made in the open-ended working group, which was the appropriate forum for bringing about general agreement on the matter.

The Council must be adapted to new realities and must be aimed at new and better international relations, he said. It must become impartial
and accountable. The legitimacy and authority of the Organization’s most important body were at stake. In a spirit of flexibility, a resolution must be adopted calling for reform of the Council in all its aspects, he said.

The times had demonstrated that major world challenges required major efforts, broad commitments and solidarity. Institutions must measure up to demands. A reformed Council must act in accordance with international norms and reassume its role as guarantor of international peace and security.

MADINA B. JARBUSSYNOVA (Kazakhstan) said it had become clear that the great majority of Member States supported expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Council. She favoured an increase in the permanent membership through inclusion of three developing countries from the Asian, African and Latin American and Caribbean regions, as well as two industrialized countries. That would ensure a balance of interests and an adequate reflection of existing geopolitical realities. Her delegation's support went to Germany and Japan. Expansion of non-permanent membership should observe the principle of equitable geographical distribution, she added.

The veto had to be applicable to the new permanent members of the Council, she said. The use of the veto, as with any other powerful instrument, should be restrained. It should only be exercised when the question under consideration was of vital importance to the United Nations as a whole. Every endeavour should be made to arrive at consensus in the open-ended working group so that the veto need not be used. She also called for more transparency in the work of the Council. Its working methods could be improved by conducting more frequent interactive discussions between the Council and non-Council members, as well as open meetings and briefings with the participation of the Secretary-General, his Special Representatives and Secretariat staff.

The recent terrorist attacks on the United States presented an unprecedented challenge to the international community. The Council had been entrusted with playing a central role in elaborating a global strategy against international terrorism. The completion of the process of Council reform would enable the Council to cope with its expanding
responsibilities to greater effect and to resolve serious regional and global problems, including successful settlement of the Afghan crisis.

LEUTLWETSE MMUALEFE (Botswana) said the need to enlarge the Security Council membership to reflect the realities of today’s adjusted balance of power could not be overemphasized. His delegation fully aligned itself with the African Group’s position on the scope of the extension required for both categories of membership. His delegation also continued to call for a limit on the use of the veto and its eventual elimination, as it had outlived its usefulness.

Equally important was the need to reform the working methods of the Security Council in a way that would make its operations transparent and allow for wider participation of the United Nations membership in its activities. It was incumbent on the peoples of the United Nations to stand up for the democratization of that august body, and refuse to continue to be held at ransom by the will of a minority at the expense of the majority. If the United Nations claimed to be defending the ideals of peace, prosperity and fundamental freedoms for all, then it would be failing in its mandate if it curtailed the very processes which promised to transform those ideals into a reality.

The African region could not and would not allow its interests to remain subordinate to those of the major powers, he said. There could be no greater demonstration of the permanent membership’s sincerity in the stated goals of engaging Africa’s interests constructively than the simple acknowledgment of Africa's existence and rightful claim to representation. The insistence on limited expansion was a veiled attempt to continue to subordinate the perceived pariahs of the global system, and retain the Council as a hub for the privileged few. Pleas of possible future ineffectiveness only contributed to the perception that Africa was unable to govern sensibly and act decisively. It was Botswana’s contention that Africa was no less -- and no more -- capable than those currently deciding its fate.

TARIG ALI BAKHIT (Sudan) said it was regrettable that, for the eighth time in a row, the Assembly was meeting to consider reform of the Council. Member States were trying to make the Council more
representative for the broader membership of the Organization. His delegation had participated actively in the open-ended working group.

He supported expansion of the two categories of the membership in accordance with the position of the non-aligned movement and he reaffirmed his country’s position that reform of the Council and an increase in its membership should be considered as a whole package. Two permanent and non-permanent seats must be allocated to African countries, taking into account the fact that most conflicts on the Council’s agenda concerned those countries.

Regarding the question of the veto, he reiterated his position in calling for gradual elimination of the veto. He valued reform of the Council’s working methods to promote transparency, and welcomed the endeavours that had been made to end the embargo against his country.

AARON JACOB (Israel) said the Security Council must adapt itself to face new geopolitical and economic realities while at the same time maintaining its effectiveness. Israel supported initiatives to increase the Council’s membership to reflect the increased membership of the United Nations as a whole and to represent more faithfully the broad array of interests of Member States. A balance must be struck, however, between the need to ensure that the Council embodied the larger will of the Organization, and the need to maintain its ability to fulfil its responsibilities under the Charter.

Israel further supported providing the Organization’s membership with improved access to the Council’s proceedings. Meetings should be conducted in an open format whenever possible, and steps should be taken to ensure that reliable information was made available to Member States, he said. Greater transparency would serve to reinforce confidence in the Council, not only within the United Nations, but also in the world beyond.

Regarding the issue of equitable representation, he pointed out that Israel was now a full, though temporary, member of the Western European and Other States Group (WEOG). Inclusion in the WEOG was an
important step towards Israel’s full integration into the United Nations. However, to fully realize the principle of “sovereign equality” as laid down the Charter, Israel’s acceptance to a regional grouping must be extended to all United Nations Headquarters around the world, as well as to all specialized agencies and international bodies and organs created by international instruments. Israel must also become eligible for the same candidatures as were all other United Nations Members. Until that time, Israel’s status within the Organization would remain unequal. It should also be noted, he said, that while Israel appreciated inclusion in WEOG, it also remained committed to achieving membership with its natural partners in the Asian Group. In lieu of that membership, however, Israel’s inclusion in WEOG would serve to increase its ability to participate as a full and equal Member State.

HAROLD FRUCHTBAUM (Grenada) said the open-ended working group needed to have a thorough knowledge of how the Security Council worked. To that end, his delegation had proposed that the group should receive briefings as well as detailed written materials about the Council’s functioning. For Member States which had never served on the Council, or had not done so for a number of years, information of this kind was essential for a fruitful consideration of Council reform.

The one briefing the working group did receive was noted in the report before the Assembly. It described the note-keeping practices for the all-important informal consultations of the whole Council, and the existence of these notes. Their value for future historical, legal and other research was potentially high, yet is was unclear at this time that they were destined for preservation in the Archives of the United Nations.

His delegation believed that if the open-ended working group was to bring its efforts to a successful conclusion, it must begin as soon as feasible to arrange for the preparation of the needed analytical and briefing materials about the work and procedures of the Council.

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