

# Pact for the Future: Reform of UN Security Council?

## With SOTF deadline looming, UN Member States accelerate Security Council reform deliberations

[President of the General Assembly Dennis Francis](#): “When the [Security] Council is unable to act, it is both desirable and necessary under the prevailing rules that the General Assembly steps forward – lest we risk further questions on the relevance and the deepening casting of aspersions on the efficacy of our organization itself. And the [General] Assembly must do so – not in a siloed fashion – but in coordination with the Council, as a cohesive unit of the United Nations, collectively responsible for the consequences of both the actions and inactions of the United Nations as an organization.”

The Pact for the Future, the proposed outcome of the [Summit of the Future](#), will address Security Council reform in Chapter 5, on global governance. The [Pact’s annotated draft](#) and process have a placeholder for input from the [Intergovernmental Negotiations \(IGN\)](#), which is due by the end of June 2024. The [input to the Pact](#) was under discussion in IGN meetings on 20 and 21 May 2024, and deliberations will continue on 20 and 21 June 2024. A [less official version](#) has been circulated by [PassBlue](#).

The linkage of on-going and decades-long Security Council reform with the September 2024 deadline for adopting the Pact for the Future has contributed to the intensity of engagement from all Member States and shaped alignments and alliances that criss-cross a number of Member State groupings and alliances within and outside the United Nations. [See active groups here.](#)

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*“We are struggling to move into a multipolar world, but in a way that is not yet clear: in a way that tends to be chaotic and in which power relations are not clear. ...it is clear that the multilateral governance mechanisms that we have today are indeed outdated, are indeed unfair and are indeed ineffective – they are not even comprehensive in relation to the totality of new problems and challenges that we face. And there must be a serious effort of reform in order to make sure that we are able to build together a multilateral system that is more inclusive, more equitable but also more comprehensive and effective in addressing the challenges of our time.”*

**UN Secretary-General António Guterres, GA Plenary, 7 February 2024 (Timestamp: 02:22:00)**

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## Co-chairs of IGN GA78

During the 78th session of the General Assembly, the IGN is led by:

**Tareq Albanai**, *Permanent Representative of the State of Kuwait*

**Alexander Marschik**, *Permanent Representative of Republic of Austria*

**In the high-stakes process towards a broad reform of the multilateral system**, the need for restructuring of the Security Council is paramount. Member States, working individually and in groups, have different priorities and bottom lines. Excerpts are included below.



**Guyana**  
13 December  
2023, IGN

“In an era when multilateralism is waning and the most basic principles of international law and a rules-based international order are under threat, the Council’s structural deficiencies must be addressed. For many of us in smaller states, Security Council reform has become an existential issue where our entire survival rests on the Council’s ability to effectively carry out its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. **We see the Council’s current configuration as a relic of the past which neither reflects today’s geopolitical realities nor the current membership of the United Nations.** Moreover, the Council’s current configuration often results in skewed outcomes that favour the interests and priorities of a few, to the detriment of the great majority.”



**Kenya**  
10 May 2024,  
UNGA ESS-10,  
54:30

“...we are at a fork in the road. This organization was created by the most powerful in 1945 with a promise to those most oppressed and vulnerable. **We must decide whether the dictates of those with the most power will define our way forward;** that way will lead to a dangerous, deadly, dignity-killing multipolarity. We must stand together for the Charter and resist its shredding, as our key defense for a world in which the most powerful are impelled to lawful conduct.”



**South Africa**  
13 December  
2023, IGN

“The nearly eight-decades-old United Nations system’s effectiveness cannot remain disproportionately reliant on serving and securing the interests of only five permanent, non-elected, Members of the Council... My delegation remains deeply concerned by the inability of the Council to act decisively even when the very existence of the people in Gaza is threatened, and the most catastrophic humanitarian crisis unfolding before our eyes deepens on a daily basis.... Indeed, the prevailing Council’s consideration of the question of Palestine which has been on the Council’s agenda for the entirety of the UN’s existence, represents a profound failure of the Security Council – **a failure which is rooted in the structural imbalances and anachronistic make-up of the Council itself, which has a direct bearing on its credibility and legitimacy.**”

### Groups Active in the IGN during UNGA 78

Group	Cross-regional Group?	Spoke at the IGN Meetings?
<a href="#">G4</a>	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">L.69</a>	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">UfC</a>	Yes	Yes
OIC	Yes	Yes
<a href="#">Africa Group</a>	No	Yes
Arab Group	Yes	Yes
SIDS	Yes	No
CARICOM	No	Yes
Nordics	No	Yes
Benelux	No	Yes



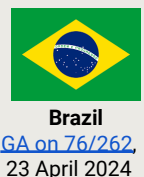
“...persistent deadlocks erode international confidence in the Security Council effectiveness and legitimacy. **A more representative, efficient and inclusive council is a paramount.** We need the council to be democratic and adaptable. We can achieve that through the increase in elected members and the limitation of veto power. Let’s translate these widely supported solutions into a text and make much needed progress. As the current situation in the world shows, we are already quite late.”



**“It is unacceptable that SC members put their own interests above those of the whole international community.** The P5 have a special responsibility to maintain international peace and security according to the UN Charter. That is what the international community expects and the UN Charter prescribes. According to Art. 24 (1), members of the SC assume their responsibilities on behalf of all Member States. They must act in compliance with the purposes and principles of the UN. **They must not conceal violations of international law with their veto.** They must not block effective SC action.”



“At present, the world is undergoing a profound change that has not been seen in a century, and developing countries and the Global South are collectively rising. **The global governance system needs to keep pace with the development of the international situation, and systematic reform is the general trend.** The reform of the Security Council should be examined and considered within the framework of the overall reform of the global governance system. The key is to grasp the right direction and ensure that the reform results truly reflect the trend of the times and historical trends. At the same time, the reform of the Security Council involves the core interests of Member States and the **redistribution of institutional rights.**”



**“Even a comprehensive reform of the UN is not enough,** nor can it be seen in isolation. **The whole architecture of global governance must be made fit for purpose again.** We need ambition and political courage. Brazil, including in its current capacity as the G20 presidency, is firmly committed to such a reform – a comprehensive, transformative and equitable reform that strengthens the multilateral system to meet the needs of our time. We kindly but firmly encourage all the UN members to commit to that urgent task.”

### Revised Elements Paper:

Since December 2023, the co-chairs have steered deliberations on reform clusters and reform models. Their understanding of progress made during the deliberations is summarized in "[Revised Co-Chairs Elements Paper](#)" of 5 April 2024.

#### I. Elements of General Convergence and Divergence

#### II. Clusters:

1. Relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly
2. Size of an enlarged Security Council and the Working Methods of the Council
3. Categories of membership
4. The question of the veto
5. Regional representation  
Annex: Models presented during UNGA78  
IGN

### Additional Readings and Links:

1. [Global Policy UN Watch](#)
2. [SOTF GPW Factsheet](#)
3. [UN Press: GA Adopts Landmark Resolution Aimed at Holding Five Permanent SC Members Accountable for Use of Veto](#)
4. [UN Media on Reform of Security Council](#)
5. [Countries never elected to the Council](#)
6. [Compilation of vetoes since 1946](#)



India  
[13 December 2023, IGN](#)

"We must all realize that the clock is ticking and turning the other way in the face of global challenges is just not an option, for **multilateral institutions rarely die. They simply fade into irrelevance.**"



El Salvador  
[20 May 2024, IGN](#)

"El Salvador considers it appropriate that the Member States take advantage of the opportunity presented by the Future Pact to commit to a prompt reform of the Security Council. The commitment to making this a more representative body must, without a doubt, include that one parameter of the reform be **its expansion to reflect the realities of the contemporary world and increase the representation of developing countries.** Regarding the convergences identified in the 'IGN' process, my delegation considers that it is important to clarify in the text that **the only convergence identified regarding the expansion of the Council, so far, is the expansion of the category of non-permanent\* members with two-year terms.** Similarly, El Salvador is firmly committed to ensuring that **the veto issue is a key element** in the reform of the Security Council and that, given a significant number of Member States support limits on its scope and use, this issue is also being addressed in the context of the reform. ...[A]s part of a comprehensive reform, consideration should be given to **including a review clause** to ensure that the Security Council continues to comply with the mandates entrusted to it by the Charter of the United Nations."

*\*In a previous version of this briefing, the prefix "non" was excluded in error. We apologize for any confusion this omission may have caused.*

## The UNGA IGN deliberates Security Council reform

It has been more than 30 years since the UN started the process to reform the Council in an open-ended working group of the General Assembly. The [Intergovernmental Negotiations](#) on the question of equitable representation on an increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters (IGN) is the cumbersome but descriptive name of the successor to the working group. It was formed by the General Assembly in 2005 with a mandate to seek the greatest possible agreement among Member States on a comprehensive Security Council reform package.

In its decision [62/557](#), the UN General Assembly identified the following clusters of issues:

1. categories of membership;
2. the question of the veto;
3. regional representation;
4. size of an enlarged Security Council and working methods of the Council;
5. relationship between the Council and the General Assembly

While Member States agree that reform is vital, reaching consensus on the substance - and process - for Council restructuring is elusive. Significantly enhanced representation from Africa is emerging as an area of convergence. It is featured in the IGN's latest [Elements paper](#) and has been highlighted by Sierra Leone, speaking on behalf of the Africa Union.



Sierra Leone  
15 April 2024, IGN

“There is a wider recognition and broader support by Member States for the legitimate aspiration of the African countries to play their rightful role on the global stage, including through an increased presence in the Security Council, as reflected in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration adopted by the African Union in 2005. **Redressing the historical injustice against Africa is viewed as a priority, and several delegations emphasized that Africa should be treated as a special case.**”

A major divergence in the IGN is whether to expand Permanent Members beyond the existing P5. Among the groups putting forward reform models, this divergence is outlined in the respective positions of the [Uniting for Consensus](#) (UfC) group, and the Group of Four ([G4](#)).

The UfC is a group of mid-sized, middle-income developed and developing countries whose signature position is “opposing **new permanent national seats**”. The UfC further notes that, “while the current status of the five permanent members is rooted in the historical circumstances following the end of the Second World War, UfC Countries are against any reform that would envisage the creation of additional and **unjustifiable privileged positions** within the international community, to the detriment of the general interest of the UN membership”.

By contrast, the G4 consisting of developing and developed countries - Brazil, India, Japan, and Germany - vigorously advocate for expansion of permanent members on the Council, and are all aspirant countries for a permanent seat.

Italy, on behalf of the [Uniting for Consensus](#) group, states that permanent membership operates against sovereign equality of states, and is therefore non-democratic. On the other hand, [G4](#) members as well as a number of developing countries feel that failure to increase the ranks of permanent members with developing country powers renders any reform inadequate.

According to Brazil (G4),



Brazil

[GA on 76/262](#), 23  
April 2024

“[W]e will continue to witness the erosion of the legitimacy and the effectiveness of the Security Council as long as developing countries remain sidelined and whole regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa, are not represented among the permanent members. That is why **veto reform alone will not solve the paralysis and correct the ineffectiveness of the Council - expansion of both categories of membership is also vital**. This is key to a true and consequential reform.”

Pakistan (Uniting for Consensus) counters that:



Pakistan

[13 December 2023](#),  
[IGN](#)

“...additional and individual permanent seats undermine inclusive regional representation in two fundamental respects: first, by **creating the illusion that a country elected only once and with a life tenure would represent that region in its entirety**. Second, **any permanent seat in a region statistically reduces the opportunity for other Member States from that same region to get elected to the Council**.”

## The Veto

Linked to the issue of permanent membership is the veto power granted by the UN Charter. The majority of Member States are receptive to initiatives aimed at restraining the use of the veto and are exploring [Article 27.3 of the UN Charter](#) that articulates that a party to a dispute shall abstain from voting. [GA RES/76/262](#), commonly known as the “veto initiative,” mandates the General Assembly to convene within 10 days following a veto, facilitating discussions among the vetoing power and Member States, and allowing the General Assembly membership to provide input on the matter.

Additionally, the France/Mexico initiative, a voluntary pact signed by over 100 Member States, pledges abstention from exercising the veto in certain situations. Similarly, Member States have signed the [ACT Code of Conduct](#), established in 2015. As expressed by [Liechtenstein](#): “At its heart, the Code of Conduct contains a general and positive pledge to support Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes – to both prevent or put an end to those crimes. This is complemented by a more specific pledge to not vote

against credible draft Security Council resolutions that are aimed at preventing or ending those crimes, which are all well defined in international law.”

Most Member States are adamant that these initiatives do not obviate the need for the veto to be vigorously addressed in the Security Reform process.



Egypt

[15 April 2024, IGN](#)

“...initiatives for the voluntary refrain from using the veto shall not constitute veto reform under GA resolution 62/557...”



South Africa

[18 March 2024 IGN](#)

“The United Nations Security Council continues to face a crisis of credibility, with the veto being used to deny the ability of the Council to act in order to stop the genocide unfolding in Gaza. This illustrates plainly that **no amount of voluntary provisions or pledges can replace the urgent and vital need for structural reform of the United Nations Security Council.**”

With regards to the veto in the IGN, the African Group articulates a position echoed by most countries who support expansion in the Permanent Category of SC membership:



Sierra Leone

On behalf of African Group

[18 March 2024 IGN](#)

“... Africa **demands the abolition of the veto.** However, **so long as the veto continues to exist with the consent of the wider membership, it should, as a matter of common justice, be extended to new permanent members with all its attributes, prerogatives and privileges.**”

Additionally, China, as a member of the P5, emphasizes the importance of considering the veto power's function:



China

[18 March 2024 IGN](#)

“... we must correctly and rationally understand the profound connotation of the power. **The veto power is an important part of the Security Council's decision-making mechanism and the final 'safety valve'** of this collective security mechanism. Its purpose is to maintain unity and cooperation among major powers and prevent the worst-case scenario from happening.”

The UfC group maintains that veto cannot stand as-is in 21st century multilateralism:



**Italy**  
On behalf of UfC  
[GA on 76/262](#)  
23 April 2024

“... the veto power is anachronistic. While understandable in the specific historical context of 1945, nowadays it blatantly contradicts one of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter: that of sovereign equality of States. On too many occasions it has prevented the Security Council from discharging its vital responsibilities with regard to situations endangering international peace and security, in which the UN could have made a real difference on the ground. **Any credible reform of the UN Security Council must depart from this awareness and build a system that is more democratic, representative, transparent, effective and accountable.**”

Hence the UfC position holds out against expanding the roster of Permanent Security Council members:



**Pakistan**  
Member of UfC  
[19 March 2024 IGN](#)

“... **if the P5 do not renounce their privileged position, we believe that further extending the veto to more states would only exacerbate – not mitigate – inequality**, further obstruct the Council’s decision-making process, and ultimately add new obstacles to the solution of important peace and security issues.”

## Taming the Veto

Confronted with the possible reality of not eliminating the veto, IGN deliberations have developed proposals to moderate its use without abolishing it:



**Malaysia**  
[GA on 76/262](#)  
23 April 2024

“The veto, and its undemocratic nature, runs against the very principles that the United Nations was built upon. It has no place in a modern and democratic multilateral architecture. Malaysia maintains its position that the exercise of the veto by permanent members of the SC should be regulated to deter it from being used unjustifiably or abused. Its application must be prohibited in situations involving mass atrocity crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. We are also of the view that to be effective and more accountable, the veto should be exercised by **at least 2 of the 5 permanent members and supported by 3 non-permanent members of the council**. This decision must then be **supported by the GA with a simple majority vote**. However, we maintain that ultimately, the veto needs to be abolished altogether.”





**Pakistan**  
Member of UfC  
[19 March 2024 IGN](#)

**“The most effective and feasible way of balancing the power of veto is to increase the number of elected members in the Security Council.** If the council has 22 non-permanent members, the majority of them from developing countries, and the affirmative votes required are 16, and it should be 17, the developing countries represented on the Security Council will have the ability to block decisions of the council and equalize, if not entirely, but to considerable extent equalize the power of the P5 or individual members of the P5. And therefore if there was an unfortunate situation as we are facing in the council today on two issues, the non permanent members would have an equal ability to guide and influence the decisions of the council.”



**St. Vincent & the Grenadines**  
Member of UfC  
[18 March 2024 IGN](#)

“...we have listened to the concerns put forward by the UfC around the possibility of further paralysis [with the expansion of the Permanent member category] and have proposed a possible **override mechanism** that can operate as a modern, and innovative, accountability mechanism. This also gives more than a nod to democratizing the functioning of a reformed council. Such a mechanism can be used to counter a veto that has been used to subvert the will of the majority.”

Inherent in the project of SC reform is the need to work within the existing power conferred upon the 5 permanent, veto-wielding SC members by the UN Charter.



**Portugal**  
[GA on 76/262](#)  
23 April 2024

“...any change to the UN Charter requires unanimous agreement from all permanent Security Council members – **meaning the veto will remain until all agree to relinquish it...**”

In addition to questions directly on the veto use, other aspects of the comprehensive reform proposed by the IGN will need to be acceptable to all five permanent members. Some permanent members have signaled points of interest, whilst not putting forward detailed proposals.



**Egypt**  
[15 April 2024 IGN](#)

“In addition to a more in-depth discussion of the reform models, we propose **a dedicated meeting where each of the five permanent members would be availed the opportunity, separately, to put forward their concrete views and proposals on their preferred reform model.** Thus far we believe that the positions of the P5 are not well articulated nor structured and are in need of further refinement. The coming IGN session could be a good opportunity for this discussion. There will be no Security Council reform without the active participation and consent of the P5, hence they are obliged to present concrete proposals for reform for the consideration of the wider membership.”

*Prepared by Marina Lent and Saniya Mittal*