

74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Agenda Item - 122

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council

INDIA STATEMENT by Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin Permanent Representative

25 November 2019

Mr. President,

1. We gather here for the 28th consecutive session to articulate our views on the agenda item Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council.
2. We welcome the importance that the President of the General Assembly has placed on the subject in the statement made at the beginning of this discussion.
3. My delegation aligns with the statements delivered earlier this morning by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Germany Amb. Christoph Heusgen on behalf of the G-4 and by the distinguished Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and Grenadines Amb. Rhonda King on behalf of the L.69 Group.

Mr. President,

4. Sitting and listening to this debate every year, one is reminded of the tragic Greek mythological tale of Sisyphus. Cursed by the Gods to roll an immense boulder up a hill, only for it to roll back down, dooming him to fruitless toil for eternity. Sadly, the story of the eleven years since the start of the Intergovernmental Negotiations process, and indeed the four decades since the inscription of this item on the agenda of the General Assembly, reads more and more like a Sisyphean struggle.
5. We enact this Greek tragedy year after year, oblivious to the warning signals all around us. The signs that global visions are changing, universal norms are shifting and established rules are altering are evident. Just earlier this month, the Secretary-General warned that the world is breaking apart and the status quo is untenable. Yet, every year we fail to find a pathway by which we can agree on something, in our quest to decide on everything, before proceeding on anything.

6. This inaction on our part is not without cost. The Security Council is being called upon to address increasingly complex issues of international peace and security. Yet, it finds itself unable to act credibly or even effectively, for it is lacking legitimacy and accountability.

7. An obsolescent global governance structure cannot be fit for purpose to address the challenges of peace and security in the twenty first century. Unlike in the case of the mythical boulder that Sisyphus kept rolling up the hill, our collective failure to deliver on the promise of reforming the Security Council has serious implications for not only the continuing relevance of global governance institutions, but for the lives of millions of “we the people” around the world.

Mr. President,

8. It is understandable that adjusting existing multilateral architecture requires time. Of course, it is also understandable that it can be contentious, as we may have differences regarding our preferred outcomes of reform. However, what is not understandable is an unwillingness to follow basic ground rules of multilateral processes.

9. More than ten years after the start of Intergovernmental Negotiations, the process we have is still not a normal United Nations negotiating process. A normal process in the UN system entails an initial sharing of views, followed by written documentation provided by those stewarding the process, which is then the basis for transparent give-and-take negotiations through attributed additions, deletions or amendments. While a normalized process does not guarantee results by itself, it does express the good faith and sincerity of the entire membership.

10. The IGN, so far, has been restricted to making repeated statements of known positions, without any genuine effort to narrow differences. It is the only process of its kind in the UN where negotiations have been conducted in a multilateral setting without any text. This goes against the very essence of multilateral diplomacy. Several delegations, including mine, have repeatedly stated that an inclusive text which reflects the positions of all delegations is not just the 'next logical step', but the 'only' step that can lead to negotiations. Absence of a text cannot narrow differences; it is in fact the primary reason for the process not moving forward.

11. The adoption of Decision 73/554 of the General Assembly at the 92nd Plenary meeting of its 73rd session on 25 June 2019 reflects the desire to transition to a single text. It provides a proto-text which we have all worked on for four years now. We expect the discussions at this session will build on the past, not supplant it. We seek a structured format of a single document that can be negotiated, one issue at a time. This is an established practice of multilateral diplomacy, which works for every other UN process, and needs to be given a chance to work for this issue too.

12. As in all other negotiating processes of the General Assembly, the use of a text for negotiations should not be seen as an expression of bias against any individual country or group of countries. If anything, the absence of a negotiating text goes against the explicit mandate given to us by our leaders in their 2005 call for early reform of the Security Council.

We have tried for more than a decade without a text and have not succeeded, let us venture the normal way forward, in order to give reform a chance to progress.

Mr. President,

13. Coming to the key issues of substance, we believe that the vast majority of member states are in favour of expansion in both - permanent and non-permanent - categories of membership of the Security Council. Repeated articulations from delegations at this, and other platforms, are on the record. This includes several member states, in their individual capacities, as well as groupings like the L.69, G-4, C-10 on behalf of Africa, the CARICOM, the Nordics and the Arab Group. My delegation reiterates its support for the reflection of the Common African Position, as specified in the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration, in any document under consideration. For the first time this year, the leaders of the Non Aligned Movement have also added their voice of support to this position.

14. Integral to any reform will have to be greater accountability and transparency of the reformed Council's working methods. This goal has very broad support too.

Mr. President,

15. In 2020, we will mark a landmark year for the organization, with the 75th anniversary of its establishment. If there was ever a year for undertaking decisive action, this is it. We, therefore, need to proceed at this session with the objective of making progress in that direction. The exercise of Security Council reforms cannot be an unending merry-go-round.

16. This is not an 'artificial timeline'. The mandate under which we are discussing this subject was agreed to unanimously on the 60th anniversary of the UN. It was a mandate for early reforms.

17. Let us begin by consolidating and building on small, incremental steps forward. For this session, we call on the Co-Chairs, to facilitate from the first meeting onwards, a normal process based on an inclusive and holistic document that allows us to structure our negotiations transparently. We also request you to allow us as much time as is necessary to continue our discussions. Only if we show mutual respect and promote better understanding by providing time and space for deliberations, can we enhance ownership of the process by all.

18. They say nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come. If that is the case, the goal of a reformed multilateral order to preserve peace and promote security qualifies as a long overdue idea. For our part, India stands ready to play a constructive role in promoting this common objective of a structured reform process.

I thank you, Mr. President.
