

THE UNITED NATIONS



Voting versus Consensus

Introduction

- General Assembly: 192 Member States
- Security Council: 5 permanent members and 10 non-permanent
- Economic and Social Council: 54 members

The General Assembly

The Forum for Multilateral Negotiation

- Established in 1945 under the [Charter of the United Nations](#), the General Assembly occupies a central position as the chief deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the United Nations.
- Comprising all [192 Members of the United Nations](#), it provides a unique forum for multilateral discussion of the full spectrum of international issues covered by the Charter.
- It also plays a significant role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law. The Assembly meets in regular session intensively from September to December each year, and thereafter as required.

The General Assembly



Election of President of the General Assembly

- The post of President of the General Assembly rotates among the regional groups.
- Each member of the General Assembly votes for the President.
- For the sixty-fourth session, the President has been elected from the Group of African States.

President of the General Assembly



- **H.E. Dr. Ali Abdussalam Treki** was elected President of the sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly on 10 June 2009.

Voting on Issues in the General Assembly

- Each Member State in the Assembly has 1 vote.
- Votes taken on designated important issues, such as recommendations on peace and security and the election of Security Council members, require a two-thirds majority of Member States, but other questions are decided by simple majority.
- In recent years, a special effort has been made to achieve consensus on issues, rather than deciding by a formal vote, thus strengthening support for the Assembly's decisions.
- The President, after having consulted and reached agreement with delegations, can propose that a resolution be adopted without a vote.

Voting in the General Assembly

- With the close of the general debate, the Assembly begins consideration of the substantive items on its agenda.
- Because of the great number of questions it is called upon to consider, the Assembly allocates to its six Main Committees items relevant to their work.
- The Committees discuss the items, seeking where possible to harmonize the various approaches of States, and present their recommendations, usually in the form of draft resolutions and decisions, to a plenary meeting of the Assembly for its consideration.

Six Main Committees

- [Disarmament and International Security Committee](#) (First Committee), concerned with disarmament and related international security questions
- [Economic and Financial Committee](#) (Second Committee), concerned with economic questions;
- [Social Humanitarian and Cultural Committee](#) (Third Committee), which deals with social and humanitarian issues
- [Special Political and Decolonization Committee](#) (Fourth Committee), dealing with a variety of political subjects not covered by any other Committee or the plenary, including the question of decolonization
- [Administrative and Budgetary Committee](#) (Fifth Committee), which is concerned with the administration and budget of the United Nations
- [Legal Committee](#) (Sixth Committee), which deals with international legal matters

Informal Working Groups

- Over the years, various informal regional groupings have evolved in the General Assembly as vehicles for consultation and to facilitate procedural work.
- The groups are: the African States; the Asian States; the Eastern European States; the Latin American and Caribbean States; and the Western European and other States.

The Security Council



Security Council

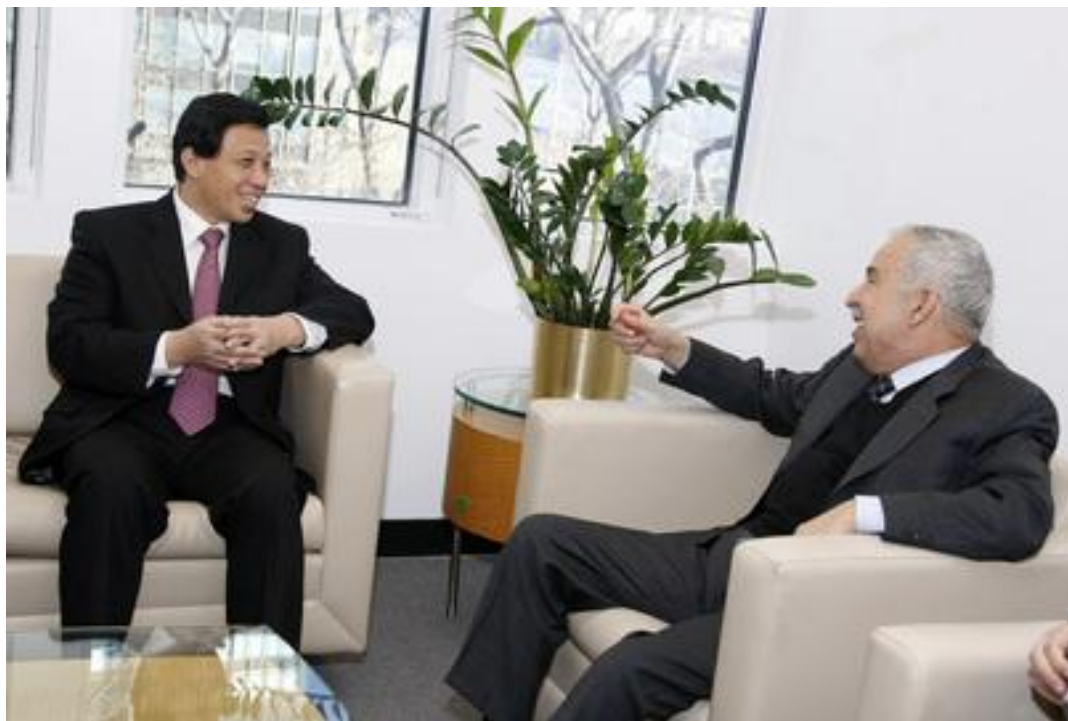
- The Security Council has primary responsibility, under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security.
- It is so organized as to be able to function continuously, and a representative of each of its members must be present at all times at United Nations Headquarters.
- On 31 January 1992, the first ever Summit Meeting of the Council was convened at Headquarters, attended by Heads of State and Government of 13 of its 15 members and by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the remaining two.

Presidency of the Security Council

- The [President of the Security Council](#) is held in turn by the members of the Security Council in the English alphabetical order of their names. Each President holds office for one calendar month.

**General Assembly
President
Meets January 2010
Security Council President**

Ali Abdussalam Treki (right), President of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly, meets with Zhang Yesui, Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations and Security Council President for the month of January.



Security Council & Voting

- A State which is a Member of the United Nations but not of the Security Council may participate, without a vote, in its discussions when the Council considers that that country's interests are affected.
- Both Members of the United Nations and non-members, if they are parties to a dispute being considered by the Council, are invited to take part, without a vote, in the Council's discussions; the Council sets the conditions for participation by a non-member State.

Members of the Security Council With Voting Rights

- **The Council is composed of five permanent members:** [China](#), [France](#), [Russian Federation](#), [the United Kingdom](#) and [the United States](#).

The ten non-permanent members:

- [Austria](#) (2010)
- [Japan](#) (2010)
- [Mexico](#) (2010)
- [Turkey](#) (2010)
- [Uganda](#) (2010)
- [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (2011)
- [Brazil](#) (2011)
- [Gabon](#) (2011)
- [Lebanon](#) (2011)
- [Nigeria](#) (2011)

Voting and the P-5

- Each Council member has one vote. Decisions on procedural matters are made by an affirmative vote of at least nine of the 15 members.
- Decisions on substantive matters require nine votes, including the concurring votes of all five permanent members. This is the rule of "great Power unanimity", often referred to as the "Veto" power.

The Economic and Social Council



Information about the Council

- ECOSOC was established under the [United Nations Charter](#) as the principal organ to coordinate economic, social, and related work of the 14 UN specialized agencies, functional commissions and five regional commissions.
- The Council also receives reports from [11 UN funds and programmes](#). The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) serves as the central forum for discussing international economic and social issues, and for formulating policy recommendations addressed to Member States and the United Nations system.

Membership of the ECOSOC

- The Council's 54 member Governments are elected by the General Assembly for overlapping three-year terms.
- Seats on the Council are allotted based on geographical representation with 14 allocated to African States, 11 to Asian States, 6 to Eastern European States, 10 to Latin American and Caribbean States and 13 to Western European and other States.

Current Members of ECOSOC

Argentina – 2012

Bangladesh – 2012

Cameroon – 2010

China – 2010

Côte d'Ivoire – 2011

Finland – 2010

Germany - 2011

India – 2011

Japan – 2011

Malta - 2011

Morocco - 2011

Niger - 2010

Australia – 2010

Belgium – 2012

Canada – 2010

Comoros – 2012

Egypt – 2011

France – 2011

Guatemala - 2011

Iraq – 2012

Liechtenstein - 2011

Mauritius – 2011

Mozambique - 2010

Norway – 2010

Bahamas – 2012

Brazil – 2010

Chile – 2012

Congo – 2010

Estonia – 2011

Ghana - 2012

Guinea-Bissau – 2011

Italy – 2012

Malaysia – 2010

Mongolia – 2012

Namibia - 2011

Pakistan – 2010

Current Members of ECOSOC

Peru – 2011

Philippines - 2012

Poland – 2010

Republic of Korea – 2010

Republic of Moldova - 2010

Russian Federation – 2010

Rwanda – 2012

Saint Kitts and Nevis

Saint Lucia – 2010

Saudi Arabia – 2011

Slovakia – 2012

Turkey - 2011

Ukraine - 2012

Uruguay - 2010

Venezuela - 2011

Zambia - 2012

UK/Northern Ireland – 2010

United States of America – 2012

Powers of the ECOSOC

- It has the power to make or initiate studies and reports on these issues.
- It also has the power to assist the preparations and organization of major international conferences in the economic and social and related fields and to facilitate a coordinated follow-up to these conferences.
- With its broad mandate the Council's purview extends to over 70 per cent of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system.

ECOSOC at Work

- In carrying out its mandate, ECOSOC consults with academics, business sector representatives and more than 2,100 registered [non-governmental organizations](#).
- The Council holds a four-week substantive session each July, alternating between New York and Geneva .
- The session consists of the High-level Segment, Coordination Segment, Operational Activities Segment, Humanitarian Affairs Segment and the General Segment.

Strengthening the ESCOSOC

- In recent years there has been mounting international support for strengthening the role of ECOSOC both within the UN system of governance and in the governance of the global economy.
- The ECOSOC and its subsidiary organs plays an important role in the integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow up to the outcomes of the [major UN conferences and summits of the 1990s.](#)

Voting Process at the ECOSOC

- Each Member of the Council Shall have 1 Vote
- A Proposal or Motion before the Council for decision shall be voted upon if any member so requests. If no Member requests a vote, the Council may adopt Proposals or Motions without a Vote.
- Decisions of the Council shall be made by a majority of the present and voting.

Voting Process continued

- Except as provided in Rule 68, the Council shall normally vote by a show of hands.
- A roll-call can be requested and is taken in alphabetical order by Member names and they respond with a Yes or No.
- Votes can also be taken by mechanical means if requested by a Member by calling out the names of the Members.

Explanation of Vote

- Representatives may make brief statements explaining their vote.
- However, the Representative sponsoring proposal or motion shall not speak regarding their vote unless it has been amended.
- Once the President has announced the commencement of voting, no one can interrupt except when casting their vote.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION



Consensus versus Voting

The North Atlantic Treaty

- The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.
- They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area.
- They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security. They therefore agree to this North Atlantic Treaty

Follow the foregoing Articles of the United Nations Charter Unless a Member of NATO Comes Under Attack

- The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.
- The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

Articles of NATO

- In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.
- The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.
- The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Articles of NATO

- Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.
- **For the purpose of Article 5, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack:**
- On the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France (2), on the territory of or on Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer;

Articles of NATO

- On the forces, vessels, or aircraft of any of the Parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the Parties were stationed on the date when the Treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.
- This Treaty does not affect, and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations under the Charter of the Parties which are members of the United Nations, or the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Article 8 – 14 (Ratifications and International Engagements)

The Decision Making Process at NATO



Consensus Decision-Making at NATO

A Fundamental Principle

- All NATO decisions are made by consensus, after discussion and consultation among member countries.
- A decision reached by consensus is an agreement reached by common consent, a decision that is accepted by each member country. This means that when a "NATO decision" is announced, it is the expression of the collective will of all the sovereign states that are members of the Alliance.
- This principle is applied at every committee level, and demonstrates clearly that NATO decisions are collective decisions made by its member countries.

How the Consensus Principle is Applied

- Consensus decision-making means that there is no voting at NATO. Consultations take place until a decision that is acceptable to all is reached. Sometimes member countries agree to disagree on an issue
- In general, this negotiation process is rapid since members consult each other on a regular basis and therefore often know and understand each other's positions in advance.
- Facilitating the process of consultation is one of the NATO Secretary General's main tasks.
- The consensus principle applies throughout NATO.

The origins of this principle

- Consensus has been accepted as the sole basis for decision-making in NATO since the creation of the Alliance in 1949.

What is Wrong with the Current System at the United Nations?

- After 50 years, no one denies the need to adapt the UN system to meet changes in a world now very different from that of the post-World War II years.
- But there are two very different agendas attempting to influence the direction of this change. On the one hand is the group of G7 governments dominated by the U.S., which is strongly influenced by those holding economic power and influence. On the other hand, are those who have a genuine desire to make the UN more effective in meeting human needs in the light of the massive social and environmental issues besetting this planet.
- The forces gaining control of the world economy have an agenda to weaken the UN by downgrading its functions, reducing its budget, discrediting its operations and value, and maintaining pressure to ensure international economic policy is kept out of UN control.

What is Wrong with the Current System at the United Nations?

- These forces tend to put emphasis on the domestic development policies of developing countries and then only on a particular kind of development policy. They insist that a restructured United Nations system should be geared to promoting a market-oriented development strategy. They believe that the emphasis on resource transfers is misplaced - they also underplay the role of the external economic environment for development.
- They recommend the scaling down of the role and function of the United Nations in the "hard core" areas of trade, money, finance and technology, and their transfer to the IMF, World Bank and WTO.
- If this view is accepted, critical policy issues will remain outside the United Nations which will be reduced to following a highly truncated and fragmented approach contrary to its mandate and the spirit of the Charter.

What is Wrong with the Current System at the United Nations?

- Some of these proposals are clearly designed to control the system, and are in violation of the Charter principles of universality, democracy and sovereign equality of states.
- The developing countries clearly have to make a choice here: a choice between a promise of the availability of resources, which will most likely prove illusory, and upholding the basic principles of the Charter. The choice is obvious: to uphold the basic principles of the Charter, because so much more is at stake than the mere promise of resource availability.
- To whom should the Third Sector advocacy be directed? The UN consists of its member governments. Each has one vote. The G7 have only seven votes in the General Assembly. So should not tactics be to hold individual governments responsible for passively voting with the G7, and, more importantly, for failing to give support to the Secretary-General and others working to make the Charter provisions come alive?

Can Consensus Decision-Making Work at the United Nations?

- Decision-making in the United Nations is firmly based on the one-nation-one-vote rule. The Charter nowhere talks about decision by consensus.
- The consensus process of decision making has implicit in it the notion of only one or a handful of countries being able to block a decision, which amounts to excising a kind of a veto. Subsequently, it was realised that in UN forums other than the Security Council acting under Chapter VII, where nations assumed only moral obligations by virtue of being a party to resolutions or decisions on reluctant parties, by majority voting, did not serve any purpose.
- Therefore, in UN forums, and particularly in the Second Committee of the General Assembly and in UNCTAD, where resolutions imposed specific obligations like transferring resources, making trade concessions, etc., decisions were almost invariably taken by consensus or "without dissent".
- However, the consensus method of decision-making was never formalized, because it was regarded as a violation of Article 2(1). In resolution 1995 (XIX) establishing UNCTAD, a conciliation procedure was incorporated whereby a formal arrangement was made to allow time for conciliation on all issues "substantially affecting the economic and financial interest of particular countries" before resorting to voting.

Can Consensus Decision-Making Work at the United Nations?

- But the option of applying the usual UN procedure for voting was retained for taking decisions in cases where the conciliation procedure ended in a failure. The word "consensus" was nowhere used in this resolution. The first time the consensus procedure for taking decisions was explicitly provided for was in the General Assembly resolution 41/213 relating to decision-making by the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC).
- The resolution that reaffirms that the decision-making process will be governed by the provisions of the Charter and the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly. Then in the next paragraph, it provides that "without prejudice to paragraph 5 above, the CPC should continue its existing practice of reaching decisions by consensus".
- There are three major qualifications. The Charter provision of decision-making will ultimately prevail; the word "should" (recommendatory) issued rather than the words "would" or "will"; and it has been clarified that what is being provided for is nothing new but merely a continuation of the past practice.

Conclusion

- The need for the reform, and where necessary restructuring, of the UN system has never been so urgent.
- I personally believe that the United Nations should look further into establishing a “Consensus” among nations states rather than “Voting”.
- The United Nations is no longer the same institution that it was when it was formed in 1945. I believe the Veto Power allotted to the P-5 (United States, China, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union) was solely to gain the backing of the world’s powerful countries to join a newly formed, and well-needed organization.

Conclusion

- I do not believe that the Veto Power should continue to exist in the United Nations. I believe at times countries have used the Veto Power abusively , just to block a vote, even though it may have been detriment to others.
- I agree with many of the critics that the UN System needs to be re-evaluated. We are now in the 21st century with membership of 192 nations with different and unique problems in the world that the different than the organization faced 60 years ago.
- With this mind, I believe and agree that it is necessary that each voice and vote be heard equally and feel that a consensus in the United Nations would best represent its members.