

Forum: Special Conference devoted to 70th Anniversary of the UN

Issue: Improving the efficiency of the General Assembly

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Introduction & Background Information

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, GA, or, from the French: Assemblée Générale, "AG") is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and the only one in which all member nations have equal representation. Its powers are to oversee the budget of the United Nations, appoint the non-permanent members to the Security Council, receive reports from other parts of the United Nations, and make recommendations in the form of General Assembly Resolutions. It has also established a wide number of subsidiary organs.

Reform of the United Nations General Assembly includes proposals to change the powers and composition of the UN General Assembly. This could include, for example, tasking the UNGA with evaluating how well member states implement UNGA resolutions, increasing the power of the assembly vis-à-vis the United Nations Security Council, or making debates more constructive and less repetitive.

Relevant Treaties and UN Resolutions

Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (April 2008)

This Center for UN Reform Education article reviews the discussion on General Assembly reform, a debate that has been going on for nearly 17 years. The article notes that many member states want to strengthen the body, insisting that the GA evaluates how well member states implement GA resolutions. Some propose the GA President for this task but others fear that this will give him too much power. Countries also discuss the relation between the GA and the Security Council. Several countries, mainly from the South, argue that these two bodies should have equal authority.

Resolution 61/292 - Revitalization of the Role and Authority of the General Assembly and Strengthening its Performance (August 2, 2007)

This resolution adopted by the General Assembly establishes an "ad hoc working group on the revitalization of the General Assembly" at the GA's 62nd session in September 2007. With emphasis on the implementation of current resolutions on revitalization, Resolution 61/292 aims at improving the GA's "role, authority, effectiveness and

efficiency," and requests UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to submit a report on the progress of this and prior resolutions at the 62nd session.

Draft Report and Draft Recommendations for Elements for a Draft Resolution (May 25, 2006)

The Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly (GA), established in September 2005, presents a report from several meetings where members debated over how to improve the GA's effectiveness and credibility. The working group has also focused on the role of the GA in selecting the Secretary General. Among the draft recommendations, the working group emphasizes the need for tighter coordination between the GA and other principal UN organs to avoid redundancy.

General Assembly President's Draft Resolution on GA Revitalization (June 2, 2005)

General Assembly (GA) President Jean Ping presents proposals to strengthen the General Assembly, reflecting Secretary General Kofi Annan's suggestions for reform. The draft resolution calls for streamlining the agenda, strengthening the role of the GA President, and improving voting procedures, but omits Annan's call for greater interaction with civil society.

Member States Consider Ways to Energize, Fully Engage Powers of General Assembly (November 19, 2009)

Member States urge the General Assembly to live up to its full potential. The Assembly should not limit its work to long debates but instead produce concrete results. The Security Council has taken over much of the work of the Assembly, such as the selection process of the Secretary General and the codification of international law. As a result, the Republic of Korea points out that cooperation with other UN organs should symbolize "coordination rather than competition". (The United Nations)

Possible Solutions

Possible ways for strengthening of the United Nations General Assembly authority and increasing the effectiveness of its work may include the following:

- Improving GA cooperation with other UN principal organs

- Developing measures for evaluating the process of UNGA resolutions' implementation by Member States
- Streamlining the Agenda
- Strengthening the role of the GA president
- Improving voting procedures
- Equalizing the authority of GA and SC