

UN Security Council
Open Debate
on
Strengthening Multilateralism and the role of the United Nations

Under the agenda item
Maintenance of International Peace and Security

Statement By
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9 November 2018

Mr. President,

Thank you for organizing this open debate on an issue that is germane. I also thank the Secretary General for his briefing.

Mr. President,

2. As many speakers before have said, this month, we commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of what was then called “the war to end all wars”. A million Indian soldiers participated in that war. As we all now know, this war to end all wars turned out to be anything but that. More wars followed, resulting in more devastation and led to more geopolitical changes.

3. Multilateralism, as an organising principle for international cooperation, survived the collapse of the League of Nations, which was established following the end of the “war to end all wars”. The international adjustments, made in the form of the current order with the United Nations Security Council at its helm, to multilaterally address matters relating to global peace more than 70 years ago, have stayed the course. One can say, the experiment of states with multilateralism has grown, as have the interdependencies and interconnectedness of our world.

4. But if we dig deeper, it is obvious that the Security Council is facing manifold crises - of performance, credibility, legitimacy and relevance. However, to blame multilateralism for the dismal situation of the Council, is, to use a New

York sporting analogy, like blaming the Madison Square Garden for the failure of the New York Knicks in the NBA, year after year, for decades.

5. Nimble organizations seek to replace routines with initiatives, continuity with flexibility, and rules with results. On the one hand, the Council has expanded its remit by broadening definitions of violent conflicts, addressing issues of nuclear proliferation, providing humanitarian access and recognizing a new generation of challenges relating to terrorism, drones, semi-autonomous weapons and climate change. On the other hand, it has remained rooted in the historical events that gave birth to it. The Council's "Path Dependency" is reflected in aversion to reform of its membership and work methods.

6. The Council's membership diverges from the distribution of global power and is unable to accommodate contemporary realities. Also, large sections of global populations are left disenchanting and nursing a sense of historical injustice due to the anachronistic composition.

7. In terms of working methods, even as the Council has spawned an entire range of subordinate bodies, the functioning of this 'subterranean universe' of subordinate bodies has become byzantine.

8. For example, in place of 5 members having a veto in formal meetings, all 15 members are bestowed with a veto in the 'subterranean universe' of Sanctions Committees.

9. Further, in an age where informed publics increasingly demand transparency from public institutions, the Sanctions Committees are the most egregious examples known to multilateralism in terms of their opacity and lack of accountability. These bodies of the "subterranean universe", ostensibly are acting on behalf of the entire membership of the UN. Yet, they do not inform us that due to a negative vote cast by any of their 15 members, they have decided not to sanction an entity or individual proposed by any Member State.

Mr. President,

10. As the global atmosphere has turned darker, and the task of promoting and maintaining international peace & security has grown more daunting, the Council has been found wanting.

11. It has failed to provide leadership on issues which are contested in spaces which no state controls, but all rely for their security and prosperity – the global commons. The domains of maritime, outer space and cyberspace are the principal channels of flow of goods, capital, data, people and ideas – all of which are key factors in our interconnectedness. They all cry for multilateral solutions. The Council, alas, is missing in action. Therefore, a patchwork of ‘plurilaterals’, ‘minilaterals’ and other regional fora are becoming the venues of convenience, sewing together codes of conduct, ad hoc coalitions of the willing and partnership agreements on issues of global peace and security.

Mr. President,

12. It is time we renovate, reinvigorate and reform multilateralism as practised by this Council. Otherwise, instead of a world at peace, we are likely to see a world order in pieces, even as the welter of piecemeal arrangements extend their sprawl to deliver partial measures of international cooperation and the Council courts obsolescence.
