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# *Topic Synopses*



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**GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
QUESTION OF EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION ON THE  
SECURITY COUNCIL**

*Introduction*

The issue of the reform of the Security Council continues to be among those issues addressed at the annual general debate of the General Assembly. Many Heads of State and Government and other high-level representatives of Member States expressed the views of their Governments on the issue during the general debate of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, held from 19 to 27 September 2006. It is generally agreed upon that the Security Council needs reform, but efforts have been hindered for over a decade. Most reform proposals relate to the work, size, and composition of the Security Council.

Even though **geopolitical** realities have changed drastically since 1945, when the set-up of the current Council was decided, the Security Council has changed very little during this long period. The victors of World War II shaped the United Nations Charter in their national interests, dividing the permanent seats, and associated veto power, among themselves. Any reform to the Security Council would require an amendment to the Charter. With the enlargement of the United Nations membership and increasing self-confidence among the new members, going hand in hand with processes of **decolonization**, old structures and procedures were increasingly challenged. The imbalance between the number of seats in the Security Council and the total number of member States became evident, and the only significant reform of the Security Council came to pass in 1965. The reform included an increase of the non-permanent membership from six to 10 members. With Boutros Boutros-Ghali elected as Secretary-General in 1992, the reform discussions of the UN Security Council were launched again as he started his new term with the first-ever summit of the Security Council and thereafter published "An Agenda for Peace". His motivation was to restructure the composition and outdated procedures of the UN organ recognizing the changed world.

By 1992, Japan and Germany had become the second and third largest financial contributors to the United Nations and started to demand a permanent seat, as well as Brazil (fifth largest country in terms of territory) and India (second largest country in terms of population) as the most powerful countries within their regional groups and key players within their regions. This group of four countries formed an interest group later known as the G4. On the other hand, their regional rivals were opposed to the G4 becoming permanent members with a veto power. They favored the expansion of the non-permanent category of seats with members to be elected on a regional basis. Italy, Pakistan, Mexico and Egypt started to form an interest group, known as the "Coffee Club" and later "Uniting for Consensus". Simultaneously, the African Group started to demand two permanent seats for themselves, on the basis of historical injustices and the fact that a large part of the Council's agenda is concentrated on the continent. Those two

seats would be permanent African seats that rotate between African countries chosen by the African group.

The existing permanent members, each holding the right of veto on Security Council reform, announced their positions reluctantly. The United States supported the permanent membership of Japan and India and a small number of additional non-permanent members. The United Kingdom and France essentially supported the G4 position, with the expansion of permanent and non-permanent members and the accession of Germany, Brazil, India and Japan to permanent member status, as well as an increase the presence by African countries on the Council. China supported the stronger representation of developing countries, voicing support for India. Russia has also endorsed the fast-growing power's candidature to assume a seat of a permanent member on the Security Council.

The General Assembly at the prompting of General Secretary Kofi Annan adopted resolution 48/26 in 1993. This established the Open-ended Working Group to consider all the issue of Security Council membership reform. For a decade now, diplomats and committees have been working on Security Council reform. Most of the discussion has revolved around technicalities such as how much should it be expanded, should they be permanent members, and whether they should have vetoes or whether vetoes should be abolished altogether. In 1997, there was a strong push to get Germany and Japan permanent Security Council seats. The initiative faced many hurdles that eventually derailed the effort. Many delegations opposed any more permanent members since they would create more **arbitrary** distinctions between member states. Other delegations felt it was unfair to only add Germany and Japan since it would elevate yet another European state and make the council even more unrepresentative of the world's people. Italy intensely opposed the Germany-Japan initiative and pushed for its own Italian Proposal. This proposal rejected further permanent members in favor of a special class of intermediate states that would be elected periodically by the General Assembly and would rotate in and out of Security Council seats.

#### *Key terms to know*

**Arbitrary:** Based on random choice or personal whim, rather than any reason or system.

**Decolonization:** The undoing of colonialism, where a nation establishes and maintains its domination over dependent territories.

**Geopolitical:** The combination of geographic and political factors influencing or delineating a country or region.

#### *Key documents*

- UN Charter
- Annan Plan

### *What to do now?*

Many member states argue for Security Council expansion, if only to reflect the steady rise in membership in the United Nations. The General Assembly has grown from 51 to 193, but the number of permanent members has remained the same. Most reform proposals suggest expanding the council from five to ten permanent members, and elected members from ten to fourteen. But what should the new geographic composition be? Which new members should be awarded permanent seats? Should states be elected by regional groupings? What about veto power among current and possible future members? “If you add another five permanent members, all of them casting vetoes, forget about anything being accomplished,” says James Paul, executive director of the Global Policy Forum. “It’s not just casting a veto, but the threat of casting a veto that keeps the whole issue off the agenda. A lot of council members wanted to act regarding Chechnya, but the Russians wouldn’t even allow any discussion, much less action.”

### *Things to consider*

1. How, and should, representation on the Security Council be expanded?
2. What role should veto power have in a reformed Security Council?
3. How can Security Council reform improve representation of historically underrepresented states or targets of violence and injustice?
4. How, and should, policies change regarding the permanence and time of different members on the Security Council?
5. What changes in how Security Council members are chosen would improve the fairness of the system?

### *For further research*

- Report of the Security Council: <http://www.un.org/en/ga/62/plenary/screport/bkg.shtml>
- Global Policy Forum: Regional Representation: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/security-council-reform/regional-representation.html>
- Center on International Cooperation: Pathways to Security Council Reform: [http://csnu.itamaraty.gov.br/images/pathways\\_sc\\_reform\\_final.pdf](http://csnu.itamaraty.gov.br/images/pathways_sc_reform_final.pdf)
- Center for UN Reform Education: Security Council Reform: <http://www.centerforunreform.org/?q=securitycouncil>

## **SECURITY COUNCIL THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

### *Introduction*

In 2011, civilians in the Syrian Arab Republic began protesting the government of long-reigning President Bashar al-Assad. These protests quickly escalated to armed rebellion, and fighting continues to date. The violence included chemical weapon attacks on the civilian population, which the United Nations condemned and worked to stop through inspections and sanctions. This uproar also spread into neighboring Iraq when Sunni militant extremists began coordinated attacks against the Shia civilian population in July, 2014. The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS), known also as both the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), has used the instability created by regional conflicts to conquer territory in western Iraq and eastern Syria, declaring itself a **caliphate** and claiming exclusive political and ideological authority over the world's Muslim population.

IS has been characterized by continual violence, including the beheadings of Western hostages and the mass execution of civilians in the country, which UN investigators are calling **genocide**. These provocative acts and mass violence against local civilians prompted the United States and other States to look for ways to stem the advance of IS through the Middle East. On 21 September 2014, the United States, with the help of regional partners, began air strikes to help stop the flow of IS aggression. By April 2015, Iraqi forces had gained ground against IS by liberating Tikrit, and Iraqi military commanders were focused on pushing “[IS] militants out of the country and into Syria by the end of the year.”

While IS has been losing ground in Iraq and northeastern Syria, IS militants have been seizing new territory in Syria, including along the Syrian-Jordanian border and in the Yarmouk District on the southern edge of the Syrian capital, Damascus. This border-crossing incident has led to new tensions between Jordan and Syria after Syrian airstrikes hit near the border. IS also succeeded in seizing a Palestinian refugee camp in Damascus in early April 2015, with reports of killings and beheadings spurring United Nations officials to call for quick action to prevent an impending catastrophe and for industrialized States to take in hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. Additionally, new reports of chemical weapons being used in Syria has angered many countries, calling for renewed United Nations efforts to force **compliance** on inspections and the removal of all sarin gas and chlorine barrel bombs.

### *Key terms to know*

**Ameliorate:** Make something bad or unsatisfactory better.

**Caliphate:** An area containing an Islamic steward known as a caliph, who is a person considered a religious successor to the Islamic prophet and a leader of the entire Muslim community.

**Compliance:** Conforming to a rule, such as a specification, policy, standard or law.

**Genocide:** The deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation.

#### *Key documents*

- United Nations, Security Council (2014). Resolution 2139. 22 February. S/RES/2139.
- United Nations, Security Council (2014). Resolution 2165. 14 July. S/RES/2165.
- United Nations, Security Council (2015). Resolution 2209. 6 March. S/RES/2209

#### *What to do now?*

The SC's limited involvement and leadership on the situation in Syria and some other places in the Middle East should not deter the international community from thinking creatively about addressing this topic. There are numerous opportunities available for SC Member States to make meaningful interventions to **ameliorate** the conflict and its consequences. By focusing on particular aspects of the situation – opposed to trying to address it in its entirety – the SC should be able to identify and collaborate on issues where progress is possible and needed. The situation in the Middle East, and its resulting consequences, is dire and in need of leadership at every level. If unaddressed by the UN's most powerful body, the political, security, and humanitarian consequences of this conflict could haunt the international community for decades to come. As delegates begin to formulate their proposals, they should keep questions like these in mind: Is there a political solution to this conflict? And if so, what viable political partners exist that the SC can meaningfully engage with to ameliorate it? Given the current state of the conflict, and the wide array of groups involved, what outcomes could be acceptable to all parties? What are the available alternatives? How can the international community better protect and provide assistance to internally displaced persons? And, finally, are there other ways for the international community to increase humanitarian assistance and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis?

#### *Things to consider*

1. How did this conflict begin? Is this a new conflict or a re-ignition of a previous conflict?
2. How have similar situations and conflicts been peacefully resolved?
3. What State and regional actors are involved in this conflict?
4. If there are non-State actors involved in a conflict, are there any States supporting them? If so, which ones?

#### *For further research*

- Council on Foreign Relations: The Islamic State:  
<http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>
- United Nations Investigators Accuse ISIS of Genocide Over Attacks on Yazidis:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/20/world/middleeast/isis-genocide-yazidis-iraq-un-panel.html>
- ISIS Seizes New Territory in Deadly Attacks in Syria:  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/02/world/middleeast/syria-isis-advances-in-hama-and-damascus.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/02/world/middleeast/syria-isis-advances-in-hama-and-damascus.html?_r=1)
- U.S. Calls Turkey's Syria Clashes 'Unacceptable,' Urges Focus on ISIS:  
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/u-s-calls-turkey-s-syria-clashes-unacceptable-urges-focus-n639266>

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## **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ENSURING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO WATER**

### *Introduction*

Water is of crucial importance to many aspects of life, directly in terms of drinking water and **sanitation**, and indirectly due to the necessity of water in agriculture and industry. The United Nations (UN) has long striven to ensure universal access to water. In fact, remarkable progress has been made since 1990: According to the UN's 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Report, over 2.6 billion people gained access to improved drinking water between 1990 and 2014, although challenges still remain in relation to water access. Over 40% of the global population still suffers from water scarcity, and disparities in access to water and sanitation persist between both developed and developing countries and urban and rural areas. On 3 August 2010, the General Assembly affirmed the crucial importance of access to safe drinking water and sanitation with Resolution 64/292, which declares that water and sanitation are a basic human right. Furthermore, on 30 September 2010, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) confirmed that all individuals have the right to an adequate standard of living that includes safe drinking water and sanitation. These actions came at a time of new and ongoing issues that continue to create challenges for water management. The international community has committed itself several times to ensuring universal access to water, but the right to water has not been explicitly recognized, and some Member States object to its codification. The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has been directly involved in the development of frameworks meant to ensure access to water and has also issued opinions and recommendations on a variety of water-related subjects. ECOSOC can address many aspects of ensuring universal access to water by working towards consensus-driven agreements on water access and making recommendations that will support internationally-agreed upon development goals.

The United Nations has long considered drinking water and sanitation to be of high importance, holding the United Nations Water Conference in 1977, the International Conference on Water and the Environment, and the Earth Summit in 1992, which all focused on water. The United Nations declared 1981 through 1990 as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade. Over those ten years, the efforts of the United Nations and Member States resulted in 1.3 billion people receiving better access to drinking water. One region where drinking water is becoming of increased concern is Asia and the Pacific. Asia is home to 60 percent of the world's population, but only 38 percent of the world's available freshwater. With this ratio, the region faces uncertainties regarding access to water, which is crucial for continued human development. In extremely underdeveloped regions, just securing water supplies and the most basic levels of sanitation has proven challenging. In Asia and the Pacific, rapid **urbanization** has made freshwater scarce, increased the levels of pollution, and resulted in inadequate sanitary conditions. Additionally, questions have arisen on how to deal with changes in weather patterns and water **allocation**.

Furthermore, it is estimated that 50 percent of the population in Asia and the Pacific will live in urban areas by 2025. Much of this urbanization is expected to take place in slums, where

the sanitary conditions that are essential to maintaining a healthy population are poor. Another result of rapid urbanization is increasingly high levels of pollution, which further threaten access to water. 70 percent of China's rivers and lakes are now polluted, and 60 percent of lakes in Malaysia are **eutrophic** due to pollution. The rising levels of pollution are also taking a growing financial toll. The cost of cleaning up water pollution in Jakarta alone is expected to exceed one billion dollars. High levels of sewage from poor sanitation systems are the primary cause of water contamination, but industrial waste is also a factor. Surface water is especially vulnerable, given that 32 percent of the region's population receives its drinking water from these sources. The 2006 United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) Global International Water Assessment estimated that over half of Asian sub-regions have ground water that is severely polluted. Addressing these problems within the context of Asia's booming growth remains a problem for Member States. In extremely underdeveloped regions, access to sanitation hinders economic growth. Lack of adequate sanitation is linked to dramatically increased levels of diarrhea, the second leading cause of death for children under five in underdeveloped regions. Additionally, poor sanitation facilities harm immune systems and increase the spread of communicable diseases. The practice of open defecation is common in certain regions of sub-Saharan Africa, which creates sanitation challenges. There is also significant concern over water allocation. Agriculture accounts for the vast majority of global water usage, taking up as much as 80 percent of the available groundwater in some areas. However, water is becoming scarcer in many regions that rely on it for drinking, sanitation and food production. Observed changes in the climate, including increased atmospheric water vapor content, more extreme drought/non-drought cycles and reduced snow and ice runoff are causing a larger percentage of available water to go towards agricultural usage.

Recently, the General Assembly has recognized these challenges and named 2005-2015 as the International Decade for Action, Water for Life. The goal of the Water for Life Decade is to meet the Millennium Development Goals' target that the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation is halved by 2015. Furthermore, 2003 was declared the International Year of Water and 2008 the International Year of Sanitation. In addition to the declaration that water is a legal human right, Resolution 64/292 calls upon Member States to provide financial resources, capacity building, and technology transfer to developing countries to provide safe and cheap drinking water and sanitation for all. Resolution 64/292 is the strongest statement that the United Nations has made on the need for safe drinking water and sanitation. Following Resolution 64/292, HRC has passed Resolution 7/22 in September 2010. The Resolution adds that safe drinking water is a part of the agreed upon international law. The Resolution codifies that Member States have the main responsibility of assuring that all human rights, including the right to water, have been met. HRC recommends that governments adopt effective regulatory frameworks that cover vulnerable groups. In addition, HRC recommends creating an accountability system for governments that violate water and sanitation related human rights. Even though Member States have agreed to support the universal rights to clean and sanitary drinking water, decisions must be made regarding the level of central planning necessary for areas with booming populations. In addition, Member States must also decide how to effectively and efficiently deal with the increased water needs in different regions, while realizing that these decisions will have serious economic, social and political dimensions.

*Key terms to know*

**Allocation:** Assigning or distributing an amount or portion of a resource to particular recipients.

**Eutrophic:** Having waters rich in phosphates, nitrates, and organic nutrients that promote a proliferation of plant life, especially algae. This kills animal life by depriving it of oxygen and can lead to algal blooms toxic to human life.

**Sanitation:** The provision of facilities and services for the safe disposal of human urine and feces, promoting health through prevention of human contact with the hazards of wastes as well as the treatment and proper disposal of sewage or wastewater.

**Urbanization:** A population shift from rural to urban areas, the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas, and the ways in which each society adapts to the change.

#### *Key documents*

- 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Mar del Plata Action Plan
- Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development
- Agenda 21
- Millennium Declaration
- Johannesburg Plan of Implementation

#### *What to do now?*

The progressive development of the right to water and sanitation within the international community has taken decades, and the right is still not universally recognized. The stark reality is that hundreds of millions of people lack both consistent access to safe drinking water and to effective sanitation systems, despite goals made as early as 1977 with the Mar Del Plata Action Plan to ensure universal access. ECOSOC has already played a key role in the recognition of the right to water globally. Additionally, as the primary UN entity in the oversight of NGOs and coordination between other bodies and agencies in the implementation of the SDGs, ECOSOC is uniquely positioned to make recommendations on how to ensure universal access to water. In order to holistically address the topic and make progress on the realization of the right to water and sanitation, ECOSOC will need to address all aspects of water access, including addressing infrastructure financing, recognition of the right to water, and threats to water access such as climate change. With the adoption of the SDGs, water access is a critical component of the international development agenda and cooperation between Member States is critical to achieving success.

#### *Things to consider*

1. How can Member States manage the allocation of water for agriculture without harming agricultural yields?
2. Given the right to clean water and sanitation, what role does the international community have in managing rapid urbanization?
3. Given the lack of existing infrastructure, what can be done to provide proper sanitation to underdeveloped regions?

4. To what extent have past frameworks been implemented, and what challenges remain?
5. How, and should, the right to water be guaranteed?
6. To what extent has your Member State and region ensured universal access to water and what are the continuing obstacles?

*For further research*

- Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation:  
[www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx)
- United Nations Global Issues: Water:  
[www.un.org/en/globalissues/water](http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/water)
- International Decade for Action:  
[www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human\\_right\\_to\\_water.shtml](http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml)
- UN-Water:  
[www.unwater.org](http://www.unwater.org)

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