

GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE RESEARCH PAPER

MESSAGE FROM THE COMMITTEE PRESIDENT

Dear Delegate,

Welcome to the research paper we have prepared for you.
This is a great starting point for your research.

If you have any questions about this research, please write
to us at *obsmun@obs.edu.pt*

Happy debating and see you soon.

PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

This research guide was compiled by the Secretariat of the OBSMUN 2025. OBSMUN aims to provide delegates with the opportunity to further develop their research skills that will help them in their academics. Thus, these research guides do not cover the whole breadth of the issues at hand. Instead, they are designed to provide a basis from which delegates can undertake their own research into the topics, with the aim of developing clauses from their independent research.

This guide is not sufficient as background information to prepare yourself for the country, since it does not look at the information from your countries point of view, but instead a generalised one.

WHEN RESEARCHING FOR INFORMATION REGARDING YOUR COUNTRY YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS;

- **Where does your country stand on the issue being addressed?**
- **Does it affect the country you are representing?**
- **Would your country be in favour / against taking action on the issue?**
- **What policies are currently in place in your country to address this issue?**
- **Given your country's stance & policies, what type of solution would you support?**
- **What measures would benefit your country?**
- **What measures would be detrimental to your country? Which ones would your country be especially be opposed to?**

TOPIC 1: THE ISSUE OF REFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS CHARTER AND THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO ENSURE FAIR

Background

The United Nations Charter, the founding document of the United Nations, was signed on the 26th of June 1945 in San Francisco. It established the UN as the main international institution responsible for the maintenance of peace and security, the fostering of international cooperation, and the promotion of human rights, marking the beginning of the post-war multilateral order (United Nations, 1945).

The Charter was designed in the immediate aftermath of World War II, and thus it reflects the geopolitical conditions of that period. This means that it mostly rewards the Allied Powers with its more prominent positions. The Security Council's (SC) composition, for example, grants permanent membership and veto power to five states (the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and China), all of which were key members of the allies. Consequently, the organisation of the UN emulates this historical context rather than the modern distribution of global power (Weiss and Daws, 2018).

There have been few changes to the UN Charter since its adoption: the Charter has only been amended five times. The most significant of these amendments was the expansion of the Security Council in 1965 from 11 to 15 members (UN General Assembly, 1965). This institutional inertia has led to calls for reform, coupled with criticisms of

inefficiency, lack of representativeness, and the misuse of the veto power (Luck, 2006). This has created considerable debate as to how the United Nations should be run, and whether its structure should be changed to better reflect the modern world.

International Reactions to the Issue

There are many countries and groups which have proposed reforming the UN Charter. The most prominent such group is the G4, made up of Germany, Japan, India and Brazil. (Auswärtiges Amt, 2024). Formed in 2004, the group defends that their positions within the UN and the global order justify a permanent seat in the SC (Rajan, 2019). In March of 2024, the G4 proposed increasing the size of the SC to 25 or 26 members, including 6 new permanent members (the G4 countries and two others from Africa), as well as four or five non-permanent members. (NDTV, 2024)

On the other hand, the Uniting for Consensus (UfC) group, led by Italy and Pakistan, emerged in the early 2000s, opposing the G4's proposals. The UfC opposes the creation of new permanent seats on the UN Security Council, defending that this would further undermine equality. The group still defends reform though,, advocating for the expansion of the number of non-permanent seats, and for the adoption of longer terms, to ensure greater geographic rotation and inclusivity, especially for regions such as Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, and Small Island Developing States, which are usually under-represented (Government of Canada, 2024). The group also aims to improve the Council's working methods, accountability, and transparency, while attempting to limit or reduce the use of the veto (Pirozzi,

2023). In 2005, the UfC tabled draft resolution A/59/L.68, formally outlining this model and continuing to use the Intergovernmental Negotiations framework as the legitimate forum for achieving reform (United for Consensus Group, 2005)

Developing nations, represented through the G77, also argue that the current system perpetuates inequality in international relations and helps to maintain a hierarchy of powers which is no longer pertinent to the modern international system (G77, 2020). The African Union has demanded permanent representation for African states on the SC, citing the continent's exclusion despite being home to over one billion people and the site of most Council interventions (African Union, 2005).

Western states also support reform in principle but are still unwilling to reduce their own influence and power. The veto is the most divisive issue: as the P5 defends the need to prevent unilateral action, while critics contend that it obstructs effective responses to global crises and conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War and the conflict in Ukraine, especially when a P5 member is involved, as with the two aforementioned cases (Fassbender, 2012).

At the same time, civil society organisations, such as the Campaign for a United Nations Parliamentary Assembly, support more radical reforms, which would create democratic mechanisms that allow for greater citizen representation, though obviously these ideas are not as defended by member states (Kissling, 2010). Still, they must be taken into account when considering reforms to the UN's system.

Reactions from the United Nations

The United Nations has acknowledged how important it is to reform its structures, especially the SC. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in 2005 that “reform is not a one-time event but a continuous process,” highlighting how the UN must evolve to reflect the current international order and to ensure that it is seen as legitimate in the eyes of the international community (Annan, 2005). The High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change proposed two models for SC reform in 2004. However, these proposals did not gain consensus among member states, mainly due to the fact many states were unwilling to give up on their power, or who should get more prominent roles within the organisations (United Nations, 2004).

Other UN initiatives have sought to channel negotiations and dialogue through the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process, launched in 2009, aimed at allowing member states to discuss options for reform, such as expanding the number of non-permanent seats, adding new permanent SC members, and changing how veto powers could be used. Though there have been many resolutions and working papers in that meantime, there has been little progress. UN Charter amendments need to be approved by two-thirds of member states and need to be ratified by all of the P5. (United Nations, 1945: Art. 108). (Please note that this will only be taken into account when we pass the GA’s resolution at OBSMUN)

Secretary-General António Guterres has defended calls for reform. To him, this would strengthen the UN’s credibility and effectiveness, better reflecting the international system. Guterres also highlighted the necessity for inclusive and

networked multilateral institutions, and that SC's structure is not a reflection of the current international order, proposing an increase in the number of actors involved in international peace and security (United Nations, 2021).

Past UN Actions

As we have seen, the most significant reform to the UN Charter took place in 1965. That was when the SC's membership was expanded from 11 to 15 members, and the voting requirements in the GA were also adjusted to reflect that change (United Nations, 1965). In 1971, when the GA recognized the People's Republic of China as the legitimate representative of China, replacing the Republic of China (Taiwan) as a permanent member of the Security Council. None of these changes, though, had a significant impact on the UN as an organisation or on its institutions: the veto power continued to be an area of contention, while the number of SC permanent members and the regions from which they came from remained unchanged.

The GA has passed a number of resolutions defending reform and calling for continued negotiations. However, there are still considered barriers to bring about any kind of reform: as noted before, all changes to the UN Charter require ratification by two-thirds of all UN member states and the five permanent members of the Security Council (United Nations, 1945: Art. 108). Thus, little meaningful action has been carried out by the UN in the previous decades since its inception.

UN Reform Timeline

- **1965:** The UN Charter is amended expanding the SC from 11 to 15 members, though keeping the number of permanent members the same. The voting majority in the General Assembly is also adjusted in accordance to this.
- **1971:** a GA Resolution 2758 is passed, replacing the ROC (Taiwan) with the PRC as permanent SC member
- **2004:** High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change held, which created two proposals to reform the SC; neither achieved consensus, and thus were not carried out
- **2005:** Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Remarks – Emphasised reform as a continuous process and the need for inclusive decision-making
- **2009:** Launch of Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) – Platform for debate on expansion, veto limitation, and working methods
- **2009–present:** Ongoing IGN Discussions – Stalled due to P5 resistance and regional disagreements
- **Ongoing:** General Assembly Resolutions – Repeated affirmations of the necessity for reform; ratification hurdles remain significant (2/3 of UN members + P5 approval)

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