

UNGA-6

United Nations General Assembly 6 (LEGAL)



AGENDA

Strengthening the Effectiveness of the United Nations:
Addressing Structural Limitations and Advancing Institutional
Reform through the UN 80 Initiative.

"The rules dictate that you must be precise, as the law is a very precise endeavor."

AGENDA:

Strengthening the Effectiveness of the United Nations: Addressing Structural Limitations and Advancing Institutional Reform through the UN80 Initiative

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Committee Introduction

What is the General Assembly?

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. Composed of all 193 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 central role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law. The Assembly traditionally also conducts informal consultations on a wide range of substantive topics towards the adoption of new resolutions.

Functions and Powers of the General Assembly

The Assembly makes *recommendations* to States on international issues within its competence. It has also taken actions across all pillars of the United Nations, including with regard to political, economic, humanitarian, social and legal matters. In September 2015, the Assembly agreed on a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, contained in the outcome document of the United Nations Summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda (resolution 70/1 entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). In 2022, the Assembly held a series of meetings to discuss the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Our Common Agenda", an agenda of action, designed to strengthen and accelerate multilateral agreements – particularly the 2030 Agenda – and make a tangible difference in people's lives (Read "Our common agenda", summary of thematic consultations).

According to the Charter of the United Nations, the General Assembly may:

- Consider and approve the United Nations budget and establish the financial assessments of Member States,
- Elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council and the members of other United Nations councils and organs and, on the recommendation of the Security Council, appoint the Secretary-General,
- Consider and make recommendations on the general principles of cooperation for maintaining international peace and security, including disarmament,
- any question relating to international peace and security and, except where a dispute or situation is currently being discussed by the Security Council, make recommendations on it,
- Discuss, with the same exception, and make recommendations on any questions within the scope of the Charter or affecting the powers and functions of any organ of the United Nations,
- Initiate studies and make recommendations to promote international political cooperation, the development and codification of international law, the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and international collaboration in the economic, social, humanitarian, cultural, educational and health fields,
- Make recommendations for the peaceful settlement of any situation that might impair friendly relations among countries,
- Consider reports from the Security Council and other United Nations organs.

The General Assembly has six main committees (sub-bodies), each dealing with a specific area of global governance:

First Committee – Disarmament and International Security (DISEC)

Second Committee – Economic and Financial (ECOFIN)

Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian and Cultural (SOCHUM)

Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization (SPECPOL)

Fifth Committee – Administrative and Budgetary

Sixth Committee – Legal Committee

The General Assembly Sixth Committee – Legal Committee

The Sixth Committee serves as the primary legal forum of the United Nations. It is responsible for discussing questions related to international law, legal accountability, treaty frameworks, codification of law, and the peaceful legal regulation of relations between States.

The Mandate of the Sixth Committee

- Promotion and codification of international law;
- Development of legal frameworks governing State conduct;
- Discussion on issues such as terrorism, cyber law, humanitarian law, sovereignty, immunity, and accountability;
- Examination of reports from bodies such as the International Law Commission (ILC);
- Encouraging peaceful dispute resolution through legal mechanisms rather than conflict.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The committee does not create directly binding laws; instead, it drafts conventions, recommendations, declarations, and legal principles that often shape customary international law and future treaties.

The Sixth Committee provides the legal and institutional framework through which States debate international obligations, sovereign rights, accountability mechanisms, and multilateral cooperation. The committee examines how existing international law applies to emerging global challenges and whether new legal instruments or reforms are required.

Debates in the Sixth Committee often revolve around balancing:

- State sovereignty vs international responsibility
- Security concerns vs human rights protections
- Technological advancement vs legal regulation
- National interests vs multilateral obligations

As a result, delegates are expected to argue not only politically, but also legally; using treaties, conventions, customary international law, ICJ judgments, and UN resolutions as evidence.

Present-Day Examples and References

Some major contemporary legal issues discussed within the Sixth Committee framework include:

- Regulation of autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) under international humanitarian law;
- Cybersecurity and applicability of international law in cyberspace;
- Legal accountability regarding the Russia–Ukraine conflict;
- International counter-terrorism conventions;

- Protection of refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention;
- Crimes against humanity and discussions on a future convention governing them.

Overview and Significance of the Agenda

The UN80 Initiative, put forward by the Secretary-General António Guterres, is the most comprehensive presentation of the structure and working of the Organisation since its foundation in 1945. Against the background of an increased geopolitical tension, erosion of multilateralism and growing complexities of modern global problems, the discussion about the suitability of current structures within the United Nations to meet new challenges has become one of the key topics in contemporary international relations.

In this context, the Sixth Committee (Legal) represents one of the central bodies within the UN General Assembly responsible for legal matters. This Committee is charged with such tasks as codification and progressive development of international law, supervising legal measures and considering the structure and mechanisms for defining and enforcing international obligations. All these areas represent some of the key issues addressed within the scope of the UN80 Initiative, including the legality of structural reforms, the interaction between new bodies and treaties, the role of ILC in revising the legislation and the procedural aspect of implementing reforms.

Historical Context: The Path from Westphalia to the UN System

Understanding the structural architecture of the United Nations requires situating it within the longer history of multilateral governance. The UN emerged from centuries of evolving international practice regarding the rights and obligations of sovereign states.

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648)

Peace of Westphalia, concluded in 1648, ending the Thirty Years War, is generally acknowledged as marking the beginning of the formation of the modern state system. The two treaties that comprise the Westphalian peace agreement enshrined certain fundamental elements that have continued to lay the base for international politics to this day: sovereignty of the state, equality among all states, and non-intervention in internal affairs of other states. Such principles have become the basis for constructing future international cooperation frameworks.

The League of Nations (1920-1946)

The devastation from the First World War led to the creation of the first important institutionalized attempt at multilateralism in the form of the League of Nations, created

through the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 and officially formed in 1920. The League instituted the concept of collective security, which stipulated that the member states should act collectively if any member is attacked, and it created the Permanent Court of International Justice, being the first standing international judicial body. However, there were a number of significant structural problems with the League. The US, whose President Wilson had been an advocate of its formation, refused to join because the Senate had rejected the Covenant. The unanimity rules for both the Assembly and the Council made joint actions difficult. It was this structural problem along with inability to act on the invasion of Manchuria by Japan (1931) and invasion of Ethiopia by Italy (1935) that led to the dissolution of the League during the Second World War.

The Founding of the United Nations (1945)

The United Nations was established on 24 October 1945 following the adoption of the UN Charter by the five permanent members of the Security Council and the majority of other signatories. The idea was conceived in the Dumbarton Oaks Conference (1944), while the final version was adopted in the San Francisco Conference (1945). The creation of the United Nations was intended to overcome weaknesses within the League of Nations. Some notable new concepts include:

- The establishment of the Security Council as the major body responsible for peace and security, and possessing the power to enforce decisions pursuant to Chapter VII of the Charter;
- The General Assembly as a forum where all member states would be equally represented (under *Article 2(1) of the UN Charter*);
- The International Court of Justice as the principal judicial organ;
- The Secretariat for administrative efficiency;
- The specialized agencies dealing with economic, social, cultural, education, public health, and other spheres (UN Charter Article 57)

Early Reform Debates (1945-1970s)

From the start, member states recognised that the distribution of power in the Charter such as the veto and the composition of the Security Council reflected the geopolitical realities of 1945 rather than the evolving international community. As decolonisation brought dozens of new states into the UN during the 1950s and 1960s, pressures for reform of the Security Council and the General Assembly grew accordingly. The 1963 amendment to the Charter expanded the Security Council from 11 to 15 members, increasing non-permanent membership from 6 to 10.

The Boutros-Ghali Era: An Agenda for Peace and Reform (1992)

However, the end of the Cold War opened up new possibilities for a revitalised United Nations organization. This can be seen from the "An Agenda for Peace" report published by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992 in which he advocated for broadening the scope of activities within the United Nations in the areas of preventive diplomacy and

peacemaking. Many of the proposals such as an active UN military force were not implemented.

The Annan Reforms (1997-2006)

The reform process initiated by the Secretary-General Kofi Annan represented the most intensive reform effort seen before António Guterres' appointment. The reform process that began in 1997 along with the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and the outcome document of the World Summit 2005 was aimed at reforming the UN Secretariat by making it more efficient and accountable, creating the Human Rights Council as a successor to the Commission on Human Rights, forming the Peacebuilding Commission, and streamlining the field operations.

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (2015)

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 represented a landmark expansion of the UN's standard role. Covering poverty, inequality, climate, education, health, and governance, the SDGs created a global accountability framework. However, the institutional architecture for monitoring and implementation has been widely regarded as inefficient.

Our Common Agenda (2021)

In 2021, Secretary-General Guterres published "Our Common Agenda", a comprehensive report responding to a UNGA mandate to reignite multilateralism. The report identified multiple structural gaps in the global governance architecture and proposed institutional innovations including a Summit of the Future, an Emergency Platform for complex global shocks, a New Agenda for Peace, and a Global Digital Compact. Many of these proposals were taken up in the 2024 Pact for the Future.

The Pact for the Future (2024)

Adopted at the Summit of the Future in September 2024, the Pact for the Future represents the most recent high-level multilateral commitment to UN reform. It includes commitments on international peace and security, sustainable development, climate, digital governance, youth, and UN system reform. Annex II of the Pact and Annex III reflect efforts to extend the UN's normative reach into emerging domains. However, several states and analysts noted that the Pact's commitments remained aspirational rather than legally binding.

The UN80 Initiative: Scope, Content, and Context

The UN80 Initiative represents the Secretary-General's programmatic framework for institutional reform timed to coincide with the UN's 80th anniversary in 2025. While not a single document or treaty, it encompasses a series of reform proposals and review processes spanning all major UN organs and agencies.

Origins and Mandate

Secretary-General Guterres first signalled a comprehensive reform agenda upon taking office in 2017, launching initiatives to reform the peace and security architecture, the development system, and management practices. The UN80 Initiative formalises this ongoing agenda as a structured, anniversary-aligned reform process.

The initiative has been described as targeting:

- Efficiency in structure: eliminating unnecessary duplication in agencies, financing, and programs;
- Representational balance: addressing the underrepresentation of the Global South in decision-making forums such as the Security Council;
- Sustainable financing: revising the assessment and voluntary contribution system to limit dependency on just a few large donors;
- Effectiveness in operation: improving the coordination between the Secretariat, specialized agencies, and missions in the field;
- Modernization of law: upgrading multilateral legal instruments to cope with contemporary problems like AI governance and cybersecurity.

Key Structural Limitations Being Addressed

The UN80 Initiative is premised on an acknowledgment that the Organisation faces several structural limitations that impede its effectiveness:

The Veto Problem

The veto power of the P5 in the Security Council has increasingly been invoked to prevent collective action in situations where there is evidence of threats to international peace and security.

Underrepresentation of the Global South

The composition of the Security Council's permanent membership reflects the geopolitical landscape of 1945. Africa, Latin America, and most of Asia hold no permanent seats, despite representing the majority of the world's population and UN membership. The G4 countries (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) and the African Union's Ezulwini Consensus position have consistently advocated for an expansion of both permanent and non-permanent membership, without consensus being reached.

Funding Deficits and Dependence

The United Nations faces a structural funding crisis. The five largest contributors to the regular budget the United States, China, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom collectively account for over 60% of aggregate contributions. The US alone contributes 22% of the regular budget

and 27% of the peacekeeping budget. Voluntary contributions to funds and programmes are even more concentrated and unpredictable. In 2024, the UN faced a liquidity crisis that led to significant cuts in staffing and programming. This structural dependence on a small number of donors creates political leverage that undermines the multilateral character of the Organisation.

Coordination Failures

The UN system encompasses 15 specialised agencies, 11 funds and programmes, and numerous other bodies, totalling over 44 entities. The fragmented institutional landscape has produced well-documented coordination failures in areas including humanitarian response, development programming, and climate action. The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) have repeatedly identified duplication of mandates and inadequate inter-agency coordination as systemic problems.

Speed, Efficiency, Accessibility, Depth, and Scale (SEADS)

Internal assessments of UN performance have identified five aspects: Speed, Efficiency, Accessibility/Acceptability, Depth, and Scale as the key performance parameters against which reform progress should be measured. These aspects capture the degree to which UN responses are timely, resource-effective, inclusive, and of sufficient reach to address problems of global magnitude.

Relevance to the Sixth Committee

While structural reform of the UN is a topic that spans all six Main Committees, the Sixth Committee's legal mandate gives it a distinctive role in this debate. Specifically, the Sixth Committee is called upon to address:

The Legal Basis for Institutional Reform

Any structural reform of the United Nations including amendments to the Charter requires adhering to the procedures set out in Chapter XVIII of the UN Charter. *Article 108* provides that amendments require the agreement of two-thirds of all members, including the ratification of all five permanent members. This means that any reform requiring Charter amendment such as expansion of the Security Council or modification of the veto faces an extraordinarily high legal bar. The Sixth Committee is responsible for examining whether proposed reforms are legally feasible within this framework.

International Law Commission Reports

The International Law Commission (ILC), established by the General Assembly in 1947, submits annual reports to the Sixth Committee. The ILC's work on topics such as the Responsibility of International Organisations, Crimes Against Humanity, and Immunity of State Officials from

Foreign Criminal Jurisdiction helps clarify the legal obligations and accountability of international institutions and their member states.

Definitions, Key Terms, and Instruments

1. **United Nations (UN)** - An international organization established by the UN Charter in 1945 to maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations, achieve international cooperation, and serve as a centre for harmonizing the actions of states.
2. **General Assembly (GA)** - The deliberative and representative organ consisting of all UN Member States. It may discuss questions within the scope of the Charter and make recommendations, except where the Charter limits its role in relation to matters before the Security Council.
3. **Sixth Committee (Legal Committee)** - The main forum of the General Assembly for the consideration of legal questions. All UN Member States may be represented in the Committee.
4. **Security Council (SC)** - The UN organ to which Member States confer primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has five permanent members and ten elected members.
5. **Secretariat** - The administrative organ headed by the Secretary-General, who acts as the chief administrative officer of the Organization and whose staff carry out the day-to-day work of the UN.
6. **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** - The principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It decides disputes between states that accept its jurisdiction and gives advisory opinions to authorized UN organs and specialized agencies.
7. **International Law Commission (ILC)** - A body established by the General Assembly to promote the progressive development and codification of international law.
8. **UN80 Initiative** - A Secretary-General-led reform initiative launched around the UN's 80th anniversary to make the UN system simpler, more coherent, efficient, accountable and future-ready. Its workstreams include efficiencies and improvements, mandate implementation review, and possible structural changes.
9. **Mandate** - An instruction, responsibility, function, or task given to a UN organ, office, mission, fund, programme, or entity through the Charter, a resolution, a decision, a treaty, or another competent authority.
10. **Mandate implementation review** - A process of examining how UN mandates are created, delivered and reviewed so that mandates remain relevant, funded, coordinated and capable of producing results.

11. **Structural limitation** - A recurring institutional constraint that affects the UN's ability to act. Examples include veto paralysis, funding unpredictability, overlapping mandates, outdated representation, and difficult Charter amendment thresholds.
12. **Institutional reform** - Changes to the structure, procedures, mandates, financing, accountability mechanisms or working methods of an institution. In the UN context, reforms may require Charter amendment, General Assembly action, Security Council action, or internal administrative change.
13. **Multilateralism** - A mode of international cooperation in which three or more states coordinate action through shared rules, institutions, negotiations or legal commitments. In the UN system, multilateralism is grounded in sovereign equality and collective problem-solving.
14. **Sovereign equality** - The Charter principle that the Organization is based on the sovereign equality of all its Members.
15. **Veto power** - The practical effect of Article 27(3) of the Charter, under which substantive Security Council decisions require the concurring votes of the permanent members. The Charter does not itself use the term "veto."
16. **Charter amendment** - A formal change to the UN Charter. Under Article 108, amendments require adoption by two-thirds of the General Assembly and ratification by two-thirds of UN Members, including all permanent Security Council members.
17. **System-wide coherence** - An approach to UN reform that seeks better alignment across agencies, funds, programmes, missions and offices so that overlapping mandates and fragmented delivery are reduced.
18. **Intergovernmental negotiations (IGN)** - The General Assembly forum through which Member States negotiate the question of equitable representation and an increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters. Most matters regarding reforms are discussed here.
19. **SEADS Framework** - A committee-level analytical framework for evaluating UN institutional performance through Speed, Efficiency, Accessibility/Acceptability, Depth and Scale. *This is not a UN legal term, but a useful tool for delegate analysis.*
20. **International law** - The rules and principles that regulate relations between states and other subjects of international law. The ICJ Statute lists treaties, custom and general principles as primary sources, with judicial decisions and scholarly writings as subsidiary means.
21. **Treaty** - An international agreement concluded between states in written form and governed by international law, regardless of its title or designation.
22. **Customary international law** - A rule arising from general state practice accepted as law. It generally requires both consistent practice and *opinio juris*, meaning a belief that the practice is legally required.

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23. **Codification of international law** - The more precise formulation and systematization of rules in fields where there has already been extensive state practice, precedent and doctrine.
 24. **Progressive development of international law** - The preparation of draft conventions on subjects not yet regulated by international law or not sufficiently developed in state practice.
 25. ***Jus Cogens* OR Peremptory Norm** - A norm accepted and recognized by the international community of states as a whole as one from which no derogation is permitted.
 26. **Responsibility of international organizations** - The principle that an international organization may incur international responsibility when conduct attributable to it breaches an international obligation of that organization.
 27. **Advisory opinion** - A non-contentious legal opinion given by the ICJ at the request of authorized UN organs and specialized agencies. Advisory opinions are not judgments between parties, but they can clarify legal questions. Defined under article 96 of the UN Charter.
 28. **Legal Accountability** - The obligation of an actor to explain, justify, and accept consequences for conduct. In UN reform debates, accountability may concern states, UN organs, officials, peace operations, or international organizations themselves.
 29. **Peaceful settlement of disputes** - A Charter obligation requiring parties to settle disputes by peaceful means such as negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies, or other peaceful means.
 30. **UN Charter** - The constitutional foundation of the UN system. It defines the powers of the principal organs, the principles of sovereign equality and non-use of force, and the amendment process.
 31. **Pact for the Future (2024)** - A recent political commitment to make multilateralism more inclusive and effective, including through institutional reform, digital cooperation and future generations commitments.
 32. **Our Common Agenda (2021)** - A Secretary-General report that frames “inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism” and informed later reform conversations, including the Summit of the Future.
 33. **UN80 Initiative (2025 onwards)** - The current reform umbrella for efficiency, mandate review and possible structural change across the UN system.
 34. **A/RES/76/262 on veto accountability** - Creates a standing mandate for the General Assembly to debate situations when a veto is cast in the Security Council.
 35. **Uniting for Peace, A/RES/377(V)** - Allows the General Assembly to consider urgent peace and security matters when the Security Council is blocked by lack of unanimity among permanent members.
 36. **ILC Statute** - Defines the ILC’s role in codification and progressive development of international law, relevant to Sixth Committee deliberations.

Detailed Analysis of the Larger Themes in the Agenda

The Legal Tension between State Sovereignty and Institutional Effectiveness

The United Nations is built on the principle of sovereign equality. Each Member State has one vote in the General Assembly, and the Charter limits the UN's ability to intervene in matters that are essentially within domestic jurisdiction. At the same time, the Charter also creates organs that can act collectively in areas such as peace and security, human rights, development, and international law. This creates the central tension in UN reform: the Organization must be strong enough to address common problems, but not so powerful that Member States view it as undermining their sovereignty.

For the Sixth Committee, this tension is legal as well as political. A proposal to create a stronger compliance mechanism, for example, may improve effectiveness but raise questions about consent, jurisdiction and enforcement. A proposal to strengthen the Secretariat may improve speed but raise concerns that unelected international officials are being given excessive discretion. A proposal to expand the General Assembly's role when the Security Council is blocked may improve representativeness, but it must be reconciled with the Charter's allocation of primary responsibility for peace and security to the Security Council.

The Veto Problem and the Limits of Collective Security

The Security Council was designed to enable prompt and effective action in matters of international peace and security. Its permanent membership and voting rules reflected the political realities of the Second World War. In legal terms, the veto is not named as such in the Charter; it emerges from the requirement that substantive decisions need the concurring votes of the permanent members. In practice, a negative vote by any permanent member can prevent the Council from adopting binding measures even when a majority of Council members support action.

This creates one of the most visible structural limitations of the UN system. When the Council is blocked, the Organization may be unable to authorize sanctions, peace operations, referrals to accountability mechanisms, or other collective measures. From a legitimacy perspective, repeated deadlock can make the UN appear unable to respond to grave crises. From a legal perspective, however, abolishing or restricting the veto through Charter amendment would require the consent of the very states that possess the veto. This makes direct veto reform extremely difficult.

Because formal amendment is difficult, Member States have developed procedural alternatives. The Uniting for Peace resolution allows the General Assembly to consider situations when the Security Council fails to act because of lack of unanimity among permanent members. Resolution 76/262 created a standing mandate for the General Assembly to meet after a veto is cast. These mechanisms do not remove the veto and do not make General Assembly

recommendations binding. Their importance lies in political accountability, transparency, and the possibility of collective recommendations outside the Council.

Representation, Legitimacy and the Global South

A second major theme is representation. The membership of the United Nations has changed dramatically since 1945, especially after decolonization. Yet the permanent membership of the Security Council has not changed. This mismatch is central to the demands of the African Union, the G4, the L.69 group, the G77 and many other reform advocates. Their argument is that institutions designed around the geopolitical balance of 1945 cannot fully claim legitimacy in a world where Africa, Latin America and much of Asia remain excluded from permanent decision-making.

Representation matters for more than symbolism. Security Council decisions often affect regions that do not have permanent seats. Peacekeeping mandates, sanctions regimes, humanitarian access decisions and conflict-related resolutions frequently concern African, Middle Eastern and Asian states. When affected regions have limited influence in the organ making decisions, those decisions may be perceived as less legitimate even when they are legally valid.

There is, however, no single agreed model for representation reform. Some states support additional permanent seats. Others support longer-term elected seats without creating new veto holders. Some argue that adding permanent members could make the Council more legitimate; others argue that it could make the Council less efficient. This is a classic reform dilemma: legitimacy may require expansion, while efficiency may require a body small enough to act quickly. Delegates should therefore assess both representativeness and functionality rather than treating expansion as automatically successful.

Mandate Overload and Institutional Fragmentation

The UN system contains principal organs, specialized agencies, funds, programmes, commissions, missions, departments and offices. Over time, the General Assembly, Security Council and other bodies have created thousands of mandates. Many remain important, but some overlap, become outdated, or lack adequate resources. Mandate overload is therefore a structural issue: the UN may be asked to do more than its finances, staff, procedures and field presence can realistically support.

The UN80 mandate implementation review is significant because it shifts the reform conversation from broad rhetoric to the actual lifecycle of mandates. A mandate is not useful simply because it has been adopted. It must be clear, funded, assigned to a responsible entity, implemented through realistic timelines, monitored, and reviewed. If mandates multiply without being reviewed, the system becomes crowded with reports, meetings and activities that may consume resources without improving outcomes.

Financing, Liquidity and the Politics of Dependency

Institutional reform cannot be separated from financing. The UN depends on assessed contributions for the regular budget and peacekeeping, and on voluntary contributions for many funds and programmes. When assessed contributions are not paid in full or on time, liquidity problems affect staffing, travel, meetings, translation, field support and implementation. When voluntary funding dominates, programmes may become more dependent on donor priorities and less predictable for long-term planning.

Financing is a legal issue because Member States accept financial obligations under the Charter and under decisions of the General Assembly. It is also a political issue because the largest contributors may seek greater influence over priorities, while smaller and developing states may argue that the UN must not become hostage to donor preferences. In the UN80 context, efficiency can therefore be interpreted in different ways. For some states, efficiency means reducing costs, merging functions and cutting duplication. For others, it means ensuring that mandates are properly funded and that austerity does not weaken development, human rights or humanitarian work.

Accountability of the UN and International Organizations

A central legal theme for the Sixth Committee is accountability. The UN promotes accountability among states, but the Organization itself also exercises power through peacekeeping, sanctions administration, humanitarian operations, procurement, investigations and field missions. When UN actors cause harm, act negligently, or fail to respond effectively, affected individuals and communities may have limited access to remedies. This can create a legitimacy gap between the UN's normative commitments and its institutional practices.

The law on the responsibility of international organizations, including the International Law Commission's Draft Articles, provides an important analytical framework. It recognizes that international organizations can commit internationally wrongful acts when conduct attributable to them breaches an international obligation. However, practical enforcement remains complex because organizations have privileges and immunities, internal dispute mechanisms, and special legal status under host-state agreements.

The Modernization of International Law

The agenda also asks whether the law and institutions of the UN are suitable for new global challenges. Artificial intelligence, cyber operations, autonomous weapons, climate-related security risks, pandemics, and complex humanitarian emergencies do not always fit neatly into the categories used in 1945. The Charter remains legally central, but interpretation and new instruments may be needed to apply its principles in emerging areas.

The Sixth Committee's connection to the International Law Commission makes it important in this respect. The Committee can consider whether existing international law is adequate, whether new conventions are required, and how soft-law instruments can shape state practice. It can also help clarify how emerging rules interact with sovereignty, jurisdiction, human rights, humanitarian law and responsibility.

Administrative Reform versus Charter Reform

Not all reforms are equal in legal difficulty. Administrative reforms can often be implemented by the Secretary-General or approved through the General Assembly's budgetary and oversight processes. Examples include digitalization, relocation of functions, simplification of reporting, coordination improvements, staff mobility, and stronger performance management. These reforms can affect efficiency without changing the constitutional structure of the UN. Charter reform is more difficult. Any amendment must satisfy the legal threshold in Chapter XVIII. This makes changes to the Security Council, the veto, or the formal powers of organs highly complex. The history of UN reform shows that successful reforms usually proceed where they address a specific institutional problem, build a broad coalition, and avoid directly removing the most protected privileges of powerful states.

Applicable International Law, Frameworks, Programmes, and Legal Institutions

UN reform has not occurred through a single moment or document. It has developed through Charter amendments, General Assembly resolutions, Security Council practice, Secretary-General reports, institutional reviews, specialized commissions, and treaty-making.

Applicable International Law

1. The UN Charter

The Charter is the constitutional framework for any institutional reform of the United Nations. It establishes the principal organs, allocates powers, recognizes sovereign equality, and creates the amendment procedure.

Article 13

Gives the General Assembly a role in encouraging the progressive development of international law and codification.

Articles 10-14

Allow the Assembly to discuss and make recommendations on questions within the scope of the Charter, subject to limits.

Article 24

Gives the Security Council primary responsibility for international peace and security. Chapter XVIII establishes the formal route for Charter amendment.

2. Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT) (1969)

The VCLT codifies the rules governing the creation, interpretation, amendment, and termination of treaties between states. Since the UN system is built upon treaties and the UN Charter itself, the Convention provides the legal framework through which states understand and apply their international obligations. In the context of UN80, the VCLT is relevant because many reform proposals require interpreting existing mandates, modifying legal arrangements, or ensuring that states continue to comply with commitments made through multilateral agreements.

Article 26 – Pacta Sunt Servanda

This article establishes one of the most fundamental principles of international law: treaties that are validly entered into must be performed in good faith. States cannot selectively comply with obligations they voluntarily accepted. For UN80, this principle reinforces that institutional reform should strengthen implementation of existing commitments rather than simply create new promises.

Article 27 – Internal Law and Treaty Obligations

Prevents states from using domestic legislation, constitutional provisions, or political constraints as a justification for failing to fulfill treaty obligations. The provision protects the reliability of international agreements by ensuring that international commitments remain binding regardless of changes within a state's domestic system.

Articles 31–33 – Interpretation of Treaties

These articles establish the universally accepted methodology for interpreting treaties. They require provisions to be interpreted according to the ordinary meaning of the text, in its context, and in light of the treaty's object and purpose. These rules are particularly relevant when debating the scope of UN organs' powers or the legal feasibility of institutional reforms under the Charter.

3. Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts (ARSIWA)

ARSIWA, developed by the International Law Commission in 2001, codifies the legal consequences that arise when states violate international obligations. Although not a treaty, many of its provisions are widely regarded as reflecting customary international law. It is relevant to UN80 because discussions concerning accountability, compliance, and enforcement mechanisms ultimately rely on principles of state responsibility.

Article 1 – Responsibility for Wrongful Conduct

Establishes that whenever a state commits an internationally wrongful act, international responsibility automatically arises. The provision forms the legal basis for accountability within the international system.

Article 2 – What Makes an Act Internationally Wrongful

Explains that a wrongful act exists when conduct can be attributed to a state and violates an international legal obligation binding upon that state. This provision provides the legal test used to determine whether responsibility exists.

Article 30 – Obligation to Cease Violations

Once a violation occurs, the responsible state must immediately stop the unlawful conduct and ensure that it does not recur. The provision highlights the importance of prevention and corrective action rather than merely punishment.

Article 31 – Obligation to Provide Reparation

States must repair the damage caused by their internationally wrongful acts. Reparations may include restitution, compensation, or satisfaction depending on the circumstances.

Articles 40–41 – Serious Breaches of Peremptory Norms

These articles address grave violations of fundamental norms such as genocide, aggression, slavery, or torture. They require all states to cooperate in ending such breaches and prohibit recognition of situations created through these violations.

4. Articles on the Responsibility of International Organizations (ARIO) (2011)

ARIO extends the principles of responsibility beyond states to international organizations such as the United Nations. As UN80 directly concerns improving the functioning and accountability of the UN system, ARIO provides one of the most relevant legal frameworks for evaluating institutional responsibility.

Article 3 – Responsibility of International Organizations

This article establishes that international organizations may bear responsibility for internationally wrongful acts just as states do. It recognizes that organizations exercising international authority must also be accountable for misuse of that authority.

Article 4 – Attribution of Conduct

Explains when actions taken by organs, officials, peacekeeping missions, or agents can legally be considered acts of the organization itself. This is particularly relevant when evaluating UN operations.

Article 31 – Reparation

Where an organization causes injury through wrongful conduct, it has an obligation to make full reparation for the consequences of that conduct.

Articles 58–61 – Shared Responsibility

These provisions address situations where states and international organizations contribute jointly to a wrongful act, helping determine how responsibility should be allocated between them.

Relevant Legal Institutions

1. International Law Commission

The International Law Commission is one of the most important legal mechanisms connected to the Sixth Committee. Established by the General Assembly, the ILC prepares draft articles, draft conclusions and studies that can become the basis of treaties, declarations, or customary-law clarification. The Sixth Committee considers the ILC's reports and provides a forum for Member States to respond to legal proposals. In the context of UN80, the ILC is relevant for three reasons. First, it provides a method for modernizing international law without improvising politically in crisis moments. Second, it can clarify legal responsibility, including the responsibility of international organizations. Third, its work shows the difference between codification of existing law and progressive development of new law.

2. International Court of Justice (ICJ)

The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, established under the UN Charter in 1945 and seated in The Hague. It settles legal disputes between states that consent to its jurisdiction and provides advisory opinions to UN organs and specialized agencies on questions of international law. Unlike criminal courts, the ICJ deals only with states, not individuals. Its judgments and advisory opinions help clarify international legal norms, strengthen the rule of law, and contribute to the peaceful settlement of disputes. Within the context of UN80, the ICJ is relevant because discussions on modernizing and strengthening the UN frequently involve improving compliance with international law.

3. International Criminal Court (ICC)

The International Criminal Court is an independent international court created by the Rome Statute in 1998 and is not an organ of the United Nations, although it maintains a cooperative relationship with the UN. The ICC prosecutes individuals—not states—for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression when national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to do so. It plays a significant role in advancing accountability and combating impunity for serious international crimes. In discussions surrounding UN80, the ICC is often referenced as part of the broader international justice architecture, with debates focusing on how the UN system can better support accountability mechanisms, strengthen respect for international law, and enhance cooperation between UN bodies and international judicial institutions.

4. United Nations Office of Legal Affairs (UNOLA)

The United Nations Office of Legal Affairs serves as the central legal service of the United Nations Secretariat and is headed by the UN Legal Counsel. UNOLA provides legal advice to the Secretary-General, UN organs, peace operations, and Secretariat departments; assists in treaty registration and interpretation; supports the development and codification of international law; and ensures that UN activities comply with the Charter and international legal obligations. Because UN80 focuses heavily on improving the effectiveness, transparency, and institutional performance of the United Nations, UNOLA is particularly relevant as the body responsible for ensuring that proposed reforms remain legally sound, consistent with the Charter, and capable of being implemented within existing international legal frameworks.

5. Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)

The Joint Inspection Unit is the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system with a system-wide mandate. Established in 1966, it conducts inspections, evaluations, reviews, and investigations across UN organizations to improve efficiency, accountability, coordination, and management practices. The JIU produces

recommendations aimed at reducing duplication, strengthening governance, and enhancing institutional performance throughout the UN system. Its relevance to UN80 is particularly significant because many reform proposals under the initiative concern organizational effectiveness, resource utilization, transparency, and institutional modernization; areas in which JIU assessments and recommendations provide evidence-based guidance for improving the functioning of the UN as it approaches its next phase of development.

Past Resolutions

1. “Uniting for Peace” (Resolution 377 V) and General Assembly Action during Security Council Deadlock

General Assembly resolution 377(V), commonly known as “Uniting for Peace,” is a major procedural response to Security Council paralysis. It was adopted in 1950 in the context of the Korean War. Its central idea is that when the Security Council fails to exercise its primary responsibility because of lack of unanimity among the permanent members, the General Assembly may consider the matter and make recommendations. Uniting for Peace does not make the General Assembly a substitute Security Council. It cannot create binding Chapter VII enforcement measures. However, it can mobilize political legitimacy, convene emergency special sessions, and recommend collective measures.

2. Resolution 76/262 and Veto Accountability

Resolution 76/262, adopted by consensus in 2022, created a standing mandate for the General Assembly to hold a debate when a veto is cast in the Security Council. This mechanism does not remove the veto. It does not legally punish a permanent member for using it. Its significance is transparency and political accountability. Permanent members must anticipate broader scrutiny when their veto prevents Council action.

Timeline of UN action

Year	UN action / instrument	Legal or institutional significance for this agenda
1945	UN Charter enters into force	Creates the principal organs, Charter principles, Security Council voting rules and amendment procedure.

1947	International Law Commission established	Creates a standing mechanism for codification and progressive development of international law.
1950	Uniting for Peace resolution	Provides a General Assembly pathway for recommendations when the Security Council is blocked.
1963-1965	Charter amendment expanding Security Council membership	Shows formal structural reform is possible, but politically difficult.
1992	An Agenda for Peace	Expands reform thinking on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and post-conflict peacebuilding.
2000	Brahimi Report on peace operations	Influences peacekeeping reform and highlights the need for realistic mandates and resources.
2005-2006	World Summit reforms, Peacebuilding Commission and Human Rights Council	Creates new bodies and demonstrates reform through resolutions rather than Charter amendment.
2015	2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development	Creates a universal development framework requiring system-wide coordination.
2018	UN development system reform	Repositions country-level coordination through the Resident Coordinator system.
2021	Our Common Agenda	Frames inclusive, networked and effective multilateralism as a response to governance gaps.

2022	Resolution 76/262 on veto accountability	Introduces procedural scrutiny after Security Council vetoes.
2024	Pact for the Future	Sets political commitments on a more effective, inclusive and future-oriented multilateral system.
2025 onwards	UN80 Initiative	Organizes current reform through efficiency, mandate review and possible structural-change workstreams.

Stakeholder Analysis

Stakeholders are entities/parties that possess the ability to influence, facilitate, obstruct, or experience the consequences of a given topic. Regarding the UN80 Initiative, stakeholders include the diverse actors who shape the prospects and outcomes of institutional reform across the UN system. Certain stakeholders can be grouped under the following parameters:

1. Status Quo Beneficiaries

A stakeholder or a number of stakeholders who gain, maintain, or expand their power, privileges, or strategic interests as a result of the current institutional set-up of the United Nations. Although many benefit from administrative and procedural improvements, stakeholders who want to bring changes that affect current distributions of power or diminish their capacity in UN decision-making will face certain resistance. Five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – the People's Republic of China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States – whose veto power can negate a resolution supported by the rest of the members of the Security Council, can be argued as the most recognizable and common Status Quo Beneficiaries of the current UN. Any change to the UN Charter would have to be approved by all five permanent members, thus they hold a great deal of power within the reform process itself.

Examples of this:

- Ever since the onset of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, the United Nations Security Council saw a number of draft resolutions being put forward calling for, among other things, sanctions, accountability, referral to the International Criminal Court, and measures against the Syrian government. The vast majority of these draft resolutions garnered support from a majority within the Security Council. During the Syrian civil war, Russia, sometimes supported by China, vetoed a number of draft resolutions with calls made against the Syrian government. This showed how an institutional advantage can

be used to the fullest in the face of majority will and thus protect a unique advantage held by some members of the United Nations system.

- In June 2025 the UN Security Council voted on a resolution calling for an immediate, unconditional and permanent ceasefire in Gaza and urging humanitarian aid delivery. Fourteen members of the Council voted in favour, yet the United States vetoed the resolution, preventing it from passing, thus demonstrating the power of a permanent member to block a consensus from the majority of the UN Security Council members, therefore highlighting an institutional inequality within the UN system.

2. Reform Advocates

Reform Advocates are stakeholders in the UN that favor changes in the institutional structure, decision making and management of the organization so as to achieve increased effectiveness, representativeness, accountability and legitimacy of the UN. The main argument of reform advocates is that many structures of the UN are based on the geopolitical reality of 1945 and do not represent the current international environment anymore.

The commitment of these actors to reforms of the UN's structures has manifested in several actions:

- The G4 nations submitted formal proposals for an expansion of the Security Council with more permanent and non-permanent seats in 2005. The argument was based on the reality of a mismatch between the existing composition of the Security Council and today's world in terms of the influence of rising powers and developing major economies. Through consistent diplomatic work, the G4 continues to be one of the most significant coalitions that argue for a reform of the Security Council.
- With the Ezulwini Consensus, adopted in 2005, the African Union demands at least two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats for Africa on a reformed Security Council. The background to the proposal is that Africa is the largest regional group of the UN and is subject to Security Council decision making although without having permanent seats. The Ezulwini Consensus is one of the most comprehensive and lasting reform proposals of any regional group so far.
- The L.69 group consisting of developing countries from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean has been consistent in its efforts to support comprehensive reform of the Security Council. The group argues that an increased representation of developing countries is needed to support the UN's legitimacy, credibility and efficiency.

3. Institutional Actors in the Reform Process

The "Institutional Actors" are formal United Nations organs, offices, and mechanisms that have official functions in the processes of proposing, negotiating, enacting or adopting reforms of the UN system. While reform advocates may be coalitions of states

interested in changes to the UN system, these actors are members of the UN institution and thus, have control over the reform process.

The main institutional actors in the UN reform process have traditionally included:

- United Nations General Assembly. The main UN institution for debating institutional reform, it uses resolutions, working groups and negotiations to facilitate debate on the issues of reform. The Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) under the UN General Assembly has been a major venue for discussion of Security Council reform since 2008.
- United Nations Secretariat. Administered by the Secretary General of the UN, it is responsible for implementing administrative and operational reforms to make the UN more efficient. In 2005, then Secretary General Kofi Annan put forward a reform report '*In Larger Freedom*' that included plans for reform relating to development, security and human rights and management.
- Security Council. The Security Council is an institutional actor in reform as it is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security. Discussions on Security Council reform, a major area of reform discussions, directly involve all 5 members, because any amendment affecting the composition or veto powers of the council requires the consent of all 5 permanent members (as per Article 108).

4. Stakeholders Most Affected by Institutional Limitations

Actors most affected by institutional limitations are actors impacted by inefficiencies, lack of representativeness, funding issues or decision-making paralysis at UN headquarters and may have the greatest incentive to implement reform to enhance the efficiency, legitimacy and responsiveness of the Organization.

Examples of groups deeply affected by the structural limitations within the present UN architecture are numerous:

- Developing states: Although they are the largest grouping within the United Nations, developing states are often underrepresented in key decision-making bodies; the African continent, for instance, constitutes more than a quarter of UN member states but the region is not represented at all on the permanent tier of the Security Council.
- States undergoing armed conflict: These countries often look to the UN to provide assistance to establish peace and security in line with the principle embodied in the Charter of 'maintaining international peace and security. The crisis in Syria is a clear example of this as, time and again, the Security Council deadlocked, thus incapacitating the Organization to come up with cohesive policies even when confronted with a severe humanitarian crisis.
- Small Island Developing states: These states are disproportionately affected by global issues like climate change and sustainable development and depend more than any other grouping within the international community on effective multilateral cooperation and global solutions.

- Humanitarian agencies and people receiving assistance: Humanitarian agencies and the persons that receive humanitarian aid are directly impacted by the bureaucratic process of the UN.

5. Other Stakeholders

The remaining stakeholders are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), human rights organizations, think tanks, academia, media, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Crisis Group tend to evaluate the effectiveness of UN mechanisms, diagnose the organization's weaknesses, and suggest improvements.

STAKEHOLDER	INTEREST	INFLUENCE LEVEL	POSITION
P5 Members	Preserving strategic influence, veto authority, and existing decision-making privileges	VERY HIGH	Cautious towards reforms that alter existing power structures
Reform Advocates (G4, AU, L69)	Greater representation, transparency, legitimacy, and inclusivity within the UN system	MEDIUM-HIGH	Strongly supportive of structural reforms, particularly Security Council reform
UNGA	Improving institutional effectiveness while ensuring broad member-state participation	HIGH	Principal forum for negotiating and debating reform proposals
UN Secretariat	Enhancing efficiency, accountability, transparency, and operational effectiveness	HIGH	Actively promotes and implements administrative and organizational reforms
Developing	Fair representation and	MEDIUM	Support reforms

Countries	increased influence in global decision-making		that address representation deficits and institutional inequities
SIDS	Stronger multilateral cooperation and greater attention to global challenges such as climate change	MEDIUM	Advocate for reforms that improve inclusivity and climate responsiveness
NGOs, Human Rights Organizations & Civil Society	Transparency, accountability, democratic legitimacy, and human rights protection	LOW-MEDIUM	Advocate for comprehensive institutional reforms and increased accountability
Think Tanks & Academic Institutions	Effective global governance and evidence-based policymaking	LOW	Provide research, policy recommendations, and analysis supporting reform discussions

Present Day Advocacy, Solutions, and Best Practices

1. Major Reform Proposals and Advocacy Initiatives

The current debate on UN reform mainly focuses on enhancing the representativeness, legitimacy, accountability, and efficiency of the organization. Although there is no common agreement on the reform itself, there are a variety of popular proposals and activism campaigns that have been launched during the last two decades. Different proposals have different solutions on SC reform, veto power, regional presence and institutional transparency. These include:

a. **G4 Proposal**

At the heart of the G4 proposal is a clear argument: the Security Council no longer mirrors the world that it governs. The proposal-submitted in 2005 by India, Germany, Japan and Brazil-calls for the expansion of the Council from fifteen to twenty-five seats, to include six permanent and four non-permanent seats. Supporters suggest that the most significant economic powers, those contributing most to the UN system and to regional representation, ought to be more heavily involved in global decision-making. Critics are concerned with both the number of new permanent seats and how the veto will be handled in an expanded council.

b. **Ezulwini Consensus**

Africa's position on Security Council reform is established in the Ezulwini Consensus which was adopted by the African Union in 2005. This document requires that Africans receive two permanent and five non-permanent members. Unlike various other rival proposals, it does not approve of permanent seats without veto powers. This reasoning is simple, if veto power still exists, new permanent members can not be placed in a subservient position to current ones. This proposal is now central to most discussions about Africa's position within the United Nations.

L.69 Group Framework for Security Council Reform

- c. Representation of the developing world is the core element of the L.69 Group's reform agenda. The grouping, formed in 2007, includes countries from Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and Caribbean who support a holistic approach to reform of the Security Council. The group advocates a reform which is to both increase numbers in the permanent and non-permanent seats and give the appropriate geographical representation. The proposal is concerned more with the systemic imbalance in representation than individual states who, in the view of many developing world nations, continue to exist under the current system.

ACT Code of Conduct

- d. The occurrence of mass atrocity situations has time again highlighted rifts within the Security Council and called into question its capacity to react efficiently to humanitarian disasters. As a reaction to some of these perceived weaknesses, the ACT Code of Conduct has been devised. It is an initiative put forward by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group that urges states to "endorse timely and decisive Council action in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes". So far over 120 states have endorsed the Code. This plan does not seek to amend the Charter but to utilize binding political commitments.

France-Mexico Initiative on Veto Restraint

- e. This initiative has a different idea on how to reform the Council; it is not concerned with who gets a seat, but with how those who already have seats

behave. Introduced in 2013, their idea demands that permanent members make a commitment not to use their veto when these actions occur; it "is perceived by supporters as a politically feasible way of increasing Council effectiveness, given the very large barriers to formal Charter revision."

f. Uniting for Consensus (UfC) Proposal

This is not to say that all reform proposals call for increased numbers of permanent seats. The Uniting for Consensus group, made up of countries like Italy, Pakistan, Argentina and South Korea, argue quite the opposite. They claim that increased numbers of permanent members would only create new centers of power while existing worries about accountability would remain unanswered. This group supports an increased number of non-permanent elected members and enhanced regional representation through regular elections, essentially spreading the privilege of representation among even more nations, but without the permanent component.

2. Existing Reform Mechanisms and Institutional Processes

Calls for reform are common within the United Nations. Implementing them is far more difficult. Institutional change must navigate legal requirements, political negotiations, and procedural frameworks that have developed over decades. As a result, the success of any reform proposal depends not only on political support, but also on the mechanisms through which it is debated, negotiated, and adopted.

a. Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN)

Security Council reform debates have been conducted through the mechanism of the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) under the umbrella of the General Assembly since 2008. Nearly every proposal such as G4 Proposal, Ezulwini Consensus, and Uniting for Consensus group was discussed through this forum. Even though negotiations have not resulted in final agreement; IGN is the only accepted mechanism within which Security Council reform as a whole can realistically be negotiated. The latest debates have shown a stronger tendency to embrace text-based negotiations, which many member states see as an indispensable element to converting years of political stances into reform proposals.

b. Charter Amendment Procedures (Articles 108 and 109)

A lot of the most audacious reform plans concerning the UN are Charter amendment proposals. As Article 108 dictates, an amendment "is adopted when it has been voted in favor by two-thirds of the Members of the General Assembly and two-thirds of the Members of the UN," with both groups including all of the permanent five members of the Security Council. Charter amendment could also be implemented, under Article 109, via a General Conference for the purpose of

"considering the revision of this Charter," although this provision has never been completely implemented. Therefore, these provisions render Charter amendment to be the hardest route to reform within the system: particularly if any reforms will influence the current permanent members' privilege and position.

c. Secretary-General Reform Agendas

A succession of Secretaries-General have utilized their role to point out institutional weaknesses and set in motion reform proposals to increase the Organization's effectiveness. Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) called for reforms to the preventive diplomacy and peace operation functions of the UN. Kofi Annan's *In Larger Freedom* (2005) put forward proposals in the areas of development, security, human rights and management reform. While agendas are not legally binding, they often drive negotiations and become frameworks for institutional reform.

d. High-Level Panels, Reviews, and Independent Commissions

Independent review bodies and expert panels are important in the discussion about UN reform. They contribute by giving an assessment and by recommending policies. The High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change that was appointed in 2003 was one example of such a body; its recommendations informed the subsequent debate about collective security, peacebuilding and the Security Council reform. However, they can neither enforce or bring about change by themselves; rather their reports build the analytical ground on which future recommendations and negotiation are developed.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: The 1963 Security Council expansion

The 1963 Charter amendment expanding the Security Council is the clearest example of successful formal structural reform. As UN membership grew during decolonization, pressure increased to make the Council more representative. The amendment expanded the Council from 11 to 15 members and increased the number of elected non-permanent seats. It entered into force in 1965 after ratification requirements were met.

This case shows that Charter amendment is possible when the political demand is broad and when reform does not directly remove the core privileges of permanent members. It also shows the limits of incremental reform. The amendment improved elected representation but did not change the permanent membership or the veto. Today's reform demands go further, which makes agreement harder.

Case Study 2: The Human Rights Council replacing the Commission on Human Rights

The establishment of the Human Rights Council in 2006 is a major case of institutional replacement. The Council replaced the Commission on Human Rights as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly. Its creation responded to concerns about credibility, membership, politicization and uneven scrutiny. One of its most distinctive features is the Universal Periodic Review, through which all UN Member States are reviewed.

The case is reformative because it demonstrates that the General Assembly can create a new body without amending the Charter. It also shows that institutional replacement does not automatically resolve political disagreements. The Human Rights Council continues to face debates over selectivity, membership standards and politicization. Nevertheless, the UPR created a universal peer-review mechanism that is often cited as a procedural innovation.

Case Study 3: General Assembly veto accountability through Resolution 76/262

Resolution 76/262 is a recent case of procedural reform aimed at a structural problem. The Security Council veto is protected by the Charter, and changing it formally would require the agreement of the permanent members. Instead of attempting to abolish the veto, the General Assembly created a standing mandate to debate situations when a veto is cast.

The reform is modest but important. It increases transparency and forces the broader UN membership to confront the use of the veto. It also creates an institutional record of explanations, objections and political arguments. However, it does not prevent the veto, reverse a Council failure, or make General Assembly recommendations binding.

Case Study 4: Syria, Security Council paralysis and the IIIM

The Syrian conflict became a major example of the Security Council deadlock. Repeated disagreements among permanent members limited the Council's ability to adopt stronger accountability measures. In 2016, the General Assembly established the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to assist in investigating and prosecuting persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in Syria since March 2011.

This case shows both institutional limitation and legal innovation. The limitation is that Security Council division can prevent unified enforcement or referral measures. The innovation is that the General Assembly created an evidence-gathering and case-building mechanism to support future accountability efforts. The IIIM does not itself prosecute accused persons; rather, it assists national, regional or international jurisdictions.

Case Study 5: UN development system reform and the Resident Coordinator system

The 2018 repositioning of the UN development system is a case of operational reform. Its purpose was to make UN development work more coherent, accountable and responsive at the country level. The reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system sought to reduce fragmentation among UN entities and align support with national development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This case is useful because it addresses an issue that does not attract the same political attention as the Security Council but affects daily UN delivery. Fragmentation can occur when different agencies have separate funding streams, reporting requirements, governing boards

and programme priorities. The Resident Coordinator model tries to create a stronger coordination centre without abolishing specialized agencies.

For UN80, this case provides lessons on how system-wide reform is implemented. A good reform requires not only a resolution but also funding arrangements, incentives for agencies to cooperate, data systems, leadership authority and Member State trust. Delegates should consider whether proposed UN80 reforms provide these implementation details.

Case Study 6: Haiti cholera and UN accountability

The cholera outbreak in Haiti after 2010 became one of the most significant examples of the accountability gap involving the United Nations. The episode raised difficult questions about the responsibilities of peace operations, access to remedies for affected individuals, and the relationship between UN immunity and accountability. In 2016, the Secretary-General presented a new approach to cholera in Haiti that included intensified efforts to reduce and end transmission and a package of material assistance and support.

This case is important because it is not mainly about the Security Council or global representation. It concerns the Organization's accountability to people affected by UN operations. Immunity can be necessary for the UN to function independently, but immunity without adequate alternative remedies may damage legitimacy. The case therefore connects international organization responsibility, victim assistance and institutional trust.

Case Study 7: The Peacebuilding Commission as a bridging institution

The Peacebuilding Commission was created in 2005 to address a recurring gap in the UN system: the transition from conflict response to long-term recovery. Before its creation, post-conflict countries could fall between separate institutional categories: Security Council attention might decline after immediate conflict, while development actors might not have the political coordination or financing needed for recovery. The Commission was intended to bring together relevant actors, marshal resources and advise on integrated strategies.

This case is reformative because it created a new body to bridge silos rather than replace a principal organ. It reflects the idea that peace, development and human rights are mutually reinforcing. It also shows the limits of advisory bodies. If an institution can only advise, its impact depends on whether states, donors, UN entities and national actors use its advice.

Case Study 8: UN80 mandate review as a live reform process

The UN80 mandate implementation review is a live case study in institutional reform. It examines how mandates are created, delivered and reviewed. Unlike older reform debates that focused mainly on representation or high-level architecture, mandate review looks at the operational engine of the UN: what the Organization is asked to do, how those tasks are funded, and whether they still produce value.

The risk is that mandate review may be perceived differently by different groups of states. Donor states may emphasize savings and efficiency. Developing states may worry that reform

could reduce development, humanitarian or human rights support. Staff and agencies may worry about job losses or reduced field presence. A credible mandate review therefore needs transparent criteria, Member State oversight, protection for essential mandates, and safeguards for affected communities.

Guiding Questions:

1. Should the Security Council be expanded, and if so, how many permanent and non-permanent seats should be added, and should new permanent members get the same veto power as the P5 or a modified alternative?
2. Mechanisms like Resolution 76/262 and Resolution 377A already give the General Assembly some oversight over the Security Council. How can these be strengthened to make that oversight actually meaningful?
3. The requirement for the P5 to explain veto use to the General Assembly already exists. How can it be made more effective, and what would real enforcement of it look like?
4. Given that the Security Council holds more political weight than the ICJ in practice, what would advisory ICJ jurisdiction over SC decisions realistically achieve, and is it a worthwhile avenue for reform?
5. Beyond what already exists, what further measures could ensure greater accountability for Security Council actions and decisions?
6. What kinds of measures, whether legal, procedural, or political, should be taken to reduce veto abuse, and how can any such measures be made to actually stick?
7. How can the principle of sovereign equality under Article 2(1) be reconciled with the structural privilege that P5 nations hold under Article 27(3)?
8. Charter amendment requires the consent of all five permanent members under Article 108. Is that a realistic route to veto reform, or does it make the process a dead end?
9. Political commitments like the ACT Code of Conduct rely on goodwill rather than legal obligation. How should the international community address the accountability gap that creates?
10. Should the Uniting for Peace resolution be used more actively as a legal workaround when Security Council reform stays blocked, and where does that approach run out of road?
11. The Ezulwini Consensus and the L.69 Group have both put forward detailed reform frameworks. What would it take to move either of them from proposal to reality?
12. What should actually qualify a country for a permanent or semi-permanent seat: population, economic weight, regional standing, or something else?
13. While the long debate over Charter amendment continues, should underrepresented regions at least be guaranteed more non-permanent seats in the meantime?
14. How can the Sixth Committee itself become more representative of the legal concerns of developing countries?

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15. The G4 proposal has been on the table since 2005 with no consensus. What realistic alternative exists for states that want meaningful reform?
 16. Should member states with overdue financial obligations automatically lose their voting rights under Article 19, or should the General Assembly keep the discretion to decide case by case?
 17. The US alone covers 22% of the regular budget and 27% of peacekeeping. How can the UN reduce that kind of dependence without undermining its multilateral foundations?
 18. The Joint Inspection Unit and the Office of Internal Oversight Services have repeatedly flagged duplication and waste. What accountability mechanisms would actually fix that?
 19. If a dedicated fund for institutional reform were created, what legal basis would it operate under and who would oversee it?
 20. How should financial contributions be rebalanced to reflect the fact that global economic power looks very different today than it did when the current system was set up?
 21. With over 44 UN entities operating across overlapping mandates, what legal framework could bring them into genuine coordination without stripping away their independence?
 22. Should the Secretary-General have stronger powers to step in when agencies are working at cross-purposes, and where should the limits of that authority sit?
 23. System-wide coherence is talked about as a goal but not treated as a legal obligation. How could that change?
 24. What role should the International Law Commission play in sorting out legal conflicts between UN bodies with overlapping mandates?
 25. Should member states face any consequences for selectively cutting or withholding funding from agencies in ways that damage the broader UN effort?
 26. The Secretary-General's AI Advisory Body is producing norms, but they carry no binding legal weight. How should that gap be addressed?
 27. Does AI governance need a full international treaty, or can General Assembly resolutions do enough for now?
 28. The Sixth Committee has already flagged autonomous weapons as a pressing legal issue. How should international humanitarian law apply to them, and who within the UN gets to make that call?
 29. What does the UN Charter actually require of member states when it comes to preventing cyberattacks on UN systems, and what happens when those obligations are ignored?
 30. How can the UN define a cyber armed attack clearly enough to trigger Article 51 self-defense rights without making it too easy for states to justify military responses?

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