

Adapted from extempore remarks

Remarks by Mr. Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative, at the Informal meeting of the GA plenary on Security Council reform on February 19 2009



Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation of the leadership of the President of the General Assembly and of the manner in which you have conducted the process since your appointment. Today marks only the formal and not the substantive commencement of intergovernmental negotiations on the comprehensive reform of the UN Security Council. Substantively, today cannot be seen as the beginning of negotiations. In this sense, my colleague and friend, the distinguished Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was right. We have not in this sense, implemented Decision 62/557 which was supposed to be our lodestar. If we continue in this way, we would simply be continuing the OEWG under another name and thereby contravening Decision 62/557 in substance just as we have not implemented it in terms of dates since actual negotiations will begin on March 4 instead of by February 28.

Today has finally come after 15 years of consultations in the OEWG with no concrete outcome, and it has come despite Herculean efforts by a minority to block any possibility of real negotiations. Today, in a formal sense, is a historic turning point but this minority is still trying to ensure that history does not turn. I will not dwell on the rather sad fate of those who have tried to hold back the wheels of history.

Mr. Chairman,

At the beginning of your statement, you had referred to the misspelling in one of the San Francisco documents – “The untied nations”. While I agree with the point you made, there are cases like the present one where some untying is useful and necessary – untying ourselves from the OEWG, from its style and methods, from its numbing, paralyzing touch. You also spoke of moving from the antechamber to the negotiating hall. As we have seen today, there are some countries who would like to keep us in the antechamber for ever. One of them spoke of the ambition of a few but even if this were to be so, it is as nothing compared to the ambition to those who are attempting to keep us in this antechamber for ever. It was astonishing to hear proposals that were defeated on 15 September 2008 that totally failed to get support in the OEWG being resuscitated. I am glad you reiterated what the President of the General Assembly stated on January 29, namely that our guiding principles would be the UN Charter, UN Rules and Procedures (naturally including the GA Rules of Procedure), the World Summit Outcome Document and past practice. As stated by a majority of speakers on January 29, inputs from member states can only be taken on board if they are in consonance with these documents and sources.

Mr. Chairman,

The frequency of meetings must be increased – the work plan currently envisages a meeting every two weeks which is inadequate. As it stands, the work plan is more plan than work. As you know in the fairy tales, all work and no play is supposed to lead to dullness. But the reverse – in this case all plan and little work – would lead to even greater dullness. I agree with the remark by the Permanent Representative of Malta that we should listen to the small states. We can make a good beginning by listening to Solomon Islands and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines who have called for at least two meetings a week, a call endorsed by South Africa, Nigeria and many other states. Solomon Islands has one of the smallest missions in the UN and if they are comfortable with two meetings a week (an index of their commitment to reform and their understanding of its urgency) then we would suggest meeting twice a week to keep the momentum – exact dates of the meetings should be informed in advance. The minority that opposes this, again does not want progress or even actual negotiations.

The most important issue is that there be a document or text on which to negotiate and focus on. Only then can negotiations be fruitful. The PGA has referred to a summary of proposals included in A/62/47 – this is a welcome recognition in principle of the need for a composite text. However, the document referred to does not automatically translate into a document on which negotiations can be held. Instead, we need to arrange all the proposals under various key issues. We would request you again to prepare such a document. Delegations could then be asked to focus their response on the various options available under each key issue. The previous speaker said that this would circumscribe and make less inclusive the negotiations. We do not see how: all proposals of member states till the eve of March 4 can be included in the composite paper and on March 4 during negotiations any member state is free to include a proposal that has not been included or make an additional proposal for inclusion.

If such a composite paper is not made available, we will end up with a repeat of the OEWG format – statements by various delegations on each of the key issues. We don't need to repeat this process – this has been going on for 15 years. The minority that does not want real negotiations looks forward to wasting March, April by simply making statements on proposals and thereby converting the Informal GA Plenary into an OEWG. We cannot accept this. One of our friends quoted an English statesman. Let me refer to another political figure who said that certain types of negotiations become like picking up mercury with a fork. Another political figure said that we should then use a spoon. The minority I have referred to should examine its own recent history and it will see that this is entirely Mephistophelean: they have achieved the opposite of what they wanted; they achieved the opposite of what they wanted on 15 September 2008; they achieved the opposite of what they wanted in the OEWG; and they will achieve the opposite of what they want now: they will compel us to use fairly quickly the spoon of the formal GA Plenary.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, let me make an important practical point. We would recommend for the negotiations an interactive format rather than the format of prepared statements so that member states can react immediately to specific proposals and ideas. From your own experience today, it is clear that there should be no pre-determined sign up sheet for the list of speakers. Member states wishing to react to specific proposals or aspects of proposals specifically

and concretely should simply raise the flag and react. We have to have actual negotiations and not waste time with yet another round of set statements.

I shall not dwell on the substance of reform which I shall do when we negotiate on each theme but I would like to, before closing, endorse what our African colleagues have said, a point that was emphasized by many of them, specially the current Chair of the African group – it is not just a question of under representation of Africa but of its non representation in the permanent membership.

I thank you, Sir.

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