

**Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on
“The United Nations in Global Governance”
(New York, 28 June 2011)**

Informal Summary by the Secretariat

Overview

1. The informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on “The United Nations in Global Governance” was chaired and moderated by H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th session of General Assembly. It commenced with opening remarks by Ambassador Deiss and the United Nations Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, followed by keynote speeches by H.E. Mr. Danilo Turk, President of the Republic of Slovenia, and Mr. Pascal Lamy, Director-General of WTO.

2. The morning panel discussion, entitled “Economic global governance: from rapid response to medium and long-term planning”, featured the following panellists: (1) Mrs. Heidemarie Wieczorec-Zeul, Member of the Federal Parliament and former Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany; and (2) Mr. Amar Bhattacharya, Director, G24 Secretariat, Washington D.C. The panel discussion in the afternoon focused on the theme “The UN in 2025 – How can the UN remain relevant in addressing tomorrow’s global challenges”. The panellists were: (1) H.E. Mr. Celso Amorim, former Foreign Minister of Brazil; (2) Dr. Ramesh Thakur, Professor of International Relations, Australian National University, Australia; (3) Mr. Richard H. Stanley, Chairman, Stanley Foundation, Iowa, US; and (4) Dr. Adekeye Adebajo, Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. During both sessions, the presentations by the panellists were followed by an interactive discussion among delegations.

3. Ambassador Deiss concluded the thematic debate with closing remarks. The main substantive points raised during the meeting are summarized below.

Opening Remarks and Keynote Speeches

Opening remarks by H. E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly

4. H. E. Mr. Deiss pointed out that global challenges and new demographic, economic and political realities required collective and coordinated responses. The structure of global governance, however, was becoming increasingly fragmented. The President of the General Assembly highlighted the central role of the United Nations in the quest for an efficient, representative and inclusive system of global governance. In order to play that role, he emphasized that both the UN system and the broader system of global governance must undergo urgent reforms.

5. According to the President of the General Assembly, in the area of global economic governance, the capacity of the international community to go beyond crisis management and to formulate and implement longer-term strategies for balanced and durable economic growth needed to be enhanced. Although the G20 had been effective in responding to the global economic crisis, it did not enjoy the same legitimacy as the UN General Assembly. It was important to find ways of legitimizing decisions taken by the G20. Moreover, its system of

annual Presidencies might impair the coherence necessary to implement a long-term strategic vision. In that context, the speaker emphasized that the rapprochement between the General Assembly and the G20 was encouraging and should continue. Other issues that needed to be discussed included strengthening the role of ECOSOC and improving the coordination of mandates of UN specialized agencies and programmes.

6. With respect to the role of the UN in 2025 and beyond, the President of the General Assembly pointed out the importance of having a more inclusive and representative system that gave proper role to non-governmental actors, civil society and the private sector. The UN needed to adapt to changing circumstances with flexibility and innovation, learning from the lessons of the last six decades. At the same time, he argued that global responses for the common good would sometimes require concessions in terms of sovereignty and national interests, stressing the important long-term gains that could accrue from short-term sacrifices.

Opening remarks by H. E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations

7. The Secretary-General highlighted the major transformation that the world economy had experienced in the last twenty years. He pointed out that although interconnectedness between economies had increased and brought prosperity to many developing countries, not all countries had enjoyed its benefits. The global economic governance structures inherited from over 60 years ago had not yet adapted to these new circumstances. Reforms had been undertaken in some institutions, but key decision-making bodies still had a long way to go to properly reflect the growing importance of developing economies and emerging markets in the global economy.

8. The Secretary-General stated that the emergence of the G20 reflected this changing environment. The complementarities between the UN and the G20 were clear and both entities needed to continue to work in a mutually supportive fashion to contribute to shared development objectives, including the MDGs. He also highlighted that every multilateral institution and association had a role to play in global economic governance and that a division of labour could make best use of the comparative advantages of the respective organizations.

9. The Secretary-General stressed that, in order to address the pressing issues on the agenda, the multilateral system needed to be revamped into an inclusive, transparent and effective system, with an efficient, accountable and coherent UN at its centre. Given its legitimacy, the UN had a fundamental role to play in ensuring that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable were taken into account in all decision-making processes. To strengthen its capabilities to do this, he mentioned that the aim of ECOSOC reform would be to make it a more dynamic, inclusive, relevant and operational body both in development and global economic governance.

Keynote speech by H. E. Mr Danilo Turk, President of the Republic of Slovenia

10. H. E. Mr. Danilo Turk emphasized the pressing need to strengthen the system of global governance in the face of a range of complex and interrelated challenges, including non-traditional threats to peace and security, economic uncertainty, the prospect of a potential food crisis, high energy and commodity prices, high unemployment, global warming, and human rights violations. He stressed that economic disparities and failures in global governance could aggravate and inhibit the capacity of the international community to

address other global challenges. The speaker also pointed to the paradox between the need for coordinated responses and the divergent interests and incentives, which served to both justify and impair global governance.

11. The speaker highlighted the difference between governance at national and global levels. At the global level, he argued that, in the quest for better governance, there was no alternative to collective action by nation states. Effective results could be produced through political will and a sense of common purpose. While common threats might generate collective action, maintaining such cooperation in the long term remained a difficult challenge.

12. According to the speaker, in order to play a central role in global governance, the UN needed to adjust and reform internally, as well as to develop effective partnerships with other stakeholders. He called for a more representative, yet effective, Security Council and argued that, among other things, the General Assembly should be focused on specific priorities and on enhancing cooperation with the other main UN bodies. ECOSOC on the other hand should be recalibrated and might serve as the interface between the UN and the G20. Finally, he argued that the Human Rights Council needed to be reinforced and should expend more effort in dealing with challenges to human rights resulting directly from the lack of economic and social development.

Keynote speech by Mr. Pascal Lamy, Director-General of WTO

13. Mr. Pascal Lamy pointed out that globalization entailed benefits as well as costs and risks. According to him, there were in principle two ways of addressing the challenges posed by it. One option would be to reverse the process of globalization. This, however, was neither possible nor desirable. Reversing globalization was not possible since it had to a significant degree been driven by advances in technology that could not be turned back. It was not desirable since this would mean giving up the manifold benefits provided by globalization. According to the speaker, the other, more preferable, way of addressing the challenges posed by globalization was to strengthen the existing system of global governance.

14. He elaborated by describing the efficacy of the global governance system as depending on three pillars: leadership, legitimacy and efficiency. According to the speaker, satisfying these conditions had been problematic at the international level. Having effective leadership was a challenging proposition in an environment habited by sovereign states, while legitimacy was tested by the increased distance between decision-makers at the international level and the local populaces affected by their policies. The primacy of sovereign states also hindered efficiency at the international level, where countries could take inconsistent positions in different forums and moreover resist measures that were perceived to contravene their immediate interests.

15. Nevertheless, the speaker argued that all these constraints could be mitigated. For instance, the legitimacy of international governance could be strengthened through better incorporating global issues into national public debates and, at an international level, through enhancing the UN system as a forum for reporting, debate and accountability. Moreover, all three pillars of governance could be better strengthened through better coordination, cooperation and interaction between the UN, G20 and specialized agencies. In that regard, he also argued that a strong ECOSOC would allow for better coherence and a strengthening of global economic governance.

Panel discussion I: “Economic global governance: from rapid response to medium and long-term planning”

Summary of the presentations by the panellists

16. **Ms. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul** stated that the global economic crisis, and inter-related threats such as the spike in food prices, endangered the attainment of the MDGs. It was therefore important for developed countries to fulfil their obligations and commitments pertaining to development assistance. Moreover, she raised the spectre of additional complications arising from the growing inequalities generated by the crisis. These could hinder growth prospects and, given the resulting social and political tensions within countries, also make it harder for nation states to come to agreement on economic policies at the international level.

17. The speaker argued that the UN had an important role to play in shaping processes that generate agreements at the global level. However, the various existing UN processes pertaining to developmental issues had not been well-integrated or sequenced. She also called for consideration to be given to the proposal for an International Panel of Experts tasked with the assessment and monitoring of both short-term and long-term systemic risks in the global economy¹. In addition to identifying and assessing the causes and impact of systemic risks and crises, the panel could also act as an early warning mechanism, give due consideration to regional particularities, and provide impetus to global policy efforts.

18. Finally, the panellist emphasized the importance of reforming ECOSOC. In that respect, she pointed to the importance of having a representative Global Coordination Council which would consider economic, social and environmental issues in an integrated manner.

19. **Mr. Amar Bhattacharya** referred to three forces that had shaped global economic governance. Firstly, there had been a remarkable structural transformation in the global economy since the mid-1990s, with developing countries growing at a significantly faster rate than their developed counterparts, leading to growing economic convergence. Secondly, there had been increasing interdependencies among countries. For instance, the recent economic problems in the developed world have had spill-over effects in the South. The increased concerns related to resource scarcity and climate change had also been a function of growing interdependencies and inter-linkages between policies and actions in individual countries. Thirdly, economic issues had become increasingly complex, in areas relating to employment, inequalities, food security, trade, tax cooperation and migration.

20. According to the speaker, existing governance arrangements had not kept pace with these trends and had been inadequate in addressing the various emerging policy challenges. On the issue of the G20, he pointed out the grouping had performed well in terms of having a coherent approach, in the sense of ensuring that, on any given issue, all relevant institutions had been consulted and engaged. Moreover, it had been effective in its response to the crisis. However, the G20’s legitimacy could be questioned, given its informal status, size and composition. As a result, it was important that the grouping had stronger links with the UN.

¹ As contained in the Report of the Commission of Experts of the President of the United Nations General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System (September 2009).

21. The panellist also stressed the importance of addressing governance issues pertaining to specialized agencies. He particularly emphasized the need to reform voice and participation in the Bretton Woods institutions and the selection of their respective heads. With respect to the UN, the speaker expressed the need for greater coherence and the importance of reforming ECOSOC.

Summary of the interactive discussion

22. Salient features of the interactive discussion included the points summarized below:

- Participants emphasised a need for comprehensive reform of international economic and financial system to better promote development, and better respond to and prevent crises. In that regard, some mentioned the need for international organizations, including the Bretton Woods institutions, to strengthen their development orientation and increase resources for development.
- A number of speakers stressed that the universal membership and unquestioned legitimacy of the UN made it well-positioned for taking a central role in global economic governance and development. In this regard, many delegations underscored that a strengthened United Nations framework for enhancing coordination and complementarity should be at centre of efforts to improve global economic governance.
- Many speakers pointed out the importance of the UN in harnessing and coordinating international responses to existing and future threats and challenges. At the same time, some reiterated that the UN needed to be equipped with the necessary resources and capabilities to effectively and quickly address global challenges.
- Participants referred to the need to improve the effectiveness of the UN. In particular, they pointed out that the proliferation of parallel processes and repetitive resolutions needed to be contained. They also called for an appropriate follow-up mechanism to be established within the UN to bridge the gap between policy making and commitments on issues related to global economic governance. More broadly, some speakers referred to the need to enhance the UN central role in areas of its competence, including development, human rights and security.
- Number of delegations underscored the importance of reforming ECOSOC. Some participants bemoaned the lack of visibility and effectiveness of ECOSOC, arguing that its deliberations should be more focused on outcomes. They emphasized the need to reform the decision-making processes and working methods of the Council and to strengthen its relations with the Bretton Woods institutions. Reference was also made to the proposal of establishing a Global Economic Council, at the level of the Security Council, with enhanced competencies and the authority to take binding decisions.
- Some speakers called for greater coherence and coordination across the UN system and other global policy-making entities. They gave importance to the need for closer coordination of macroeconomic policy decisions with other areas of global governance, including those related to the multilateral trading system, aid architecture, poverty eradication and sustainable development. On that note, some delegations argued that global economic

governance should be seen in conjunction with global social governance and global environmental governance.

- Some speakers emphasized that any reformed system of global economic governance needed to ensure a balance between efficiency, inclusiveness and transparency. Some participants stated that priority should be given to increasing the representation and voice of developing countries in global economic governance. They also argued that strengthening the role of the UN in global economic governance should not entail a weakening of its inclusiveness. On a related note, a delegation referred to the importance of strengthening the General Assembly, where all countries participated on an equal footing.
- Participants emphasized the importance of determining the respective roles and core competencies of informal and formal bodies of global economic governance, and ensuring their cooperation. In this context, they underscored that the G20 must work in a complementary manner with the UN system and other international organizations. Some delegations pointed out that the G20 needed to be more transparent, inclusive and representative in its deliberations and should give priority to development. There was also a call for greater transparency in the interactions between the G20 and international organizations.
- A delegation referred to the increasingly important role of non-state actors, such as civil society and the private sector, in global economic governance and pointed out that the UN needed to cooperate with these new and evolving set of actors who may inject fresh views into its discourse.
- Some participants were of the view that the regional arrangements needed to be better incorporated into the framework for global governance, and in this context the governance initiatives at the regional level, as well as the linkages between governance mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels should be promoted. Some also mentioned the important role of regional bodies, including regional development banks, in the architecture of global economic governance.
- Others mentioned: the need to have clear and internationally harmonized norms and standards in a number of areas, such as financial regulation and supervision; the importance of converting widespread agreements on issues, such as the benefits of free and open trade, into political agreements; the need to bring back to the table debt restructuring mechanisms that would ensure fair debt crisis resolutions; and the pressing need to ensure that the international mechanisms of economic governance are conducive to the attainment of sustainable development and the MDGs.

Panel discussion II: “The UN in 2025 – How can the UN remain relevant in addressing tomorrow’s global challenges?”

Summary of the presentations by the panellists

23. **H.E. Mr. Celso Amorim** underscored the need for the UN to remain relevant in dealing with present as well as future challenges. He cited instances where the activities and intervention of the UN were very pertinent. For instance, the UN had proven its importance in supporting rehabilitation, recovery and development efforts of developing countries facing humanitarian emergency situations, like in the case of Haiti’s disastrous earthquake.

Moreover, the speaker also stressed the importance of the UN as a forum for global and regional political dialogue. As an example, he felt that its unique legitimacy and neutral standing could provide an important political platform for deliberations aimed to facilitate collaboration among the new political stakeholders emerging in the Arab world.

24. The speaker nevertheless emphasized the urgent need for reform of relevant intergovernmental bodies. In the economic and social sphere, ECOSOC needed to respond to current changes in a more timely and effective manner. In the area of peace and security, the UN should increase the transparency of the work of the Security Council and include non-permanent members as well as non-members more extensively in its consultations.

25. According to the panellist, transparency and inclusiveness were fundamental to legitimacy. In this connection, it was a welcome development that the G8 was effectively replaced by the more inclusive G20. However, the participation of African countries in the G20 should be increased. He argued that greater legitimacy would enhance the capacity of the G20 to serve as a consensus-building forum that was complementary to the formal global intergovernmental structures of the UN system. At the same time, he pointed out that the G20 might also need to consider discussing political issues in addition to having dialogue on global financial and economic challenges.

26. **Dr. Ramesh Thakur** underscored that global governance had to respond to a wide number, range and complexity of issues in an increasingly intertwined but also fragmented world. The world had changed enormously since the creation of the UN. Security challenges had morphed from being solely about defusing national security threats to also including risk assessment and management as well as the preparedness to cope with complexity and uncertainty.

27. The speaker emphasized that a major task was to structure the institutions of international governance to make them more robust, resilient, flexible and adaptable. This would in turn enable them to better deal with the rapidly changing nature and source of present-day threats. He pointed out that the challenges related to areas such as international peace and security, economic development, international trade, human rights, and the environment required cooperation and joint action. The speaker moreover emphasized the importance of multilateralism in an increasingly interdependent, globalized and networked world. At the same time, limitations on the effectiveness of multilateralism had been evident, including in the work of the UN on security issues where it had frequently failed to prevent conflict, enforce punishment, come to defense or use authorized force to protect civilians. More predictability, reliability and consistency were needed for collective action efforts to keep pace with emerging international challenges.

28. The panellist referred to five priority items that would need to be tackled in order to mobilize collective action more effectively. These included reforming the Security Council to reflect the growing importance of major powers in Asia and better represent Africa, increasing the coordination between the G20 and the UN, and ensuring the accountability of the G20 to the UN General Assembly or Security Council. He also pointed to the need for more effective involvement of civil society and the private sector in collective action and reform of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

29. **Mr. Richard Stanley** emphasized that the role of the United Nations must go beyond dealing with the interdependence between nation states and also incorporate interactions with

civil society and the private sector. He also referred to a number of conditions for having a more effective multilateralism. An important starting point was that UN Member States should apply a truly global perspective in their deliberations and decision-making. ‘Zero-sum thinking’ was inadequate since human survival, dignity and decency depended on a sense of shared responsibility that would recognize the importance of collective action for common public needs.

30. The speaker also stressed that effective multilateralism would require institutional development. He pointed out that the increasing number of institutions, actors, and stakeholders had led to a form of “messy multilateralism” that needed to make way for a more principled form of multilateralism. In this connection, he felt it was important that the G20 should not be seen as a threat but a complement to the UN since it could serve as a valuable consensus-building forum. At the Secretariat level, he underscored that reform initiatives should focus on enhancing and strengthening the “Delivering as One” initiative and reinvigorating the work of UN staff. At the intergovernmental level, the speaker referred to the need for more coordination among representatives of each Member State in different multilateral organizations. At the same time, he argued that decisions should not always require consensus. Resolutions should be fully implemented and adhered to even when they were based on a majority decision. He also argued that the General Assembly should refrain from micromanaging the Secretariat.

31. Finally, the speaker emphasized the need for the UN to find effective and practical solutions to address existing challenges. In this regard, he stressed that the key function for the UN was to help Member States identify and promote their common long-term interests. Successful examples in this connection included the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and the adoption of first United Nations General Assembly resolution on the Responsibility to Protect.

32. **Mr. Adekeye Adebajo** noted that the United Nations would only account for a small share of the entire development system. Developed countries preferred the world of weighted voting systems, embodied by the IMF and others, where their economic size would translate into a greater decision making power than that of developing countries. In terms of the UN role in peace and security, the panellist highlighted the need to focus on peacekeeping. He also underscored the critical importance of reforming the Security Council and making sure that its composition reflected existing global political dynamics. In this connection, he argued that it was scandalous that Africa and South America were the only two major regions without a permanent seat in the Security Council.

33. According to the speaker, the experience of the last few decades had shown that the United Nations was most effective when it engaged with external actors, encouraged and cooperated with local powers, and promoted an effective division of labour between relevant regional and international mechanisms. Moreover, the organization should refine its strategy to better address domestic and regional factors that undermine peace and also ensure that its resources were spread evenly.

34. The speaker strongly criticized the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC). In his view, the ICC suffered from a lack of credibility. According to him, there was a general perception in African countries that the court was selective in how it assessed or laid charges. He also pointed out that ICC prosecutors were currently investigating cases in six African

countries while they had not opened an investigation in any country outside the African continent.

Summary of the interactive discussion

35. Salient features of the interactive discussion included the points summarized below:

- Participants reaffirmed the central role of the United Nations within the global governance framework. Its legitimacy, convening power, expertise and field presence were seen as indispensable in addressing fundamental challenges related to international peace and security, development, human rights and environment.
- Some speakers emphasized that the major United Nations bodies, namely the General Assembly, the Security Council and ECOSOC, had to remain at the core of global governance processes. At the same time, they underscored that the United Nations required adequate funding to properly carry out its functions.
- The debate illustrated a wide consensus on the need to improve the current system of global governance. Speakers pointed out that, in order to enhance its relevance and efficiency, the UN should overhaul structures and procedures. Participants also underscored the importance of having constructive and transparent multilateralism and the need to reconcile the central elements of leadership, legitimacy and efficiency. Moreover, some stressed the need to strengthen the implementation of internationally agreed actions.
- Some speakers emphasized the reform of the Security Council as a priority matter. They argued that the composition and working methods of the Security Council needed to be revised to better reflect today's realities. Some participants also supported the establishment of a Global Economic Coordination Council, at a level equivalent with the Security Council, which would be entrusted with responsibilities in economic, social and environmental matters. On a related issue, some speakers suggested that due consideration be given to adopting constituency-based representation and decision-making.
- Some speakers expressed support for the proposal to create an International Panel of Experts tasked with the assessment and monitoring of global economic and financial risks. They argued that setting up this panel could be an initial step towards improving the global economic governance framework and would contribute to a more systematic identification of emerging challenges.
- Delegates stressed the importance of adequately involving all relevant stakeholders in global governance processes. On this note, the involvement and participation of civil society and the private sector was seen by some participants to be a crucial factor in making global governance more effective and broad-based.
- Many participants deemed the cooperation between the UN and informal mechanisms, in particular the G20, to be essential and of utmost importance. Participants called for further exploration of practical ways to enhance this cooperation, including through briefings and other forms of information exchange. They also called for strengthening collaboration between the UN and other international organizations.

- Some speakers emphasized the important role that regional and sub-regional institutions could play in complementing the global governance structure. Those institutions were seen as having the ability to better address specific regional needs and demands and serve as a middle-way intermediary between global and national policy-making.

Closing Remarks by the President of the General Assembly

36. The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, concluded the debate on “The United Nations in Global Governance” by highlighting a number of points raised during the meeting.

37. These points included: the broad consensus among delegates on the need to improve the current system of global governance and to reaffirm the central role of the United Nations; the tension between the global nature of challenges and the sovereignty of states to design and implement policies that hampered the existing governance framework; the importance, in the context of the reform of the global governance system, of striking a balance between the central elements of leadership, legitimacy and efficiency; and the need for global governance to go beyond crisis management and also to be capable of addressing medium- and long-term issues, such as economic development and climate change.

38. The President of the General Assembly also highlighted the importance of ECOSOC in terms of economic, social and environmental governance and also as a bridge between the United Nations and informal processes like the G20. At the same time, he underscored the views expressed during the debate that ECOSOC urgently needed to reform its structure and procedures. The President concluded that the thematic debate had made a contribution towards advancing the discussion on the role of the United Nations in global governance and expressed his thanks to all the speakers, panellists and participants.