



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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## **Statement**

By

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At the

**7th Informal Meeting of the Plenary on the Intergovernmental  
Negotiations on the Question of Equitable Representation on and  
Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Related Matters**

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines would like to align itself fully with the statement made by Jamaica on behalf of the 14 members of the Caribbean Community.

While researching the historical justifications and criticisms of the veto, I came across an interesting article in *The New York Times*, dated 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971.<sup>1</sup> The article recounts a rather passionate denunciation of the Security Council by the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then-Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Before walking out of the Council unceremoniously, Mr. Bhutto addressed the use of the veto. He said: “We have been frustrated by the veto. Let’s build a monument for the veto. Let’s build a monument for impotence and incapacity.”

Mr. Bhutto’s statement, removed from its context, is a precursor to the question you have put to us today, Mr. Chairman. What sort of monument shall we build for the veto? One of impotence and incapacity; or of responsibility, equality, transparency, and judicious restraint?

As illustrated by document A/61/47, to which you referred in your March 13<sup>th</sup> Letter, many Member States make a distinction between “ideal and attainable reform” on the question of the veto. It is at this intersection of principle and pragmatism that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines hopes we will meet, without unnecessary grandstanding on unattainable wishes or quiet capitulation to yet another threatened or imagined veto.

We begin with the principles that undergird our intervention today: First, we believe that the veto is undemocratic on its face. Second, that the veto is an anachronistic and outmoded practice, which should be abolished. Third, that permanent members of the Security Council should have equal powers, and that no permanent member should be able to exercise a power unavailable to fellow permanent members.

Pragmatism tells us clearly that our desire to abolish the veto is currently an unattainable dream, because of disagreements among us; and because those who hold the veto are the same ones who will ultimately decide upon its continuation. We even recognise the attractiveness, if not the persuasiveness, of the argument that the veto, properly used, is a useful diplomatic tool in the arsenal of those who are ultimately held to account for the successes and failures of the Security Council.

To our mind, therefore, the principled and pragmatic solution is this: To accept, however reluctantly, the continuation of the veto in some form, but to seek that its use be formally restricted, made more transparent, more diffuse, and more subject to the democratic imperatives that drive our reform effort generally.

Some useful ideas to facilitate formal restriction are contained in the document A/60/L.49 – the so-called “S5” position – which advocates proscribing the use of the veto in cases involving genocide, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law. In terms of transparency, the S5 resolution suggests that every use of the veto be formally explained, and such explanation circulated to the wider Membership. We agree fully with these two proposals, and believe that they will address some of the more indefensible, arbitrary and opaque exercises of the veto. It is critical, however, that mechanisms must be put in place to make these measures legally binding on the permanent membership, and not merely unenforceable guidelines.

In our view, there are two additional measures that must be taken to more effectively democratise the Council’s continued use of the veto. First, assuming an expansion of the permanent membership, the power of the veto must be extended to all new permanent members, equally and without additional

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<sup>1</sup> Tanner, Henry. “Bhutto Denounces Council And Walks Out in Tears.” *The New York Times* 16 Dec. 1971: pp. 1, 17

qualification. It is not at all contradictory to call for the abolition of the veto on one hand, and its extension to new permanent members on the other. The root of our objection to the veto is its undemocratic nature and its concentration of too much power in the hands of too few. Diffusion of this power to additional players reduces both its deleterious impact and the current undemocratic imbalances. Indeed, it is fair to say that a *prerequisite* for the continuation of the veto should be the expansion of the permanent membership, with full veto rights. Today, no member of the African or GRULAC geographic blocs has the power of the veto. This is an untenable and unjust situation that must be redressed, either by abolition of the veto in its entirety or its extension to all new permanent members. Suggestions to weigh proposed African vetoes differently in different contexts strikes me as too clever by half, and has the potential to be a pejorative and divisive concept, with all-too-familiar undertones.

A further democratising ideal could be adopted from the compelling example of the United States of America, whose Constitution affords her President the right of veto. Under the U.S. Constitution, the veto acts as a check against impolitic congressional action, and forces the Congress to take another look at legislation that it has passed. However, if, upon review, the Congress continues to disagree with the President, it may override the veto by a prescribed supermajority of votes. We should adopt this veto override provision to further subject its use to democratic imperatives. Whether the veto should be subject to an override vote of the General Assembly or the Security Council itself is a matter that we can discuss in later rounds of negotiation.

In sum, Mr. Chairman, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines believes that, in lieu of abolition of the veto – our preferred position – the following steps should be taken: (1) forbidding the use of the veto in specifically prescribed instances; (2) explanation of the use of the veto to the General Membership; (3) extension of the veto power to all new permanent members; and (4) adopting a provision that allows for override of the veto by a specified supermajority.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we consider it unwise to rely on voluntary or non-binding promises of greater restraint in the future, particularly when many of the would-be promisers already consider their behaviour to be perfectly restrained and responsible. Further, we cannot be afraid to seek meaningful reform out of fear of a veto from the P5 at the point of ratification. This is the very essence of what is wrong with the veto to begin with – its chilling effect on real progress and real reform that is counter to the will of the General Assembly. If any of us had any questions about the use and effectiveness of the hidden veto, we need only listen to speaker after speaker today, who first condemned the veto in uncompromising terms, before quickly tempering our reforms with “reality” in the face of an assumed veto from some member of the P5.

I for one find it difficult to believe that any member of the P5 would undercut the will of the General Assembly, expressed tangibly and overwhelmingly, regarding Security Council reform, and the use of the veto. Such a decision would only render their future actions illegitimate and irrelevant. This I am sure they will not do, as I am convinced that they take seriously the responsibilities with which they have been entrusted, and the powers that they hold in trust for the wider Membership. If, however, our reform efforts are to be governed by learned helplessness, or constrained by fear of an ultimate veto, then we should stop being coy and trying to divine the tealeaves of what is acceptable to the P5. Instead, we could simply ask them politely to reform themselves, or to tell us explicitly what reforms we should attempt to enact. That would save us all hours of haggling.

Mr. Chairman, we are better than that. Today, we are the tradesmen and women who will erect a lasting monument at the crossroads of principle and pragmatism. How will future generations judge our efforts? I trust that we are up to this most challenging undertaking.

Thank You.