



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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

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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (63rd Session)

Statement

By

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on

Agenda Item 9: Report of the United Nations Security Council

and

Agenda Item 111: On the Question of Equitable Representation On and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Related Matters

19th November, 2008
New York

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines aligns itself with the statements made by Barbados, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and by Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. President,

According to our Charter, the Security Council has the “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.” It is through the prism of that formidable responsibility that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines views this Report and the question of Security Council Reform.

In our own region, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines would like to thank the Council for continuing to focus its attention on the threats to peace and security that face our brothers and sisters in Haiti. We welcome the continued presence of MINUSTAH, and call for its further extension and expansion in a manner that reflects the current situation on the ground and is cognizant of the ongoing threats facing our fellow CARICOM State.

There are also many other hotspots and flashpoints for conflict across our troubled planet, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanks the Council for the work that it has done and continues to do in furtherance of its functions and responsibilities. For every conflict contained, resolved, or avoided through the work of the Council, we are grateful. We also acknowledge the magnificent bravery and sacrifice of the troops, police and other personnel, and thank those States who have volunteered their sons and daughters to the noble cause of world peace.

However, it is the nature of the Council’s work and mandate that its shortcomings and failures will attract more attention than its successes. And this is as it should be, because every failure of the Council represents lives lost, peoples uprooted, and development in reverse.

In that regard, my delegation confesses some disappointment with the content of the Report before us. I am reminded of the job applicant, who, lacking the necessary accomplishments to distinguish himself, resorts to puffery and padding of his résumé to dazzle the reader with verbs, verbosity, or mind-numbing recounts of data that are devoid of context.

Take, for example, the Council’s assessment of its work in the Sudan, where, as we speak, another slow moving genocide is staining humanity’s conscience. On pages 14-17 of the Report, my delegation learned that the Security Council condemned; condemned in the strongest possible terms; expressed strong concern; expressed deep concern; expressed serious concern; considered reports; heard briefings; adopted presidential statements; took note of developments; exchanged views; and extended the mandate of existing ineffective missions and panels of experts, essentially perpetuating an unacceptable status quo. But what did the Council actually do to stop people from being massacred? Is this what we mean by “never again?” An endless stream of impotent statements and interminable hand wringing is of no comfort to the murdered innocents in Darfur, and is a stark failing of the Council to fulfill its mandate.

Similarly, regarding the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, we learn from the Report that “the Council was not able to reach the unanimity needed for it to take any

action during the current 12-month reporting period, despite the seven attempts that were presented by different delegations in due course.”

The council was also limited to merely reviewing the situations in Kenya and Zimbabwe, apparently since “neither situation is a formal Security Council agenda item.”

These failings, and many others speak to both the absence of the requisite political will and the structural inadequacies of the Security Council. Political priorities – which justify billions to save profligate financiers, but pinch pennies in lifesaving efforts; or which sacrifice our young in far more ignoble adventures than the cause of international peace – cannot be blamed solely on the Council. However, we can and must address the issue of the reform of the Security Council, because its current track record does not inspire confidence in its ability to operate effectively as-is.

Mr. President,

When the Security Council was created in 1948, the United Nations consisted of 58 Members. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, like 133 other current member States, was neither consulted nor afforded an opportunity to address the composition and function of the Council. And when we joined the United Nations, like 133 other countries, the composition of the Council was presented to us as a *fait accompli* – an immutable and immovable object in the UN landscape.

As the world has moved from great power unilateralism to multipolar, multilateral, interconnectedness, and as new powers and threats have emerged and old ones faded, the Council has remained stubbornly resistant to change and impervious to the logic of an evolving world. As the UN trumpeted equality, the Council remains fundamentally unequal. As we cheer emerging democracies, the Council is firmly undemocratic and unrepresentative. As we demand transparency, the Council’s functions remain shrouded and opaque. And as we decolonize the world, our most cherished international function remains the exclusive province of a virtual 5-headed monarchy, largely unchanged in 60 years of global metamorphosis.

How, for example, can this Report state that “Africa again featured prominently on the Council’s agenda,” when the Council itself remains devoid of permanent African presence? Surely, Africa deserves appropriate membership on a body so often preoccupied with the Continent, quite apart from the undeniable overarching logic of equitable regional and developmental representation.

To be fair, the stagnation of reform is not entirely the fault of the Council itself, but of we, the Members of the General Assembly. We have for too long succumbed to paralysis by analysis, or to the undue pressures of minority groups with a narrow self-interest in inaction.

We therefore welcome Decision 62/557, which you, Mr. President described on Monday as our “road map” and yesterday as our “platform for progress.” Decision 62/557 has finally cleared the way for intergovernmental negotiations to begin, no later than February of next year, but hopefully much sooner.

There will undoubtedly be hiccups on the road to substantive Security Council reform. However, we urge all member States to approach this process with good faith and flexibility.

Mr. President, Yesterday, you again placed at the fore your noble imperative of “a more democratic United Nations, where every country counts.” Your imperative is rooted in the principle of sovereign equality of states that undergirds the operation of this Body. This equality may be a legal fiction, but the legality of that fiction is enshrined in our Charter, and has no place for Orwellian notions that some states are more equal than others. It follows naturally from this concept that negotiations are open to all States, and that all States’ voices are equally respected in a process such as this.

As such, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines rejects as a matter of principle the notion of undue pressure being applied by minority groups, or the concept of backroom “gentlemen’s agreements” that supersede the letter and spirit of unanimous decisions. Similarly, we repudiate the concept that we must somehow avoid voting on the substance of Security Council reform, lest influential members of a small minority question the credibility of a reformed Council. To this we ask: What of the 134 members who have never had the opportunity to voice an opinion on the current Council? Are we not – collectively and individually – influential? And why should we accept the credibility of a process that denies us our right to stand up and be counted? To fear the transformative democratic power of the vote – or to weigh and rank States’ positions by their military or financial might – is to debase the foundations upon which this institution stands.

We have as our road map a Decision that explicitly divorces the consultative role of the Open Ended Working Group from the substantive negotiations to come in the GA plenary. It serves no one to revisit, renegotiate or subvert a unanimous decision of such recent vintage. The clarity of Decision 62/557 leaves no doubt as to the urgency of our task.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has no aspirations to join the Permanent Membership of a reformed Council, and is under no illusions as to the difficulties inherent in the reform process or the myriad modern challenges facing a reformed Council. Instead, we approach this issue from a position of principle and pragmatism, and we see the efficacious functioning of a democratic, representative, nimble, responsive and transparent Council as absolutely essential to core values of the United Nations. Let us rise above pettiness and dilatory tactics, and get on with the serious work of reform.

I thank you.