



ECOSOCC
Economic Social & Cultural Council



From Taboo to Necessity: How to Prepare for a New Dawn in Global Governance

Summary of Diplomatic Briefing on UN Charter Reform

On 19 March 2025, the Global Governance Forum, the UN Charter Reform Coalition and the African Union ECOSOCC convened representatives from 26 Member States, from every region of the world for a closed-door briefing on reform of the UN Charter. Recent geopolitical developments have highlighted the vulnerability and inadequacy of the current international architecture, and the urgency of developing credible and robustly debated vision for the future.

This document serves as a summary of the discussion, which was held under the Chatham House rule (after the opening presentations), at the Baha'i International Community's office in New York.

Key take-aways:

- The call for comprehensive review of the UN Charter has gained momentum in recent months, from various Member States, and is increasingly discussed among civil society, in the media and in policy circles.
- As outlined in the Global Governance Forum's [Second Charter](#), a revision of the UN Charter could include legacy updates, normative advances, and structural changes.
- A Charter review conference can be called by invoking Article 109 of the Charter with a two-thirds majority at the General Assembly and any 9 of 15 members of the Security Council. The veto does not apply to the *holding* of a conference.
- Many Member States at the briefing voiced support for further exploring the use of Article 109 to trigger a review of the Charter
- Concerns were raised about the power of the five permanent members of the Security Council to veto the outcomes of an Article 109 charter review conference, and encouraged further thought to be given to how to overcome this challenge
- The UN Charter Reform Coalition is a new effort to support Member States through convening, outreach, and policy and research capacity. It will facilitate informal meetings to further discuss the issue and explore the creation of a Group of Friends on this topic.

Please find a more detailed summary of the discussions below.

What reforms can charter review usher in?

Dan Perell, UN representative at the Baha'i International Community, opened the meeting by encouraging participants to embrace "future back thinking" - imagining a positive future, 100 years from now, and considering what global governance system will have enabled it. While much of diplomacy is focused on the art of the possible, this dialogue aimed to create space to discuss not only what is possible today, but what is necessary for the future.

Augusto Lopez-Claros, executive director of the Global Governance Forum, noted that the UN Charter was always meant to be a living document, as encapsulated by US President Harry Truman's remarks at the 1945 conference in which the UN was established: *"This Charter will be expanded and improved as time goes on. No one claims that it is now a final or a perfect instrument. It has not been poured into any fixed mold. Changing world conditions will require readjustments."*

The Global Governance Forum's [Second Charter report](#), published in September 2024, outlines three categories of potential changes to the Charter:

- **Legacy updates** include eliminating outdated language, such as "enemy states", and institutions, such as the Trusteeship Council.
- **Normative advances** aim to raise global standards in key areas such as women's participation, human rights, and environmental and planetary health, for example by adding the latter as a fundamental UN pillar.
- **Structural changes** involve reforming the institutional framework of the UN to improve effectiveness, representation, and decision-making. These proposed changes include the creation of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, the establishment of a new Earth System Council, and the expansion of the UN Security Council to be more representative.

Other key proposals include the creation of a an Earth System Council to better coordinate global environmental policy and oversee the negotiation and implementation of global environmental treaties, Security Council reform to address the issues of representation and the veto; the formation of a standing peace force and setting in motion a process of disarmament as called for in the original Charter; the introduction of limited compulsory jurisdiction for the International Court of Justice; giving the ICJ authority to review actions taken by the UN and its affiliated organizations; ensuring greater oversight and accountability within the UN system; and a revised process for selecting the Secretary-General. Additionally, a mechanism for embedding further revisions into the Charter is proposed to ensure its continued evolution.

Support for invoking Article 109

It was proposed to enact such changes by invoking Article 109 of the UN Charter, which calls for a general conference to be held to review and update the Charter. Article 109 was a concession made by the drafters in 1945 to the many countries who opposed the veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council: they promised to revisit the distribution of power within 10 years of the UN's creation. Eighty years later this built-in review mechanism has never been used. The international community is still using 1945 technology: it's time for a software upgrade.

Heba Aly, director of the UN Charter Reform Coalition, described the political mobilisation taking place towards a Charter review conference. She noted support for invoking Article 109 to update the UN Charter among former heads of State, Nobel Laureates, and the Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective multilateralism. Following a [call for comprehensive charter reform](#) by Brazil's president Lula da Silva in September 2024, Brazil, South Africa and India recently called for the convening of a Charter review conference, in a joint [IBSA Leaders' statement](#), noting: "We cannot wait for another global tragedy, like the Second World War, to build a new global governance on its ruins."

William Carew, head of African Union ECOSOCC Secretariat, recounted a diplomatic briefing on the sidelines of the African Union Summit in February, in which the Ambassador of Cameroon to the AU said his country is ready to work with others to build a coalition of nations to invoke Article 109.

Is Charter reform politically viable?

Ms. Aly addressed some of the common concerns about reform of the UN Charter:

Is this really possible in the current political environment? There will never be a perfect or easy time to pursue UN Charter Reform. And it is often in times of crisis that reform is most possible. The UN Charter itself was drafted during World War II. But frankly, we may have no choice given the existential attacks on multilateralism. Charter reform may be a way of saving the UN. But if the UN in its current state does not survive this moment of crisis, it will be important to have some ideas of what should come next.

Couldn't we end up with something worse? The threats being made to multilateralism are coming from a minority of States. The majority still recognize that an improved international order would serve their interests. No changes to the Charter can take effect unless they secure support from a majority of governments. Until such agreement exists, the current Charter stands. So there is a fail-safe mechanism against regression. Besides, this change will take time. No one is suggesting we do this tomorrow. But if we agree that the system we have today is not the system we will have forever, then it is useful to lay the foundations and start developing a vision for the future, so that as an international community, we are not caught flat-footed when the moment is ripe. If managed well, such a process could in fact improve the political mood. Finally, even if the process did carry risk, the world's current trajectory carries higher risk – and is ultimately untenable.

Can't the P5 overturn this? Even if the effort ultimately does not lead to a new Charter, the broad-based consultations at a review Conference would be useful in themselves and could lay seeds for the transformation of multilateralism in other ways. Moreover, the power of the other 188 countries should not be underestimated, and the P5 should not be treated as monolithic.

The UN Charter Reform Coalition, made up of more than 30 civil society groups, peacebuilding organisations and think tanks from around the world, aims to support Member States in creating the enabling environment for this pathway for change, by providing convening, outreach, policy, and research capacity, as well as a neutral space in which to have these conversations.

Member State reactions

Many Member States voiced support for further exploring the utilisation of Article 109 to trigger a review of the UN Charter, and as a first step, creating a Group of Friends to facilitate informal meetings to further discuss the issue.

“While immediate charter revisions may not be possible, we must lay the groundwork for future reform,” one Member state representative said. “We are ready to engage in discussion on Article 109 and stand ready to work with all stakeholders to build a more inclusive system.”

Another pointed to the need for Member States to be speaking about Charter Reform at the UN General Assembly. “It’s high time amid these circumstances.”

A third noted: “This is a really important exercise. It pushes us to think about what it is we actually want. We keep trying to do the art of the possible, without actually changing the Charter. But what would we want to see if we could do anything to it?” This participant noted that discussions about reform are rarely specific enough to address questions about specific articles and expressed curiosity around what each Member State would want to see reflected in a new Charter. “I want to compare notes.”

Several referred to the idea of Charter reform as “fascinating”, and appreciated having concrete ideas to coalesce around.

Here are some of the specific issues raised in the subsequent discussion:

The process of invoking Article 109:

The P5 veto: Several participants raised the question of how to ensure buy-in from the five permanent members of the Security Council given their ability to block any changes to the Charter. It was noted that breakthroughs in global governance have taken place without P5 buy-in, including the process that led to the landmine ban treaty, and that there have been historical instances in which the use of the veto was overturned during the ratification process. Another Member State representative reminded peers that the steps of invoking Article 109 are often conflated. Step 1 is to convene the conference. Step 2 is to vote on its outcomes. Step 3 is ratification. The P5 members only have control over Step 3. “How deferential should Member States be to the P5?” this participant asked.

Another Member State suggested refraining from binary ways of treating “the P5 vs. the rest”, noting that governments change, and that the P5 are not monolithic in their views. “There is a core of interests where there is relatively broad consensus that things need to change; a second tier of issues that will require horse-trading and compromise – that was the case in 1945 – and a third set of issues that are not going to be politically feasible for the P5, whether collectively or for one member – and end up on the cutting room floor, at least this time around.”

Reforming the Charter vs. creating something new: The question of creating a new institution or charter, rather than amending the current Charter, came up several times, given the obstacles to change built into the current system through the veto power.

Group of Friends: One Ambassador pointed to the need to draw learnings from 15 years of negotiations on Security Council reform, which revealed that structural UN reforms are “difficult, complex and slow”. Informal meetings, through the establishment of a Group of Friends, could help assess the appetite. It was noted that an Article 109 conference could force the IGN discussions on Security Council reform to come to resolution.

Reforms that do not require Charter reform: It was noted that efforts towards Charter reform should not stop Member States from pursuing opportunities to improve the system in more incremental ways, such as the Veto Initiative. The General Assembly, under Article 22, already has the power to create bodies like a UN Parliamentary Assembly.

Potential reforms that could emerge from Charter Reform:

Intergovernmental nature of the UN: One participant questioned how far to go in reducing the intergovernmental nature of the UN, and suggested regional and sub-regional actors be included in the future.

Sovereignty: Perceptions that a new Charter might usher in a World Government could be a major blockage, another participant noted, given resistance to any infringements on national sovereignty. In response, it was noted questions of subsidiarity should be considered to identify which issues require universal vs. national decision-making - it is not a binary choice. In any event, a world government presupposes a UN able to pass laws that are binding on Member States, which could not be done without broad-based support among members.

Inclusivity: One Member State advocated for the Charter to ensure greater inclusivity for the Least Developed Countries. “Middle powers play a crucial role in maintaining stability, yet their voices remain under-utilized.”

Strengthening existing bodies: Some Member States voiced support for strengthening the General Assembly, giving its decisions the binding force of those of the Security Council, and transforming the Economic and Social Council into a platform for sustainability and climate governance.

Emerging trends: One participant asked whether a new Charter is really needed to address climate and artificial intelligence, noting that the international community has addressed youth, peacekeeping and climate change, despite there being no reference to them in the current Charter. However, it was noted that on each of those fronts, the response has not been adequate and would be strengthened by more robust and overt language in the Charter.

Equality vs. Effectiveness: It was noted that Security Council reform raises a tension between the principle of equality among any new permanent members and the ineffectiveness of granting more states the veto power.

Other comments

Implementation: One participant voiced concern over implementation of the existing Charter noting that States are using parts of the Charter to justify violations of other parts of the Charter. It was noted that the Charter's inadequacy may itself be a cause of non-compliance.

Financing: Where will the money to fund UN reform come from? If we don't address the issue of finance, then it is hard to imagine any change occurring. It was noted that this is, indeed, vital and represents a key part of the ongoing expert discussions hosted by the Global Governance Forum. A draft protocol on this issue will be shared in September of 2025.

Call to Action on Global Governance Reform: It was recalled that 60 Member States endorsed the Call to Action on Global Governance Reform, launched as part of Brazil's G20 in September 2024, pledging to work for a reinvigorated and strengthened multilateral system, rooted in the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and international law, with renewed institutions and a reformed governance that is more representative, effective, transparent and accountable, reflecting the social, economic and political realities of the 21st century.

Next steps

The meeting ended with gratitude for the production of a menu of options that can be dissected to identify what is politically feasible. In closing, it was noted that this particular time in history brings opportunities that Member States will need to leverage. "We are experiencing a new San Francisco moment," one participant said. "Perhaps the time is ripe."

Building on the Second Charter report, the Global Governance Forum will develop further protocols - on disarmament, an international peace force, and UN financing - to be published in September.

The UN Charter Reform Coalition would welcome the opportunity to serve as a Secretariat for a Member States Group of Friends on this issue. Subsequent informal convenings, convened at regional levels and smaller groupings, will seek to identify areas of consensus and interest in participating in the Group of Friends.

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