UN Summit of the Future and the Reform in UN Institutions

Source: DTE

Why in News?

The **United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres**, recently addressed the **UN Summit of the Future 2024**, and called for urgent reforms to **outdated UN institutions** related to global peace, security, and finance. The Prime Minister of India also participated in the summit.

What are the Key Highlights of the UN Summit of the Future?

- **About:** The UN Summit of the Future is aimed at reforming and strengthening international governance. The summit seeks to address contemporary global challenges and secure a sustainable future for upcoming generations.
    - This summit builds on recent UN efforts such as the **2022 UN Environment Stockholm+50 conference** and the **High Seas Treaty**.
    - The theme of the Summit is **'Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow'.**
    - The Summit concluded with the **adoption of an outcome document - A Pact for the Future, along with two annexes, Global Digital Compact and A Declaration on Future Generations.**
- **Pact for the Future**: It is aimed at accelerating **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **Paris Agreement for climate action**. Includes commitments to a **just transition from fossil fuels** and ensuring a sustainable and peaceful future.
    - The Global Digital Compact promotes **equitable access to technology, ensuring it benefits everyone.**
    - Introduced the **first universal agreement on Artificial Intelligence (AI) governance,** advocating for establishment of a **multidisciplinary Independent International Scientific Panel on AI** within the UN, ensuring balanced geographic representation to enhance scientific understanding through evidence-based assessments of impact, risks, and opportunities, leveraging existing initiatives and research networks **(SDG 17).**
    - **The "Declaration on Future Generations"** focuses on long-term thinking by urging current decision-makers to consider the interests of future generations.
        - It commits to **nuclear disarmament,** regulating autonomous weapons, and preventing an arms race in outer space, representing the **first multilateral support for nuclear disarmament in over a decade.**
- **India's Stance at the Summit:** India calls for reforms in the UN and Security Council to ensure

relevance, advocating for **expanded permanent membership, including itself and African nations.**

- ○ The Prime Minister of India highlighted **cyber, maritime, and space** as new conflict arenas, urging global frameworks to ensure security. Advocated for **global digital governance** while offering **India's digital public infrastructure** for global cooperation.
- ○ India backed the UN's Pact for the Future and initiatives on **AI governance, and digital cooperation.**

Why is UN Reform Needed Now?

- **Outdated Structure:** The UN was established in 1945 when there were only **51 member states, compared to the current 193.**
  - ○ The global economy is now over **twelve times larger than it was in 1945**, and the international financial system was designed during colonial times.
- **Global Disparities:** Developing nations face mounting **debts and inequalities** that **hinder sustainable development,** making it clear that current global systems do not serve the needs of today's world.
- **Technological and Geopolitical Shifts:** Modern technological advancements and shifting global power dynamics highlight the inadequacies of **post-World War II institutions** in addressing current global challenges, such as **climate action, sustainable development**, and **economic inequalities.**
- **Legitimacy and Credibility Issues:** The legitimacy and credibility of the Security Council are increasingly questioned. To effectively maintain international peace and security, the **Council must reflect the general will of all member states,** rather than **being dominated by a select few permanent members.**
  - ○ Reform is essential to enhance the legitimacy of the Council's decisions and actions, as its current permanent membership **does not adequately represent today's geopolitical realities.**
- **Inequitable Representation:** Regions such as **Asia, Africa, and Latin America** are underrepresented in the current Security Council structure.
  - ○ This imbalance raises concerns about the **equity of representation and undermines the effectiveness of the Council's decision-making processes**.
  - ○ An equitable distribution of non-permanent seats is essential to address these disparities.
- **Financial and Administrative Reform:** The financial sustainability of the UN is paramount, especially as it faces increasing demands for peacekeeping and development initiatives.
  - ○ Japan's proposal to reform emphasises **aligning financial obligations with member states' responsibilities,** ensuring fair and proportional contributions.
- **Global Security Challenges:** The current international security environment faces complex challenges, including **regional conflicts, terrorism, and humanitarian crises.**
  - ○ An effective Security Council is essential to address these issues effectively. Reform would enhance the **UN's ability to implement preventive diplomacy** and peace-building strategies.

What Reforms did the UN Secretary General Propose?

- **Security Council Reform**: The UN Security Council no longer reflects current geopolitical realities and risks losing credibility without reform.
  - ○ Guterres called for changes in the council's composition and working methods to address the **under-representation of regions like Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America.**
- **Strengthening Global Financial Architecture**: The international financial system including the **International Monetary Fund,** the **World Bank Group** and **World Trade Organization,** must better support debt-stricken developing nations struggling to achieve SDGs.
  - ○ The UN Summit of the Future introduced reforms to make financial institutions more representative and capable of addressing global economic challenges.

How will UN Reforms Impact Global Governance?

- **Enhanced Inclusivity:** The reforms aim to make global governance more inclusive by giving

a **stronger voice to developing countries** and underrepresented regions like Africa, Latin America.
- This could lead to **more equitable decision-making processes.**
- **Increased Agility**: The reforms will establish a more agile **Peacebuilding Commission** and revise peace operations, enabling a quicker response to emerging global challenges.
- **Strengthened Financial Architecture**: Reforms in the international financial system **will better assist developing countries facing significant debt,** facilitating their progress towards SDGs.
- **Digital Governance:** The Global Digital Compact, part of the Pact for the Future, aims to regulate artificial intelligence and digital technologies to ensure they contribute to sustainable development and human rights.
  - This includes addressing issues like the **digital divide and cybersecurity.**
- **Youth Engagement**: The Pact for the Future emphasises including young people in decision-making processes, ensuring that future generations' interests are considered.
- **Conflict Resolution:** The reforms call for new norms and accountability mechanisms to strengthen the multilateral system and manage geopolitical competition. This could help in preventing and resolving conflicts more effectively.

How does India Critique the United Nations?

- **Ineffectiveness in Crisis Management:** India stated that the UN Charter has failed to address critical challenges such as the **Covid-19 pandemic,** the **Russia-Ukraine Conflict,** **terrorism**, and **climate change.**
  - The Indian ambassador called for urgent reforms to make the UN more relevant and responsive to today's geopolitical realities.
- **Veto Power Concerns:** India criticised the veto power held by the **P-5 nations (the U.S., U.K., France, Russia, and China)**, questioning the fairness of a system that grants disproportionate influence to a select few.
  - Many nations, including India, have expressed concerns about the lack of representation for regions such as Africa, South America, and Asia in the Security Council.
- **Charter Review:** India has called for a comprehensive review of the **UN Charter,** highlighting its outdated references to former entities like the **"Union of Soviet Socialist Republics"** and designations of certain countries, including Japan, as **"enemy states,"** despite their current roles in the international order.
  - It emphasises the need to rectify these failures and update the Charter to reflect modern geopolitical realities.
- **Slow Reform Process:** India's concerns stem from the sluggish pace of the **Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) process on UN reform,** which began in **2008** but has yet to yield significant progress. India has stressed that this issue must remain a global priority.

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UN Security Council (UNSC)

The UN Charter vests the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security to the UNSC

About

One of the **6 principal organs** of UN; established in **1945 by UN Charter**

Headquarters

New York City

First Session

17 January 1946 at Church House, Westminster, **London**

Membership

- 15 members - 5 Permanent Members **(P5)**, **10 Non-Permanent Members** elected for **two-year terms** (5 elected each year)
- P5 - the **US**, the **UK**, **Russia**, **France** and **China**

Presidency

- **Rotates every month** among the 15 members
- **India's** Presidency for year **2022 - December**

Voting Powers

- 1 member = 1 vote
- P5 have **veto power**
- Members of UN sans membership of UNSC **participate without vote**

UNSC Committees/Resolutions

Terrorism

- **Resolution 1373** (Counter Terrorism Committee)
- **Resolution 1267** (Da'esh and Al Qaeda Committee)

Non-Proliferation Committee

- **Resolution 1540** (against nuclear, chemical and biological weapons)

India and UNSC

- Served **7 times** as non-permanent member; elected for the **8th time** for 2021-22; **advocates for a permanent seat**
- Arguments for a permanent seat:
  - **43 peacekeeping missions**
  - Active participation in **formulating Human Rights Declaration (UDHR)**
  - India's **population, territorial size, GDP, economic potential, cultural diversity, political system** etc.

G4

Group of 4 countries (Brazil, Germany, India and Japan) which advocate each other's bids for permanent seats in the UNSC

Uniting for Consensus (UfC) Movement

- Informally known as the **Coffee Club**
- Countries **oppose the expansion Permanent Seats** of UNSC
- **Prime movers of the club** - Italy, Spain, Australia, Canada, South Korea, Argentina and Pakistan
- Italy and Spain are opposed to Germany's bid; Pakistan - India's bid; Argentina - Brazil's bid and Australia - Japan's bid

Major Challenges in UNSC

- Usual UN rules don't apply to UNSC deliberations; **no records of meetings kept**
- Powerplay in UNSC; **anachronistic veto powers** of P5
- **Deep polarisation** among P5; frequent divisions end up blocking key decisions
- **Inadequate representation** of many regions among of the world

Drishti IAS

Conclusion

The UN Summit of the Future 2024 underscored the urgent need for comprehensive reforms and enhanced the effectiveness of international governance. India's proactive stance on reforming the UN and its institutions reflects its commitment to fostering a **more equitable and inclusive global landscape.** Implementing these reforms will be crucial for **ensuring the UN's relevance** and ability to address the complex issues of the 21st century.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate the necessity of reforming the United Nations as proposed at the UN Summit of the Future. How do these reforms seek to improve global governance for developing nations?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Prelims

Q. With reference to the "United Nations Credentials Committee", consider the following statements:

1. It is a committee set up by the UN Security Council and works under its supervision.
2. It traditionally meets in March, June and September every year
3. It assesses the credentials of all UN members before submitting a report to the General Assembly for approval.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct? (**2022**)

(a) 3 only
(b) 1 and 3
(c) 2 and 3
(d) 1 and 2

Ans: (a)

Exp:

- A Credentials Committee is appointed at the beginning of each regular session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It consists of nine members, who are appointed by the General Assembly on the proposal of the UNGA President. **Hence, statement 1 is not correct.**
- The credentials of representatives and the names of members of the delegation of each Member State are submitted to the Secretary-General and are issued either by the Head of the State or Government or by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Committee is mandated to examine the credentials of representatives of Member States and to report to the General Assembly thereon. **Hence, statement 3 is correct.**
- Usually, the committee meets in November, brings the report to the General Assembly in December. **Hence, statement 2 is not correct.**
- **Therefore, option (a) is the correct answer.**

Mains:

Q. What are the main functions of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)? Explain different functional commissions attached to it. (**2017**)

Q. Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council (**2015**)

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