



Perspective: Need for UN Reforms

For Prelims: [United Nations](#), [UNSC](#), UNGA.

For Mains: Need for UN Reform, [UN Reforms and India](#)

What is the Context?

On October 24 the world observes United Nations Day to mark the organization's establishment in 1945. In 1947, the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) designated this date to inform the global community about the UN's objectives, solidifying its dedication to global cooperation, peace, and international relations. The UN plays a pivotal role in uniting nations for a better world, especially in the face of mounting global challenges.

However, as the world has evolved in the 21st century, the UN's structure, decision-making processes, and effectiveness have come under scrutiny. Consequently, reforms within the structure of the UN are imperative to bolster its efficacy as a multilateral organization, enhance transparency, and boost its credibility.

What is the Historical Background of the United Nations?

▪ Formation of the UN (1945)

◦ Establishment in the Aftermath of World War II:

- World leaders, in the aftermath of World War II, convened the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in 1944 to lay the groundwork for the United Nations, and the UN Charter was signed on June 26, 1945, officially establishing the organization, with its entry into force celebrated on October 24, 1945, as United Nations Day.

◦ Founding Principles of UN:

• Collective Security:

- The UN established collective security to address threats to international peace collectively through diplomacy, economics, or military action, as per the Charter.

• The UN Security Council:

- The UNSC, with its P5 members holding veto powers, was established as the central organ to enforce the principle of collective security, ensuring major powers' active involvement in global security.

• Disarmament:

- The UN Charter prioritizes disarmament and arms control to mitigate global conflict risks through mechanisms and agreements.

• Peacekeeping:

- The UN's strong [peacekeeping missions](#) promote peace and security by deploying to conflict zones, upholding ceasefires, safeguarding civilians, and aiding peace talks.

- While the UN has faced challenges and criticisms over the years, its foundational principles

remain relevant in addressing contemporary global conflicts and crises.

▪ **Structure of the UN**

◦ **The General Assembly (GA):**

- The General Assembly is the primary deliberative and policymaking body of the UN, representing all 193 member states.
- The GA addresses various global issues, from development goals to budgetary matters, and offers a platform for diplomatic discussions and resolutions.

◦ **The Security Council:**

- The UN Security Council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security.
- It comprises 15 members, with five permanent members (P5) possessing veto powers—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

◦ **Specialized Agencies:**

- The UN includes numerous specialized agencies and programs, such as [UNICEF](#), [WHO](#), and [UNESCO](#), which focus on specific areas like health, education, and humanitarian aid.

What is the Importance of the UN?

▪ **Addressing Global Challenges:**

◦ **Peacekeeping and Conflict Resolution:**

- The UN is pivotal in maintaining global peace through peacekeeping missions; it deploys troops and mediators to conflict zones, facilitating negotiations and preventing further violence.

◦ **Humanitarian Assistance and Development Programs:**

- The UN offers vital humanitarian aid to communities affected by crises, including natural disasters and armed conflicts.

◦ **Environmental and Climate Change Initiatives:**

- The UN addresses environmental challenges by promoting global cooperation; the [Paris Agreement](#) is a notable example of a UN-led effort to combat [climate change](#).

▪ **The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**

◦ **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:**

- The United Nations' 2030 Agenda, comprising 17 [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), establishes a worldwide development framework focused on inclusivity and sustainability.

◦ **Progress and Challenges in Achieving the SDGs:**

- The UN plays a central role in tracking progress toward the SDGs. Annual UN reports evaluate the advancements and challenges faced by member states.

What is the Need to Reform the UN Structure?

▪ **Outdated Structure and Decision-Making Processes:**

◦ **P5 and Power Imbalance:**

- Five permanent members (P5) holding veto power, reflects the geopolitical realities of the post-[World War II](#) era.
- Reform in this area is imperative to reflect the contemporary global power dynamics.
- Proposals for limiting or reforming the veto power have been discussed but not yet implemented.

◦ **Lack of Representation and Inclusivity:**

- The UN's decision-making bodies need to be more representative; many countries, especially from Africa and Latin America, lack sufficient influence and a voice in shaping global policies.

▪ **Ineffectiveness and Inefficiency:**

◦ **Bureaucracy and Red Tape:**

- The UN's bureaucratic structures and complex decision-making processes can slow down responses to global challenges.
- Streamlining administrative procedures and reducing red tape would help the organization become more efficient and responsive.

- **Duplication of Efforts Among Specialized Agencies:**
 - The UN has numerous [specialised agencies](#), each with its own mandates and resources.
 - Coordinating the work of these agencies to eliminate duplication and improve collaboration is essential for enhancing effectiveness.
- **Financial Stability:**
 - **Financial Constraints and Arrears:**
 - The UN often faces financial instability, with member states failing to pay their assessed contributions promptly.
 - Reforms should focus on ensuring timely financial contributions from member states and addressing arrears.
 - **The Equitable Distribution of Financial Burdens:**
 - There is a need to reassess the formula for assessing financial contributions to the UN budget.
 - Currently, it is largely based on a country's gross national income, with a cap on contributions. Some argue that this system does not fairly distribute the financial burden among countries, leading to imbalances.
- Thus by addressing its outdated structure, streamlining its processes, and ensuring financial stability, the UN can become a more effective and inclusive global institution that better serves its mission of promoting peace, security, and development.

What are the Proposals to Reform of the UN?

- **Reforming the UNSC:**
 - **Expanding Permanent Membership:**
 - One key proposal for Security Council reform is expanding the number of permanent members beyond the existing P5.
 - This expansion would better represent contemporary power dynamics and include countries like India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan.
 - **Abolishing or Limiting the Veto Power:**
 - Many argue for the abolition or reform of the veto power held by the P5.
 - Limiting the veto power could prevent its misuse and ensure that the council acts in the best interests of the international community.
 - **Inclusive Representation for the Global South:**
 - Increasing the number of non-permanent seats on the Security Council, particularly for countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia, is another proposal.
 - This would address the long-standing issue of underrepresentation of the [Global South](#) and provide more voices in critical decision-making processes.
- **Streamlining Bureaucracy and Decision-Making:**
 - **Reducing Inefficiencies in Administrative Processes:**
 - Streamlining the UN's administrative procedures and reducing bureaucratic complexities can significantly improve its efficiency.
 - **Enhancing Accountability and Transparency:**
 - Ensuring greater [accountability](#) and transparency within the organization is crucial.
 - Developing mechanisms for auditing and oversight, as well as promoting a culture of transparency, can help regain trust and confidence in the UN.
- **Strengthening Financial Stability:**
 - **Fair and Equitable Distribution of Financial Contributions:**
 - To address concerns about the current system's inequities, revising the formula for assessing financial contributions is essential.
 - Moving toward a more equitable distribution based on factors like GDP, population, and development indicators can ensure a fairer sharing of the financial burden among member states.
 - **Addressing Arrears and Fiscal Constraints:**
 - Dealing with arrears and fiscal constraints requires creating mechanisms to encourage prompt payment of assessed contributions.
 - Sanctions or penalties for countries with outstanding arrears can be introduced.
- Reforming the United Nations is a complex and long-term process, requiring consensus among its member states. However, implementing these proposals can address some of the most pressing

issues and make the organization more effective, transparent, and inclusive.

What are the Political Challenges to Reform of the UN?

- **Resistance from Current Permanent Members:**
 - **Veto-Wielding Countries Reluctant to Cede Power:**
 - One of the primary political challenges to reforming the UN is the reluctance of the current permanent members (P5) to relinquish or dilute their power.
 - They often resist efforts to expand the Security Council's permanent membership or reform the veto system, fearing a loss of influence.
 - **The Need for Consensus Among Permanent Members:**
 - Any significant reform to the UN, especially those related to the Security Council and the veto power, requires unanimous agreement among the P5.
 - Achieving consensus among these major powers can be extremely challenging, as their interests and priorities often diverge.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:**
 - **The Impact of Global Conflicts on UN Reform Efforts:**
 - Geopolitical conflicts and tensions among major powers can significantly affect UN reform efforts. For example, disputes between Russia and Western countries, such as those related to [Ukraine](#) or Syria, can hinder cooperation on broader reform issues.
 - These conflicts divert attention and resources away from the reform agenda, making it difficult to find common ground.
 - **The Role of Regional Powers in Influencing the UN's Agenda:**
 - Regional powers, both those with and without permanent seats on the Security Council, play a significant role in influencing the UN's agenda and reform efforts.
 - These countries often advocate for reforms that align with their own regional interests and priorities. This can lead to competing agendas and complex negotiations within the UN, further complicating reform initiatives.
 - Addressing these political challenges is essential to make meaningful progress in UN reform.

What is India's Role in UN Reform?

- **India's Historical Perspective:**
 - India has a significant historical association with the United Nations. It was one of the founding members of the UN in 1945 and played an active role in the drafting of the UN Charter.
 - Over the years, India has consistently demonstrated its commitment to global peace, security, and development through its participation in [UN peacekeeping missions](#), humanitarian assistance programs, and contributions to various UN agencies.
- **Advocating for a Permanent Seat on the Security Council:**
 - India has been a vocal proponent of reforming the UNSC to reflect the contemporary geopolitical landscape.
 - It seeks a permanent seat on the Security Council, emphasizing that such a step would make the Council more representative and responsive to the needs of the 21st century.
 - India's claim is based on its status as one of the world's largest democracies and its growing global influence.
- **Emphasizing the Importance of an Inclusive World Order:**
 - India consistently advocates for a more inclusive world order within the UN. It argues that the organization must evolve to reflect the growing influence of emerging economies and regional powers.
 - India's calls for reform align with the broader principles of democratizing the UN's decision-making processes and making them more equitable and representative.

What is the Relevance of the UN in the 21st Century?

▪ **The Global Response to Contemporary Crises:**

◦ **COVID-19 Pandemic Response:**

- The [Covid-19](#) pandemic serves as a stark reminder of the critical role the United Nations plays in addressing global crises. The UN, through its specialized agencies like the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), played a pivotal role in coordinating international responses to the pandemic.
- It facilitated the sharing of information, resources, and expertise among nations and provided a platform for developing and distributing vaccines.

◦ **UN's Continued Role in Humanitarian Assistance:**

- The UN remains a primary actor in providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by conflicts, natural disasters, and other emergencies.
- The UN's ability to mobilize resources, coordinate relief efforts, and advocate for vulnerable populations underscores its enduring significance in addressing humanitarian crises.

▪ **Looking Towards the Future:**

◦ **Adapting to Evolving Challenges:**

- The 21st century presents an array of complex challenges, including [climate change](#), [cybersecurity](#) threats, and [economic inequality](#).
- Given its convening power, diplomatic role, and vast network of agencies despite its imperfections, the UN is uniquely positioned to address the multifaceted issues.

◦ **The Potential for a Reinvigorated UN through Reforms:**

- Implementing reforms will enhance the UN's effectiveness in addressing global challenges.
- Streamlining the bureaucracy, reducing inefficiencies, and ensuring more equitable representation can improve the UN's decision-making processes.

Conclusion

The United Nations serves as a vital platform for addressing contemporary crises and adapting to evolving challenges. While the need for reform is evident, the UN's continued role in global governance, humanitarian assistance, and crisis management demonstrates its enduring importance.

As the international community grapples with complex global issues, the United Nations stands as an essential institution capable of fostering cooperation, dialogue, and collective action for the betterment of humanity.

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.150 words (2017)

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