

## Second Meeting on Security Council Reform Addresses the Veto

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*Member States met on 16 and 17 March to discuss the veto in the second of five meetings devoted to different substantive issues connected to Security Council reform.*

After finishing the [first meeting](#) in early March on new categories of membership of a reformed Council, countries turned their attention to the issue of the veto. Delegates involved in the negotiations say that the issue of the veto - and whether to grant any new permanent members this right - remains one of the main sticking points dividing the 192 Member States.

The aim of the meeting on Monday and Tuesday was not, however, to find a definite solution, but simply to give all states an opportunity to present their respective views and perspectives. After all five meetings (new categories of membership, veto, regional representation, size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, the relationship between the Council and the General Assembly) end sometime in late April, a second and more focused round is expected to follow.

### The Meeting

Reportedly, almost half of all Member States took the floor during the almost two-day long meeting. According to several delegates present, a number of African countries stated - in accordance with the common African position - that they are against the veto in principle, but as long as it exists any new permanent Security Council members should be granted the right of veto.

Other countries supported expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent category, but were opposed to furnishing new permanent members with the veto. Among others, [Iceland](#) said that "Rather than perpetuate the anachronism that the veto has become, we believe that a process is called for whereby existing permanent members voluntarily engage with the wider membership in an effort to, in effect, reform the use of veto in the Council's work." [Norway](#) stated that although they supported new permanent members, they too were against giving these countries the right of veto, and the Norwegian ambassador added that "We have also called for greater accountability by members using their veto powers. We remain open to proposals limiting the scope and application of the veto based on a voluntary commitment by permanent members."

While supporting this, [Liechtenstein](#) noted that since it does not seem realistic to get rid of the veto, reform efforts should concentrate on the *use* of the veto. "First, permanent members should at least explain their reasons for using the veto, the delegate said, and continued, "Second, permanent members should commit themselves to a policy of not casting a veto in situations where genocide, crimes against humanity and similar acts are involved."

The latter was a theme that many states apparently also touched on. The [Philippines](#) noted that "...even in the face of this extreme difficulty to remove the veto power, we may yet consider the need to curtail its exercise or use. There is a big chance for that," ambassador Hilario G. Davide pointed out. To address this issue, the ambassador not only supported disallowing or denying the use of the veto power in certain grave cases, he also reiterated a Philippine proposal for a veto to be set aside or overturned by an absolute majority of the General Assembly, or by a vote of two-thirds of the Security Council itself.



The [Netherlands](#) said that they hoped to see "...a voluntary commitment to, one, use the veto with restraint and, two, to use it with enhanced transparency."

Some states, including [Italy](#) as well as others affiliated with the Uniting for Consensus faction, which opposes adding new permanent members to the Council, argued against giving any new members the veto. Italy's Ambassador Giulio Terzi said that even when not used, the veto can alter or block the discussion of urgent issues. "Again and again the 'hidden veto' has prevented substantial discussions of questions that are crucial to international peace and security," he said.

[India](#) argued vehemently that the right of veto should be given to new permanent members, although the Indian ambassador further noted that India would consider deferring the use of the veto until a future scheduled review conference.

German Ambassador Thomas Matussek apparently stated that the veto was "an anachronism and should be abolished." But hopes of scrapping or giving it to new council members were unrealistic and should not be used as a pretext to halt reform, he added.

Apparently China, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, permanent members of the Security Council, all signaled unwillingness to give up, change or reform the current veto structure.

[France](#), also a permanent member of the Council, underlined that they believed in a so-called intermediate solution in which new permanent members without veto were admitted to the Council now, with the option of evaluating their status at a later review conference. "The difficult question of granting the right of veto to other permanent members of the Security Council could and should be resolved at the review conference," the ambassador said and added that "The question of the right of veto must not bloc the urgent and necessary reform of the Security Council."

The next meeting on regional representation is scheduled for late March.

*Unless attributed to a specific source, all expressions of opinion in this analysis are those of the author. The Center for UN Reform Education does not endorse any particular reform proposals.*