



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5 March 2018

Excellency,

I refer to my letter of 30 October 2017 in which I informed of a new initiative called the *Morning Dialogues*. You will recall that the series is meant to promote genuine and frank exchanges amongst Permanent Representatives in small group settings on a range of issues that affect the General Assembly. I hosted the first of the *Morning Dialogues* on 10 November, and have convened five additional ones since then.

I have found the *Morning Dialogues* to be refreshingly effective in facilitating open informal discussions about both practical and normative aspects of our work at the United Nations. Participating Permanent Representatives have advised that the series has been a welcome opportunity to truly engage with colleagues. I thank them for their active engagement.

We have determined that, though informal, the discussions should not become just another exchange of views. As such, following each of the *Morning Dialogues*, I have sought opportunities to advance the ideas, thoughts and proposals raised. With the agreement of those participating, I have shared the outcomes with relevant other actors to elicit appropriate action.

In the interest of transparency, I am pleased to share with you a summary of the topics and discussions thus far, and will continue do so on a regular basis. I re-emphasise that these discussions do not represent a formal process, are held under Chatham House rules, and will not generate any official report.

They have nevertheless become an important avenue for sharing views and perspectives and developing useful suggestions for action that can be taken to improve our collective work. I encourage all Permanent Representatives to participate in the *Morning Dialogues* and reiterate that over the course of the Session, all Permanent Representatives will be invited.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Miroslav Lajčák

All Permanent Representatives and  
Permanent Observers to the United Nations  
New York

**President of the UN General Assembly**  
**72<sup>nd</sup> Session**  
**Summary of the Morning Dialogues series**  
**November 2017 – February 2018**

The President of the General Assembly has convened six *Morning Dialogues* with Permanent Representatives between 10 November 2017 and 23 February 2018.

**Dates and Topics**

November 10, 2017	Gender Mainstreaming
December 1, 2017	Small States and the UN: Supporting effective engagement of small delegations
December 19, 2017	Closer Cooperation and Coherence between NY, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna
January 26, 2018	Coherence in the Work of the Main Committees: Lessons Learned
February 15 & 23, 2018 (To be Continued March 9)	Multilateralism Under Fire?

**Synopses of Discussions**

Gender Mainstreaming

- Participants acknowledged the *limited number of women PRs* and that most lead small missions, which face capacity constraints.
- In some cases, this resulted from a lack of women in senior positions within Foreign Ministries.
- There is a *need to increase visibility of women PRs in leadership roles* in the General Assembly. The PGA *should strive to achieve gender balance in appointment of co-facilitators* as well as in selection of experts for high-level events (*Note: As of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2018 in 15 processes 13 women and 16 men were appointed to facilitate*).
- However, it was acknowledged that the low number of women PRs and capacity constraints sometimes impede their opportunity to take up such roles.
- Participants *also noted the lack of women in the UNSC* as well as absence of any women chairing any of the Main Committees. As a result, the General Committee was also woefully short of women.
- On a practical note, participants noted that the *UN premises lacked adequate child/family friendly facilities* that could support women and mothers, whether delegates or staff. A breastfeeding facility could be provided, for example.
- Among the other suggestions were the need for *gender to be a key factor in regional group nominations* to leadership and other roles and the continued work of the women PRs group. Additionally, experienced women PRs can mentor newly arrived women PRs.

- The *PGA committed to continue to champion gender equality* and to raise the issues with the wider Membership.

#### Small States and the UN: Supporting effective engagement of small delegations

- Participants expressed the view that the *Secretariat was sometimes not 'small state friendly'*.
- Interacting with the Secretariat can be challenging because of the complexity involved. This was particularly burdensome for small delegations. Participants suggested that a *'one-stop-shop' for Secretariat services would help solve this challenge*.
- Some participants highlighted that documentation from the Secretariat was sometimes overwhelming, and that the *Secretariat could do more to help small delegations keep abreast of processes and deliberations taking place in fora outside of New York*.
- Additionally, participants suggested that the Secretariat could *create an online side events platform particularly during the busy high-level week period* each September.
- In relation to events and facilities, participants expressed concern about the *prohibitive cost of utilising UN facilities*, thus placing small states at a significant disadvantage to their counterparts that can afford it. Suggestions include having special rates for small states to use UN facilities, and that additional charges (such as catering and cleaning) be non-mandatory allowing Member States to bring in their own catering and clearing.
- Representatives opined that some of the solutions rested with delegations themselves. One suggestion, for example, is to *consider joint statements*.
- With regard to information, representatives *agreed to share information among small delegations*.
- Participants also noted that *it was up to delegations to reduce the growing number of resolutions*, and consider sunsetting or biennialising some.
- It was noted that some resolutions also added to the already onerous reporting requirements, which was a burden for small states.
- *The PGA's role should be strengthened as a stronger General Assembly is in small states' interests*. Participants emphasised the ways in which the PGA can help improve visibility of small states such as by mainstreaming across all process and events, and seeking out representatives from small states to take up co-facilitation roles and to participate in panels.
- *The PGA agreed to bring the relevant matters to the attention of the SG*. It was also agreed that the issues should continue to be raised in relevant fora, such as the consultations on *Revitalisation of the Work of the General Assembly*.

#### Closer Cooperation and Coherence between NY, Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna

- Participants concurred that *coherence was crucial for an effectively functioning United Nations*. They agreed that while variation in approaches and cultures has benefits, it was important not to allow this to impede the achievement of the larger goal of the organization.
- The expertise that resides within each locale is important to help the system function.

- Participants also acknowledged that *for the most part, New York tends to set the normative agenda.*
- As such many technical matters dealt with in other locations are brought to New York for political imprimatur. *Leaders in the various locations are sometimes unaware of important developments taking place elsewhere.* This was so especially for small states and those that do not have representation outside New York.
- It was noted that *some delegations seem to adopt different approaches in various locations on the same issue.* Participants also noted that political and other narrow national interest considerations, sometimes prevent efforts to improve coordination.
- Participants offered *many solutions and ideas to promote coherence:*
  - reviewing working methods, including in keeping with alignment, the 2030 Agenda and the delivering as one approach;
  - more use of technology to help share information;
  - encouraging Member States to adopt coordinating mechanisms between its UN Missions;
  - briefings in NY by agencies based in other locations;
  - for the PGA to use convening power to arrange informal meetings between key players in the various locations to promote coherence in the work and agenda.

#### Coherence in the Work of the Main Committees: Lessons Learned

- Participants exchanged views on *time management, overlap, working methods and workload of the main Committees.*
- There was broad convergence on the view that the *timing of the election of the Main Committee Chairs and bureau should be earlier.* An earlier election would allow for better preparation before the start of the session.
- Participants pointed out that it would be good to have a *training/induction for new Chairs.*
- They highlighted the importance of *joint meetings between the outgoing and incoming bureaux,* as this also helps with preparation and a smooth transition.
- Also, *outgoing Committee Chairs could be requested to submit an assessment of lessons learned* at end of their tenure.
- Participants also called for *greater use of the General Committee to support streamlining the agenda,* putting in place new working methods, and reaching out to member states.
- The participants noted that some issues are being addressed through the GA *revitalization* process. These include biennialization or triennialization of resolutions and meeting deadlines for submission of PBI texts to the Fifth Committee. More should be done to encourage Member States to implement.
- Participants also called for *strengthening of the OPGA, especially to preserve institutional memory.*

### Multilateralism Under Fire?

- Participants opined that *multilateralism was being challenged by new developments in the socio-political landscape*. However, the sheer scale of global connectivity and global challenges made multilateralism essential.
- *The United Nations remains the most appropriate forum* but it needs to adapt to evolving changes in the global architecture. More needs to be done to communicate the benefits of multilateralism and the positive work being done, including within countries.
- *Other stakeholders have taken on new influence* and should be engaged in a more effective way.  
(NB. Discussion on this topic will continue)

### **Actions Taken**

- The President has followed up on the ideas raised throughout the series. Steps have included:
  - *bringing suggestions to the attention of the Secretary-General;*
  - providing summaries of relevant ideas to the *co-chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Revitalisation* of the Work of the General Assembly, and the Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva.
  - The *PGA has also taken specific steps to ensure gender balance* in co-facilitation appointments and composition of panels, select representatives of small states to leadership roles, and will continue to raise these issues, as appropriate, with delegations, the General Committee, the Secretariat and other stakeholders.