



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

14 September 2018

Excellency,

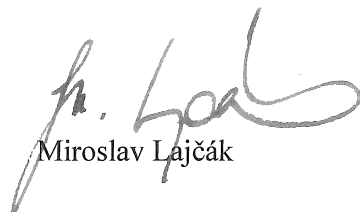
I write further to my letter of 23 February 2018 by which I shared a summary of the topics discussed in the new initiative called the *Morning Dialogues*. The series, which has been a means of promoting genuine and frank exchanges amongst Permanent Representatives in small group settings, has proven to be successful. Over the course of the session, I have hosted fourteen of these *Morning Dialogues*, beginning on 10 November 2017, and culminating on 7 September 2018.

The rich and vibrant exchange of views and presentation of ideas have been a beneficial product of these informal and inclusive interactions. In fact, the *Morning Dialogues* became one of the few spaces in this environment, where colleagues could share thoughts, concerns, ideas and solutions openly and freely. This return to dialogue can only serve to improve our work and strengthen the quality of our multilateral engagement.

As on the previous occasion, I am pleased to share with you a summary of the topics and discussions from the second half of the series. Let me remind you that these discussions do not represent a formal process, are held under Chatham House rules, and will not generate any official report.

Let me use this opportunity to thank all participating Permanent Representatives for their contribution to the success of the *Morning Dialogues*. I am honoured that this simple idea has had such a profound impact. I feel honoured to note that the General Assembly encourages its continuation in future sessions. I trust we will continue to use this platform to promote dialogue, diplomacy and better outcomes for the peoples we represent at the United Nations.

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
72nd Session
Summary of the Morning Dialogues series
March - September 2018

The President of the General Assembly convened eight *Morning Dialogues* with Permanent Representatives between 9 March and 7 September. These were in addition to the six dialogues held earlier in the session.

Dates and Topics

March 9, 2018	Multilateralism Under Fire?
April 13, 2018	The UN-poppable bubble: Engaging with external stakeholders
April 20, 2018	Leading from the front – How to strengthen the primacy of the UNGA
June 1, 2018	Harnessing Africa’s Strength
June 14, 2018	Bridging the Global Divide – The role of groups at the UN
June 29, 2018	Bridging the Global Divide – The influence of like-minded groups
July 13, 2018	Peace and Prevention – Elusive but not impossible
September 7, 2018	Best practices and lessons learned – What we did, what we didn’t do and how to move forward

Synopses of Discussions

#7. Multilateralism Under Fire?

- Participants were of the view that while multilateralism faced threats from different quarters, **most states were still committed to multilateralism.**
- The United Nations should remain the leading forum for dialogue. It must therefore **adapt to emerging dynamics and realities.**
- While other players are taking on a growing influence, we should seek to engage constructively. This is a better approach than trying to deny their existence, ignore them, or step back from the United Nations’ leadership role.
- This will involve reforming the way we operate, communicate and **ensuring that the United Nations delivers** on what matters most for people.
- Multilateralism must be seen to work in order to maintain and strengthen its relevance.

#8. The UN-poppable bubble: Engaging with external stakeholders

- **Global dynamics are changing.** Governments and people interact in a different way and through different mechanisms and structures. The United Nations must adapt to this evolving reality.
- While the United Nations will remain an inter-governmental forum, there can be **better channels for engaging with other stakeholders.** At the same time, we need to ensure balance and guard against a transactional approach.
- Engagement with stakeholders requires a carefully considered approach.
- **Partnerships are essential** for the United Nations and its member states to effectively conduct the work we are doing. The SDGs, for example, require this approach for financing and for implementation.
- Existing mechanisms can be strengthened, and new ones created to provide space for private sector, tech leaders, youth and other relevant players to bring their skills and resources to the table.

#9. Leading from the front – How to strengthen the primacy of the UNGA

- Participants agreed that it was important that the UNGA reinforce its role as the **main deliberative body of the United Nations.** It is the only organ of the United Nations which has universal and equal representation. It is in the UNGA that many small, and medium-sized, countries have an opportunity to exercise greater influence.
- Representatives indicated that to ensure the UNGA strengthened its leadership role, **reforms are necessary.** Reforms included procedural ones, structural ones and cultural ones. Among them:
 - Adapting the **rules of procedure** to suit the Membership's needs;
 - Streamlining the **agenda**;
 - Shift away from 'UN-speak' and resolution wording that is often unintelligible to most people outside the UN;
 - Funding and **strengthening the Office of the President** as a means of creating a more equal playing field and enhancing institutional memory;
 - Create spaces for **more dialogue** and informal interactions, including with non-state representatives
- At the same time, we should ensure that the UNGA is positioned to deal with issues that are **relevant to everyday people**, in this current time. Otherwise, other players such as the G20, Davos or even the private sector will overtake as the main actors.
- There must be a strategic effort to effectively **communicate the work we are doing** in the UNGA, and the benefits that people derive from what is being done here.

#10. Harnessing Africa's Strength

- Participants commended the African group on its **unity and strength.** They noted that when Africa unites their voice **cannot be ignored.**
- The increasing momentum of African integration has resulted in **better coordination** at the United Nations

- Participants also agreed that Africa had made a significant turn; it was no longer to be considered a patient but rather a partner. African leaders and **African people are taking responsibility for Africa's future**. What is needed is appropriate support from other countries, institutions and stakeholders.
- There was an acknowledgment that despite Africa's new influence, it was **under-represented in the UN Security Council**, where in fact, most agenda items pertained to the continent.
- Representatives also highlighted that Africa was seeing good economic growth, and other positive developments. The continent was the most youthful and as such could look to capitalise on a demographic dividend. The political, economic and social potential should not be allowed to go to waste.

#11. Bridging the Global Divide – The role of groups at the UN

- Participants at this session emphasised that **groups are an indispensable mechanism** in the context of the United Nations.
- Groups help:
 - **Communication** to be more efficient
 - Delegations to manage the **heavy agenda** and workload
 - Amplify the voice of individual delegations, in particular smaller ones
- At the same time, it is important to mitigate the inherent challenges that groups present. Among these are engendering a **group-think mentality**, managing the disproportionate influence by some members of a group, imbalance in groups size that affects elections.
- It was suggested that there should be a more **structured and systematic mechanism** for collaboration and engagement with and between groups, which could be facilitated by the President of the General Assembly.
- However, it is important to find the balance between group actions and the inter-governmental nature of the United Nations.

#12. Bridging the Global Divide – The influence of like-minded groups

- Groups of Friends and other like-minded groups are a useful tool to champion issues and engender broad support from multiple regions. They allow delegations to collaborate on issues which may otherwise be sensitive. They serve to provide information and knowledge that help delegations during negotiations. Representatives are able to leave the script behind and **build understanding and dialogue**.
- Groups are effective because of their **inclusive and cross-regional** nature. Their informality also helps, as it not only allows delegations more room to manoeuvre but also in many cases allow for participation of **other stakeholders**.
- Groups can lead to a concentration of like-minded views and end up 'preaching to the converted'. As such, it is important that groups reach out to other members and **avoid a siloed approach**. In this way, they enhance a **bridge building** function.
- A good idea would be for groups working on different but related issues to collaborate and advance joint ideas. They can be used to **forge consensus**.

- Due to their informal and *ad hoc* nature, there is no comprehensive listing of all existing groups. One suggestion is that the OPGA can **maintain a listing of all current groups**. Such a database could be helpful for the PGA, delegations and the Secretariat. However, this should remain an informal and unregulated dimension.
- Groups can become a new layer of engagement and thus another burden for delegations. As such it is up to each to determine the level of involvement in each group.
- Despite their informal nature, some groups are very **effective at impacting the formal processes**.

#13. Peace and Prevention: Elusive but not impossible

- This session allowed participants to share views on the peace and security dimension.
- Participants agreed that **peace is not sufficiently reflected** in the agenda of the UNGA; however, the recent developments, including the sustaining peace process, was creating more space for a peace and prevention agenda. It may be useful to convene an UNGASS on peace.
- It was agreed that an accurate understanding of what peace means was necessary, At the same time, we need to deal with fundamental issues such as development. Achieving the **SDGs**, it was opined, is the **best formula to preventing conflict and promoting peace**. Investing in the SDGs is investing in peace. We should work to bring the peace and security pillar closer to the development and human rights pillars.
- **Political divides** interfere with efforts to achieve peace. Furthermore, we must recognise the role and linkages between systems and players at the national, regional, and global levels.
- **National leadership** is essential. Sometimes it takes a single leader to change the narrative and show the political will. Additionally, the international community cannot ignore the role of national leaders when they seek to promote peace in a country or region. At the same time, we must recognise that some actors are invested in the continuation of conflict.
- We also need to examine the impact of **new threats** such as cyberwarfare.
- It is imperative to move beyond rhetoric and sentiment, to **action and implementation**.

#14. Best Practices and Lessons Learned: What we did, what we didn't do and how to move forward

- Participants shared views on some of the challenges encountered in executing mandates over the session.
- There was a prevailing view that sometimes there is a divergence in the stance taken by ambassadors and the approach taken by experts. As such, it was felt that it is important that **Ambassadors take more responsibility and exercise more ownership**.
- Many participants emphasized the importance of having sufficient time to carry out the consultation phase, which would include **sensitizing Permanent Representatives**. This would allow for them to become more invested in the outcomes.

- The key is to have the right balance between the experience and political guidance of Permanent Representatives, and the expertise and technical skill of delegates.
- We must address dynamics that affect the execution of mandates – mistrust, influence of groups, culture of inertia. It is important to remain focused on the impact of the work being done on the **lives of people** in the field.
- On the matter of procedure, participants emphasised the importance of:
 - Establishing a clear **timeline and deadline** for the end of negotiations;
 - Sharing **clear and full information** with delegations, from the outset preferably;
 - Dealing with procedural issues so they do not become an obstacle to substantive matters.
- Participants emphasised the importance of adequate **preparation** for co-facilitators, including by receiving advice from previous facilitators and making use of technical support of the Secretariat.
- There was also a recognition that a **political shift** is taking place. Agreed language is no longer a recourse to solve an impasse. Furthermore, the quest for **consensus** on every issue is unrealistic. Consensus should be an aspiration not a rule.
- Participants also noted that the President of the General Assembly played a key role by:
 - Appointing co-facilitators with the right skills and experience, in keeping with gender balance and bearing in mind political implications;
 - Maintaining transparency and accessibility;
 - Conducting adequate outreach; and
 - Empowering co-facilitators to act.
- Another thought was that the Morning Dialogues could be a useful venue for Permanent Representatives to directly address problematic issues in various texts.

Actions Taken

- The President has followed up on the ideas raised throughout the series. Steps have included:
 - Developing a database of Groups of Friends and like-minded groups;
 - Speaking on the threats to multilateralism during numerous engagements;
 - Sharing outcomes and concepts regarding the Morning Dialogues with the President of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly.
 - Producing a book entitled “Morning Dialogues: A Conversation” capturing the main takeaways from the series.