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Deiss urges flexibility as Assembly debates stronger UN role in global governance



General Assembly President Joseph Deiss

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The President of the General Assembly Joseph Deiss today urged States to be flexible and innovative when considering ways of strengthening the role of the United Nations as the central institution for global governance.

“In order to ensure that the United Nations remains relevant to the world in 2025 and beyond, we have to learn the lessons of the past 60 years and affect the requisite reforms,” Mr. Deiss [said](#) in his opening remarks to the Assembly’s [debate](#) on the UN in global governance.

“We must dare to be flexible and innovative in order to ensure that working methods are efficient. However, it also seems to me to be essential to accept that we can’t have it all – the sovereignty of the nation State that we have known up until the present day, defence of national interests, globalization and an efficient system of global governance,” he said.

Mr. Deiss called for the realizations that global responses for the common good will make concessions necessary.

“We will have to see beyond national positions to the common good. What may appear to be a loss in the short term is undoubtedly the only way we can gain in the long term. The fight against climate change is the best example.”

On global economic governance, he said the international community needed to go beyond crisis management and instead formulate and implement longer-term strategies for balanced and durable global economic growth.

Mr. Deiss gave the example of the Group of 20 (G20), which he said had demonstrated its ability to deal quickly and in a concerted manner with the economic and financial crisis that erupted in 2008. But he wondered about the global legitimacy of that bloc.

“What can be said about its [G20] capacity to become a leader outside times of crisis? Efficiency does not bestow legitimacy. As far as I am concerned, that is the sole preserve of the General Assembly, which, with its 192 States Members and its system of ‘One State, one voice’ is, par excellence, the democratic forum at the global level. It is therefore important to find ways of legitimizing the decisions that were taken by the G20,” said Mr. Deiss.

He voiced appreciation of efforts to bring the bloc closer to the General Assembly, which he said began under the G20 presidency of the Republic of Korea, and which are being intensified under the presidency of France this year.

“However, in the longer term, is the G20 system of annual presidencies compatible with a strategic vision? Does that system make it possible to ensure the coherence of initiatives that are taken over several years under various presidents?” Mr. Deiss asked.

He said the debate on global economic governance should consider the role of United Nations economic entities, particularly the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). “How can it be strengthened? How can it be made into an essential actor in global economic governance? At the agency and special programme level, how can mandates be better coordinated?”

Mr. Deiss said debate should try to identify the type of global challenges that world will face in future and come up with the kind of global entities that will be needed.

“We will also have to ask ourselves how we can be more representative and inclusive of non-governmental actors, civil society and the private sector, all of which are playing an ever larger role in global governance,” he said.

In his [remarks](#) to the General Assembly debate, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon said that existing structures of global economic governance do not adequately reflect the changing world, with many of the structures having been created more than 60 years ago.

He noted that the Bretton Woods institutions had improved their governance through reforms that have increased the voice and representation of the developing world. The growing weight of developing economies and emerging markets in the global economy, however, is still not sufficiently reflected in those and other key decision-making bodies.

“This is not just a matter of democracy and legitimacy; it is a crucially important factor in being able to address the many pressing issues that demand our attention, including climate change, food and energy security, migration, tax cooperation and much else,” said Mr. Ban.

He called for greater efforts to improve the coherence and efficiency of the multilateral system.

“The United Nations is the world’s leading universal forum, with unique legitimacy. But legitimacy alone is not enough. Coherence in policy-making and standard-setting... Efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out our work.... Accountability for impact and results...

“These are all indispensable if the United Nations is to earn the confidence of its Member States and the world’s people,” the Secretary-General added.

Today’s debate is part of a series of initiatives on global governance by Mr. Deiss to coincide with the theme of the Assembly’s General Debate during its current session.

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