GWL Voices: Multilateralims at UNGA81

The State of Multilateralism: Positions Expressed at UNGA81

As anticipated, UN reform and the imperative to rethink and reconfigure international relations emerged as central themes during the High-Level Week of the 81st UN General Assembly.

Drawing on the information collected by GWL Voices from the statements delivered by 195 heads of state and government and other senior representatives, from 93 countries, as well as the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the European Union, this analysis identifies key strategic trends and diplomatic positions on the future of the multilateral system.

GWL Voices continues to advocate for a more inclusive, representative and effective multilateral system, and to contribute to the debate on how multilateral cooperation can adapt to the changing global context.

1. Consensus on the Structural Imperative for a New Multilateral Order

Deliberation during the 81st General Assembly reflected widespread acknowledgment that the existing international architectural framework fails to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. Approximately 78% of participating Member States formally advocated for a fundamental transformation of the multilateral system, while 70% underscored operational deficiencies within multilateral frameworks as a primary concern. Overall, national statements demonstrated a collective commitment to **institutional renewal and systemic reform**, rather than disengagement from multilateralism.

2. Institutional Reform of the United Nations System

In addition to calls for multilateral revitalization, high-level statements broadly addressed comprehensive institutional reform. Data findings indicate that 156 Member States explicitly addressed UN reform as a priority, highlighting convergence around the view that current governance models are misaligned with contemporary global requirements. Delegations moved beyond minor administrative modifications, demanding systemic changes to render the Organization **more representative, effective, and operationally capable**. Modernizing central organs was consistently characterized as vital to reinforcing core principles of collective governance amid a shifting global landscape.

3. Security Council Reform and the Veto Mechanism

A significant proportion of delegations raised concerns regarding institutional deadlock within the Security Council, specifically noting the disruptive effect of the veto prerogative. **Twenty-eight Member States explicitly referenced the veto**, highlighting its adverse impact on the Council's credibility, operational efficacy, and crisis-response capacity. Representatives from African nations reiterated the demand for **two permanent seats for the African continent, encompassing all associated rights and responsibilities—including veto privileges, where applicable**. Additional interventions focused on the erosion of institutional authority resulting from the pursuit of narrow national interests over collective security obligations.

Proposals for Security Council expansion received support across distinct regional groupings and political blocs. Notably, **permanent members including the Russian Federation and France expressed explicit support for expanding permanent membership**, reflecting a shared assessment that the Council's configuration must be adapted to reflect contemporary international power distributions.

4. Regional Dimensions and Perspectives from the Global South

Statements from African and Asian delegations placed strong emphasis on **equitable representation,** enhanced operational effectiveness, diplomatic dialogue, and institutionalized cooperation. These interventions highlight the necessity of exploring flexible, interest-aligned coalitions across regions, designed to reinforce and complement the central role of the United Nations system.

5. Launch of multiple initiatives on Multilateralism

Several initiatives were launched around the need to renew and rethink the global system. Among them, the initiative launched by Former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Rockefeller Foundation on the **Principles of Cooperation Initiative as well as the Accra Reset are particularly noteworthy**, seeking to reaffirm and articulate the fundamental principles that should underpin international relations.

Further, on 21 September, representatives from the European Union, Canada, Kenya, Barbados, Australia, Brazil, and India formally launched the **Partners for Multilateralism (P4M)** platform in the Trusteeship Council Chamber at United Nations Headquarters. Convening the session, President António Costa stated: "*This initiative is conceived as an open platform for international partners committed to upholding common principles and advancing concrete solutions. It will serve as a network for diplomatic dialogue, coalition-building, and practical cooperation to coordinate responses to shared global challenges, with the primary objective of supporting the United Nations and complementary multilateral frameworks.*"

P4M is structured to operate as a **flexible, issue-driven coalition** grounded in core international norms. Specific priority areas will be delineated in subsequent operational phases. Participating entities are expected to engage in diplomatic coordination, issue joint declarations, and collaborate on targeted thematic priorities—such as climate finance mechanisms, global health governance, and digital infrastructure—while preserving sovereign foreign policy autonomy.

The founding declaration was signed by the following delegations: *Albania*, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, *Council of Europe*, *Croatia*, *Cyprus*, *Finland*, *Guatemala*, *Liechtenstein*, *Luxembourg*, *Republic of Moldova*, *Norway*, *San Marino*, *Slovakia*, *Spain*, *Türkiye*, and *Uruguay*.