

Subject: Statement by Ambassador Wolff on Revitalization of Work of General Assembly in GA on 11-26-97
USUN PRESS RELEASE # 331
AS DELIVERED

November 26, 2007

Statement by Ambassador Alejandro Wolff, U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative, on Agenda Item 121: The Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly, in the General Assembly, November 26, 2007

Thank you, Mr. President. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important issue today, although I note the sparse attendance in the Hall, which I hope does not reflect the lack of interest or the futility of the topic at hand. At the outset, I would like to remind delegations of the conclusions drawn by the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. The Panel noted that the General Assembly's capacity – and I quote – "is often squandered on debates about minutiae or thematic topics outpaced by real-world events. Its inability to reach closure on issues undermines its relevance. An unwieldy and static agenda leads to repetitive debates." Unfortunately, in our view, these shortcomings are now threatening to undermine the very process of General Assembly reform; indeed, the agenda item under consideration is at risk of falling victim to the very same deficiencies it seeks to rectify.

Prior debates on GA reform have produced valuable and insightful, if modest, recommendations, including those put forward by the co-chairs of the 61st session, Ambassadors Bodini and Badji. However, few of these recommendations have been able to alter significantly the prevailing "business as usual" mind-set. In the past few weeks alone, we have witnessed the passage of many resolutions whose texts have not been significantly revised in decades, contributing to an increased perception of the GA's irrelevance. This dangerous slide toward irrelevance is displayed, for instance, in the stark contrast between the static and unbalanced resolutions on the situation in Palestine and the reinvigorated effort to achieve tangible progress on the ground. Some of the most vocal proponents of these outdated resolutions are the same countries involved in the very effort underway this week to launch a process at Annapolis that we hope will lead to a permanent Israeli-Palestinian peace.

We have also recently witnessed renewed interest in the reform of other UN organs, including the Security Council. As President Kerim noted in his concluding statement on November 14, one of the seven pillars of Security Council reform is the necessity of reforming the greater UN system. Clearly, meaningful reform of the UN system must include meaningful reform of the General Assembly, including in areas such as the financing of and decision-making by the organization.

The convening of the current session's ad hoc working group represents a new opportunity for Member States to reinvigorate their efforts and take ownership of the GA's effectiveness and credibility. The onus of restoring the public's trust in the ability of the GA to respond to real-world issues falls on our collective shoulders.

How do we accomplish this task? First, we must be guided by the mandate of the working group as established in GA resolution 61/292, that is, we must “evaluate and assess the status of implementation of relevant resolutions” on revitalization and “identify ways to further enhance the role, authority, effectiveness, and efficiency of the General Assembly.” These two proposals are not mutually exclusive. In fact, we believe that the best way to “enhance the role, authority, effectiveness, and efficiency of the General Assembly” is by implementing these relevant resolutions.

In this regard I would like to highlight several recommendations contained in the relevant resolutions that seek to reform the General Assembly’s working methods:

There is a clear need to rationalize the General Assembly’s program of work by focusing its efforts on addressing contemporary challenges. We must discard the outdated debates recycled year after year, which are no longer reflective of current realities.

Greater cooperation among the principal organs, as well as between the GA and its main committees, will enhance their ability to carry out their competencies, as mandated in the Charter. Greater cooperation will also help streamline agendas and reduce wasteful overlap and inter-organ power struggles.

Member States should exercise discipline in their submission of draft resolutions in the GA. Adopting resolutions on outdated or obscure topics diminishes the credibility of this body, while selectively recalling language from previous resolutions weakens their standing.

These recommendations, and numerous others contained in resolutions from past sessions, provide ample material for initiating lasting reform. In the 62nd session, the Working Group must take stock of the status of implementation of these proposals, identifying improvements made and areas in which tangible results remain elusive. The constructive and painstakingly negotiated proposals contained in previous resolutions have already established the path to revitalization. Now, it is our collective responsibility to follow that path to its logical conclusion: a dynamic and responsive General Assembly that is capable of forging consensus on issues of greatest contemporary importance.

My delegation looks forward to working closely with you, Mr. President, and with our counterparts from other delegations to capitalize on this opportunity to achieve concrete reform. Thank you.