

Officials at UN Security Council push for a permanent seat for Africa

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United Nations, August 13 (RHC)-- The United Nations chief has called for the UN Security Council (UNSC) to reform its outdated structure and assign Africa a permanent seat at the table, stressing that the continent is underrepresented.

Addressing the council on Monday during a high-level debate, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the composition of the UNSC has failed to keep pace with a changing world.

“We cannot accept that the world’s preeminent peace and security body lacks a permanent voice for a continent of well over a billion people ... nor can we accept that Africa’s views are undervalued on questions of peace and security, both on the continent and around the world,” he said.

The 15-member UNSC consists of five permanent members with veto power – China, France, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom – while the remaining 10 nonpermanent seats are allocated regionally.

The 10 seats include three seats for African states; two each for Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and other states; and one for Eastern Europe.

In May, the UNSC called for the role of African countries to be strengthened in addressing global security and development challenges.

UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis said at the debate that the UN must reflect the world as it is. “The fact that Africa continues to be manifestly underrepresented on the Security Council is simply wrong, offending as it does both the principles of equity and inclusion,” he said.

“It runs counter to the principle of sovereign equality of states and calls for the urgency to reform this institution to reflect the world as it is now, rather than what it was nearly 80 years ago.”

Speaking at the UNSC, Sierra Leone President Julius Maada Bio said Africa demands two permanent seats in the UNSC and two additional nonpermanent seats.

“The African Union will choose the African permanent members. Africa wants the veto abolished. However, if UN member states wish to retain the veto, it must be extended to all new permanent members as a matter of justice,” he said.

Carlos Lopes, a professor at the University of Cape Town who previously served as a high representative for the African Union (AU), told Al Jazeera that African attempts to have better representation aren’t new, but current geopolitics have made this current moment “quite favourable”.

“[There’s] a competition for Africa’s votes; Africa’s bloc has become much more difficult to actually align with one position or another,” Lopes said.

“The Africans have been able to navigate these geopolitical tensions very well. We have seen it with the membership of the G20 being expanded to include the African Union. Now it’s another attempt by the Africans to push the envelope and try to do it at the Security Council.”

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