

75th UN General Assembly (UNGA) meet

September 23, 2020

The UN is the source of diplomatic influence of developing countries and the principal outlet for their foreign relations initiatives. One has to study in detail the role of the UN in maintaining multipolar global order.

In news: The 75th session of the U.N. General Assembly which is virtual for the first time began on September 15.

Placing it in syllabus: International organisations

Static dimensions

1. What is UNGA – Voting, Powers and Functions

Current dimensions

1. Criticisms against UN
2. Details of the meeting and the agenda

Content:

What is UNGA?

- The United Nations General Assembly is **one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN)**.
- It serves as the main deliberative, policy-making, and representative organ of the UN.
- Its powers, composition, functions, and procedures are set out in **Chapter IV of the UN Charter**.
- The UNGA is the **only UN organ wherein all member states have equal representation**.

Voting:

- Voting in the General Assembly on certain important questions—namely recommendations on peace and security

including development, disarmament, human rights, international law, the peaceful arbitration of disputes between nations, budgetary concerns.

- The election, admission, suspension or expulsion of members, is by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting.
- Other questions are decided by a simple majority.
- **Each member country has one vote.**
- Apart from the approval of budgetary matters, including adoption of a scale of assessment, **Assembly resolutions are not binding on the members.**
- The Assembly may make recommendations on any matters within the scope of the UN, except **matters of peace and security which are under Security Council consideration.**
- The Assembly may take action if the Security Council fails to act, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member, in a case where there appears to be a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression.

Powers and functions:

- It **appoints the non-permanent members** to the Security Council.
- It **appoints the Secretary-General** of the UN based on the Security Council's recommendation.
- It considers **reports from the other four organs** of the United Nations, assesses the financial situations of member states, and approves the UN budget.
- The assembly works with the Security Council to elect the judges of the International Court of Justice.
- It also **establishes numerous subsidiary organs** to advance or assist in its broad mandate.
- The General Assembly meets under its president or the UN secretary-general in **annual sessions** at UN headquarters in New York City.
- It can also **reconvene for special and emergency special sessions.**

- The **first session was convened on 10 January 1946 in the Methodist Central Hall in London** and included representatives of the 51 founding nations.
- Today it has **193 members**, out of which more than two-thirds are developing.

Criticisms against UN:

- The five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), who are all **nuclear powers, have created an exclusive nuclear club whose powers are unchecked.**
- The powerful Security Council system does not have distinctions between the legislative, executive, and judiciary branches and the **UN Charter gives all three powers to the Security Council.**
- UNSC **only addresses the strategic interests and political motives of the permanent members**, especially in humanitarian interventions.
- A **veto** from any of the permanent members can halt any possible action the Council may take. One country's objection, rather than the opinions of a majority of countries, may cripple any possible UN diplomatic response to a crisis.
- The practice of the permanent members meeting privately and then presenting their resolutions to the full council as a *fait accompli* is criticised.
- UN is still very **male-dominated**. While it has achieved gender parity in its employees at the two lowest levels of responsibility, equal representation has not yet been achieved at any levels higher.
- Regarding the US foreign aid expenditure, **ODA (Official Development Assistance)** there is a strong connection between the distribution of foreign aid payments and rotating membership of the UNSC. As soon as the country's time in council is over, the financial aid

drops to the level prior to the time serving on the UNSC.

- Issues relating to the state of Israel, Palestinians and other aspects of the Arab–Israeli conflict occupy a large amount of debate time, resolutions and resources at the United Nations.
- The effectiveness and relevance of the UN in most high-profile cases is questioned as there are no consequences for violating a Security Council resolution. E.g. At the 68th Session of the UNGA (2010-11), New Zealand Prime Minister John Key heavily criticized the UN's inaction on Syria, more than two years after the Syrian Civil War began.

Details of the meeting and Agenda:

- The **president of the 75th session is Volkan Bozkir**, who served as Turkey's minister of European Union affairs and the chief negotiator for Turkish accession to the EU.
- As the heads of state and government are not physically attending the annual gathering due to the coronavirus pandemic, world leaders will submit **pre-recorded video statements** for the UNGA session.
- The number of people into the U.N. building, **physical access and presence will be limited to one or two delegates** in the General Assembly hall.
- The U.N. headquarters began its **first phase of re-opening on July 20**, under which no more than 400 people will be allowed to be present at the premises on any given day and those present in the premises will have to follow strict social distancing guidelines.
- In **phase 2**, the UNHQ occupancy will gradually increase from 10 to 40%.
- **Phase 3 or the "new normal"** is being designed and will draw on lessons learned from the earlier phases.

Agenda:

- The meeting to commemorate the 75th anniversary will take place on September 21 and the Declaration will be formally adopted at the meeting.
- September 22 – General Debate of the 75th session of the Assembly (time limit of 15 minutes for each country)
- September 30 – Summit on biodiversity
- October 1 – Meeting of the General Assembly on the 25th anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women
- October 2 – Meeting to commemorate and promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Mould your thought:

1. The UN General assembly (UNGA) plays a significant role in the process of standard-setting and the codification of international law. Discuss.

Approach to the answer:

- Write 2-3 lines about the UNGA
- Write its powers and functions
- Mention the criticisms
- Give a balanced conclusion