



#5 - Decolonising the UN

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DECOLONISING THE UN

A FOGGS Open Consultation Discussion Note

by the moderator

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and the keynote speaker

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND DISCLAIMER

The fifth in the series of *FOGGS Open Consultation Mondays* (10 February 2025) focused on the topic of decolonising the United Nations. Moderated by FOGGS Executive Director Georgios Kostakos, with practical and academic insights provided by keynote speaker Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, former senior UN official and current Professor of International Affairs at The New School, the consultation brought together experts, academics, policymakers and civil society activists to analyse how colonial legacies continue to shape global governance. The session explored the structural power imbalances within the UN, their historical roots, and potential pathways towards a more inclusive, legitimate and effective UN for the future.

Key issues raised:

- Structural power imbalances in the UN
- Concept of decolonisation in the UN context
- Economic exploitation and inequality
- Norm-making and knowledge production biases
- Alternative approaches and possible solutions

A central theme was how the UN, established by the victors of World War II, still reflects power dynamics that favour a few dominant nations. Decolonisation was framed not only as a historical process but as an ongoing struggle against persistent economic, epistemic, and cultural domination. Calls for reform focused on policy and structural changes, beginning with the UN Charter itself.

Among the potential solutions discussed was strengthening regional organizations, such as the African Union and ASEAN, to create alternative spaces for decision-making outside Western-dominated institutions. There was also an emphasis on increasing the participation of Global South countries in norm-setting processes and restructuring international financial systems to promote fairness.

A more detailed, AI-assisted summary follows. The meeting video recording is available on [FOGGS' YouTube channel](#), while this note serves as an analytical recap (available on the dedicated [FOGGS Open Consultation Mondays web page](#)).

The interpretation of statements made during the open consultation and the conclusions drawn here are those of the moderator and the keynote speaker; no consensus among consultation participants should be assumed.

Structural power imbalances in the UN

The UN's creation by the victors of World War II led to an entrenched power hierarchy in the world body, which is dominated by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Soviet Union / Russia, United Kingdom, United States – the veto-wielding “P5”). Leadership positions within key UN departments remain largely occupied by representatives from Western powers, and some are reserved for the non-Western P5, reinforcing the idea that decision-making structures remain exclusive.

Concept of decolonisation in the UN context

Decolonisation was framed not only as a historical process but as an ongoing struggle against economic, epistemic and cultural domination. While many former colonies gained political independence, often assisted by the UN, economic exploitation continues through unfair trade practices, labour exploitation, tax policies and debt structures.

Norm-making and knowledge production biases

Even norm-setting processes often reflect a Western-centric worldview, marginalizing perspectives from the Global South. Thus, Western modernity continues to frame global policies, sidelining non-Western knowledge systems. Many international agreements, including those on climate change and public health, were criticized for prioritizing the interests of developed nations while neglecting the realities of the Global South. For instance, international health regulations have historically been designed to protect wealthier nations from diseases originating in the South, rather than ensuring a balanced global response to pandemics. Even the UN human rights discourse tends to overlook the Global North's violations, while scrutinizing Global South issues.

Economic exploitation and inequality

Finance capitalism was seen as having intensified inequality, with profits of multinational corporations flowing disproportionately to the North, while the South provides cheap labour and resources with little return. Wealth extraction from the developing world continues unabated through trade, labour exploitation, debt structures and tax systems. The Global South countries have limited influence on all this, despite forming a large majority of UN member states.

Challenges in reforming the UN

Calls for reform focused on policy and structural changes, beginning with the need to amend the UN Charter itself. The contradiction between the principle of sovereign equality and the UN Security Council's veto power (Article 27) was highlighted as a major obstacle to true global representation. While some progress has been made –

such as through the open and participative structures used for negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Universal Periodic Review in human rights – these measures are still not enough to dismantle systemic inequalities.

Alternative approaches and possible solutions

Potential solutions discussed included strengthening regional organizations like the African Union and ASEAN to create alternative spaces for decision-making, counterbalancing the Western-dominated global institutions. There was also an emphasis on increasing the participation of Global South countries in norm-setting processes and rethinking financial systems, international trade rules and corporate taxation to promote fairness. Education and communication were also seen as vital in empowering marginalized communities to engage with global governance by informing them about their rights and participation opportunities.

Key takeaways and next steps

The session concluded with a call to continue expanding this dialogue, integrating decolonisation into broader UN reform efforts. The need was underscored for new governance models that are truly inclusive and equitable, whether through regional forums, new alliances or a restructured UN. Lessons can be learnt from successful initiatives that have shifted power balances, such as the SDGs.