

Global South Perspectives on the United Nations

Open Consultation Mondays #13, 10 November 2025

Concept Note

The United Nations (UN) remains the world's primary international organisation. Founded in 1945 following the ravages of the Second World War, the UN has sought to promote peace and security, development, and human rights around the world. Whereas it has served as a stabilising force and a locus for multilateralism, its outdated organisational structure and protracted negotiation processes have increasingly been criticised as being ineffective, not least by the Global South.

The Global South is a broad term used to describe developing and middle income countries. It is not defined by geographic lines but rather through history, power and economics. Many Global South countries were either marginal members at the UN's founding or have only joined later, often after independence from colonial empires. Most of these countries remain underrepresented in bodies that matter, like the UN Security Council, notwithstanding their increased (and ever increasing) significance in economic, demographic and geopolitical terms.

The views and interests of the Global South are neither singular nor static. The UN, though, has traditionally being a site of Global South solidarity and resistance to the powers that be. Groupings such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the G77, and BRICS all maintain the UN's primacy in terms of principles and international law, while at the same time expressing their discontent with the way the world body functions. They see the UN ultimately as being manipulated by the powerful to maintain the status quo of global inequality and developing country disempowerment. The tensions between the demands of the Global South and entrenched interests in the system of global governance requires critical reflection.

This open consultation will explore, as part of the Global South's perspectives on the UN:

- How the Global South's economic and demographic rise is altering traditional power dynamics
- How are Global South powers and civil society actors seeking to redefine the rules of international engagement
- How and to which extent these actors can influence UN reform

The consultation will commence with a short introduction by the host, Dr Klaus Kotzé (Inclusive Society Institute of Cape Town, South Africa, institutional co-convener of the Global South Perspectives Network). It will then proceed as an open discussion. The participants are encouraged to consider the points above, and the questions below:

- Is the UN salvageable as the best way to advance the interests of the Global South?
- What would equitable multilateralism look like?
- Which UN reforms are required to establish such an equitable framework?

The 10 November consultation marks the transition of the Open Consultation Mondays series from FOGGS to the Global South Perspectives Network (GSPN), in view of FOGGS' winding down its activities.