

Introductory statement by Amb. J. Enkhsaikhan at round table discussion on
“The Role of Small and Medium States in International Relations”

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Your Excellency Minister Pahr,
Esteemed Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to first of all thank Foreign Policy and United Nations Association of Austria for agreeing to co-organize this round-table discussion. I would also like to personally thank Minister Pahr for graciously agreeing to open and moderate it.

As the organizers have pointed out in the invitation, this event is being organized to commemorate 50 years of Mongolia’s membership in the United Nations. The best way to commemorate this anniversary is to hold an open discussion on one of the pressing issues of international relations or the United Nations. The role of small and medium states in international relations is surely such an issue,

The role of small and medium states in international relations is in general increasing and is not limited to representation or making general statements. In the first post World War II period, Mongolia, though contributed materially to the allied powers, due to great powers differences, unfortunately, was not admitted to the United Nations when it applied for membership in 1946. It took 6 more applications and 15 years for us to be admitted to the United Nations. In the end the decision to admit was taken not based on the sovereign will of the Mongolian people but as part of a bargain, of a package deal between the two major powers.

Since then fifty years have passed and the United Nations has become a real center of international activities. Today any sovereign country, irrespective of its size or political orientation can become member of this truly universal organization. This is a real achievement. This provides great opportunity for any small state to voice its views and play, to the extent possible, an active role in addressing many issues of international relations and jointly work and define the norms of international behavior.

My country is but one example of the role that small and medium states can play in international relations. Mongolia tries, to the extent possible, to articulate its views on the pressing international issues. This concerns issues close to it or other small states with similar concerns or interests. The field of disarmament is an example. Mongolia is not a nuclear-weapon state. However it takes an active stand on issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation since it affects its vital interests as well as those of all the nations. Mongolia’s goal is not only to add its voice to the calls for effective measures of nuclear disarmament and non proliferation, but also to take concrete action to the extent possible.

In the area of economic development, as a land-locked developing country, it tries to raise awareness of this inherent handicap for trade and economic development. In our case almost 6-7

percent of the GDP is spent for transit transportation costs and insurance, which is 3-4 times higher than what it spends on defense. Most of the other land-locked developing countries face the same dilemma, though it is not widely known.

Our role in peace-keeping is quite known. In per capita sense, Mongolia is one of the top troop contributors to PKOs (DRC, Western Sahara, South Sudan, Eritrea, Georgia, Sierra Leone, Chad, Darfur and Kosovo).

Another area is democracy promotion. Only 20 years ago Mongolia was a country with autocratic form of government. In the past two decades it was able to make two simultaneous reforms: embracing market economy and promotion of democratic changes and prove that these reforms do not exclude each other.

The role of Malta in starting the Law of the Sea conferences that ended in the adoption of the Law of the Sea Convention is well known. Known are also the role of small and medium states in negotiating a consensus text of the convention. Role of Finland in starting the CSCE process, peace-keeping and crisis management is well known and documented. Small and medium states have played a leading role in establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones is known. All these examples demonstrate that small and medium states can and do play an important role in addressing many challenges in international relations. Their vision, ideas and experience contribute when duly understood and supported by their peers.

Today international realities are such that voices of small and medium states are heard, and many of their initiatives and practical contributions are rewarded by concrete tangible results that benefit the international community as a whole. When, on the other hand, it comes to issues of maintaining international peace and security, their voices might be heard, however the influence or impact is weak. That is connected with the make up and the decision-making mechanism of the Security Council - the main UN body entrusted to dealing with such issues. This discrepancy is well-known and is being annually considered by the General Assembly of the United Nations. I am sure that some of the panelists will touch upon this issue; there is no escaping it.

In this connection, and due to time limit, I would like to make the following two observations as food for thought and possible discussion:

1. Fairness of the existing system of the United Nations
2. Inherent weaknesses of small states.

One. The role of states in international relations can be assessed from different angles. Even definition of “small states” may vary, depending on the criteria used. In my view the role of states in international relations should be valued primarily by the ability or possibility to influence decisions that affect them or the international community as a whole. Earlier I have pointed out some cases when small and medium states played and still play important role in addressing issues of common interest and concern. Now I would like to briefly focus on the issue of fairness of the system that was devised in the middle of the last century.

It is well known that lack of power induces states, especially small states, to be more internationalists, placing more hope on international organizations, international norms and binding decisions, which at times can protect their interests.. That is logical and natural. It is believed that strong international institutions promote greater equality. The Security Council, ideally, according to the Charter, should be that body. However, in reality it is very elitist, closed and at times quite un-accessible to many. The decisions taken under Chapter 7 of the Charter, even those taken without adequate consultations with member states, are binding on all members. However, each one of the five permanent members (the P5), has a veto power. At times this right is abused by the permanent members by using it with regard to minor procedural or financial issues. With special privileges and un-elected, the P5, it seems, at times has little incentive to address the real root causes of the dispute or essence of the conflict. Thus the issues tend to obtain the life their own.

The United Nations Charter was signed in 1945 when the make up of the world was different. Though the world has changed a lot, as reflected in UN membership and the issues on the agenda of the General Assembly, the Security Council does not reflect these changes, be in its composition or working methods. The P5 often misuse the veto power to serve their narrow national interests. Having served at the Mongolian mission to the United Nations, I know firsthand that though small and medium states increasingly take part in open debates on issues of common concern or in thematic debates, the great powers listen to the statements but in many cases do not hear the messages of the larger membership. Resolutions on some issues are drafted in advance and do not necessarily reflect the debate. In short, today the P5-centered Council does not reflect the reality – the emergence of the multi-polar world. Therefore, to be more effective, it needs to be reformed to reflect these changes. The Security Council needs to be made more transparent and responsive; closed door meetings and consultations need to be reduced UN statement to essential minimum and the veto power needs to be restricted until it is abolished.

As the debate on enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the United Nations demonstrates, the General Assembly, being the other main body reflecting the entire membership of the organization, needs to play a larger role not only in discussing issues but also seriously addressing them so as to provide practical recommendations to member states and, if needed, even to the Security Council.

Two. Inherent weaknesses of small states. The world is not ideal. Though on many international issues UN member states have common positions (usually reflected in the statements of the Non-Aligned Movement, the G-77, the European Union and other groups of states), however when it comes to taking concrete decisions on many pressing issues, the majority is divided or vanishes, many states tend to vote otherwise, sometimes even in contradiction to their earlier jointly held positions. That is because many tend to give in to the pressures of bilateral considerations, especially their relations with larger states on which they depend in one or another area. Some great powers even draw up charts on voting behavior of member states that are used to put pressure or extract concessions on those or other issues. In many cases the perceived interests of the great powers are *apriori* sufficient to induce certain behavior. Though the UN does not have a weighted voting system, many of its decisions are taken mindful of the financial contributions of larger states.

This state of affairs demands that small and medium states take strong consistent stands on issues of principle and consciously work closely together as well as with influential international NGOs. To be more effective they should create ad hoc coalitions that cross regional borders, disregard level of development or other dividing lines so as to influence important decisions that affect us all. The inherent weaknesses can be reduced by cooperation and joint position. Like immunity deficiency, “immunity” from pressures will decrease with overall economic and social development of states.

Conclusion: Despite its inherent flaws, the United Nations system, its goals and values are as important as ever. However in order to raise its effectiveness and efficiency, its flaws need to be addressed, including the Security Council. The role of the General Assembly needs to be strengthened. At the same time, in order to make the needed changes, the overwhelming majority should not only criticize the system but work to change it from within and from without. To do that states need to work closely together. Sacrifices are needed from large, medium and small states alike. That is the imperative for making international relations serve the interests of all in this XXI century.