

## Session 7

# Dis/United Nations: Working Towards Effective Multilateralism



### Moderator

**Imran Garda**, Presenter, TRT World

### Speakers

**H.E. Awn Al-Khasawneh**, Former Prime Minister, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

**H.E. Dr. Jorge Castaneda**, Former Foreign Minister of Mexico; Global Distinguished Professor, New York University

**Hans von Sponeck**, Former UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq

**Gwi -Yeop Son**, Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Development Coordination Office

# Key Takeaways

- There is a consensus regarding the urgent need for reform within the United Nations. This includes addressing outdated governance structures such as the Security Council and General Assembly to better reflect the contemporary global landscape.
- The current composition of the Security Council lacks inclusivity and diversity, with calls for a more representative membership that includes voices from regions such as Africa, Latin America, and the emerging Global South. Reform efforts aim to make the UN more inclusive and reflective of the world's diversity.
- Concerns have been raised regarding the veto power wielded by permanent members of the Security Council, highlighting the need to reassess its role in decision-making processes. Suggestions for alternatives, such as consensus-based decision-making, have been put forward to address this issue.
- Civil society's involvement is deemed crucial in the reform process, with emphasis on engaging diverse voices, particularly those of young people, in shaping the future of the UN. Their perspectives and activism are seen as essential in driving meaningful change and revitalising multilateralism.
- Despite challenges and limitations within the UN system, there remains a steadfast commitment to humanitarian action. Efforts to protect vulnerable populations, deliver aid effectively, and uphold international humanitarian and human rights laws persist, demonstrating the UN's ongoing dedication to alleviating human suffering.
- While acknowledging the complexities and obstacles ahead, there is optimism and hope for a reinvigorated UN that embraces multilateralism, inclusivity, and people-centric approaches. Aspirations for a more networked, inclusive, and people-centred UN drive the reform agenda, reflecting a shared vision for a better future.

# Summary of the Session

The session “Dis/United Nations: Working Towards Effective Multilateralism” delved into critical questions surrounding the effectiveness and relevance of the United Nations (UN). The moderator initiated the discussion by posing the fundamental query: Is the UN still fit for purpose? This set the tone for an exploration of the institution's viability in contemporary global affairs. Another pivotal question raised was whether the UN should meet the same fate as the League of Nations, highlighting concerns about its efficacy and adaptability. The discussion further scrutinised the UN Security Council's structure, particularly the contentious issue of veto powers wielded by permanent members.

The session grappled with the historical context of the UN's establishment in 1945, questioning its relevance in today's vastly transformed geopolitical landscape. The disproportionate influence of veto-wielding nations, particularly evident in recent events, underscored criticisms of the UN's deci-

sion-making process. Participants debated whether pessimism regarding the UN's efficacy outweighs optimism for potential reforms. The discussion also touched upon the subjective nature of perceptions towards the UN, citing contrasting views based on specific contexts and historical experiences.

Moreover, the session highlighted the paradox between aspirations for a more peaceful, technologically advanced world and the persistent reality of violent conflicts and humanitarian crises. This dissonance underscores the ongoing challenges facing the UN in fulfilling its mandate to maintain international peace and security.

Overall, the session provided a platform for nuanced reflections on the UN's role in contemporary global governance, underscoring the imperative for meaningful reforms to enhance its effectiveness and relevance in addressing pressing global challenges.

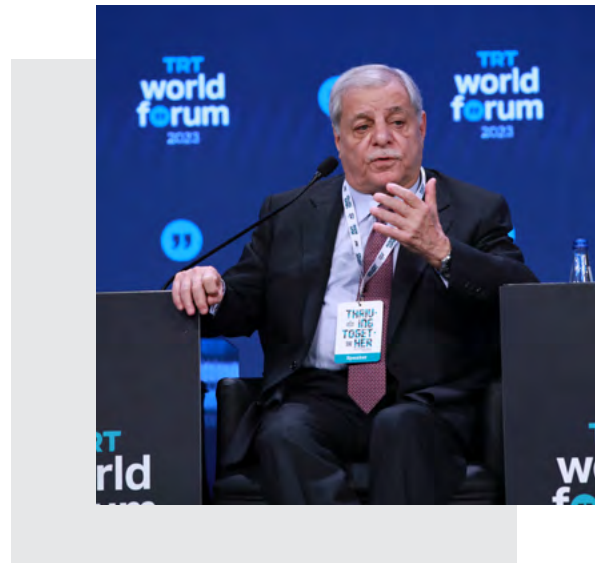
# Highlights

## Awn Al-Khasawneh

Former Prime Minister, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Judge Awn Shawkat Al-Khasawneh, educated at Cambridge University, continued his diplomatic career for Jordan after completing postgraduate studies in International Law. Serving as a Judge on the International Court of Justice from 2000 to 2011, he held the position of Vice-President from 2006 to 2009. Following his tenure, Al-Khasawneh became the Prime Minister of Jordan until April 2012. Currently, he is an Academic Expert at Doughty Street Chambers in London and an Honorary Fellow at Queens' College, Cambridge. Widely recognised for his expertise in public international law, he has lectured globally. Recently, he served as Judge Ad-Hoc in a dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua and continues to play a crucial role in arbitration cases, representing Sudan in State-State negotiations and acting as counsel in various investment-related arbitrations. Al-Khasawneh has also provided legal counsel to several regional governments on international law matters.

- There is a prevailing tendency to criticise the United Nations, yet we must remember that the United Nations serves as a mere reflection of the complexities within our world. When we express disdain towards the UN, we must recognise that it operates within the confines of global dynamics. Criticisms often target its principal organs, notably the Security Council and, to some degree, the General Assembly, for their perceived inefficiencies. These criticisms stem from the undue influence exerted by a few powerful states, exemplified in instances like the Palestine and Gaza situations, where actions by the United States and, to some extent, the United Kingdom, have significantly shaped outcomes.
- While contemplating potential avenues for reform may seem straightforward, we must acknowledge that the international system operates fundamentally on power dynamics rather than academic ideals. I have observed instances, such as during the development of the Rome Statute, where efforts were made to bolster the authority of judicial bodies, even in addressing issues of state responsibility.

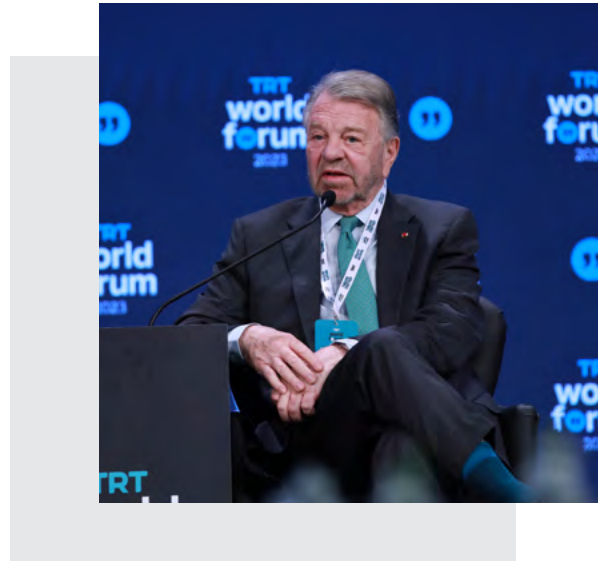


- It is imperative that we accurately interpret the current state of affairs. Reflecting on the words of Al-Sharani, a 15th-century Egyptian jurist, who asserted that the wisest of men are those who can best interpret their times, we find resonance in our contemporary context. Throughout history, whenever a dominant group, whether within societies or on the global stage, perceives a threat to its supremacy, it tends to resort to drastic measures, driven by fear of losing control. This fear-induced response often leads to egregious actions and grave injustices. Presently, we find ourselves in such a moment in history, where the spectre of fear looms large. My concerns are deeply rooted in the hope that we navigate these turbulent times with minimal harm, not only to precious human life but also to the core principles and aspirations of international law and justice.

## Jorge Castañeda

PhD; Former Foreign Minister of Mexico; Global Distinguished Professor, New York University

Jorge Castañeda, Mexico's Foreign Minister from 2000 to 2003, is a distinguished public intellectual, political scientist, and prolific writer. Born in 1953 in Mexico City, he holds degrees from Princeton University, Université de Paris-I, and the University of Paris-I. Castañeda taught at Mexico's National Autonomous University, Princeton University, UC Berkeley, and NYU. His extensive writings include over 15 books, covering topics like U.S.-Mexican relations, Latin American politics, and the Cold War's impact on the region. Notable works include "Compañero: The Life and Death of Che Guevara" and "Mañana Forever? Mexico and the Mexicans." Appointed Global Distinguished Professor at NYU, Castañeda is a Human Rights Watch member and received honours from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society.



to permanent membership in the Security Council, and would such aspirations be welcomed by others? Similar queries apply to other nations seeking greater representation.

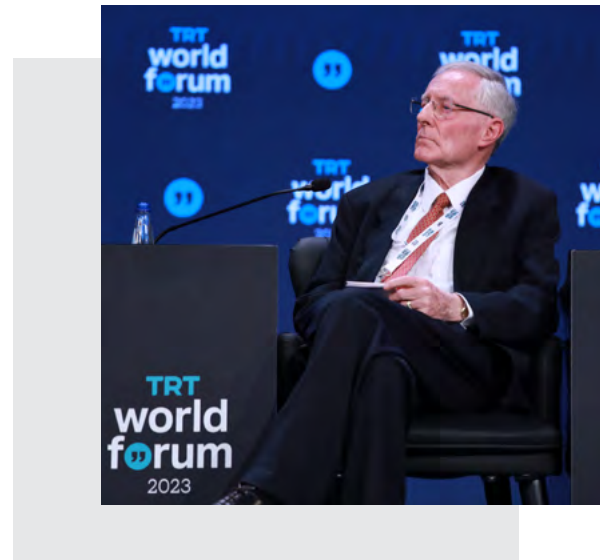
- The statement that "if the United Nations didn't exist, we would have to invent it" encapsulates the paradox. The UN performs indispensable tasks that require attention, yet its efficacy is contingent upon the will of member states. As rightly noted, not all member states wield equal influence, with the P5 holding significant sway. However, it's crucial to acknowledge the vital role the UN plays, often overlooked. Organisations like UNHCR and IOM are instrumental, particularly in regions like Latin America, addressing critical issues such as migration. Even today, in Mexico, these UN agencies are at the forefront, providing assistance to countless migrants awaiting entry into the United States, surpassing the efforts of national governments.
- The dilemma lies in whether to abolish the existing structure or to enact reforms. This quandary underscores the significance of countries like Mexico, representing the emerging Global South. While acknowledging the necessity of transforming not only the UN but also institutions like the IMF and the World Bank to reflect shifting global dynamics in demographics, economics, and trade, questions arise about the role of countries like Mexico. Are we part of the new Global South, or are we merely impoverished neighbours of the Global North? Should we aspire
- I hold little faith in the possibility of reforming the United Nations Security Council. It's improbable that the five permanent members, who hold veto power over any changes, would willingly diminish their own authority or redistribute it to others. Realistically, I don't foresee such a scenario unfolding in the foreseeable future. Given this reality, the question becomes: How do we navigate the current landscape? While I'm hopeful for change spurred by civil society or emerging powers from the Global South, I remain sceptical of significant shifts occurring. Moreover, I am cautious about the idea of universalising bodies like the Human Rights Council, despite its shortcomings. I'm hesitant about endorsing values that diverge from its current principles, as I find fault with much of its current operations."

## Hans von Sponeck

Former UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq

Hans von Sponeck, had a distinguished UN career from 1968 to 2000, serving as UNDP Deputy Resident Representative in Türkiye and UN Resident Coordinator in Botswana, Pakistan, and India. His roles also included being the Director of the European Bureau of the UNDP in Geneva and the UN Assistant Secretary-General and Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq. Post-retirement, he contributed to academia as a Faculty Member of the Centre for Conflict Research at the University of Marburg (Germany) from 2006 to 2019. Additionally, he served as a Consultant Trainer at the UN System Staff College in Torino (Italy) from 2006 to 2015. An accomplished author, von Sponeck's notable work includes a multilingual monograph on Iraq, titled "A Different Kind of War – The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq," reflecting his lifelong dedication to global humanitarian efforts and scholarly pursuits.

- The United Nations presents itself in various dimensions. There's the political facet embodied by the General Assembly and the Security Council, the judicial aspect represented by the International Court of Justice, and the executive realm, in which I was actively engaged for 30 out of the 32 years. This executive facet encompasses the Secretary-General and a multitude of specialised agencies, funds, and programs under his purview. When considering reform, it's crucial to recognise the distinct challenges faced by each dimension. We gather here to explore strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of the UN. However, it's important to note that the reform challenges differ significantly across these dimensions. While all aspects warrant attention, the reform challenge within the political sphere, particularly concerning the Security Council, may arguably be the most critical.
- The crux of the matter lies in the UN's failure to adapt to changing global dynamics. The world has evolved significantly, yet the UN's structure remains stagnant. Why should countries like Germany, Brazil, Japan, South Africa, and India not have a stake in permanent seats? Currently, Africa and Latin America lack representation in the permanent group, while Asia, with over 50% of the world's population, holds only one seat. Conversely,



the Western world retains three seats. Such imbalances render the current platform inadequate for addressing international geopolitical issues. Therefore, the primary reform imperative is to rectify this disparity and establish a more balanced representation within the UN framework.

- A new voice is emerging, and many of its proponents are among us, particularly the younger generation, driven by a desire to effect positive change surpassing that of previous generations. I firmly advocate that any future discourse on reform, whether academic or political, must actively engage civil society. Despite the challenges we face, I am more hopeful than some of my esteemed colleagues. When I reflect upon the current state of affairs, I see a glimmer of optimism, symbolised by a small smile in the mirror. I believe that through collaboration and partnership, we can transcend the limitations imposed by the dominance of the five permanent members. Indeed, the world is more than just these five governments; it encompasses a new power—the collective force of civil society. This perspective isn't naive; it's a stark reality.

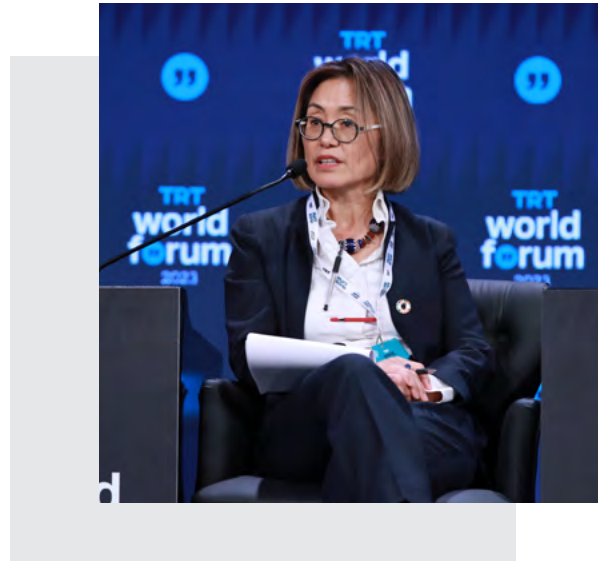
## Gwi-Yeop Son

Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia, United Nations Development Coordination Office

Gwi-Yeop Son began her career in Haiti, assisting HIV/AIDS patients with a non-governmental organisation. She then worked with the Country Women's Association of Nigeria, focusing on microfinance schemes.

In 1994, Ms. Son was posted to Somalia as a Programme Officer with the United Nations (UN) Development Programme (UNDP), marking the beginning of 18 years with UNDP. After two years in Somalia, she worked in various other locations including Lao PDR, Timor-Leste during the pre-independence period, Indonesia during the first democratic elections, and the Tsunami 2004 period. She was also posted in New York to serve as a Programme Adviser on Afghanistan and as OCHA's Director of Corporate Programmes. In OCHA, she was responsible for organising the World Humanitarian Summit and provided direct oversight over work on communications, information services, policy development and humanitarian financing including the CERF and the country-based pooled funds. Ms. Son took up her assignment as the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator from August 2018 until August 2020. Subsequently, she assumed the Regional Director for Europe and Central Asia with the Development Coordination Office.

- The Secretary-General has unequivocally stated in his opening address to the General Assembly this year that both the global governance structure of the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions are antiquated and urgently require reform to align with the realities of the contemporary world. There are concerted efforts underway to reform the UN, with specific proposals addressing the Security Council and General Assembly being actively discussed. These proposals will be presented by member states as part of the intergovernmental process during the upcoming summit for the future. The discussions echo the sentiments expressed by previous panellists regarding the UN's role as a mirror reflecting the fragmentation, division, and polarisation among member states. This context underscores the Secretary-General's decision to invoke Article 99.



- The dedicated efforts of United Nations staff members are commendable, as they tirelessly work on the frontlines of humanitarian response. This commitment is underscored by the Secretary-General's invocation of Article 99, urging for a humanitarian ceasefire to facilitate the delivery of aid to the most vulnerable populations. Protecting humanitarian aid workers is paramount to ensuring adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, as it enables us to fulfil our mission of delivering aid effectively. It is imperative to safeguard hospitals, where lives are saved, and to ensure the safety of humanitarian workers. Regardless of the resolutions passed, the United Nations remains steadfast in its commitment to reducing vulnerabilities and alleviating human suffering. This unwavering dedication to humanitarian action persists, independent of the outcomes of resolutions.
- An example of necessary reform within the Security Council is the imperative for its membership to be more inclusive, reflecting the evolving global landscape. This entails diversifying the composition of the Security Council and re-evaluating the veto power. Should the veto power align with the new composition of the Security Council? Perhaps consensus-based decision-making could be explored as an alternative. Furthermore, there are recommendations concerning the General Assembly, advocating for a shift from non-binding resolutions to binding ones. Enhancing the accountability of not only the Security Council but also

## **Thriving Together: Responsibilities, Actions and Solutions**

other organs of the United Nations is a critical aspect of these ongoing discussions. These deliberations are occurring presently, highlighting the urgency and relevance of these reform efforts.

- We must aspire to a revitalised UN that revitalises multilateralism, fostering a more interconnected and inclusive global community. While it may seem ambitious, without such aspirations and vision, progress will remain elusive. Placing people at the forefront of our efforts is paramount, and the voices you represent are integral to effecting change within the UN system and advancing multilateralism.

