

# NO REPRESENTATION, NO PEACE

The African demand for a reformed Security Council



**OXFAM**

## Abstract

This briefing report argues that structural inequality in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – marked by Africa’s exclusion from permanent representation – undermines global peace and security. Case studies from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Western Sahara demonstrate how this failure manifests, with devastating human costs.

The report articulates Africa’s unified Common Position on UNSC reform, as well as the African Union Member States’ Model on the UNSC Reform, rooted in the Ezulwini Consensus and championed by the African Union (AU) Committee of Ten and reinforced by the Pact for the Future adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the United Nations. This position calls for no less than two permanent seats for Africa, with full veto rights for as long as the veto exists and five non-permanent seats, alongside comprehensive reforms to make the Security Council more accessible, democratic, transparent and accountable.

Aligning with Oxfam’s findings in its Vetoing Humanity report, the document synthesizes a shared agenda for change based on Africa’s call for greater and permanent representation as well as Africa’s push to see the abolition of the veto.

The paper concludes with a six-point call to action, urging the international community to secure Africa’s permanent voice, abolish the veto, redirect resources toward peacebuilding, formalise AU–UN co-decision mechanisms, centre women and local actors, and uphold international humanitarian law.

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Cover photo: Refugees fleeing the Sudan conflict, Saud Yosif Idris Mahmou, 40, and her children Asia\* and Hassan\* at their shelter at the transit center in Renk. Photo: Peter Caton/Oxfam

# 1 Introduction

The persistent inequality at the heart of the United Nations Security Council has undermined its ability to guarantee international peace and security. Global conflict is widespread, and in Africa it remains ‘persistently high, despite peace agreements, elections and aid efforts aimed at fostering peace’,<sup>1</sup> resulting in escalating humanitarian crises.

Africa remains the epicentre of global armed conflict, accounting for roughly 40% of the world’s active clashes and generating a profound humanitarian crisis<sup>2</sup>. The continent is home to nearly half of the world’s armed groups of humanitarian concern, exerting control over an estimated 102 million people<sup>3</sup>. This pervasive violence has driven record levels of displacement, with 46% of the global total of internally displaced persons being displaced in Eastern, Central, Western and Southern Africa – some 38.8 million people by the end of 2024.<sup>4</sup> Concurrently, humanitarian fallout means that over 101.2 million people across 26 African countries will require humanitarian assistance.<sup>5</sup>

Oxfam’s 2024 report, *Vetoing Humanity*<sup>6</sup>, stresses that this failure necessitates urgent multilateral reform. It documents the severe consequences of a governance structure in which Africa, despite being deeply affected by UNSC agendas, lacks a representative voice in critical decisions concerning its own security and future. For far too long, Africa has faced unjust, disproportionate challenges stemming from the current geopolitical landscape, where

key decisions affecting peace, security and development are often made without adequate African representation or consideration of the continent’s unique needs and perspectives.

This new briefing report examines the urgent intersection between the global imperative for UNSC reform and Africa’s concrete propositions. It advocates for a more equal future in which African voices and leadership are central to global peace and security decision-making, in an effort to challenge and transform the systems that should contribute to peace, justice and the wellbeing of all, but instead often perpetuate conflict and fragility.

The briefing draws on Oxfam’s findings and Africa’s enduring calls for equity – articulated through the Harare Declaration on the Reform of the United Nations Security Council (1997),<sup>7</sup> the Ezulwini Consensus (2005)<sup>8</sup> and the Sirte Declaration (2005).<sup>9</sup> These frameworks collectively align with the UN Pact for the Future (2024),<sup>10</sup> which calls for a Security Council that is more accessible, representative, transparent, democratic, effective and accountable. The African continued calls for reform and the UN Pact makes a compelling case for a reformed and inclusive UNSC, with a vision centring on redressing historical injustices against Africa while also improving the representation of other underrepresented and unrepresented regions, including the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

# 2 Testing the system: How UNSC dynamics play out in the DRC and Western Sahara

Examination of the Security Council's role in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Western Sahara offers powerful, real-world

case studies that underscore the urgent need for multilateral reform, precisely from an African perspective.

## CASE STUDY 1

### The DRC – the gap between UN decisions and implementation

The UN's engagement in the DRC exemplifies the Security Council's failure to translate its decisions into meaningful change, resulting in a catastrophic gap between rhetoric and reality, a pattern established by the unimplemented DRC-UN Cooperation Agreement of 2013. Most recently, the adoption of Resolution 2773 (2025) starkly illustrated the gulf between the vision and the implementation of UNSC plans and resolutions in the DRC over two decades. Months after its adoption, the UN's top official in the country, Special Representative Bintou Keita, reported to the Council that 'key provisions of Resolution 2773 remain largely unimplemented'. She explicitly identified a 'persisting gap between the decisions of this council and the realities on the ground', a direct admission from within the UN system of its own struggles to effect change.<sup>11</sup> This implementation gap has dire human costs. As of late 2025, the UN's humanitarian response plan for the DRC was only 21.3% funded,<sup>12</sup> exacerbating a crisis where over 27.7 million people are food insecure.<sup>13</sup> The data underscores how political inaction in the Security Council directly translates into increased suffering on the ground. This, in turn, erodes the local legitimacy of the UN stabilization mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, which has faced violent anti-UN protests and a profound loss of faith among the Congolese people. After more than two decades of UN presence, peace remains 'still mostly a promise',<sup>14</sup> demonstrating a critical failure to build trust and deliver tangible security.

A more representative UNSC with African permanent members could have ensured resolutions like 2773 were better aligned with on-the-ground realities and received stronger implementation support. The AU's own peace initiatives in the Great Lakes region have often been under-resourced and sidelined by the Council—a dynamic that could shift with more and stronger African voices at the table.

**CASE STUDY 2****Western Sahara – imposing a solution and excluding affected communities**

On 31 October 2025, the UNSC adopted the US-led Resolution 2797, which took an unprecedented stance on the process of self-determination of Western Sahara. Defying the original UN-led plan for a democratically led referendum (Security Council Resolution 690, 1991), the newly adopted resolution proposes taking Morocco's *2007 Autonomy Proposal*<sup>15</sup> as the most viable basis to achieve a just, lasting, and mutually acceptable resolution to the dispute.

The Sahrawi people representatives did not reject the plan but insisted that it had to be presented as an option in a free referendum alongside independence, to preserve their inalienable right to self-determination. UN jurisprudence had also identified the need for a referendum (freely expressed choice of the population concerned) as the basis for resolving the territory's status. Legal experts note that this new resolution could represent a legal basis for formalising Morocco's existing de facto control over the territory.<sup>16</sup> Departing from earlier UN practice, which stated that self-determination must be people-driven, rather than state-imposed, it rendered permissible what was previously impermissible under international law.

The resolution represents an unprecedented shift from earlier UN frameworks, such as Resolution 690, which affirmed self-determination as the basis for resolving the territory's status. International jurisprudence and UN practice affirm that self-determination must be people-driven, meaning it results from the freely expressed choice of the population concerned, not a state-imposed decision.

This shift is particularly consequential given that, in 1982, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) formally admitted the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) as a full member state through Decision AHG/Dec.104 (XIX), adopted at the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Following the OAU's transformation into the African Union, Western Sahara, represented by the SADR, has remained a full member of the Union. This recent Security Council's endorsement of an autonomy framework under Moroccan sovereignty therefore stands in direct tension with the AU's long-standing legal and political recognition of Western Sahara as a distinct political entity, as well as with Africa's collective commitment to decolonisation and self-determination.

The process of drafting this resolution was a testament to the lack of consultation of affected communities in decision-making at the UNSC. This case is also illustrative of how powerful Security Council members can unilaterally reshape a decades-old peace process, prioritizing a political outcome over a principled approach to self-determination, thereby undermining the UNSC's legitimacy. A more representative UNSC and one which had a more robust African presence could potentially have provided more leadership to recentre marginalised voices.

# 3 The common Africa position on UNSC reform

Rooted in the **Ezulwini Consensus (2005)** and reaffirmed in the **Sirte Declaration** the same year, the African Common Position seeks to correct historical exclusions that have long denied Africa permanent membership in the Security Council. This initiative is championed by the **Committee of Ten (C10)**, which represents Africa in ongoing UN reform negotiations. Comprised of ten African Heads of State and Government, representing the continent's five regions, the C10 is mandated to promote and defend Africa's collective stance on UNSC reform in international forums. The ten countries are: Algeria, Congo, Equatorial Guinea,

Kenya, Libya, Namibia, Senegal, Sierra Leone (current chair of the C10), Uganda and Zambia.

The C10 has been instrumental in advancing Africa's position, regularly reporting its activities to the **African Union Assembly** and articulating AU positions within the **Intergovernmental Negotiations on UNSC Reform**. Most recently, the C10 presented the **AU Member States Model on United Nations Security Council Reform**, offering a comprehensive proposal for restructuring the UNSC.

# 4 Africa's demands for reform

The African Union Member States' model on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Reform of the United Nations Security Council (AU Model) was developed in response to the invitation by the Co-Chairs of the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Council (IGN), calling on all Member States and Groups to submit and/or revise models to support structured dialogue and facilitate the development of a consolidated model based on convergences across the five clusters and proposals submitted by Member States. Presented at the C10 Summit in New York in 2025 and formally adopted on 25 July, the model reflects the Common African Position, building upon the Ezulwini Consensus, the Sirte Declaration, and the 2015 Framework Document. It highlights Africa's stance on the veto, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council, working methods, and the relationship between the Security Council and the General Assembly—reinforcing Africa's rightful place in global decision-making. The model will be submitted for discussion during the UNGA 80<sup>th</sup> IGN session. The key features are outlined below.

## a. On membership and representation

- Expansion of the Permanent membership category of the UNSC from 5 to 11, with Africa granted no less than two permanent seats. The selection of these representatives will be conducted by the AU, for submission to the UN General Assembly for election.
- Africa should also have five non-permanent seats. The AU will also select these representatives.
- The enlarged Security Council should have no less than 26 members.

## b. Position on the veto

Africa's position is clear. The veto power should be abolished. However, as long as the veto exists, it must be extended to all permanent members, including the new African permanent members, as a matter of 'common justice'.

## c. Working methods of the UNSC

The C10 model calls for a more democratic, accountable and effective Security Council through:

- Enhancing engagement with countries that contribute troops to peacekeeping missions (among whom Africa is a major contributor) in drafting up mandates and throughout the lifecycle of peacekeeping missions.
- Upholding the UN Charter, including member states refraining from discussing internal state issues that do not constitute a threat to international peace and security.
- Limiting the use of Chapter VII (enforcement action) to a measure of last resort, and prioritizing Chapters VI (peaceful settlement of disputes) and VIII (regional arrangements).
- Avoiding the imposition of sanctions that put the political objectives of a few member states above the general international interest.
- Increasing transparency in the Security Council's work and access to documentation.

#### d. Relationship between the UNSC and the General Assembly

The model emphasizes the need to promote closer working relations between the two organs, fostering harmonious interaction and cooperation in accordance with their respective mandates, as stipulated in the Charter of the United Nations, and therefore proposes:

- Full implementation of existing resolutions on the revitalisation of the General Assembly and address growing concerns regarding the Security Council's encroachment on the Assembly's mandate. The Security Council's submission of more comprehensive, analytical and subject-oriented reports to the General Assembly.
- Timely flow of information and regular consultations between the presidents of both bodies.
- Convening more formal and informal meetings to allow for wider participation before decisions are adopted.
- Ensuring the role and authority of the General Assembly, including on international peace and security, are guaranteed and respected

#### e. Treating Africa as a special case and priority in the UNSC reform process

- Must entail granting it not less than two permanent seats and five non-permanents in the Security Council
- Means, if the veto continues, the veto has to be granted to the African Permanent Members.

Recent African-led initiatives in peacekeeping exemplify effective, contextually relevant approaches to security that empower local actors and promote sustainable peace<sup>17</sup>. By showcasing these innovative models, the African continent is demonstrating its capacity for leadership in addressing its own challenges, thereby reinforcing the argument for an inclusive and reformed multilateral system that reflects the realities of the 21st century.

While Africa's model provides a clear framework for reform, significant challenges remain, as the IGN negotiations have dragged on for over 16 years with little concrete outcome. The model, to be tabled during the UNGA 80th IGN session, builds on the UNGA 79 Elements Paper, which acknowledged some progress on representation, inclusivity, and accountability but also exposed persistent disagreements over membership, veto powers, and seat allocation. Africa and its allies will now have to push hard, though whether the IGN will finally deliver a truly equitable, transparent, and effective Security Council remains uncertain.

# 5 Oxfam's demands and Africa's position

The table below summarizes the core problems identified by Oxfam in *Vetoing Humanity*.<sup>18</sup> These are set alongside corresponding reforms

demanded by the African Common Position to show the convergence between Oxfam's asks and the C10's proposed reform.

Core problem: Oxfam perspective	African Common Position and proposed UNSC reform
<p><b>Structural imbalance and representation deficit:</b> Africa is the largest single regional<sup>19</sup> grouping in the UN General Assembly, with 54<sup>20</sup> member states recognised by the United Nations, but has no permanent seat on the UNSC, despite the Council frequently dealing with African issues. This excludes the continent from central decision-making.</p>	<p><b>Expanded membership:</b> The Ezulwini Consensus, as elaborated in the AU Model, calls for at least two permanent seats for Africa on the UNSC with all the associated privileges, as well as two additional non-permanent seats. In total, this represents an increase of <b>five non-permanent seats</b> (including the two additional seats beyond the current allocation). This proposal is widely regarded as a correction of a historical injustice, addressing Africa's longstanding underrepresentation in the Council.</p>
<p><b>Abuse of veto power:</b> The veto power of the permanent five (P5) members, particularly Russia and the US, has repeatedly blocked action on protracted crises, leading to unresolved conflicts and human suffering. Following the adoption of the Pact for the Future, the official position of the United States of America indicates that the USA will support Africa's bid for two permanent seats with no veto power attached to these seats.</p>	<p><b>Restraint and reform of the veto:</b> There are calls to renounce the P5 veto monopoly. Although the Pact for the Future calls for meaningful Security Council reform and redress of historical injustices against Africa, there is resistance with the United States indicating its unwillingness to fully support Africa's claims, offering only two permanent African seats without veto powers. Africa, however, maintains that any permanent seats granted to the continent must include veto rights to ensure equality with other P5 members.</p>
<p><b>Ineffective and externally driven peacekeeping:</b> Decisions on peacekeeping missions, where Africa is a major contributor of troops, are often made without sufficient local input from the communities living in the conflict zones. This leads to mandates that are misaligned with realities on the ground.</p>	<p><b>More representative and informed mandates:</b> A reformed, more inclusive UNSC, which has a clear CSO/Citizen engagement framework, would ensure the voices of those directly affected by conflict feed into processes, including those for designing missions, leading to more effective and legitimate interventions.</p>
<p><b>Undermined regional diplomacy:</b> The UNSC has at times sidelined AU peace initiatives. For example, during Sudan's 2019 transition, the AU PSC issued a firm demand for power to be handed to a civilian authority within a set timeframe otherwise, the AU would suspend Sudan. The UNSC blocked any strong endorsement of the AU's position and issued a weaker statement that ignored the AU's suspension—frustrating African members who felt the P5 disregarded their expertise.</p>	<p><b>Enhanced UN–AU cooperation:</b> Reform should strengthen cooperation between the UNSC and regional bodies like the AU, in line with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, respecting regional leadership.</p>

## 6

# Conclusion and call to action: An agenda for a fairer system

**The current crises in the DRC and Western Sahara provide a sobering reminder of the consequences of an unequal, dysfunctional multilateral system – one that can pass resolutions yet often fails to secure peace, and that deploys peacekeeping missions without a coherent political strategy, perpetuating injustice and dependence on international aid.**

Oxfam’s call for a fairer system and the African Common Position are mutually reinforcing.

From an Oxfam in Africa perspective, reforming the multilateral system so it is fair, effective, and works for Africa is not an abstract goal but a humanitarian imperative.

As the African Union prepares for its first 2026 Summit, it is time to heed Africa’s unified call for representation and implement a bold, integrated agenda for a UN Security Council that serves all of humanity.

## A comprehensive, Africa-focused reform agenda must include the following critical actions:

### 1. Make the Security Council representative

**– secure Africa’s permanent voice:** The foundational step is to correct the historical exclusion of Africa by expanding UNSC membership, based on the Ezulwini Consensus and the C10 model on UNSC reform. Securing Africa’s permanent representation will make the Security Council more legitimate and its decisions more informed.

### 2. Abolish the veto and centre humanity – adopt a position on abolishing the veto:

Following Oxfam’s demand, P5 members should renounce the use of the veto, particularly in situations of mass atrocities. The relentless use of the veto has blocked life-saving humanitarian action and paralysed the Security Council.

### 3. Fund peace, not just arms – redirect global military expenditure:

Oxfam’s Vetoing Humanity highlights the stark imbalance where P5 states provide far more in military aid than humanitarian assistance<sup>21</sup>, and dominate the global arms trade. Redirecting even a fraction of global military expenditure towards humanitarian and peacebuilding funds could close the funding gap and support robust, politically led peacebuilding.

### 4. Unlock African agency – establish formal AU–UN co-decision mechanisms:

Sustainable peace requires African leadership. Establishing formal AU–UN co-decision mechanisms for peace operations on the continent is critical for effective conflict resolution.

### 5. Place women and local actors at the heart of peace processes:

Inclusive participation and sustainable solutions require inclusive processes. Women and local actors must be central to negotiations and peacekeeping efforts. This principle must be institutionalized in peace process design and political mandates.

### 6. Uphold International Humanitarian Law:

Finally, the international community must respect, and ensure respect for, International Humanitarian Law and all UNSC resolutions aimed at protecting civilians. Continual impunity for violations erodes global trust in UN institutions and the rules-based order.

This six-point agenda, to be launched at the upcoming AU Summit in February 2026 in Addis Ababa, provides a concrete blueprint to challenge and transform a system that has for too long served the powerful few rather than securing peace, justice and wellbeing for all.

# Notes

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