Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: TA | AP Insight

Can Africa get a permanent seat on the UN Security Council?

They want to help make the decisions — not just watch them unfold.

As in years past, African leaders attending the U.N. General Assembly this year are demanding a reform of the powerful Security Council that would include permanent seats for countries from the continent in the global body's highest decision-making structure.

Many African heads of state who addressed the meeting since it began on Tuesday have decried the continent's lack of permanent representation in the Security Council as it navigates global security issues that directly and indirectly affect their populations and governments.

These include the war between Russia and Ukraine, the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict and, more recently, the U.S. war with Iran — issues that all loom large at this year's General Assembly.

The 15-member Security Council has five permanent members — the United States, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and China — that hold veto power. Other nations, which do not, are elected by the General Assembly rotate in and out every two years on a staggered basis. Africa holds three of those nonpermanent seats.

The representation question is becoming more urgent

While the calls for Africa to be represented permanently on the Security Council have often been debated by the General Assembly, many said the global conflicts currently faced by the organization made it more urgent for the body to be more inclusive.

According to most African leaders, the unfair representation in the Security Council has created doubt about the credibility of the organization and its oft-trumpeted commitment to multilateralism and equality among nations.

> The equality proclaimed in this assembly ends at the doors of the security council - William Ruto

"Every nation is sovereign and equal under the (U.N.) charter. Yet, on the gravest question of war and peace, five nations possess a permanent power that the other 188 do not. The equality proclaimed in this assembly ends at the doors of the security council," Kenyan President William Ruto told delegates on Wednesday.

They have also highlighted the large African population and the high number of African countries that are member states of the United Nations.

"How can a world led with a right conscience justify the denial of 1.6 billion Africans, the right to equal representation?" asked Ethiopia's president, Taye Atske Selassie.

In 2024, the United States said it would support the addition of two new permanent seats for African countries on the council. That, however, was under the administration of former President Joe Biden.

Liberia's president, Joseph Nyuma Boakai, said Wednesday that "the historical injustice is no longer tenable."

"The imbalance is not a favor for Africa," he said. "It is necessary to restore United Nations trust, credibility and legitimacy."

Artificial intelligence is a key example

As the world's leaders grapple with the future of artificial intelligence at the meeting, many in Africa also insisted that the decision-making about its rapid growth and development should include the developing nations as they were likely to feel its impact reverberate across the continent.

This came a day after U.N. Secretary-General

António Guterres urged global competitors in artificial intelligence to cooperate in addressing threats from the technology.

And on the same day, the Security Council held a special meeting about AI that featured the industry's leaders calling for help in managing the technology.

Reform is not an attack on the United Nations - Hassan Sheikh Mohamud

On Wednesday, Botswana President Duma Boko was among the leaders calling for African nations to be included in the discussions.

He said this extended to critical minerals, rare earths, and energy resources that power the technological developments. Many of those come from developing countries.

“Therefore, developing countries must have a meaningful voice in setting the standards and safeguards that will govern these technologies, ensuring that they expand opportunities, support decent work, and strengthen public services, while protecting human dignity, rights, and security,” Boko told delegates.

Most leaders are sticking the initial demands contained in the African Union's position on the issue adopted in 2005, which includes a demand for at least two permanent seats on the Security Council.

Said Namibia President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah: “The time has come for us to recognize that we have been negotiating for too long."

Reform is not an attack on the United Nations, said Somalia's president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

“Reform is necessary to protect its legitimacy, renew confidence in its institutions and ensure that it remains capable of responding to the realities of our time,” he said Wednesday.