

Small States at the United Nations: Diverse Perspectives, Shared Opportunities

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Cover Photo: Flags of member states flying at United Nations Headquarters in December 2005. UN Photo/Joao Araujo Pinto.

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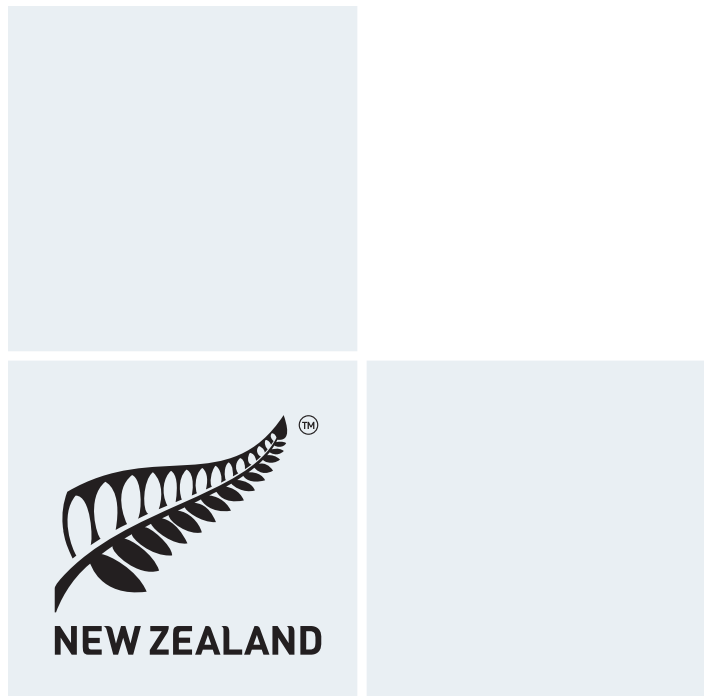
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Executive Summary

Small states make up the majority of United Nations member states, and they are among the strongest advocates for the rules-based multilateralism that underpins the UN's mission and work. Indeed, multilateral platforms like the UN provide small states the opportunity to play a role in global affairs that is disproportionate to their size. Yet, while small states have served as key drafters, negotiators, and thought leaders on a variety of international issues, many nevertheless face challenges in advancing their interests at the UN.

In March 2013, the International Peace Institute (IPI) and the Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the United Nations launched a research project to study the key strengths and challenges of small-state diplomacy at the UN, to identify opportunities for strategic cooperation among small states, and to develop practical options to address their shared challenges. The research findings outlined in this report draw on the insights and ideas of fifty-four small-state UN missions, collected through interviews and ambassadorial roundtables.

In many cases, small states have made significant contributions to policy development and debates at the UN, as they strive to uphold and develop international law and principles. Yet the diversity of small states is significant, in terms of their circumstances, interests, policy priorities, and resources. These significant differences limit the extent to which small states can cooperate on policy issues or come together as a single negotiating bloc. The key challenge that small states share, however, relates to structural and capacity barriers to their effective participation in diplomacy and policymaking at the UN—regardless of the particular substantive issue at hand.

Small states' foreign ministries and missions are much smaller than their larger counterparts, the relative costs of engagement are higher for small states, their access to insider information is more limited, and they often face capacity problems in filtering and processing the vast quantities of information they do receive. Many small states have developed tactics to address these capacity constraints, such as cooperation and burden-sharing within regional and likeminded networks, careful prioritization of issues and long-term strategic planning, investment in skilled and

experienced mission personnel, and other innovative approaches detailed herein.

Based on the common perspectives of the small-state ambassadors who participated in this research, three overarching areas of shared small-state challenges were identified: (1) asymmetric access to information, (2) capacity constraints, and (3) structural barriers to full participation at the UN. Small states must contend with a paradoxical "information asymmetry"—they are inundated with too much information to process while simultaneously lacking access to crucial insider information. Their limited resources and policy capacity pose particular challenges in complex processes like treaty reporting and running for elections. And small states are overburdened by the breadth of the UN system and the lack of services to facilitate small-state participation.

Corresponding to these three main challenges, practical steps and reforms can be pursued to support small states in three key areas: (1) information sharing, (2) capacity building, and (3) support from the UN system. These could include, for example, streamlining the UN's information-delivery processes, enhancing the accessibility of Secretariat personnel, and developing training and guidance for mission personnel on technical and procedural matters at the UN. While these recommendations were formulated with the needs of small states in mind, they would benefit all member states' engagement at the UN, regardless of size.

Introduction

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, when many of the world's small states did not yet exist, the world body's membership has nearly quadrupled. Only one in seven small states was present at the signing of the United Nations Charter. Today, small states comprise the majority of UN member states and are increasingly important players in international diplomacy.

Despite their extensive membership in the UN and other international organizations, there has been relatively little research about the activities of small states in the international arena and their prospects for influencing policy outcomes. Large states and powers most often take center stage in the practice and coverage of international affairs.

But small states have made major contributions to multilateralism, and it is important to study how and under what circumstances they are able to “punch above their weight.”¹

Multilateral fora like the UN offer small states the opportunity to play a role in global affairs that is disproportionate to their size. Small states are often excellent multilateral players, as they can work swiftly and more flexibly than their larger counterparts saddled with extensive domestic bureaucracies and chains of command. Small states also tend to prioritize issues strategically, as their UN mission teams and foreign ministries are not large enough to cover the entire range of issues on the global agenda. This practical prioritization or “niche diplomacy” often leads to success when it comes to the big ideas that small states bring to key issues. As such, small states can become recognized experts in their selected areas of focus.

The UN General Assembly is governed by the principle of sovereign equality enshrined in the UN Charter, so that all member states are represented and have an equal vote, regardless of size, population, or economic power. Still, despite these nominal guarantees of equality, small states face special challenges on the world stage. A report from the Danish foreign ministry warns of the risk for small nations of being forgotten or sidelined.² As one analyst reflects, “If that is the perception of a wealthy European country of 4.5 million, how much more acute might be the problem for a small state that also lacks material resources to face its economic and social challenges?”³

Moreover, a range of multilateral negotiations are currently underway with the potential to profoundly impact small states in the years ahead, notably those on climate change and the UN’s post-2015 development agenda, and small states cannot afford to be left out of the global conversation. At the same time, given the magnitude of these challenges, the international community may benefit from the regional influence and niche

expertise that small states can offer.

To explore the complex challenges and opportunities of being a small state at the UN, the Permanent Mission of New Zealand and the International Peace Institute (IPI) launched a research project on Small States at the United Nations in March 2013. The project aimed to identify opportunities for strategic cooperation among small states and practical steps to address their shared challenges, with a particular focus on their diplomatic activities and efforts at UN Headquarters in New York.

IPI conducted twenty not-for-attribution interviews with permanent representatives to the UN from small states, including ambassadors from each of the UN’s regional groups. The member states selected for interviews reflect the diversity of small states as described below, with wide-ranging socioeconomic and geographical circumstances, population sizes, and histories of peace and conflict. IPI also interviewed leaders of two regional organizations that provide capacity assistance to small states, to gain an additional perspective on enhancing the voices of small states at the UN. Following the individual interviews, a series of closed-door roundtables with small-state ambassadors was convened, with fifty-four small states participating in the project in total.

The insights and assessments of this diverse group of ambassadors yielded three critical areas of focus for best practices and possible reforms: (1) information sharing, (2) capacity building, and (3) support from the UN system. This report reviews the meaning of a “small state” and small states’ roles at the UN and in the international arena. Drawing on the reflections and ideas of small-state ambassadors themselves, it then examines small states’ strengths and challenges as international diplomatic actors and explores ways to strengthen their diplomatic engagement at the United Nations.

1 Diana Panke, “Small States in Multilateral Negotiations: What Have We Learned?,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 25, No. 51 (October 2012): 387–398, at 387. See also, Maria Nilaus Tarp and Jens Ole Bach Hansen, “Size and Influence: How Small States Influence Policy Making in Multilateral Arenas,” Danish Institute for International Studies Working Paper, November 2013, available at http://en.diiis.dk/files/publications/WP2013/WP_2013_11%20size%20and%20influence.pdf.

2 Kishan S. Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy: A Practitioner’s Guide* (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 62.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 62.

Defining a Small State

Small states are incredibly diverse, with greatly varying sizes, populations, economies, natural resources, and vulnerabilities. Within the Forum of Small States at the UN, the population of member states ranges from less than 10,000 to more than 10 million. The unofficial category of “small states” includes some of the most and least developed nations in the world, resource-rich and resource-scarce countries, and both island and landlocked states. Given this, the priorities and perspectives of small states can be as diverse as their characteristics.

Many attempts to classify small states turn on population as the most straightforward definition. Still, even population-based definitions vary:

- The World Bank and the Commonwealth tend to use a threshold of 1.5 million people to count nations as small states, totaling forty-five countries. In some instances, larger states, such as Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia, and others, are included to reflect limited levels of institutional capacity.⁴
- The Forum of Small States (FOSS), a voluntary and informal grouping at the UN described at length below, defines small states as those with populations of fewer than 10 million people. At the time of this report, 105 countries are members of the FOSS, and several additional small states have not joined. The forum is open to states with a population of fewer than 10 million, although the population of some members has exceeded that level since they joined the group.
- Another category in the literature on small states focuses on the special challenges faced by “microstates.” This term further distinguishes very small states, or countries with populations of less than 500,000 people. Thirteen UN member states currently have populations of less than 100,000 inhabitants, while fifteen member states have populations between 100,000 and 500,000 people.⁵

A further distinction was made repeatedly by

small-state representatives between small states in general and those with limited diplomatic resources, including at their permanent missions to the UN. IPI’s research on small states at the UN followed the population-based definition of the FOSS. The interview and research process therefore included states with fewer than 10 million people, and intentionally included the views of microstates and others with particularly severe capacity challenges.

Small States at the UN

Many small-state diplomats point out that the UN multilateral system is a great equalizer. A central element of this is the principle of “sovereign equality” or “one country, one vote” in the UN General Assembly. This convention of formal equality between large and small states is an operational means of leveling the playing field and is fiercely defended by small states.⁶ But the challenges that small states face, explored below, suggest that the story of small states at the UN is more complicated. Regardless of their levels of influence and successful diplomacy, most small states do encounter difficulties in effectively advancing their views and interests at the UN given their more limited size, capacity, and resources relative to their larger counterparts.

To fully understand the challenges small states face when engaging with the UN’s principal organs and agencies, it is worth noting early debates over their role in international fora. Small states were not always welcomed at the UN as equal members, or at its predecessor the League of Nations. In 1919 and 1920, states like Liechtenstein, San Marino, and Morocco were viewed as too small to capably conduct foreign policy agendas independently from their larger neighboring states. Small states were offered a lower tier of membership in the League of Nations but declined to apply under this diminished label.⁷

Concerns about the independence of some small states persist today at the UN—including among small states themselves, as several have commit-

4 Baldur Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?,” *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 7, No. 2 (April 2012): 135–160, at 136.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 136. Numbers updated based on 2014 UN membership.

6 Panke, “Small States in Multilateral Negotiations,” p. 389.

7 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council,” p. 144.

ments that require them to consult larger regional powers and to consider the policy interests of their powerful neighbors.⁸ Even without formal commitments or requirements, many small states find themselves subject to influence by larger states in practice, due to their reliance on regional and global powers for many forms of support.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as decolonization gave rise to new states—many of which were small—a similar debate took place among UN members. Some argued that small states could not meet the obligations of the UN Charter due to their limited resources, anticipating that many small states would face difficulty in funding peace operations and other responses to global crises. Ultimately it was decided that anything other than full and equal membership for all states would be unworthy of the UN Charter. Full membership as well as equal voting in the General Assembly was established to affirm the sovereignty equality of all states.⁹

Given this difficult history, it is understandable that small states tend to place high importance on the principle of sovereign equality and the rules-based multilateralism on which the UN rests. In the words of one ambassador, “We know that the alternative to multilateralism is a world where the small can be marginalized.”¹⁰ The UN provides small states, which have limited resources available to defend their borders, with a framework of international treaties and laws that protects their sovereignty. As a former permanent representative of Singapore asserted, “small states have a greater vested interest in international peace and stability than larger states.”¹¹ Indeed, some view rules-based multilateralism and its underlying principle of collective security as their very means of survival.

Small States as International Actors

The perspectives of small states in the international arena are immensely diverse, including their views on the implications of a country’s size and their outlooks on UN diplomacy. While some small-state ambassadors insist that size does not matter and that there is no correlation between size and performance at the UN, others point out that size has practical implications. On the positive side, size can create solidarity among similarly situated states. On the negative side, size affects capacity and can limit influence. Nevertheless, some small-state ambassadors maintain that size is simply not the most important determinant; instead, the quality of the mission and its representatives determine a state’s impact.

Despite different outlooks on smallness itself, small states share several common characteristics as international actors:

- a. **Small states often excel in multilateral diplomacy.** Multilateralism and international platforms like the UN provide small states the opportunity to play a role in global affairs that is much greater than their comparative size. According to one small-state minister, “Small states are in fact making a disproportionate contribution to multilateralism, because we know that it is the only way for us to have our say and our voice heard in world affairs.”¹² As a result, small states often excel in multilateral diplomacy.¹³ Small states are skilled at developing networks and working through groups. This cooperative mindset and positioning is important in international organizations and helps a state to be effective at the UN.

8 For instance, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Palau are committed to consulting the US on foreign affairs, while Monaco is obliged to consider the political, economic, and military interests of France. See Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council,” p. 145.

9 Ibid., pp. 144–145.

10 Jim McLay, “Small States at the United Nations: Taking Our Place at the Global Governance Table,” speech delivered to the Forum of Small States, New York, March 14, 2013, available at www.nzunsc.govt.nz/what-we-say-speech-2.php.

11 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council,” p. 142.

12 Marie-Josée Jacobs, “Small States and their Role in International Relations,” speech delivered at the twentieth anniversary conference of the Forum of Small States, New York, October 1, 2012.

13 Some small states also have a surprisingly extensive presence in terms of bilateral diplomacy, demonstrated by the number of embassies they maintain abroad. For instance, Grenada—a country of 110,000 people—has nine embassies; Namibia, a country of 1.8 million people, has twenty-six embassies; Jamaica, a country of 2.8 million, has seventeen embassies. Small states require representation at the capitals of major powers around the world. See Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*, p. 64.

b. Small states prioritize international rule of law.

Small states tend to place a high value on upholding the international rule of law and serve as strong advocates of the UN system and international cooperation in general. Because they lack traditional forms of hard power, the international system is their safeguard. Small-state coalitions, including the FOSS, help the UN as a whole operate toward consensus building. Indeed, small states have led in the development of international law and institutions, such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the International Criminal Court.¹⁴

c. UN presence offers great value. For many small states, their diplomatic mission at the UN is their “mission to the world,” through which they carry out business and communications with other states where they do not have diplomatic representation.¹⁵ The UN’s expansive framework offers many opportunities in one place; country missions in New York serve as platforms for bilateral contact, providing a cost-effective way for small states to connect with each other and larger countries without incurring the expenses of maintaining embassies around the world. In the words of a former UN ambassador, “Where else...can Tuvalu interact with El Salvador?”¹⁶

Still, small-state missions must justify the investment required for their UN presence to home governments and domestic populations. Several permanent representatives have recently faced public debates in their home capitals on whether their nation’s investment in the UN is justified. These ambassadors called for research to quantify and demonstrate the benefits that small states at the UN receive in return for their engagement, such as the costs saved by conducting bilateral diplomacy with multiple member states in New York.

d. Small states maximize influence through cooperation with regional and like-minded partners. Many permanent representatives

emphasized small states’ overall need for cooperation; according to one ambassador, “Our strength in the UN world is cooperation. When we move together in a united way, we do best. In every area, we maximize our strength by combining strengths.”¹⁷ As such, small states often engage through regional and like-minded groups and alliances, both to share burdens and to amplify their voice and influence. Existing mechanisms of coordination and collaboration are explored below, with an overview of thematic and regional alliances joined by small states.

Methods of Diplomacy

Many small-state ambassadors agree that the following approaches to diplomacy offer advantages to their small mission staff and are the best options for making an impact at the UN.

AGILE DIPLOMACY

Small states are often able to work and respond to international issues more quickly than larger powers, due to simpler domestic policymaking processes and fewer internal and international constraints. Small states are less constrained by large, often rigid and siloed bureaucracies in their home capitals. And, for many, “the relationships between the political leadership and the diplomats in the field are much more direct and trusting.”¹⁸ Where this is the case, it often reflects the prioritization of the UN by the country’s foreign ministry. Small-state ambassadors emphasized that positive support from the foreign ministry and national government is crucial for successful diplomacy, as it ensures a consistent investment of strategic support and funding for the mission’s UN activities.

Ambassadors reported significantly different levels of input from and communication with their capitals; some receive daily direction from their home governments, while others make the majority of their day-to-day decisions without direct guidance from capital. While this independ-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁵ Mark Hong, “Small States in the United Nations,” *International Social Science Journal* 47, No. 2 (June 1995): 277–287, at 281.

¹⁶ Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, “Small States in UN System: Constraints, Concerns, and Contributions,” Institute of South Asian Studies Working Paper No. 160 (October 2012), p. 9.

¹⁷ Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, February 12, 2013.

¹⁸ Colin Keating, “The United Nations Security Council: Options for Small States,” speech delivered in Reykjavik, Iceland, June 16, 2008, available at www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/Media%20Small%20States%20Reykjavik.pdf.

ence can have advantages, many ambassadors in the latter scenario would prefer additional capacity and substantive support from their national governments.

INVESTMENT IN THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

The extensive bilateral diplomacy carried out by small states in New York underlines the need for leaders of small-state missions to be effective, respected, and engaged diplomats. As a result, small-state representatives tend to be highly qualified and well regarded domestically and internationally. These ambassadors can ensure, “through the sheer force of their abilities,” that their states are noticed and listened to at the UN.¹⁹ The centrality of the UN in small-state foreign policy endows missions in New York with incredible value, but can also raise serious capacity challenges. A single small-state ambassador may be accredited to as many as five nations while serving at the UN in New York, and expected to interact bilaterally with as many countries as possible.²⁰

In some cases, small-state ambassadors may have longer terms than their large-state counterparts. Longer terms in New York can help ambassadors develop networks and connections leading to a greater voice and impact. Yet when these ambassadors leave their UN posts, the small mission faces a serious loss of institutional knowledge. Strategic planning for the mission in New York, coordinated by the foreign ministry, is one possible way to overcome the disproportionate vulnerability of small-state missions to the impact of staff turnover. In one instance, a small state’s foreign ministry authored a fifteen-year strategic plan that each successive permanent representative undertook to implement. This ensured continuity in policies and priorities, and aimed to build the expertise and profile of the mission through campaigning for and serving on various UN bodies.

PRIORITIZATION AND NICHE DIPLOMACY

Given the breadth of the UN agenda and the resources required to cover even core UN meetings, prioritization is also key for small states. Prioritization was raised repeatedly as an essential process for enabling small states to have an effective role at the UN. Small states do best when they choose a limited scope of issues, and invest resources and personnel accordingly.

Prioritization is not only advantageous for individual states and missions, it also facilitates “small-small cooperation” or cooperation among small states. As small states develop experience, networks, and expertise in priority areas, they gain access to insider information that can be shared with fellow small states. As one permanent representative explained, “Small states’ best approach is choosing a niche, taking relevant posts like committee and convention chair positions, and becoming a recognized insider.”²¹ In addition to providing small states with the best return from their limited resources, prioritization can enable them to develop expertise that is ultimately sought out by states of all sizes, thus further enhancing their profile and influence. In developing these areas of niche diplomacy, small states can in turn offer each other insider access and elusive information, such as dynamics in the Security Council. Many small-state ambassadors agreed, “When a small state is elected to the Security Council, this helps other small states gain information about what is happening.”²²

In the literature on small states, the importance of prioritization is widely documented. It has been termed “niche specialization,”²³ wherein states cultivate an area of expertise; “norm entrepreneurship,”²⁴ wherein states champion a certain issue or area in the multilateral arena; or “magnetic attraction,” wherein small states engage the world community on an appealing or relevant topic.²⁵

19 Hong, “Small States in the United Nations,” p. 283.

20 Some small-state permanent representatives to the UN are accredited to multiple posts. For instance, one Pacific Island ambassador concurrently serves as ambassador to the UN, the United States, Cuba, Venezuela, and Israel.

21 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, January 31, 2013.

22 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, February 5, 2013.

23 Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*.

24 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council.”

25 Rana, *21st Century Diplomacy*, p. 68.

Box 1. Niche Diplomacy: Small States Bring Big Ideas to the UN

In an address to the FOSS in 2012, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asserted, “Being small does not mean an absence of big ideas.”²⁶ Indeed, there are many examples of small states, often less constrained by political alliances and direct national interests, championing ideas that have led to major international agreements:

- The Arms Trade Treaty, adopted by the General Assembly in April 2013, grew out of a concept and early documents introduced and coordinated by Costa Rica, a state that went on to contribute to the intergovernmental process that produced a treaty following more than a decade of intense advocacy and negotiation.
- In 2009, the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) drafted a resolution calling for the security implications of climate change to be acknowledged and addressed. Their resolution passed the General Assembly by consensus and enjoyed co-sponsorship from more than 100 states.
- The long-neglected idea for the establishment of an International Criminal Court was revived by a speech to the UN General Assembly by the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 1989, leading to the adoption of the Rome Statute and the creation of the court less than a decade later.
- The process of negotiating the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which came into force in 1994 and has now been ratified by 165 states, was driven throughout by small maritime states, with countries such as Malta, Singapore, Fiji, and New Zealand playing significant roles.

REGIONAL TIES COME FIRST

Despite the importance of small-small cooperation, several ambassadors emphasized the precedence of regional and subregional ties in their approach to UN diplomacy. In their view, countries from the same region have “the same problems, the same

vulnerabilities.”²⁷ Within a region, the long-term cooperation of countries often translates to similar approaches to diplomacy.

Some ambassadors said that outside of regional groups, they encounter different cultures of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy—particularly with regard to information sharing and substantive cooperation. In explaining this reality, one representative asserted, “The regional approach has to come before the international approach. Small-state international cooperation has to begin at the point where regional cooperation ends.”²⁸

The natural limits to substantive cooperation between small states, given the diversity of their priorities and interests, confirms the precedence of alliances based on factors other than size alone. Still, ambassadors pointed to a number of substantive areas in which greater cooperation among small states could be successful, including transparent and accountable working methods in UN bodies, the post-2015 development framework, and transboundary challenges such as climate change and responses to natural disasters.

BROAD COOPERATION

Several small-state permanent representatives outlined common approaches to cooperation and information sharing at the UN. In working with other states, it appears that many small states work through a number of collaborative relationships simultaneously. These partnerships include the following alliances and groupings: (1) states selected according to national interest; (2) neighboring states; (3) an official or unofficial regional group or caucus; (4) a regional governing body, such as the European Union; (5) strategic security partners such as NATO; (6) informal groups on substantive issues, such as the Friends of Mediation or the Friends of Resolution 1325; and (7) the FOSS.

As noted above, small-state representatives sometimes share information and cooperate based on substantive or thematic alliances, rather than a regional approach. Their cooperation does not center on size or partnerships with other small states but instead on common ground regarding

26 Ban Ki-moon, speech delivered at the twentieth anniversary conference of the Forum of Small States, New York, October 1, 2012, available at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/sgsm14558.doc.htm.

27 Interview with small-state ambassador, New York, May 21, 2013.

28 Ibid.

certain issues. There was consensus among small-state officials that groups and alliances are only effective when all members can reach common agreement. To that end, like-mindedness and shared interests trump size when it comes to forging partnerships and lobbying alliances. An additional factor mentioned by many small states is the development of networks based on personal connections and relationships.

Mechanisms and Groups

Groups play a vital role in facilitating the engagement of small states at the UN. Small groups and small-state oriented alliances may offer the most effective fora for achieving substantive and electoral cooperation, as small-state voices can be stifled in larger groups. But this also raises challenges due to the great diversity of small states. Small-state groupings at the UN without a thematic focus can lack clear common objectives.

Nevertheless, “it is through partnerships...that small states survive and thrive at the UN.”²⁹ Groups enable states to exponentially expand their coverage of the UN agenda. Small states that have employed “variable geometry”—working through multiple groupings and approaching issues with allies—are particularly successful at the UN.

As noted above, 105 small states belong to the Forum of Small States (FOSS), an informal grouping that meets to discuss issues of shared concern.³⁰ The FOSS was established in 1992 under the leadership of the permanent mission of Singapore to the UN. When then permanent representative Chew Tai Soo arrived in New York in 1991, he realized that small states—especially those not aligned with a recognized grouping—were often excluded from negotiations. An initial coalition of small states created the FOSS to redress the problem of under-representation; serve as a forum for small states to support each other in elections; promote shared views; and pressure the international community to adhere to the UN

Charter’s principles. They defined “small” not by physical size or economic status, but by population, in order to create a more inclusive coalition with greater political influence.³¹

Additional small-state groups at the UN are sometimes formed to address particular issues, including Security Council reform. In 2005, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, and Singapore formed the Small Five (S5) group to call for limited Security Council reforms to benefit states too small to expect to obtain a lasting seat on the council in future reform processes. The S5 sought greater transparency through reformed Security Council working methods regarding membership, veto power, and relations between the Security Council and General Assembly.³² More recently, in May 2013, twenty-one member states—including sixteen small states—renewed the call for Security Council reform with the launch of the cross-regional Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) group, led by Switzerland.³³ ACT approaches Security Council reform from a pragmatic stance, calling not for the enlargement of the council but instead for better working methods. Another group comprised of small and medium-sized states is the Global Governance Group, or 3G, which was formed in 2010 to address the emergence of new global processes outside the UN, in particular the G20. The 3G’s thirty members seek to promote a more inclusive framework of global governance in the face of exclusive processes.³⁴

Small states often benefit from regional and geographic groups and the coordination and burden-sharing mechanisms offered by group membership. Prominent examples include the European Union and the African Union, both of which offer member states information-sharing and policy briefings, as well as other regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), established in 1973, and the Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS), established in 2007, are examples of regional small-

29 McLay, “Small States at the United Nations.”

30 Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “International Issues: Small States,” available at www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/international_issues/small_states.html.

31 Chew Tai Soo, “A History of the Forum of Small States,” paper prepared for the twentieth anniversary conference of the Forum of Small States, October 1, 2012.

32 The group submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly in April 2011, which was debated but ultimately did not advance to a vote.

33 The Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) Group, “Better Working Methods for Today’s UN Security Council,” May 2013, available at www.eda.admin.ch/etc/medialib/downloads/edazen/topics/intorg/un/missny/other.Par.0165.File.tmp/ACT%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf.

34 Global Governance Group (3G), “Press Statement by the Global Governance Group (3G),” New York, September 25, 2013, available at www.mfa.gov.sg/content/mfa/overseasmission/newyork/nyemb_statements/global_governance_group/2013/201309/press_20130925.html.

state groups that have both effectively crafted common negotiating platforms and advanced shared interests on issues such as climate change and sustainable development.

Small states also work through like-minded groups beyond regional affiliation to coordinate policy and negotiate on issues of common concern. Many small states belong to two long-standing informal coalitions, the G77 and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which aim to promote joint economic interests, increase shared negotiating power, and strengthen multilateralism for their numerous members. One relevant negotiating group is the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a coalition of small island and low-lying coastal countries established in 1991. AOSIS “functions primarily as an ad hoc lobby and negotiating voice for small island developing states within the United Nations system,” addressing their shared development challenges and environmental concerns.³⁵ Many small-state ambassadors cite AOSIS and PSIDS as particularly effective negotiators on climate change.

Small states may also receive support from historic or linguistic groupings, such as the International Organisation of La Francophonie or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries. The Commonwealth is an intergovernmental organization recognized for promoting small states for many years. This is important for the Commonwealth, as thirty-two of its fifty-three members are small states, and many of those are microstates. It has offered support to its smallest members through capacity building, policy advice, assistance with negotiations, and development initiatives to benefit domestic economies. The Commonwealth has also established joint offices for small states in New York and in Geneva, where several small states utilize a shared space and take advantage of subsidized rent to operate and maintain their missions to the UN.

Many ambassadors assert that small states could better utilize their total numerical strength,

especially to coordinate votes in the General Assembly, through more effective organization and alliances. Some argue that subgroups that further differentiate small states (grouping small states by region or geographic characteristics) can have negative net effects by dissipating their collective power. Others insist that subgroups—which tend to focus on one or two key issues—serve as the most promising and coherent voices in small-state advocacy. Several ambassadors called for small-state groups like AOSIS and the FOSS to work more closely to build deeper natural alliances.

Box 2. Small States in the UN Security Council

The importance of Security Council reform for small states is clear. From 1991 to 2010, forty-two states elected to the council had fewer than 10 million inhabitants, and twenty-five of these had a population of less than 5 million. Still, many small states have never gained a seat, and not one of the UN’s twenty-eight member states with a population of less than 500,000 has been elected to the council.³⁶ In 2014, three members of the FOSS are serving on the Council: Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Jordan.

The Security Council has been described as the “high table” of international relations, and, in the words of one diplomat, “If you’re not at the table, you’ll be on the menu.”³⁷ Several ambassadors in this project noted that during Haiti’s nearly decade-long place on the Security Council agenda, not one Caribbean state sat on the council to offer a regionally informed view of the situation.

Research on the ability of small-state elected members to influence the Security Council points to two broad categories that determine effectiveness: (1) their knowledge, initiative, and diplomatic and leadership skills, and (2) the image of the state in the international system, and whether it is perceived as neutral and/or as an expert in a niche area.³⁸

35 The Alliance of Small Island States, “About AOSIS,” available at <http://aosis.org/about-aosis>.

36 United Nations Security Council, “Countries Never Elected Members of the Security Council,” available at www.un.org/en/sc/members/notelected.shtml. See also Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council.”

37 Jim McLay, “Making a Difference: the Role of a Small State at the United Nations,” speech delivered at Juniata College, Pennsylvania, April 27, 2011, available at www.juniata.edu/services/jcpress/voices/pdf/2011/jv_2011_121-134.pdf.

38 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council.”

Strengths, Challenges, and Ways Forward for Small States at the UN

STRENGTHS OF BEING A SMALL STATE

Small states draw significant strength from their common approaches to diplomacy, as outlined above. They are vocal proponents of multilateralism, as their influence in global platforms depends on upholding the international rule of law. Their quick and flexible diplomacy and tendency toward international cooperation often make them effective international players. In 1998, then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that the contributions of small states are “the very glue of progressive international cooperation for the common good.”³⁹ Indeed, small states routinely drive substantive and structural discussions at the UN, as they strive to uphold and develop international principles.

Yet traditional theories of international relations closely associate a state’s size with its capabilities. By recognizing small states’ roles in global governance and the rule of law, the literature on small states challenges this long-standing assumption.⁴⁰ As suggested above, “To become active and successful, small states need to demonstrate strong leadership, excellent coalition-building skills and an ability to prioritize heavy workloads.”⁴¹

Many small-state missions develop expertise on specific themes and practices because they prioritize and invest heavily in a few issue areas. Many small states have commitments to transparency and have already developed an active approach to sharing information. However, these practices can depend on the culture of the mission and foreign ministry, as well as on the personality and approach of individual ambassadors and experts. Most countries do not have formal arrangements for information sharing, but nevertheless pass on a

great deal of information and share their positions on specific issues or resolutions. As highlighted above, this is often organized through formal and informal regional groupings. For instance, within CARICOM, members are assigned certain issues and have responsibility for covering these topics both in the region and at the UN.

Box 3. Seven Good Practices of Effective Small States

While each small state has its own recipe for success, many of the most successful small delegations have adopted some or all of the following approaches:

1. actively utilizing processes to coordinate and burden share with like-minded and regional partners;
2. developing and utilizing broad and diverse networks to extend their voice and influence and achieve objectives;
3. establishing a clear strategic focus, and directing efforts and resources toward building expertise and pursuing goals in a limited number of priority areas;
4. setting a limited number of specific medium-term goals and designing strategic plans to achieve these;
5. leveraging UN engagement for bilateral relationships and other foreign policy objectives to extract maximum value from their UN presence;
6. recruiting, investing in, and retaining a core of skilled and experienced personnel, particularly at the ambassadorial level, and carefully managing staff turnover;
7. employing innovative approaches to strengthen and supplement capacity and to manage workloads.

39 United Nations, “Secretary-General Lauds Role of Small Countries in Work of United Nations, Noting Crucial Contributions,” Press Release No. 6639, July 15, 1998, available at www.un.org/News/Press/docs/1998/19980715.sgsm6639.html.

40 Thorhallsson, “Small States in the UN Security Council,” p. 141.

41 Ibid., p. 140.

CHALLENGES OF BEING A SMALL STATE

Many small states face challenges that affect their ability to engage fully in diplomatic activities at the UN. In their domestic affairs, by-products of smallness can include limited trade and economic diversification, high levels of import and dependence on few export products, lack of natural resources, remoteness, limited security capability, and vulnerability to environmental risks and natural disasters. At the UN, these domestic challenges often translate into capacity constraints for small states. This is exemplified by the size of their missions. While visible and effective, the mission of Jamaica operates with just 8 diplomatic staff, and those of Liechtenstein and Timor-Leste operate with only 3; fellow small state Switzerland has a more substantial diplomatic staff of 23. By contrast, China has nearly 80 personnel in its mission and the US mission exceeds 150 diplomatic staff.

Alongside this limited capacity, small missions face obstacles accessing the information needed to engage effectively, under-representation in the UN's principal organs and agencies, and difficulty winning elections to serve on UN bodies.⁴² Given these challenges, many small states are strong proponents of transparent and inclusive working methods at the UN. Transparency is particularly important in relation to UN bodies that do not include all states but that make decisions affecting all—the primary example being the Security Council. Working methods have special weight for small states that do not regularly obtain seats on any elected bodies.

Based on the common perspectives of small-state ambassadors, three overarching areas of shared small-state challenges were identified during the course of this project: (1) asymmetric access to information, (2) capacity constraints, and (3) structural barriers to full participation.

Asymmetric Access to Information

Due to the UN's sweeping agenda, numerous meetings, and voluminous documents, small states face a serious challenge with their more limited

capacities in filtering and analyzing information. Small states must contend with a paradoxical “information asymmetry”—they are inundated with information they cannot process while simultaneously lacking access to crucial insider information. Facing a daily barrage of press releases, reports, draft resolutions, and civil society reporting, UN missions need to constantly filter this considerable information flow. For small states, this process is at the heart of their capacity challenges.

The advent of global media organizations and the appearance of new issue-focused organizations have changed the paradigm of information consumption at the UN. Now, a small state can learn a great deal about the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Darfur or Afghanistan by building links with reporting organizations without the need for physical presence in that country. In this context, “a small state will not be short of raw information.”⁴³

In discussing this information overload, small-state ambassadors identified the quality of information as an essential component. Like all UN missions, small states need high-quality, trustworthy, succinct, and timely data and analysis. Impartial information is important but hard to obtain, as UN-produced information is often slow and of variable quality, and reports from civil society and nongovernmental organizations on a meeting or issue tend to come from a particular advocacy perspective.

Small states have benefitted hugely from high-quality reporting initiatives such as the independent Security Council Report, which offers broad access to previously unavailable information through timely and in-depth reporting on the work of the Security Council.⁴⁴ Many small missions lament the absence of a comparable service that both aggregates data and provides analysis for the work of the General Assembly and for priority issues and meetings elsewhere. For instance, on each resolution before the General Assembly, small states must evaluate the topic, communicate their analysis to capital, and arrive at a position before the vote. This requires background information

⁴² Chew, “A History of the Forum of Small States.”

⁴³ Keating, “The United Nations Security Council: Options for Small States,” p. 3.

⁴⁴ See the work of Security Council Report on their website, available at www.securitycouncilreport.org.

and assessment across a vast agenda of issues, many of which are likely to be beyond the specific focus and expertise of smaller delegations.

Parallel challenges arise in UN elections, when small states often need information on candidates' voting records and positions, which is not currently summarized or collected in any one accessible resource. As will be explored below, in addition to calls for new external resources, small states can benefit greatly from information sharing with each other. Sharing expertise and knowledge through small-small cooperation can help alleviate the structural barriers to UN participation outlined below.

Capacity Constraints

Limited capacity, evident from the comparative size of many small-state missions as outlined above, raises serious challenges for small states at the UN. Their limited resources and policy capacity can pose particular challenges in complex processes like treaty implementation and reporting but also in practical matters like intern recruitment and management.

Running as candidates for election to UN bodies raises many capacity hurdles for small states. Representation on elected bodies is crucial for UN member states and effective diplomacy, but small states tend to face financial and political barriers in advancing their candidacies. To learn how to campaign effectively, small states often approach fellow member states one at a time to gain insights on their experiences of Human Rights Council or Security Council elections. Several small-state ambassadors called for capacity building in the area of elections, to harness this expertise and make it more accessible for small missions.

Another central capacity challenge for small states is international obligations and treaty reporting requirements. More work is needed to reduce this burden, which has been called the "obligation overload," as more and more international treaties require extensive annual and periodic reporting. Several ambassadors noted that they struggled to meet even mandatory reporting obligations for treaties and Security Council resolutions, and suggested that meeting additional reporting requirements would simply not be

feasible without capacity-building assistance. Some small states have developed processes that streamline reporting requirements, which could be shared with other small states in capacity-building exercises. For instance, one state combined their reporting processes for three related conventions, as they realized they were consulting the same expert three separate times throughout the year. By combining these processes, they completed their reporting requirements all at once. Another state has developed software that simplifies reporting, by creating a database and templates to minimize unnecessary repetition of work from year to year.

Sharing best practices and lessons learned on treaty reporting and reducing domestic compliance burdens could help small states tackle this serious challenge. However, additional fora or meetings would further stretch small-state capacity, and new initiatives should not add to the burdens already placed on small states. Many small states are willing to share their best practices in areas like treaty reporting or elections—and software or other tools for carrying them out—but have not had a simple forum for doing so. They called for a platform to facilitate this type of small-small cooperation and exchange.

A number of small states have adopted innovative approaches to supplement their capacity and make their existing resources stretch further. Some delegations regularly post husband-and-wife delegates to increase their diplomatic resources. The Commonwealth Small States Office has also provided several of the UN's smallest delegations with significantly reduced overheads. The most common approach involves supporting seconded diplomats with locally employed personnel and an increasing number of interns, with groups such as the organization Islands First providing assistance with recruitment.⁴⁵ However, several ambassadors noted that the recruitment and management of appropriate interns also requires resources, and that the use of interns cannot substitute for the capacity-building benefits of even short-term assignments of their own nationals.

Structural Barriers to Full Participation

Many small-state ambassadors asserted that the Secretariat could do more to facilitate their partici-

⁴⁵ See the work of Islands First on their website, available at www.islandsfirst.org.

pation in diplomacy at the UN, offering improved services to assist with capacity constraints—from substantive information to basic logistics. The creation of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) unit within the UN Secretariat’s Division for Sustainable Development is one example of a move to facilitate small-state participation and interests. Small-state representatives currently find the reports from the Secretariat too long and, often, too delayed. They called for more consistently concise and focused information that is easier to read and process.

Ambassadors remarked on the slow, formal processes of contacting staff members across the Secretariat machinery. They reported that interaction with Secretariat staff can be complicated, even for small states with relatively large mission staff, largely because it can be difficult to ascertain which individuals are working on certain substantive issue areas. Offering practical suggestions at the most basic level, ambassadors called for a UN “Blue Book” for the Secretariat, akin to the one listing contact details for all permanent missions to the United Nations, or a comprehensive directory that is regularly updated.⁴⁶

Most small-state missions called for better access to basic logistical information, from how to reserve a meeting room in a UN building to how to obtain a diplomat’s parking decal in New York. Small-state representatives emphasized their need for support not just on substantive issues that could prove difficult to change but also on these seemingly simple matters of logistics and day-to-day operations.

POSSIBLE REFORMS AND PRACTICAL INITIATIVES

There are many different views on what small states need in terms of practical and specific initiatives aimed at facilitating their effective engagement at the UN. Based on the three major challenge areas above, practical steps and reforms to support small states were considered in relation to (1) information sharing, (2) capacity building, and (3) support from the UN system.

Information Sharing

Information sharing among states can ensure that small missions have the information necessary for effective engagement. Greater sharing—not only of information but also of expertise between small states—can help address structural barriers to UN participation, such as the breadth of the UN agenda and the voluminous information it produces. In considering possible new modes of sharing information among small states, ambassadors called for “information sharing with a purpose.” This strategic exchange could center on priority areas for certain missions, preparation for General Assembly sessions, or learning more about the platforms of country candidates in elections.

As some ambassadors pointed out, the content of the information needed depends on the priorities of each mission. “Updates and briefs are a great idea, but on ECOSOC reform or Rio+20? This depends on the mission’s priority.”⁴⁷ Ambassadors considered new possibilities for information sharing using information technology, the Internet, and multimedia—from the use of Twitter accounts, websites, and blogs to the creation of new ad hoc platforms like databases and web-based training for small states.

Throughout the roundtable discussions convened for this research, ambassadors largely agreed that the following possible approaches, resources, and tools for information sharing could prove the most useful for small states:

- Develop an online hub of practical tools and resources for delegates to facilitate access to essential information.
- To that end, further explore iD Network (international Diplomatic Network), a web platform created for information exchange between delegates to international organizations around the world. Small missions in New York could utilize the site for online message boards and commentaries, meeting announcements, and the exchange of practical policy information and documents.
- Organize tailored briefings for small states ahead

⁴⁶ The UN Blue Book is a list of all diplomatic personnel in UN missions. See United Nations Protocol and Liaison Service, “Blue Book,” available at www.un.int/protocol/bluebook.html.

⁴⁷ Ambassador remarks at small-state roundtable meeting, New York, July 25, 2013.

of major UN meetings, such as those currently being organized in advance of sessions of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals at the Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the UN. Briefings could be organized by small states themselves, by regional organizations such as the Commonwealth, by the UN Secretariat, or an external organization.

- Engage the UN Secretariat on its provision of information to delegates and member states (see the section on support from the UN system below). The UN Committee on Information in the General Assembly and the under-secretary-general for communication and public information could be engaged in advocacy calling for streamlined information.
- Consider greater “small-small” information exchange and engagement in substantive areas of common interest.

Capacity Building

In considering options for sharing best practices and supporting small-state capacities, ambassadors pointed out the potential for development partners—including small developed states—to support capacity-building initiatives. Ambassadors stressed that any training and support initiatives should aim to reduce transaction costs of UN membership and lessen the capacity constraints of small states.

There are many examples of training courses for junior and senior diplomats on bilateral and multilateral affairs, organized by regional organizations, universities, and training institutes, including the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). While these can be extremely useful, their scope, duration, and means of delivery are not always well-tailored to the limited resources of small states. There seems to be space to make such training opportunities more accessible to small-state delegates. Small-state ambassadors discussed and supported the following practical options to enhance capacity building:

- Engage UNITAR on how existing and future training courses and materials could be more accessible and tailored to the challenges of small states and small missions.
- Organize practical orientation courses specifically tailored to newly arrived permanent

representatives and deputy permanent representatives, focusing on core information of relevance such as General Assembly procedures and budgeting processes. These courses could be designed with UNITAR and the UN Secretariat, or independently.

- Develop short “how-to” guides for key UN activities, including both procedural and logistical matters. In terms of technical and procedural matters, the following topics were suggested as possible focus areas:
 - drafting and sponsoring resolutions, including budgeting and program budget implications (PBIs);
 - participating in UN meetings, including rules of procedure, credentials, statements, voting, outcome documents;
 - chairing UN meetings;
 - elections, including voting in elections, running candidates, and serving in elected positions;
 - signing and ratifying treaties and meeting treaty obligations, including reporting processes and undergoing universal periodic reviews;
 - national planning processes for UN engagement;
 - the UN budget process and payment of assessed contributions.

The following topics were suggested as possible areas of focus for logistical matters:

- organizing events and booking rooms at the UN;
- planning and managing participation in Leaders’ Week;
- recruiting and accommodating interns;
- host-country engagement, rights and obligations, and associated processes.
- Explore the possibility of additional seminars and training sessions on these topics. Engaging small missions to share their best practices and approaches to tackling capacity challenges would promote small-small learning and capacity development.
- Coordinate and encourage the further development of practical tools to assist small states.

Recent examples include New Zealand's UN Handbook application⁴⁸ and Switzerland's PGA (President of the General Assembly) Handbook.⁴⁹ Possible future options including the development and sharing of candidacies management software, treaty reporting tools, and additional "how-to" guides.

- Consider new initiatives to provide practical support to small states and to reduce administrative burdens and overheads. Two possible options include initiating a version of the Commonwealth Small States Office for non-Commonwealth small states and establishing funding and administrative support for recruiting and managing interns for small missions (potentially including short-term assignments from their own foreign ministries).

Support from the UN System

Most small-state ambassadors agreed that there is more to be done to make the UN Secretariat and the broader UN system more "small-state friendly," such as streamlining UN processes to reduce transaction costs, developing "small-state proofing" for new initiatives, making the UN more accessible and responsive to small states, and providing greater practical support.

Small-state representatives suggested a range of possible steps to address structural barriers to participation. One option discussed was the submission to the UN Secretariat of a request to mainstream "small-state proofing," or more consistent consideration of the needs and constraints of small states and missions, across UN processes, decision making, and activities. Ambassadors discussed generating a list of specific requests for the Secretariat in this regard, together with a request for the designation of a senior-level "small states' champion" to oversee the consideration and implementation of these requests and to report on progress. Small states would engage regularly with this official, to monitor progress in ensuring that UN initiatives and processes do not needlessly overburden small states and missions (see box 4).

Box 4. Draft Request to the UN Secretariat/ System

The following text, drafted by the Permanent Mission of New Zealand to the UN and based on input received during the course of this project, outlines some possible requests to the Secretariat and UN system from small states.⁵⁰

We recognize that the UN Secretariat and other members of the United Nations system operate under a range of externally imposed obligations and restrictions relating to funding, mandates, and lines of accountability.

However, we remain firmly of the view that the Secretariat has direct responsibility for many actions that could significantly improve UN activities and processes, to reduce transaction costs and enhance the ability of states—particularly small states—to engage effectively at the United Nations.

As such, we request that consideration be given to mainstreaming the principle of "small-state proofing" all current and future activities by the UN Secretariat. This will ensure due regard for the limited capacity, personnel, and resources of the missions of many small states.

We ask that particular attention be given to the following areas:

- Enhancing the **accessibility of Secretariat personnel** to all member states, by making the UN Secretariat phone directory more readily available to UN missions; providing clearer information on where staff can be located (online and with visible signs in elevators and on each floor of Secretariat buildings); and providing a designated point of contact in each division responsible for directing enquiries from UN missions.
- Reviewing **core services** provided by the Secretariat to UN missions (e.g., booking rooms and organizing catering, allocating passes during Leaders' Week, collecting

⁴⁸ New Zealand's United Nations Handbook is "a comprehensive guide to the UN system and how it works," providing a summary of all UN organizations. See New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, "United Nations Handbook 2013 – 2014," available at www.mfat.govt.nz/UNHB2013/index.php.

⁴⁹ Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations, "The PGA Handbook: A practical guide to the United Nations General Assembly," 2011, available at www.unitar.org/ny/sites/unitar.org/ny/files/UN_PGA_Handbook.pdf.

⁵⁰ This draft text was circulated to small-state ambassadors in December 2013 for comment and discussion at roundtable meetings.

delegates' passes) to ensure they are as quick, simple, and efficient as possible.

- Considering steps to make basic **information on key UN processes** (running resolutions, chairing meetings, elections) more readily accessible to member states.
- Reviewing the Secretariat's **main information channels** for delegates (UN Journal, Quick-Place Committee websites, un.int and un.org websites) to ensure that they are as simple, clear, and accessible as possible, and to identify possible gaps or improvements that would benefit smaller delegations.
- Ensuring consistent use of best practice in the **preparation of UN reports**, including clear format and brevity.
- Conducting a comprehensive review of the **reporting requirements** relating to UN General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and multilateral treaties, with a view to identifying practical steps (simplified formats and templates, cross-referencing reports, nil returns, support from regional bodies) that could reduce compliance burdens and enhance reporting rates among small states.
- Consideration of the constraints of smaller delegations in **scheduling official meetings**.

We further request the identification of a **senior member of the United Nations leadership** team as a champion for small states, with the responsibility to pursue and respond to small-state requests.

Conclusion

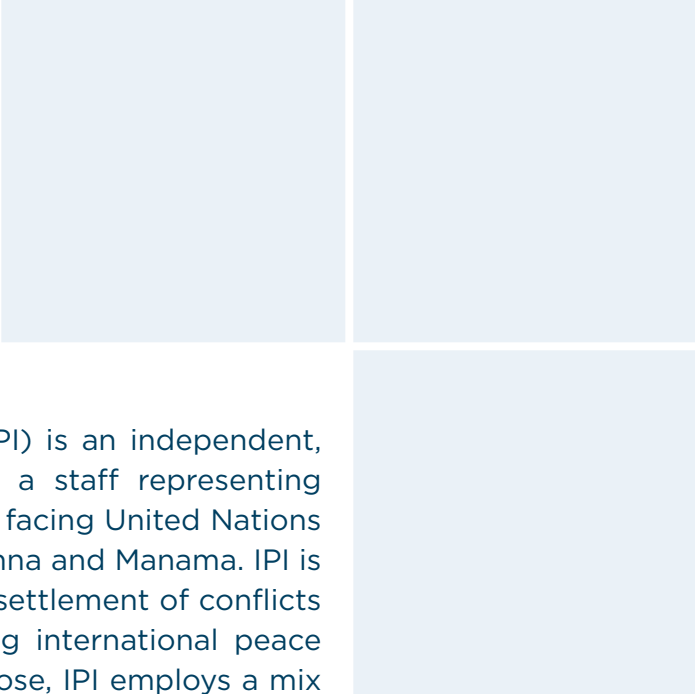
This research project set out to formulate practical steps to strengthen the voices and effectiveness of small states at the UN, based on the insights and ideas of small states themselves. It found that small states can address their shared challenges through three critical areas for future action: information sharing, capacity building, and support from the UN system. To this end, it has offered a number of recommendations for small states to consider, which could be operationalized individually and through alliances.

At the UN, size is what states make of it, and as demonstrated by their accomplishments, “small states have no tied hands for those issues that are of high importance to them.”⁵¹ Small states can make significant contributions at the UN, as they can work swiftly and more flexibly than their larger counterparts; they tend to prioritize issues strategically and develop expertise in niche areas; and they promote multilateralism and international cooperation, as their roles and voices in the international system depend on these principles.

However, small states also face limited access to information, capacity constraints, and other structural barriers to their full participation at the UN. These challenges are not just problematic for small states, but for all advocates of the multilateral system. The ideal global conditions for small states—a peaceful and equal order governed by international cooperation—serve the common good of all states.⁵² The same is true at the level of operational processes at the UN. Possible reforms to reduce the challenges of UN membership, including streamlined information and revitalized core services for member states, could ultimately prove valuable for states of all sizes.

51 Panke, “Small States in Multilateral Negotiations,” p. 389.

52 Hong, “Small States in the United Nations,” p. 284.



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