



Meeting Report - Rethinking the Foundations of the International Order: A roundtable on re-writing the United Nations Charter

Date: June 25, 2025

Venue: CEBRI Headquarters

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter, CEBRI organized a roundtable held at its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro during the visit of the Coalition for the Reform of the UN Charter delegation to Brazil. The event brought together experts from national and international research centers, civil society representatives and academics to discuss proposals for a broad review of the UN Charter in the face of contemporary challenges, such as: i) climate emergency, ii) the fragility of multilateralism, iii) global inequalities, and iv) the international protection of human rights.

It is important to assess that the 1945 Charter reflects a specific historical context, never intending to be, in this format and scope, perennial. The acknowledgement of this recognition of the importance of revision of the charter resides in Article 109, the one that defines the procedure for convening a review conference. The mismatch between the challenges posed in the contemporary international arena and the institutionalization of UN argues in favor of the calling of such an assembly.

MAIN PROPOSED REFORM AREAS

The reform proposal presented by the international coalition was structured around three interrelated fronts:

I) The first axis involves legacy updates, including the elimination of references to “enemy states” from World War II still present in the Charter, the removal of obsolete provisions such as the trusteeship system, and the adaptation of the document’s language and structure to contemporary values and principles;

II) The second axis covers normative advances, including the creation of a specific chapter on global environmental governance and the establishment of an **Earth System Council**, the incorporation of the principle of gender parity in UN power structures, and the strengthening of the human rights pillar through the creation of a new council with greater authority, representativeness, and responsiveness.

III) Finally, the third axis involves structural reforms, such as the creation of a **Global Parliamentary Assembly** with country representation proportional to the population of each country, to be directly elected or defined by each member. The expansion of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) from 15 to 25 members, including regional seats without veto power, promoting greater geographic and functional diversity, and restructure the selection process of Secretary-General so that the position is less constrained by the need of acceptance by the P5 members.

COALITION STRATEGY: PROCESS AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

The proposal is available at the Coalition’s website: <https://globalgovernanceforum.org/un-charter-reform-coalition/>

Main issues addressed by the proposal:

i) Legal basis: The proposal is anchored in Article 109 of the UN Charter, which allows for convening a review conference. The distance between some provisions of the Charter (Enemy States, Trusteeship System) and some of UN’s current attributions, such as Peacekeeping Operations, debates around Climate Emergency and the lack of popular representativity, calls for a rethinking of the structure of the institution as a whole.

ii) Multilateral engagement: Engagement is necessary in order to call for the reform, but is also necessary to be considered in the long run, so that the final result of the reform does not alienate countries whose government systems do not share liberal-democratic values.

iii) Transnational citizen mobilization: The recognition that the lack of representativeness in the UN is an issue mobilizes this call for reform. However, the understanding that this opens up the possibility of a grassroots mobilization to advance these proposals is not a reality to every country in the world for different reasons, and poses the question of how to balance the

STRATEGIC DIVERGENCES AND TENSIONS

Despite a broad consensus on the urgency of reforming the UN Charter, the challenge resides in defining the priorities in doing so. In Brazil, for instance, where the debate on UN reform has, for long, orbited the discussion on the country's participation in the Security Council as a permanent member, a challenge that is anticipated is that of moving past this demand in understanding the scope of the reform and its adherence to broader and more ambitious set of institutional adjustments. Thus, even though Brazil is a relevant actor in calling for Article 109 to be invoked, the limits of the country's commitment to this process were discussed, especially if other members do not engage in the call vocalized by President Lula in his speech during the 2024 General Assembly..

Considering the challenge of having P5 members engaging with this proposal, it is well-known that France and UK are more sensitive to the necessity of reform in UN, though the difficulty of incorporating in the discussion almost 200 countries remains a challenge, especially if compared with the context of the original charter, in 1945, that had 51 signatures.

Another tension concerns the protagonism of civil society versus diplomatic prudence. The holding of symbolic events and engagement of digital influencers and youth were pointed out as innovative strategies, although concerns were raised about narrative coherence and international receptiveness. Some warned about risks of narrative dispersion, resistance from countries less open to popular participation, and possible conflicts between social initiatives and long-term state strategies.

Finally, the debate highlighted the tension between defending universal values and respecting political pluralism. Some participants warned that a reform agenda perceived as normative or exclusionary might be seen as Westernized or selective. It was reiterated that the proposal aims precisely to build a representative, plural, and democratic system capable of respecting different models of state and governance.

KEY INSIGHTS: THE BRAZILIAN DEBATE

- Participants underscored Brazil's potential to lead the reform agenda but also noted its strategic ambivalence: oscillating between diplomatic protagonism and excessive caution;
- Initiatives such as UN reform simulations carried out by Brazilian universities were valued for their relevant formative potential;

- The importance of social media and digital influencers in disseminating foreign policy themes was emphasized, along with the need to control narratives and avoid misinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRAZIL

- Broaden the national debate on UN reform by linking diplomacy, academia, youth and civil society;
- Institutionalize and scale up civic engagement tools such as global governance simulations and open forums;
- Avoid strategic isolation by reducing overreliance on the Security Council bid and embracing complementary reform pathways ;
- Proactively build Global Geopolitical alliances around shared reform objectives ;
- Develop a multi-channel communication strategy that connects with broader publics while ensuring narrative coherence and institutional credibility.

The reform of the UN Charter is a political project, not merely a technical one. The renewal proposal goes beyond updating an institutional text: it seeks to redesign the role of the United Nations as a plural, democratic space focused on international cooperation. Holding the debate in Brazil reflects confidence in the country as a strategic actor but also demands political and diplomatic responsibility.

Embracing this agenda requires breaking institutional comfort zones, recognizing the limitations of the current system, and betting on innovations that reflect the multipolar and unequal reality of the 21st century. As was emphasized: “It is not possible to transform the UN without a vision. And without vision, we will never get close to the change the world needs”