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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Strengthening of the United Nations System

Statement by H.E. Mr Mitch Fifield, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, on behalf of Australia, Canada and New Zealand

(As delivered)

Mr President,

I take the floor on behalf of Canada, New Zealand and my own country, Australia.

Our delegations attach great importance to the question of membership of the ACABQ, to its working methods, and its overall functioning.

Let me be very clear at the outset. Our delegations do not support the expansion of the ACABQ.

But let me be equally clear. We acknowledge that equitable geographic representation is of great importance to many delegations. And we are willing to engage in dialogue on this proposal.

I should emphasise that none of our delegations has a national serving on the Committee.

We have no vested interests either way.

A well-functioning Committee and UN effectiveness writ large is our principal interest and concern.

Mr President,

We have deep concerns over the way in which this proposal in A/74/L.5 has been brought forward for consideration to the General Assembly.

We appreciate that informal consultations were held on Friday. But we regret that these consultations were held so close to taking action in the General Assembly today.

Bear in mind, the draft resolution has been in circulation since 7 October 2019. But there has been no substantive or inclusive discussion through the Fifth Committee.

It's important to note that previous expansions of the ACABQ have gone through the Fifth Committee.

An enlargement of the ACABQ as proposed in A/74/L.5 and highlighted by the oral statement would have a significant impact on the UN budgetary process and the overall functioning of the Organisation.

These are matters rightly within the purview of the Fifth Committee.

The current process clearly undermines the rules of procedure as well as the long-established principle that the Fifth Committee works on the basis of consensus.

Not all forums in this building operate on the basis of consensus. Those that do need to be protected, not undermined. We don't have so much consensus in this place that we can afford to take it for granted.

Each Member State has an interest in both the effective operations of the Organisation and accountability for the use of their taxpayers' money. So we get the intense interest here.

But consensus is vital to ensure that the budgetary views of all Member States – developed or developing, large, medium or small – are taken into account.

The Fifth Committee works by consensus so it can achieve the broadest possible agreement that reflects diverse views.

Let me reiterate, we are willing to engage constructively and in good faith in that forum.

Mr President,

Expanding the ACABQ will have impacts on the Committee's working methods as well as on the broader Organisation.

Our delegations appreciate the hard work and the recommendations provided by the ACABQ representatives and its Secretariat.

We acknowledge that their workload is immense.

However, in recent years the ACABQ has not been working as effectively as it could. This is reflected in the frequent late issuing of reports which contributes to delays to the Fifth Committee's work.

Expanding the Committee will not alleviate these problems. To the contrary, it runs the real risk of exacerbating them.

Accordingly, we think it's timely to consider the ACABQ as a whole to see if we might be able to make some incremental improvements, which we think should enjoy consensus.

In both the 68th and 70th sessions, the Secretary-General and the Chair of the ACABQ respectively put ideas and recommendations forward regarding the operational arrangements of the ACABQ.

Our delegations believe it is timely to consider new ideas and proposals that would improve the efficiency and functioning of the Committee and enhance its accountability and independence.

For instance, we could look at the expertise level which has not increased, despite multiple membership expansions, since the Committee's creation.

Is it appropriate that so few Committee members are required to have relevant expertise in finance?

In addition, the gender balance of the Committee is embarrassingly lopsided for an Organisation that champions gender equality.

Only two out of 16 representatives are women. We are confident that there are qualified women from all regional groups who could be put forward as candidates.

We could also consider ways to improve the working methods of the Committee to enable the timely issue of reports to help improve the Fifth Committee's working methods.

Mr President,

To sum up, our delegations would be open to discussing and reaching consensus on the issue of ACABQ enlargement, working methods and overall functioning.

I re-state that our preference remains for this discussion to take place in the Fifth Committee.

This is the most relevant body to consider this important matter. This is the best place to reach consensus.

This is where previous enlargements have been discussed and agreed.

We therefore support the EU amendment and encourage all delegations to support it.

In the event that this does not occur, we encourage all delegations to vote no on this resolution.

Thank you.