

Bangladesh, India, China among 32 countries abstain from UN vote on Russia

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Online Desk: The UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution that demands Russia leave Ukraine. Thirty-two countries including Bangladesh, India, China, Pakistan and Sri Lanka abstained from voting while seven countries including Russia voted against the resolution. A total of 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution. The U.N. General Assembly approved the non-binding resolution Thursday that calls for Russia to end hostilities in Ukraine and withdraw its forces, sending a strong message on the eve of the first anniversary of the invasion that Moscow's aggression must stop, reports AP.

The resolution, drafted by Ukraine in consultation with its allies, passed 141-7, with 32 abstentions. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said the vote was more evidence that not only the West backs his country. "This vote defies the argument that the global south does not stand on Ukraine's side," Kuleba said. "Many countries representing Latin America, Africa, Asia voted in favor." The General Assembly has become the most important U.N. body dealing with Ukraine because the Security Council, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, is paralyzed by Russia's veto power. General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding, unlike Security Council resolutions, but serve as a barometer of world opinion.

The seven countries voting against Thursday's resolution were Belarus, Nicaragua, Russia, Syria, North Korea, Eritrea and Mali, which has developed close military ties with Russia. Amendments proposed by Belarus would have weakened or stripped much of the language but were resoundingly defeated. The vote was slightly below the highest total for the five previous resolutions approved by the 193-member world body since Russia sent troops and tanks across the border into its smaller neighbor on Feb. 24, 2022. That tally, in an October resolution against Russia's illegal annexations, won approval by 143 countries.

Foreign ministers and diplomats from more than 75 countries addressed the assembly during two days of debate, with many urging support for the resolution that upholds Ukraine's territorial integrity, a basic principle of the U.N. Charter that all countries must subscribe to when they join the world organization. The war has killed tens of thousands on both sides and has reduced entire Ukrainian cities to ruins and its impact has been felt worldwide in higher food and fuel costs and rising inflation.

Venezuela's deputy ambassador addressed the council on behalf of 16 countries that either voted against or abstained on almost all of five previous resolutions on Ukraine: Belarus, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Cuba, Eritrea, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Laos, Mali, Nicaragua, North Korea, St. Vincent, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe. While other countries focused on Russia's actions, Venezuelan Deputy Ambassador Joaquin Perez Ayestaran said Wednesday that all countries without exception "must stringently comply with the United Nations Charter," a barely veiled dig at an international order long dominated by the U.S. and Europe, and at what some call violations of the charter.

Ayestaran said the countries in his group were against what he called divisive action in the General Assembly, and for "a spirit of compromise." European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell told reporters that the aggressor and the victim can't be put on equal footing. "Russia has not sent any positive signal of any minimum willingness to work for a peace," Borrell said. Instead, Russia is intensifying attacks, firing 50,000 rounds every day, and has put 300,000 soldiers on the front lines, double the 150,000 it massed before the invasion, he said.

Facing this reality, Borrell said, the EU and the West have to support Ukraine militarily, impose sanctions on Russia, and try to isolate Moscow diplomatically which is what Kyiv's supporters are trying to do at the

United Nations this week. China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Dai Bing, told the assembly Thursday: "We support Russia and Ukraine in moving towards each other. The international community should make joint efforts to facilitate peace talks." China says it is neutral in the conflict and an advocate of peace talks, but has not criticized the invasion or described it as such. Beijing has condemned the U.S. and its allies over sanctions on Moscow and military assistance to Ukraine. China and Russia have increasingly aligned their foreign policies to oppose the U.S.-led international order.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi reaffirmed the strength of those ties when he met Russian leader Vladimir Putin during a visit to Moscow this week. More broadly, Russia and Ukraine have been trying to win support from around the world. The head of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidential office, Andriy Yermak, spoke Tuesday about the U.N. resolution with India's national security adviser because "Ukraine is interested in the broadest possible support for the resolution, in particular from the countries of the global south," a statement from Zelenskyy's office said.

India had a Cold War dependence on the Soviet Union and has abstained several times from voting on U.N. Security Council resolutions demanding that Russia cease its invasion. Less-powerful countries, including many in Africa, also have been caught up in the diplomatic wrangling. "We were colonized, and we forgive those who colonized us. Now the colonizers are asking us to be enemies with Russia, who never colonized us; is that fair?" Uganda's foreign minister, Abubaker Jeje Odongo, told the Sputnik news agency this month. Russia is Africa's top arms supplier and Odongo also noted that most of his country's military equipment is Russian-made.

"Countries in Africa have traditionally been attached in the Cold War division to the Soviet Union, having the old nostalgia, but also Russia has good tools, how to motivate them to be on their side," Slovak Foreign Minister Rastislav Kašer told reporters in New York on Thursday. "And then there are others, like China, who are big powers, and are very carefully following what's going on, and calculating what's good for them."