

Dateline UN | October 18, 2012

Kid in a candy store at ‘high table’ of planet

Day Four: However old we become, there is still inside us that child wanting to reach to that candy behind the store window. As I sat there at the horseshoe-shaped Security Council table, I was transfixed by the voting button in front of me, itching to touch it, feel it, press it.

Unfortunately (or fortunately), the issue didn’t come down to voting!

Nevertheless I had a real-life, real-time experience of the Security Council. All those political science lessons Father Huart, the forever-smiling Jesuit, had taught us in classes XI and XII at St. Xavier’s came rushing back, as if I were in a reverie. Except of course, this was not a political theory lecture — this was the real thing.

The 15-member Security Council was discussing the “Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question”. The Palestinian case for full membership of the United Nations is supported by 132 of 193 countries. Of the 61 naysayers, Israel is expectedly the most prominent. Seated at the two ends of the horseshoe (in the second-last seats to the left and the right) were the contending parties, the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The 15 members of the Security Council (five permanent, 10 — among them India, elected for two-year terms) and 50 countries from the General Assembly made submissions on the issue being discussed. They spoke from chairs placed at the ends of the horseshoe table, sitting next to either Palestine or Israel. There was no controversy this time, but in the past even seating arrangements at the Security Council have caused problems. An Iranian delegate once refused to make a presentation because he was seated next to the Israeli delegate and wanted his seat changed. It was only when he was threatened with forfeiture of speaking opportunity that he quietened down. Thankfully there was no such drama this time.

The Security Council meets from 10 to 1 and then from 3 to 6. The two-hour lunch break is an indulgence that I used to discover the food

options in the UN Headquarters but more on that in another piece. I heard the submissions of various countries with rapt attention. To my mind, the best, most forceful and articulate voice was that of the Bangladeshi representative. I was tempted to go up to him and congratulate him in Bengali.

India becomes president of the Security Council in November. It (and I) sat to the left of the Guatemalan representative, who presides over the Council in October. To my left was the gentlemen from Morocco, separating India and Pakistan as it happened. All in all it was a good day at the high table of the planet. Father Huart would be proud of me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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