Agenda Item 169: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations

Statement by Mr. Kamalesh Sharma, PR on October 5, 2000

Mr. Chairman,

How important is peacekeeping? Though most peacekeeping operations have been set up in developing countries, and most of those who take part in them are developing countries, their citizens are unlikely to list peacekeeping as the most important thing the UN does, either for them or elsewhere. Villagers in Asia, in Africa or Latin America know what UNICEF does, for instance, or the UNDP or the WHO, and would be worried if they stopped doing it, or were forced to do less; very few would know much about peacekeeping operations. Outside host developing countries, the common man in other developing countries knows little about peacekeeping operations: he has other pressing preoccupations and concerns. This is a fact that must be faced.

Governments of developing countries do not of course share this disinterest. The Government of India, for instance, has always acknowledged, not least by putting the lives of its soldiers at risk in almost every major operation the UN has run over the last fifty years, that peacekeeping is important, an international obligation, and needs its support. However, we see the work of the UN in the larger perspective, and in it, peacekeeping, though important and frequently crucial for promoting peace and security, cannot be paramount.

Developed countries, however, do frequently claim that peacekeeping is the most important, the most visible, work that the UN does, and that the success of the UN hinges on whether peacekeeping works or not. As I said, the vast majority of developing countries, who neither host a peacekeeping operation nor participate in them, but do know the impact that the development arm of the UN system has on their economies and societies, would not agree, but we would ask, if peacekeeping is indeed so crucial, why is there such difficulty by those who strongly advocate it in financing it particularly as the means are available? Surely there is something inconsistent in saying in effect- we believe peacekeeping is the most important work the UN does, you do not, therefore you must pay more for it.

As this is rather illogical, we thought we should take another look at the cost of UN peacekeeping, to see if indeed it placed an unfair burden on the major contributors. We assumed that peacekeeping would again reach a plateau of $3 billion, (which it has not so far) and that collectively the eight richest developed countries wanted 10 percentage points to be picked up by others. The burden for the major contributors, for which they seek immediate relief, therefore, is $300 million.

We looked at the tables in the World Bank's "World Development Report 2000 - Attacking Poverty". These show that the collective GNP in 1999 of these eight richest countries was $19,551 billion. $300 million is 0.001% of this. (The floor for the regular budget, as we all know is 0.001%; obviously that is a percentage considered negligible, or at the very least, tolerable, for even the weakest economies.)

Despite what we knew about these powerful economies had they gone into recession, and therefore needed every little protection they could get? But the Bank reports that these eight economies added on $354 billion to their GNP between 1998 and 1999; US $300 million is 0.084% simply of the increase in their GNP over the year.

The Bank also very thoughtfully puts out figures for Government spending as fractions of national GDP. Because there are phases in the lives of nations when, even in a period of prosperity, governments spend little, it could be a possibility that, if the eight richest countries were going through an interlude of fiscal austerity, they might not want to divert scarce resources from domestic needs to those of UN peacekeeping. However, the Bank's tables show that current Government expenditure in these eight countries in 1998 was US $4855 billion. Even at US $3 billion, the total peacekeeping budget of the UN would be no more than 0.06% of their current expenditure; the relief of US $300 million that they seem to be seeking is 0.006%.

We can put it another way. None of the eight are more than half-way towards meeting the agreed target of 0.7% of GDP as ODA, which means that, at their 1999 GDP, they are at least US$70 billion short of their commitments. US $300 million is 0.42% of that figure, of assistance that could have made the difference in many developing countries and might not have made it necessary to deploy peacekeeping operations there. So we would urge our colleagues from the major contributors to see their contribution in a more liberal light.

We and other developing countries that are troop contributors have put no pressure on the UN over the reimbursements that we are owed for troop and equipment costs. Collectively, these fluctuate but at any one point of time are usually in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars. We find it disconcerting that we are in effect being told that these monies, which developing countries are owed and can ill afford to lose, will only be reimbursed to us if the richest countries get relief on a peacekeeping scale which, as the figures I have cited show, are not even a fleabite for them.

In some ways, the major contributors are looking at the wrong problem. It is not the scale that is unrealistic, but the mandates the Security Council sets for peacekeeping operations. Peacekeeping costs have spiralled in large measure because having set up an operation, tasks have been given to it that are increasingly ambitious, often not doable, and driven by political agendas and needs that are rarely those of the country the operation is meant to benefit. Having set these new and often unnecessary tasks, a steady increase in the strength of the peacekeeping force is then authorised. In such cases, which are now the rule, the UN is set up for a fall; its blue helmets cannot deliver on tasks that are unrealistic, and opens UN to the charge that it is ineffective, and is not giving value for money.

Which brings me to the Brahimi report, on the basis of which the Secretariat plans to ask this Committee to urgently sanction new posts for the DPKO. As we have said elsewhere, the failures of peacekeeping have been failures of political will, or of performance on the ground. Expanding the DPKO will not help. Nevertheless, because the DPKO is so hard pressed, we agree that it could do with reinforcements, but so could almost any other Department in the Secretariat. If, however, the Secretariat comes to this Committee with a request for new posts only for the DPKO, that would simply skew the UN's work in directions favoured, as I said at the outset, only by a few. If the major contributors insist that the DPKO

must grow within a zero-nominal growth budget, the swing away from other areas of the UN's work will be extremely damaging. We therefore need to think these issues through, and to take sensible decisions.

In peacekeeping as in everything else, there is a pattern. In May 1995, as my good friend Richard Holbrooke writes in his book, "To End a War", just as he was about to surrender himself into the custody of Kati Marton, UN peacekeepers were taken hostage in Bosnia; he advised a firm line with the hostage-takers, and helped resolve the crisis. Five years later, in May 2000, UN peacekeepers were taken hostage in Sierra Leone; with his help and that of others, and the resolve of the troops who mounted the rescue, the UN tackled that crisis as well. At periodic and unfortunate intervals, blue helmets and their units have been taken hostage, but UN peacekeeping never has; all of us would agree that it never should be.