

Agenda Item 10: Report of the Secretary General on the work of the Organization

Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, Permanent Representative on September 27, 2000

Mr. President,

Permit me to compliment you on the skill with which you have conducted the work of the Millennium Assembly.

We join previous speakers in thanking the Secretary General for his annual report on the work of the Organisation and for introducing it at the beginning of the General Debate. We also thank him and the Secretariat for their tireless efforts to make the Millennium Summit a success. As the Secretary General has said, we must read his report together with the one he prepared for the Summit and, in deciding on priorities for action, bear in mind what our leaders had to say when they met here earlier this month.

When he spoke to the Millennium Assembly, the SG in effect said that to act on the priorities set by the Summit, the UN must wage four fights -for development, against injustice, against violence, and for the environment. We are glad that the Secretary General sees these as tasks for the entire UN system to carry out, because there was some ambiguity in his report, which listed them, in the section on peace and security, as elements of the even more ambiguous concept of "human security". This is not a quibble over words; over the last few years, the Security Council has used an elastic concept of security to stretch its mandate well beyond what the Charter gave to it. This is a development with which the majority of the membership of the UN is deeply uncomfortable; we would not like the Secretariat to promote this minority view. Economic and social problems can constitute a threat to peace and security only if they are allowed to fester; they cannot be addressed by bodies like the Security Council.

Last year, the Secretary General asked the General Assembly to consider the challenges thrown up by what has come to be known as "humanitarian intervention", and, as he acknowledges in his report, a vast majority of the membership rejected the concept. It is absent from the Millennium Declaration, the silence of our leaders being proof that it has gained no currency over the year. But, the Secretary General asks in paragraph 37 of his report this year, "if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica - to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?" By definition, those were exceptions to which an immediate and exceptional response should have been forthcoming. This was absent not because of an absence of doctrine. The international community failed to act, not because it did not have a theoretical underpinning for action, but because of a failure of political will and leadership. The danger in generalising from exceptions is too obvious to have to be belaboured. We understand and share the Secretary General's concern, but humanitarian intervention is not the answer.

We agree with the Secretary General that peacekeeping is a vital area of the UN's work. The surge in UN peacekeeping over the last year shows how much it is needed, and the problems that beset it must be corrected. We therefore welcomed the appointment of the Brahimi panel. With other member states, we are carefully considering their courageous and far-reaching report. We believe that the Secretariat should not act piecemeal on its recommendations, which should be implemented only after they have been examined and approved by member states.

The references made in the report to some of the panels's recommendations show the need for intergovernmental agreement before they can form the basis for action. While it is argued that peacekeepers and peace-builders are "inseparable partners" and the only ready exit for peacekeeping forces is sustainable peace, too often the mandates of a peacekeeping operation have been confused with that of a post-conflict peace-building mission. Blurring the distinction between peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building leads to unrealistic expectations and unachievable mandates.

We agree that structures need to be strengthened both in the field and at headquarters to support peacekeeping; the question is how much and at what cost. Again, the danger lies in generalising from exceptions. In Kosovo and in East Timor, the UN is running what are euphemistically called transitional administrations, but which are in reality trusteeships. These are rare exceptions, even now, and to use them as yardsticks for the entire peacekeeping structure is not only much too ambitious but also unnecessary.

Peacekeeping is not an end in itself but a means to an end and should not be seen as a substitute for the task of nation building. As the Secretary General himself has always emphasised, there can be no lasting peace without economic growth and social development. It would therefore be both unacceptable and self-defeating if resources are diverted from development to peacekeeping, either by the international community, or within the Secretariat.

Towards the end of its report, the Brahimi panel refers in passing to a question which is crucial, not only to peacekeeping, but to the credibility of the UN - what it calls "equitable representation on the Security Council". The Secretary General has rightly reminded this Assembly, when he introduced his report, that our "Heads of State and Government have called for a reform that will make the Council more representative and legitimate, but also more effective."

The Council cannot claim to act on behalf of the general membership in the present circumstances. The lack of adequate representation of developing countries in the Council severely impairs its functioning and casts a shadow on the legitimacy of its decisions, which impact mainly on developing countries. We hope therefore that the reform and expansion of the Security Council will receive, after the Millennium Summit, the attention it deserves. We share the hope that you, Mr. President, expressed while closing the General Debate, that there is a "willingness by the majority to move forward on this issue".

Mr. President,

The Secretary General, and the UN system as a whole, has placed increasing emphasis on good governance. This might be a concept on which a common definition still eludes us, but there is a general consensus that without democracy, there can be no good governance. Like all democracies, we are pleased that it is increasingly the norm of governance, casting aside dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. Yet, there has been some regression. In his report, the Secretary General refers to two recent instances, but is silent on others. We laud his commitment to work with the Commonwealth and the international community on Fiji. We hope that he will use his moral authority to build international opinion against military juntas that have overthrown democratically-elected governments, and do nothing, within the UN, which would either give them any respectability or a reason to believe that the international community had condoned their actions.

International terrorism is the growing menace of our age, battenning on open, liberal, democratic and law-abiding societies. It is a collective challenge to societies everywhere, and can be countered only through cooperative endeavour. In the Millennium Declaration, our leaders committed themselves to concerted action; we hope for the early adoption of the comprehensive convention against terrorism now under discussion at this Assembly. In his report the Secretary General too has recognised terrorism as a direct threat to our collective security; we hope that the Secretariat's reports will focus more sharply than they presently do on international terrorists and the states that sponsor, finance and assist them.

Mr. President,

We agree with the Secretary General that disarmament is a critical element of the United Nations strategy for peace and security and share his assessment that despite some progress in the reduction of nuclear weapons there is deep concern within the international community at the continuing risk posed by such weapons. We are disappointed that his report does not focus on the achievable goal of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. We believe that the United Nations has the foremost responsibility to promote nuclear disarmament, and this should be both articulated and pursued among its highest priorities. The Secretary General's leadership would be crucial in this, as well as in convening quickly the international conference to identify ways to eliminate nuclear dangers.

We share the Secretary General's assessment that the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects is of crucial importance and hope that it would lead to a curb on trafficking in small arms and weapons particularly by or with the connivance or participation of states.

We agree with the Secretary General that sanctions have had an uneven track record in encouraging compliance with Security Council resolutions. We have always believed that sanctions are a blunt instrument which must be sparingly used, and only after the most careful consideration by the international community; we support his call for sanctions regimes to be so designed as to minimise negative effects on civilian populations and neighbouring and other affected countries.

Mr. President,

As highlighted in paragraph 116 of the Report, the lack of adequate resources is the most important challenge facing the provision of humanitarian assistance. The enthusiasm with which theories are developed on IDPs or humanitarian intervention fades when it comes to mobilising humanitarian assistance for those in whose names we undertake these long debates. This is a pity. On IDPs, we agree with the thrust of paragraph 114 that governments have the primary responsibility, and international action must be at their request. We do not share the opinion that some governments might not have the capacity or be willing to discharge their responsibilities. No evidence has been presented for this sweeping charge.

We also do not agree with paragraph 139 that UNDP has a role in "reducing the incidence and impact of complex emergencies". Only activities in natural disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness were transferred to UNDP, in the context of the UN reforms of 1997. Giving UNDP a political role would be unacceptable to most countries, and fatally damage it.

Though the preamble of the Charter enjoins us "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom", the record of the United Nations is mixed. As the Secretary General has highlighted in paragraph 165 of his report, half of the world's population still must try to survive on less than \$2 a day. Some 1.2 billion subsist on less than \$1 a day. Removing their abject poverty must be the highest priority for the United Nations, which will otherwise be irrelevant for them.

Multilateral development cooperation must therefore be the central tenet of the United Nations, more so in the era of globalisation and its pressures. This requires the creation of an enabling international economic environment, transfer of technology, guaranteed special and differential treatment to products and services of export interest of developing countries so that they can benefit from integration in the global trading system and the like. These are the issues on which the UN must act, but where it is currently marginalised. The UN has institutional centrality on this crucial issue for future generations in the developing world and must claim it for the general good. It is a matter of some regret that the Millennium Declaration could not agree on trade facilitation measures in favour of developing countries, and thereby abdicated its responsibility to the WTO, whose failures at Seattle the report notes. We fully support the exhortation contained in paragraphs 167 and 168 on these issues and firmly believe that globally agreed targets of ODA must be achieved at the latest by 2010 if international solidarity is to have any meaning.

The era of globalisation and liberalisation, in which we live today, promised to mankind opportunities of unprecedented prosperity and it was hoped that the free flow of capital, goods and services would bring about sustained and equitable economic growth to all nations. This, however has not happened and is not around the corner. The benefits have spread unevenly, resulting in a world where there is prosperity in a smaller part and poverty in the larger, where disparities in income and wealth between nations and within nations are widening. As the Secretary General has pointed out in paragraph 155 of his report, this has resulted in disquiet that is evident not only in the streets, as manifested in violent protests in Seattle, but in the concerns about the consequences of globalisation that pervade much of the developing world. To enable globalisation to be a powerful and a dynamic force for growth and development, it is essential that its benefits spread more

equitably and the process be made more inclusive. The UN has an institutional responsibility to conduct the discourse on a universally advantageous and corrective course of the process of globalisation.

The Secretary General has correctly pointed out in paragraph 16 that these goals cannot be achieved without effective global institutions. We believe that global financial instability and volatility of capital flows pose serious problems for sustained economic development in developing countries and, therefore, urgent reforms in the international financial architecture must be undertaken. The high level event on Financing for Development to be held in 2001, we hope, will offer the international community an opportunity to comprehensively address the diverse aspects of development, including through the strengthening of international financial institutions for developmental purposes.

India believes that the test of economic growth and development is that it must bring about palpable improvement in the lives of the people. We are heartened to note that while identifying elimination of poverty worldwide as the most important goal of the United Nations, the Secretary General has in Para 168 of his report emphasized the need for a new commitment on the part of the international community to transform paper targets into concrete achievements.

On the environment, while developing countries have done commendable work in the implementation of Agenda 21, the commitments undertaken by developed countries to make available new additional financial resources and environmentally sound technology on concessional terms to developing countries remain unfulfilled. We agree with the assessment of the Secretary General that the Rio+10 review process should provide an opportunity to reassess what progress has been made towards achieving the targets established by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. We also hope that at the Rio+10 meeting the international community will reinvigorate the global partnership needed to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

We have noted from paragraph 187 the work being done by UNEP and UNCTAD in the field of environment and trade. We must caution that this should not in any way promote new conditionalities on trade and assistance.

We support the 10 year initiative on Girls Education launched by UNICEF and the Secretary General and other initiatives such as those on bridging the digital divide, in cooperation with the private sector. However, we must continue to ensure that cooperation with the private sector subserves the agenda and goals of the international community, and respects the basic principle that operational activities should be nationally driven, neutral, impartial, and non-conditional.

We have noted from paragraphs 228 to 241 the work being done for the development of Africa and support such initiatives. However, some important elements have not been highlighted, which we believe deserve special and urgent consideration. These are first and foremost the issue of debt and its servicing; falling commodity prices; return of illegal gains taken away from Africa that lie sequestered in banks of developed countries and the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. Concrete actions on all these fronts would be required if the development of Africa is to be achieved. And, Mr. President, these actions should be those which are required by the African countries and not those that subserve the interest of their partners. As Kalumbi Shangula, the Permanent Secretary of Namibian Health and Social Services recently pointed out, "a fundamental problem for developing countries is that all drugs, not just anti-retrovirals, cost too much". It is this problem of over-priced pharmaceuticals even in the face of public emergency that needs to be addressed and not the issue of extension of bank loans for costly drugs, which only augment the already unsupportable debt burden.

On information, I compliment the Under Secretary General of the Department of Public Information and the Editor of the UN Chronicle for the significant improvements in both the print and electronic versions of the journal. We have also noted, with interest, the initiatives within the Secretariat to take full advantage of modern means of communication. However, as communications become speedier the need for accuracy becomes even more important. Retractions of misleading stories never get the same exposure as the initial article. We therefore stress, as did the Committee on Information at its last meeting, that all information put out by the United Nations must be accurate and truthful.

Finally, Mr. President, I come to the crucial problem of resources. The Secretary General refers more than once to the incompatibility between approved mandates and the resources available for their implementation. When the Secretary General says that he "could do more with less (resources), but only up to a point", we agree; and we agree even more with his appeal to the Assembly not to condemn the UN to operating with a budget frozen in time. We are concerned that, as the report recalls, "the level of unpaid assessments remains unacceptably high". This long-standing problem must be urgently resolved.

In conclusion, Mr. President, I recall the Secretary General's reminder that our task and his is to swiftly translate the Millennium Declaration into reality. It was perhaps apt that, at this first General Assembly of a new century, there should have been a touch of Janus in the choice of the quotation with which he began his address. The paeon to colonialism from which he quoted, Rudyard Kipling's tellingly named "Recessional", is full of poor politics but better poetry, and it has two other lines which we will also do well to recall as we move forward:

Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,

Lest we forget, lest we forget.