

Statement by Ms. Sujata Mehta, Secretary (M&ER), Ministry of External Affairs at
the United Nations General Assembly High Level Thematic Debate on
“Maintenance of International Peace and Security” on October 1, 2015

Mr. Chairman,

India welcomed and supported the initiative of the African Union by which the UN General Assembly decided to hold a high-level thematic debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security as part of the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the United Nations.

The idea of a universal association of humankind to work collectively for the common good goes back thousands of years. It is born of a sense of common humanity, shared opportunity and a shared global fate, an aversion to anarchy and a desire for order.

It was this idea that inspired our nations to come together 70 years ago to form the United Nations - to save future generations from the scourge of war; and to secure a better life for our peoples. Maintenance of international peace and security lies at the heart of the UN Charter. As we look back today, we can take pride in some of its achievements while aware of some notable failures.

On the positive side, the UN has been successful in averting another major war of the kind that engulfed humankind twice in the first half of the 20th century. It has evolved as an inclusive organization, a platform for all nations— big or small – to raise their voices. Today, less than 0.5% of the world population is outside the UN. This is in sharp contrast to its predecessor - the League of Nations – in which nearly half of the world population was not represented.

During the last seven decades, the UN has supported resolution of numerous disputes and conflicts through peaceful means. The blue helmets have become a symbol of peace. India is proud to be largest contributor of peacekeepers in aggregate terms.

Yet the record of the last 70 years is also replete with instances when the UN and its principal organ responsible for maintenance of peace and security – the

Security Council – remained a bystander to conflicts, either unable or unwilling to take any action.

Today, we see the limitations of the UN more obvious than ever before.

The conflicts in the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, and the rise of ISIS have resulted in a refugee crisis of a level not seen since the Second World War. The state of extreme economic deprivation in some parts of the world has compounded this problem.

The world has witnessed the horrific journeys by African and Middle Eastern migrants across the Mediterranean, in search of a better life in Europe. The painful human tragedy of over four million Syrian refugees reminds us of the need to find a lasting solution, which is to stop the war in Syria. It took the painful drowning of a four-year old Syrian child to shake the world into some action.

Terrorism has acquired global dimensions but we are unable to come up with a global response. No nation, how strong and powerful or remotely located, can remain unaffected by this scourge. The phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters has taken this threat to an altogether new level, although India has been a victim of this phenomenon for several decades.

Rapid advancement in technology has enabled socio-economic development of peoples at a pace and scale which was unthinkable in the past. But it has also made our security challenges far more complex and widely dispersed. New threats to international security have emerged in the form of cyber crimes, pandemics, propagation of extremist ideologies and rising intolerance.

The prevailing architecture of the UN has proved to be grossly inadequate in effectively dealing with these challenges.

The UN Security Council is not paying enough attention to maintenance of international peace and security. Instead, we see a tendency to overload the agenda of the Council with issues that are better addressed by other organs of the UN.

Clearly, we cannot continue to do as we have done in the past.

The international community must show greater resolve to counter the scourge of terrorism. The existing international instruments and mechanisms have tried to address this issue in a piecemeal manner. We should work for early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism during the 70th Session of the General Assembly.

Our efforts in this endeavour are also undermined by those who seek to give religious and sectarian colour to conflict situations and use terror, as an instrument of State policy, to pursue their own agenda. We should not allow them to do so. We must also ensure strict compliance with UN Security Council sanctions regime on Terrorism.

UN Peacekeeping Operations require a fresh approach that is driven by a sense of pragmatism and realism. Peacekeeping cannot be a substitute for political solutions. Conflict prevention, rather than managing conflict, needs to be brought to the fore in the work of the UN. Multilateral efforts - and not unilateral action and excessive emphasis on use of force - should guide our quest for peace and security.

Safety and security of peacekeepers is of paramount importance. The mandates of peacekeeping operations should be defined keeping in mind the availability of resources. Troop Contributing Countries should be given a greater say in the decision making process.

India is committed to continue supporting and even strengthening our contribution to the UN peacekeeping operations. We will engage constructively in taking forward the recommendations of the Horta Panel.

However, all these efforts would be meaningless unless we comprehensively reform the principal organ of the UN responsible for peace and security to reflect contemporary geo-political realities. It is ironical that an organization that champions democratic values internationally, itself remains undemocratic in its functioning. Reform of the UN Security Council is one of the most urgent and important tasks before us.

We are happy that during the last one year, we have achieved what we could not achieve over two decades of discussions. We finally have a text to negotiate.

This is a very significant step forward - but still only the first step. We should aim to conclude these negotiations during the 70th Session of the UNGA.

Mr. Chairman,

We really cannot live in a world without an accountable and legitimate vehicle of political leadership. We need to ensure that the organization we established in 1945 remains appropriate for the challenges of today and tomorrow. We need to ensure that the United Nations is a sunrise organization, and not a sunset one.

With this end in mind, I reach out to all of you to propose that we resolve to conclude, within an early timeframe, the reform to which we have all committed. Let us work together to ensure that the UN maintains its capabilities to continue doing what it was envisaged to do at the time of its establishment - to save "generations from the scourge of war"; "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights"; and to promote "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms". Let us keep the United Nations relevant to the times.

I thank you.
