

**STATEMENT BY MR. ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE, PRIME
MINISTER OF INDIA AT THE 58TH SESSION OF THE UN
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON SEPTEMBER 25, 2003**

Mr. President,

We congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the 58th session of the UN General Assembly. We wish you every success in our shared endeavours. You will have our fullest co-operation in your efforts.

As we gather here, in the wake of many momentous events over the past year, it is inevitable that we ponder on some fundamental questions about the role and the relevance of the United Nations.

The United Nations was charged by its Charter 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. The Charter also speaks of our collective determination 'to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security'. There was an implicit conviction that the UN would be stronger than the sum of its constituent member-states. Its unique legitimacy flows from a universal perception that it pursues a larger purpose than the interests of one country or a small group of countries.

This vision of an enlightened multilateralism has not materialised. There have been difficulties and deficiencies in ensuring a world free from strife, a world without war. The United Nations has not always been successful in preventing conflicts or in resolving them.

During the past year, the United Nations encountered further new challenges. We saw the extraordinary inability of the five permanent members of the Security Council to agree on action in respect of Iraq, in spite of complete agreement on basic objectives. Most recently, the brutal terrorist attack on the UN Office in Baghdad struck a body blow at the UN's humanitarian efforts there.

Looking back at events over recent years, we can analyse the successes and failures of the UN in this or that crisis. But it would be more purposeful to reflect on our own commitment to

multilateralism, the extent of its applicability in the real world of today, and the manner in which it can be exercised through the UN. The reality is that international institutions like the UN can only be as effective as its members allow it to be.

Our reflections on the UN should focus on three key aspects:

- First, we need to introspect on some of the assumptions that have been made over the years on the will and reach of the United Nations. In the euphoria after the Cold War, there was a misplaced notion that the UN could solve every problem anywhere. Its enthusiasm and proactive stance on many issues reflected laudable intentions. But we soon realised that the UN does not possess magical powers to solve every crisis in all parts of the globe, or to change overnight the motivation of leaders and communities around the world. We need to clearly recognise, with a sense of realism, the limits to what the UN can achieve, and the changes of form and function required for it to play an optimal role in today's world.
- Second, the Iraq issue has inevitably generated a debate on the functioning and the efficacy of the Security Council and of the UN itself. Over the decades, the UN membership has grown enormously. The scope of its activities has expanded greatly, with new specialised agencies and new programmes. But in the political and security dimensions of its activities, the United Nations has not kept pace with the changes in the world. For the Security Council to represent genuine multilateralism in its decisions and actions, its membership must reflect current world realities. Most UN members today recognise the need for an enlarged and restructured Security Council, with more developing countries as permanent and non-permanent members. The permanent members guard their exclusivity. Some states with weak claims want to ensure that others do not enter the Council as permanent members. This combination of complacency and negativism has to be countered with a strong political will. The recent crises warn us that until the UN Security Council is reformed and restructured, its decisions cannot reflect truly the collective will of the community of nations.
- Third, even after such reform, the Security Council would have to evolve suitable decision-making mechanisms, which ensure better representation of the collective will of the international community. How can multilateralism be genuinely implemented? A single veto is an anachronism in today's world. On the other hand, the requirement of unanimity can sabotage imperative actions. A simple majority vote may not be sufficiently representative for major issues of gravity. Should we aim for the highest common factor, or should we settle for the lowest common denominator? National experiences in democratic countries provide usable models of mechanisms, which could specify the extent of support required, depending on the impact of action to be taken.

The Secretary General has rightly emphasised the urgency for reform of the institutions and processes of the United Nations. We encourage his efforts in this direction. We should seek to implement these reforms within a specified time frame.

Mr President,

The Iraq issue continues to present a major challenge to the United Nations. At this point in time, it is not very productive to linger on the past. Our thoughts and concerns should be about the suffering of the people of Iraq. It is imperative that the people of Iraq should be empowered to determine their own future, to rebuild their nation.

The immediate priorities are ensuring security and stability, restoration of basic facilities and infrastructure, and a roadmap of political processes for a representative Iraqi government. It is clear that the UN has a crucial role to play in this process of political and economic reconstruction of that country. This has been acknowledged both by those who had opposed military action and by those who did not seek specific UN endorsement for it.

Mr President,

One issue on which the UN showed remarkable unanimity after 9/11 was global terrorism. Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1456 were unequivocal in condemning all forms of terrorism and in calling for united action against support, shelter, sponsorship, arming, training and financing for terrorism or terrorists.

Unfortunately, the solidarity in words has not translated into coherent and effective action. Terrorist acts continue to shatter our peace: from Mombasa to Moscow; from Baghdad to Bali. India has had more than its share in various parts of the country. The global coalition against terrorism has registered successes in Afghanistan, but has not been able to extend this elsewhere. Some of its members are themselves part of the problem. We are sometimes led into semantics about the definition of terrorism. The search for "root causes" or imaginary "freedom struggles" provides alibis for the killing of innocent men, women and children.

There is a lot that the UN can do to carry forward the war against international terrorism. Its Counter Terrorism Committee should develop measures to ensure compliance by member-states of their obligations under UNSCR 1373 and 1456. We should have credible multilateral instruments to identify states that contravene these Resolutions. Multilateral mechanisms must be created to detect and choke off international financial flows to terrorists and terrorist organisations.

A much better international system of information exchange and intelligence sharing needs to be devised to prevent terrorists from

evading capture, simply by crossing national borders. No state should be allowed to profess partnership with the global coalition against terror, while continuing to aid, abet and sponsor terrorism. To condone such double standards is to contribute to multiplying terrorism.

Yesterday, the President of Pakistan chose this august assembly to make a public admission for the first time that Pakistan is sponsoring terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir. After claiming that there is an indigenous struggle in Kashmir, he has offered to encourage a general cessation of violence within Kashmir, in return for "reciprocal obligations and restraints".

We totally refuse to let terrorism become a tool of blackmail. Just as the world did not negotiate with Al-Qaida or the Taliban, we shall not negotiate with terrorism.

If we do so, we would be betraying the people of Jammu & Kashmir, who defied a most ferocious campaign of violence and intimidation sponsored from across our borders, and participated in an election, which has been universally hailed as free and fair. This was an unequivocal expression of both determination and self-determination.

When the cross-border terrorism stops – or when we eradicate it – we can have a dialogue with Pakistan on the other issues between us.

While on this subject, I would also like to point out to the President of Pakistan that he should not confuse the legitimate aspiration for equality of nations with outmoded concepts of military parity.

Mr President,

We should be particularly concerned at the various recent revelations about clandestine transfers of weapons of mass destruction and their technologies. We face the frightening prospect of these weapons and technologies falling into the hands of terrorists. Surely something needs to be done about the helplessness of international regimes in preventing such transactions, which clearly threaten international security. The same regimes expend considerable energy in imposing a variety of discriminatory technology-denial restrictions on responsible states.

Mr President,

Our preoccupation with terrorism should not dilute our commitment to tackle the non-military threats to human and international security. We have to sustain the fight against trafficking in narcotic drugs, human beings and small arms; the pandemic of HIV/AIDS; diseases like malaria and tuberculosis that

grip developing countries and the degradation of our common environment. Food security, energy security and health security are important goals.

The countries of the North and of the South – the developed, developing, and transition economies – must resume their dialogue to build a better world for the present and future generations. For the agenda of globalization, Cancun was a disappointment. Significant progress was made at Johannesburg towards realisation of sustainable development, but the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change remains stalled. The Bio-diversity Convention has not yielded any tangible benefits to the world's poor.

International economic relations continue to be characterised by inequities and inequalities. Globalisation has helped sections of the international economy, including some developing countries. However, large communities have been left outside its pale. It has engendered economic crises and instability in several developing countries, which have sharply increased poverty.

Poverty is multidimensional. It extends beyond money incomes to education, health care, skills enhancement, political participation at all levels from the local to the global, access to natural resources, clean water and air, and advancement of one's own culture and social organisation.

Poverty alleviation requires resources on a far greater scale than now available. Globalization itself constrains developing country governments in raising public resources for poverty alleviation. The promise of the climate change and biodiversity treaties to raise significant resources for investment and technology transfer is yet unrealised. The resources of multilateral and bilateral development agencies are limited by the failure of industrialised countries to enhance development budgets.

Therefore, if the current regimes of globalization and sustainable development are to be expanded – or even to survive – they must be directly harnessed to provide the necessary resources for poverty alleviation. In fact, all international agreements and initiatives affecting developing countries have to be evaluated by their impact on poverty.

Developing countries need to coordinate their positions in international negotiations to promote the adoption of regimes, which would help poverty alleviation. The India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum, which was established earlier this year, is an effort in this direction.

Mr President,

We in the developing countries do not have the luxury of time. Political compulsions force us to meet the aspirations of our people

quickly even as we subject ourselves to newer and more rigid international standards and norms. We owe it to our future generations to make strong efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals. There is a mutuality of interest in this between the developed and the developing countries. Global interdependence today means that economic disasters in developing countries could create a backlash on developed countries. We hope the world will act in this spirit of enlightened self-interest.

Thank you.

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