

*Agenda Item 100: Globalisation and Interdependence*

*Statement by Hon'ble Mr. S.S. Palanimanickam, MP*

*Chairman, Standing Committee on Agriculture,*

*on October 24, 2000*

---

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, we associate ourselves with the statement delivered by Nigeria as the Chairman of the Group of 77. We also thank the Secretariat for the comprehensive nature of the documents (A/55/381 and A/55/75) before us.

In speaking on the role of the United Nations in promoting development in the context of globalisation and inter-dependence, we should first recall that the Millennium Declaration noted that "the central challenge we face today is to ensure that globalisation becomes a positive force for all the world's people". Globalisation -- done right -- that is supportive of social and economic developmental objectives of developing countries, is what we need. The choice is not between globalisation and isolation; but a discussion is required on the terms on which globalisation would progress. If globalisation is to be meaningful, it cannot be driven purely by the profit motive, through increases in international trade or financial flows. It must serve the objectives of Article 55 of the Charter, which laid down that "the United Nations shall promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development". Either the 21st century will continue to produce increasingly divided societies and expanding gaps between and within nations, or we can resolve to ensure that economies, local, national and global, increasingly serve their communities. The welfare of people and the full development of their potential must be the cornerstone of globalisation. It must be, and be perceived to be, an expression of international commitment and solidarity to work together to build a system, a new global human order, which, over and above politics and economy, would have universal ethics as its cornerstone. It must be securely anchored in, and promote, the fundamental values essential to international relations in the 21st century that have been so clearly outlined in the Millennium Declaration.

We have studied, with a great deal of interest, the historical recapitulation of major developments since 1945 in the global economic, financial and trade spheres contained in Part II of the Report of the Secretary General, before us. While it clearly brings out the problems encountered so far and hints at the reasons which impeded their solution, we regret that it does not provide any concrete recommendations or forward-looking suggestions for the future. This is not a failure of the Secretariat alone. We also deeply regret, that despite proposals put forward by India, the Millennium Declaration did not move the debate on international trade issues forward, specially on those issues of great interest to developing countries as they embrace market driven paths to development. These are important issues, and, if the United Nations does not focus on the need to make the international trade, financial and monetary system supportive of the developmental needs of developing countries, its relevance, in the years to come, might be severely diminished.

However, we need to recall that human beings have interacted with each other for millennia. The difference in today's globalisation lies in its rapidity, the new communication technologies which underpin it, surplus capital in search of the most economically profitable investment opportunity, almost hurricane-like in its ability to destroy lives, jobs, traditions and communities, which drives it.

It would be a dull world where new ideas, concepts, gadgets and technology did not capture the headlines and our imagination. However, the fascination with the new should not be at the cost of what is tested and what is required. The need is not to choose between "brick" and "click" economies, but rather to build both of them together. The new technology must surely flourish and some of its users and proponents will too. But mostly, the digital revolution represents an opportunity for creating wealth to spend it in the old economy. It is a machinery, primarily for the satisfaction of other needs. The new means are just more efficient paths to development, which in a holistic sense must mean freedom from all types of want, and an exclusive focus on new technologies alone will not serve this purpose.

India has been in the vanguard of the knowledge revolution. Information technology and knowledge-intensive industries including bio-technology, communications, space technology, as also entertainment, communications and services, have taken root. Our experience in this sector has evoked a considerable degree of interest and been the subject of much commentary, within and outside the United Nations. We regard information technology as a facilitator and enabler of enormous potentiality, adding value to nearly all sectors of national activity. Advances in information technology offer a gateway, not only for economic growth but for meeting the goals of the crucial social sector. In its fully convergent form in compassing various modes of information delivery, - the print media, radio and television, computer and Internet, - it touches the lives of every one. Certainly, information technology is no panacea for all developmental challenges: the real challenge lies in enhancing its positive impact on broader developmental goals. It is our strong belief that information technology to be successful must be pro-people and pro-development, which can only happen if it reaches out to the masses, with appropriate and useable local content, and, therefore, we, in India, have set for ourselves the ambitious target of IT for All by 2008.

We fully share the Secretary General's views that actions to promote the use of information and communication technologies must be taken on several fronts. While the list of areas requiring cooperative action would of necessity, be quite long, issues of connectivity, provision of adequate bandwidth, and development of usable local content, must surely be among the top priorities. It may be true that technology is somewhat less important than the information it carries, but this should not imply the marginalisation of the crucial issues of technology transfer to the developing countries, from the agenda of the international community. Even in the field of ICT, technology in many cases is a content-determinator. Furthermore, many technologies, especially in the ICT field, that are required by the developing countries, are denied through the application of unilateral dual-use technology control regimes. The calls for a universal agreement, under the auspices of the United Nations, negotiated in an open, transparent and inclusive manner, to promote the transfer of such dual-use technologies for peaceful purposes, have been in vain. ICT-led globalisation must be based on a free flow of ideas that all democracies espouse, and should not be reminiscent of the centralised autocratic or oligarchic control regimes, that we hope

died with the twentieth century. We are, therefore, perplexed that none of the recommendations put forward in the report of the Secretary General deal with the most important role of the United Nations in facilitating the transfer of technology and knowledge. We also do not share the view expressed in paragraph 16 that UN should focus less on the transfer of technologies and more on factors of access and use of ICT, more so, because the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the High Level Segment of the Economic and Social Council, in its paragraph 17 (g) had clearly called upon funds, programmes and specialised agencies of the UN system to urgently, and I quote, *“facilitate the transfer of information and communication technologies, in particular to developing countries”*. We would strongly urge the United Nations to urgently focus on this critical issue instead of devoting inordinate amounts of precious time on so-called policy advice and advocacy functions outlined in the recommendations put forward in the report. We also believe that the need of the hour is to implement the recommendations contained in the ECOSOC Ministerial Declaration, not to think of steps additional to those contained in it. Action, and not continued policy analysis is what we need.

We fully share the view of the Secretary General that knowledge has become a source of competitive advantage and is increasingly embedded within the production process. In fact, a paradigm shift has occurred, from being concentrated in the manufacturing sector, technology now focuses on all wealth-producing activities; from the pursuit of tangible technology to both technology and know-how; from the aim of technological advances being radical innovations and patentable, saleable products, to both radical and incremental innovations, those that can be commercialised and those that make a difference to results but cannot be sold as such; from the development of technology being an exclusive preserve of research and development institutions to such development being undertaken by all members of the society; in sum, from perceiving innovation as a “job” in a specialised organisation, to viewing innovativeness as a way of living and working in the Knowledge Society. However, we should not confuse the availability of vast quantities of information with knowledge; the words of T.S. Eliot are worth recalling:

*“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?”*

*Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?”*

Globalisation can produce a rich diversity with the sharing of ideas, views and cultures, though there is no guarantee that it will not be used to dominate but to liberate; not to exploit but to assist; not to divide but unite. We must take concerted action at the international level to effectively counter the use of information technology by the “global bads” -- for terrorism, money laundering, drug trafficking, cybercrime, fraud and so on. As we move away from an economy where success was determined solely by capital, cheap labour, abundance of raw material, and manufacturing technologies, towards one that is knowledge-intensive, the monopoly and use of information may easily become a frightening weapon of division, domination, oppression, promotion of narrow-nationalisms and hatred. This must be avoided at all costs.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, a holistic and comprehensive approach to globalisation, maximising the advantages that could accrue to the developing nations, and reducing, if not eliminating its dangers, is what is required and must be promoted.