

Statement by Mr. V.K. Nambiar, Permanent Representative on Agenda Item 55: Revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly; Agenda Item 57: UN reform: measures and proposals; Agenda Item 58: Restructuring and Revitalisation of the UN in the economic, social and related fields; and Agenda Item 59: Strengthening of the UN system at the 58th Session of the UN General Assembly on October 28, 2003

Mr. President,

My delegation is pleased to participate in this debate. We thank the Secretary-General for the various reports presented under the respective agenda items. We also express our appreciation to Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Frechette, for her introductory statement.

The broader issues outlining the Non-Aligned position have already been expressed by Algeria and have my delegation's support.

We congratulate you, Mr. President, for your personal commitment to the process of revitalisation of the General Assembly. In the few weeks that you have presided over the General Assembly, you have demonstrated, by personal example, your determination to restore the prestige and authority of the General Assembly. We wish you every success in this endeavour and assure you of the fullest cooperation of the Indian delegation.

My delegation has maintained that in reform and revitalisation we cannot expect to achieve remarkable results overnight. There are no magic solutions. Where we are called upon to deal with sensitive political questions and issues perceived by member States as impinging on their core national interests, change will necessarily be slow and measured. We need to build on areas of agreement step by step, block by block. A useful beginning can be made by a quick review of the revitalisation exercise undertaken so far and the state of implementation or non-implementation of the resolutions already adopted.

Mr. President,

India's broad political support to the reform process is premised on the object of enhancing the organisation's effectiveness to make it more responsive to the priorities of

the member States, particularly for the developing countries that constitute the vast majority of its membership.

Our support to the Secretary-General's initiative in setting up a high-level panel of eminent personalities to report on the threats and challenges faced by the UN and the changes necessary in its institutions and processes is also premised on the same objective. We hope the inter-governmental consideration of the report and its recommendations will provide us an opportunity to take a holistic view of the entire processes so that reforms in different parts of the UN system move in the same direction and prove enduring in the long run.

The litmus test of any reform exercise would be whether it increases the Organisation's ability to assist the developing countries in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and other targets agreed upon at the major UN conferences and summits. The UN will be strengthened if and when it contributes effectively to the efforts of the developing countries in the implementation of these outcomes. This must also involve monitoring the extent to which developed countries are demonstrating shared responsibility by fulfilling the commitments and obligations, especially in reaching the agreed target of official development assistance through provision of additional financial resources, transfer of technology, debt relief, market access and move towards greater voice for the developing countries in international, monetary and trade institutions. The other major test of the reform exercise will be greater effectiveness in the UN's ability to deal with the 'global bads': international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction including nuclear disarmament, and trans-national organised crime including the trafficking in narcotic drugs, humans and arms.

Mr. President,

In attempting to revitalise the work of the General Assembly, we must underline first of all the question of its core competence. The General Assembly is meant to be the highest body in the organisation to deliberate and review policy. It is not expected to function as an executive or judiciary. As its presiding officer the President must be able to enhance the effective performance of this function in the interest of the broad membership of the Assembly. In this era of cross-cutting concerns we must guard against an overly zealous approach for this body to proceed intrusively into areas which are essentially the core competence of other bodies in the UN system even as we avoid a surrender of its remit to other bodies, including the Security Council or the Secretariat.

In practical terms, while the interactions between the General Assembly and the Economic & Social Council have given rise to few difficulties, the relationship between the Assembly and the Security Council does occasionally give rise to anomalies in terms of issues taken up for consideration and their treatment. Also the relative roles of the presiding officers of the two organs need clarification. We need to remember that the President of the General Assembly does not have authority to represent the collective opinion of the General Assembly except when he is explicitly authorised to do so by the General Assembly itself. The UN Charter does not confer any authority on the President in substantive matters.

While saying this there is no denying the need for the office of the President to be strengthened for the effective and orderly conduct of the Assembly's business. Even without waiting for a lengthy and time-consuming exercise, we could move rapidly in several areas. For example, the office of the President could easily be strengthened with the provision of a small number of additional posts. The implementation of this measure should not depend on the relative alacrity of the Secretariat's response to this as compared to other more attractive demands upon it. Similarly, the Assembly needs to undertake a thorough review not only of the agenda and programme of work of the plenary and the Main Committees, but also look at methods of work of the plenary and the Main Committees with a view to improving them and enhancing their effectiveness. The General Committee or equivalent body could be entrusted with functions similar to those of the Bureau of a Main Committee.

If there is consensus on reforming the agenda, member States would be willing to explore ways in which discussions could be organised around particular themes and sub-themes in the work of the Main Committees. Similarly, member States would be open to the idea of designating a theme for the general debate in the plenary, as long as they are in a position to address issues of concern to them.

There has been some talk of rationalising the number, length and language of resolutions of the General Assembly. Both as the principal deliberative organ and in terms of its policy-making function, it is inevitable that some of the resolutions of the General Assembly will contain declaratory language. However, when it comes to resolutions concerning the implementation of programmes of action or operational activities, it should be possible, in our view, to rationalise the language of resolutions and to simplify them so that the focus would be on their operational content. This would also help in overseeing and reviewing implementation of the resolutions.

Another area that lends itself to early examination and agreement is that of the strict observance of the rules of procedure. The Main Committees seem to have developed work cultures of their own and often display scant respect for the established rules of procedure. This is not conscionable and it is important that this area is looked into more closely. At the same time, we need to be open to the idea of reviewing the rules of procedure and to adapt them to modern times. To illustrate this point, the General Assembly would save valuable time and resources if we were to decide that delegations would be free to circulate a longer version of their statement but read only, say, the executive summary as long as it is assured that the longer version will go into the records. However, as long as the provisional verbatim records of the General Assembly contain only what is actually spoken, this will not be possible.

There is often talk of the need to make the General Assembly proceedings more "interesting" and "attractive". This is sought to be achieved by organising several high-profile 'parallel' events such as interactive dialogues, panel discussions and seminars. One of the stated objectives is to enhance interaction with the civil society, including non-governmental organisations, the academia and the private sector. While there is nothing intrinsically objectionable in this idea, we wish to underscore the inter-governmental character of the Organisation. Any efforts to enhance interaction with the

civil society should be done in a manner that increases the quality of inter-governmental decision-making.

Mr. President,

The Secretariat deserves our praise for recommending elimination of several reports, meetings and other activities of marginal utility. Many of the reports for the 58th session were received well within the prescribed limit. We are grateful for this.

There are several other areas which need to be explored for reducing the number of meetings and reports, reducing the number of resolutions, and have sunset provisions for both new mandates and existing activities. Without doubt, these will require further discussions. We would only like to underline that reducing the volume of work and managing time and resources efficiently and effectively is not only a task for the Secretariat but also for member States. A degree of self-discipline has to be exercised by member States before rushing forth with new initiatives and resolutions every year.

Mr. President,

The Secretary-General has outlined some of the measures being undertaken in his report on status of implementation of actions in response to General Assembly resolution 57/300, in document A/58/351.

We trust that the consultations being held by the High Commissioner for Human Rights will encompass not only the members of the Commission on Human Rights but non-members of the Commission as well. We would emphasise the need for the process to be inclusive so that no impression is given of agreeing on matters in exclusive groupings. We hope the exercise will reduce the burden on reporting requirements, particularly on the developing countries. We would be open to consider guidelines for an 'expanded core document' as long as it is understood that such a document would reduce the reporting burden, address the issue of backlog, avoid the repetition of details and obviate the need for replicating the contents of the core document in individual reports to treaty bodies, or effectively expand the obligations of States Parties to the core covenants. We call for more consultations with member States in the matter.

The information provided in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the system of special procedures raises several points of concern. We are not clear as to whether the consultations initiated by OHCHR on improving the special procedures mechanisms are inclusive and wide-ranging. We believe that emphasis should be on greater co-ordination, avoiding duplication and overlapping, and checking the tendency of special procedures to exceed their mandates, which seems to be happening rather too frequently. We do not favour the idea of joint initiatives, including joint urgent appeals, statements, press releases and communications, by special procedures. This is because, in our view, the mandates of the special procedures are different and distinct. We do not see the need for a feasibility study for enhancing the 'dissemination' of findings and recommendations of special procedures. We believe that such dissemination should be in the form of submission of the report to the Commission on

Human Rights. After all the special procedures are appointees of the Commission. We also do not, for example, see any useful purpose served by interaction between special procedures mechanisms and the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council.

We call on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to implement fully the recommendations made by the Office of Internal Oversight services [OIOS] after the management review. These recommendations, in our view, are comprehensive, focussed and merit full and effective implementation. Any expansion in the activities of OHCHR has to be commensurate with its budgetary resources, not on the basis extra-budgetary funding.

Mr. President,

We note the on-going work on simplification and harmonisation of programming tools and the strengthening of the Resident Coordinator system. These efforts will, we hope, result in a reduction of transaction costs for developing countries and also enhance country ownership. It is important that specific proposals developed consequent to the policy guidance contained in General Assembly resolution 57/300 are submitted for approval by the Executive Boards of the Funds and Programmes.

The report of the Secretary General has provided us with the recommendations of the Joint Working Group of the Secretariat on Transition Issues. This Group was to review a range of UN responses in post-conflict situations. The Group has recommended the facilitation of links among the political, peacekeeping and operational wings of the UN in order to address the variance in mandates for different UN offices at a given location. The underlying premise seems to be that the UN response cannot be effective if it is fragmented and that, therefore, those dealing with humanitarian assistance, those dealing with security, those dealing with human rights and those dealing with development should deliver an integrated response.

As we have reiterated on a number of occasions, there are several risks associated with such an approach. There is a predisposition in some quarters to see transition issues as opportunities to fundamentally transform the social mores, recast economic priorities and influence political dynamics of such post-conflict societies. We find it necessary to sound the caution that the United Nations, if it collaborates with such efforts, could jeopardise its status as a trusted partner of developing countries. It is most important for the United Nations to respect the differences in its roles in peacekeeping, in the protection and promotion of human rights, in fostering economic and social development, and in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. The delivery or coordination of assistance needs to be in a manner which clearly conforms to the principles of development assistance and humanitarian assistance which have been clearly established by the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The current session of the General Assembly will deliberate far reaching reform of the planning and budgetary process. There is widespread recognition that these processes can be made more efficient and effective, with added value to both Member

States and to the Secretariat. While it is important to retain the inter-governmental nature of these processes, we need, at the same time, to ensure that inter-governmental review is more effective and relevant and provides better guidance to the Secretariat. This is a matter of crucial importance. While there is need for urgency, however, given the long-term implications for the Organisation, we must also avoid hasty or half-cooked conclusions.

Mr. President,

These are some preliminary views of the Indian delegation on the cluster of issues under debate today. We look forward to working with other delegations in the upcoming discussions and consultations under these items.

Thank you, Mr. President.

[BACK TO TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)