

Agenda Item 59: Question of Equitable Representation on and increase in the membership of the UN Security Council and related matters

Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on November 16, 2000

Mr. President,

The debate on this subject has now become a hardy annual, which perhaps was not the intent of the membership when the resolution leading to a consideration of this subject was moved unanimously. The consensus resolution was adopted because a need was felt to reform the Security Council, including its archaic composition, to make it more reflective of the vastly expanded membership and responsive to the world today. We can, however, in resuming the debate, take both encouragement and direction from the solemn resolve of our Heads of State and Government at the recently concluded Millennium Summit in New York "to intensify our efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects". The need for Security Council reform was also stressed by an overwhelming majority of leaders during the Summit and in the general debate of this Millennium Assembly. It is, therefore, more incumbent upon us to persevere and address this vital issue with all the commitment and seriousness it deserves. Seven years of deliberations on the subject has not succeeded in producing general agreement. At the dawn of a new century we continue with an unrepresentative Council that has become an anachronism and which continues to conduct its business by superannuated and non-transparent working methods. In these circumstances, it is idle to believe that the Security Council can be considered equipped to discharge its primary responsibility in the maintenance of international peace and security to the satisfaction of the members of this organization, as the Council is bound to do under Article 24 of the Charter. The Council's actions cannot be seen to be commanding a legitimacy which its own composition and working methods do not possess.

There is little disagreement among member states that the Council requires reform to better reflect current global realities, which have somewhat superseded those obtaining in 1945. A measure that imparts legitimacy and balance to the Council and which reflects contemporary reality would restore the Council's credibility and equip it to confront the challenges of our times. While prescriptions have varied, it would not be wise to reflect interminably on the cure for the disorder: they should be comprehensive but administered in reasonable time. A magic cure is not in our possession, but the affirmation of our leaders is the clearest possible indication that there exists a vast reservoir of political will and conviction and takes us forward. A comprehensive package, which includes expansion of the Council's membership, improvement in its working method and reform of its decision-making process, can bring this renewal.

Piecemeal and partial approaches that do not take into account the concerns of developing countries, the vast majority of the membership, would perpetuate the unrepresentative character of the Council and erode its credibility even further. Developing countries cannot continue to be marginalised when the Council's actions are primarily focussed on them and the manifold impact of these actions are felt by them. The Non-Aligned Movement, which is the single largest group of member states in the UN, continues to be unrepresented in the category of permanent members of the Council. This aberration

needs correction. There is also need for greater representation of NAM in the non-permanent category.

With the increasing trend of the Council pronouncing and impinging upon the functions of other organs of UN, the need for its reform and expansion becomes reinforced. The Council will now interpose itself in "integrated peace operations", where instruments of development, poverty alleviation, combating hunger and disease and addressing core social challenges are being amalgamated to give the Council sharper tools to pursue its remit of maintaining international peace and security. Notwithstanding the questionable validity of the liberal interpretation behind the Council's expanded role in the pursuit of international peace and security, it is clear that the objects of the Council's attention would be the vast majority of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, who would have peripheral say in the formulation of the Council's mandate that would determine the activities of a host of UN and other bodies, including the Bretton Woods institutions. Developing countries cannot be expected to be bystanders applauding the Council's actions from the sidelines. Non-participation by developing countries in their own affairs and destiny will hopefully remain a vestige of the unlamented past.

We should not yield to the temptation of drift and the path of least resistance, which would entail preservation of the status quo, or of undertaking cosmetic reforms which bring no resolution to the core problem. We have stated time and again that partial solutions are no solutions at all and would be a disservice to the membership of the organisation.

Both Cluster I and Cluster II issues are equally important and have to be addressed together. NAM has consistently argued that expansion and reform of the Security Council should be integral parts of a common package. Any attempt at securing a partial advance will contradict not only the NAM position but also the mandate of the General Assembly, which enjoins us to consider all aspects of the question of the increase in membership of the Council and to effectively appraise other matters related to the reform of the Council. We are also of the opinion that creating additional categories of membership based on rotation would not meet the essential aspirations of developing countries as they would then be relegated to a subsidiary and discriminatory status. In this regard, however, we continue to respect the position of the OAU. As the African group has itself made clear, their preference is not intended to serve as a model for others.

Mr President,

As we have said earlier, we believe that any increase in permanent membership should be guided by objective, and not subjective, selective or arbitrary criteria. We are confident that the membership as a whole will see this historic responsibility before it in this light. The manner of selection of new permanent members should be uniform. All new permanent members should be designated together by the General Assembly, which is the only forum which can elect them. There should be no restrictions imposed on the role or authority of the General Assembly in this regard.

We support the concept of periodic review of an enlarged Council as long as such an exercise has universal application and promotes greater accountability and responsibility among members of the Council.

India's commitment to all aspects of the organisation's work is total and immutable. We continue to have the confidence that on any objective grounds, criteria and belief in strengthening the work of the Council, the membership would conclude that India possesses the necessary attributes for permanent membership of an expanded Security Council, whenever the membership finds this decision posed before it.

We look forward to the resumption of deliberations in the Open Ended Working Group next year with a view to advancing discussions on Security Council reform. We must not be distracted from the goal set out for us by our leaders. General agreement is possible with the vast majority of the membership investing belief in and according priority to achieving a representative Council, whose working methods and decision making are both transparent and promote the collective aspirations of the general membership. We are confident that this is the dominant sentiment within the membership. We have great faith in your leadership, Mr President, and in your guiding our deliberations in the direction of collective interest.