

Statement by

Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin, Permanent Representative

on Report of the Secretary-General on the Work of the Organisation

United Nations General Assembly

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Madam President,

The General Debate always provides an unparalleled opportunity to hear from our leaders about what they think is the state of the world and the ability of the organization to handle the challenges we confront.

Hence I begin by drawing upon what we heard. In myriad ways, we heard that armed conflicts and terrorism are continuing to expand alarmingly; large movements of peoples fleeing conflicts are increasingly straining societies; humanitarian nightmares are playing out with alarming repetition; climate change events are becoming more regular; environmental challenges are becoming more urgent; multiple ailments are hamstringing efforts to improve global health; technological innovation is driving economies, societies and individual responses into uncharted territories in a networked world even while development concerns remain paramount for the vast majority of the world's population.

We also heard clearly that the uneven impacts of these cataclysmic changes are causing enormous discontent and all this churning is testing multilateralism as never before.

We acknowledge that the Secretary General has embarked upon re-shaping the organizational structures of the United Nations Secretariat to improve its ability to deliver better in times of change. We welcome his personal engagement in guiding this process. We will support the Secretary General in the implementation of these proposals for change, including through voluntary contributions, as appropriate.

These changes, however, address but a small aspect of the need for change in the broader firmament. A much larger set of issues confront us and need to be tackled, if we have to stay contextual. As the Secretary General said, 21st century challenges are outpacing 20th century institutions and mindsets.

To his credit, the Secretary General in his address to the General Assembly last month candidly accepted that all the 7 challenges he outlined at the start of the 72nd session in 2017 remained unresolved to date even as we have moved into the 73rd session. These are symbolic of the need for changed mindsets.

Madam President,

It is obvious that the world is awash with challenges that the current institutional arrangements are ill equipped to handle. For example, new technologies are increasingly changing the nature and dynamics of international conflict. Cyberwarfare, unmanned aerial drones, and combat robots are just three instances of

technological change shaping the future of warfare and raising profound ethical and normative questions.

Similarly, there is no global approach in dealing with basic issues regarding frontier technologies. For example, even as the internet is becoming ubiquitous what rights do individuals have to privacy? How should tensions between individual liberties and collective security be mitigated?

Neither is the General Assembly addressing the developmental and normative aspects nor is the Security Council addressing the peace & security implications. This is but one of the many new areas where international mechanisms for cooperation and collaboration are either weak or incomplete or non-existent. We therefore, welcome the Secretary General's initiative to establish the High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation. The outcome of the Panel, we hope, would help us better understand and respond to exponential technologies.

As in the case of frontier technologies, so in other areas such as climatic shifts, debt sustainability, counter terrorism, illicit financial flows and tackling pandemics - to name just a few - we should be considering scenarios and preparing plans to prevent upheavals and taking stronger steps to mitigate risks.

Many of these problems require continuous attention rather than one-shot solutions. To counter terrorism, for example, we need to establish a reliable and efficient set of controls for monitoring borders and financial flows. Such efforts will work only if appropriate standards are widely adopted and cooperation in implementing them becomes routine.

Madam President,

Global cooperation and collaboration have been critical to the impressive expansion of well-being over the past 70 years. However, proliferating global problems demand new narratives, and new forms of cooperation. For example, we will need international cooperation of a nature and kind that we may not have thought of before, to promote Climate Action required by the findings of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) Report, released earlier today.

Madam President,

We cannot focus merely on exterminating bugs while allowing life-threatening wild beasts to roam free. We cannot spend our time in clearing the weeds, oblivious to the growth of the jungle all around us. If we do so, we will be nursing an establishment that has declined almost to the vanishing point with respect to overarching challenges that states acting on their own cannot hope to overcome.

Madam President,

Updating the current architecture of international institutions, which are so out of sync with the modern world, is imperative if new global challenges are to be met

Nowhere is this need for common purpose required more than in reforming the Security Council. Today, we have a Council which is all about primacy but with little purpose. We need to fix the flaws. We need to do it before it is too late. We need to do so before the technologies of the future sharpen the conflicts of the past, while the Council remains nursing its self-inflicted wounds of diminishing relevance.

We cannot pose as guardians of a status quo that no longer exists. To use a pretty metaphor, the state of our times is “one great blooming, buzzing confusion”, akin to the world of a new born. We need to undertake a new journey towards a reformed and reinvigorated multilateral system. Whether we do so or not will determine the destiny of this organisation. It is a decision that all of us who see the benefits of multilateralism will need to take, if we desire to stem the tide against it.

I thank you, Madam President.