

Statement by
Ambassador Syed Akbaruddin
Permanent Representative

On
Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly

United Nations General Assembly

15 November 2018

Madam President,

Thank you for being here today and setting the tone for the debate on this important issue of Revitalisation of the General Assembly.

2. India aligns itself with the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

3. We extend our appreciation to the Permanent Representatives of Croatia and Colombia for ably steering the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group during the previous session and congratulate the Permanent Representatives of Jordan and the Slovak Republic on their appointment as Co-Chairs for this session. My delegation will extend its full support to them for a productive outcome.

Madam President,

4. The legitimacy of the General Assembly stems from its universality. It is the most inclusive forum, where states can come together based on sovereign equality to share burdens, address common problems, and seize common opportunities. The principal purpose of the General Assembly is not to usurp the role of sovereign states, but to enable all states to serve their peoples better by

working together. No other global institution can match its representative character and the credibility that it derives from such representativeness.

5. Let us not forget that at the outset, the General Assembly demonstrated leadership in global agenda-setting, while dealing with complex challenges.

- The first issue the General Assembly addressed at its first session in January 1946 related to the “problems raised by the discovery of atomic energy”. The first resolution that the General Assembly adopted on the basis of the report, submitted by your compatriot Mr. Viteri Lafronte of Ecuador, called for a Commission to make recommendations, inter-alia, “for the elimination from national armaments of atomic weapons and of all other major weapons adaptable to mass destruction.”
- That same year, 1946, the General Assembly, based on an initiative of my own country, India, started addressing the global struggle for “equality of opportunity for all races against the doctrine of racial discrimination”, then germinating in South Africa.

6. These examples testify to the ambition and far-sighted nature of deliberations of the General Assembly, years before any other organ of the UN started tackling them.

7. Since that formative period, the General Assembly can count many agenda-setting achievements on issues ranging from sustainable development, to climate change, to oceans, to global health, to migration.

8. However, we need to acknowledge that our collective record as the General Assembly is mixed. Just as generals too often refight their last war, we diplomats are struggling to overcome our legacy issues, even as the variety and intricacy of new demands for international cooperation has expanded.

9. Today, there is a proliferation of new transnational threats such as terrorism requiring comprehensive cooperation; accelerating technological change requiring broad norm setting; and worsening environmental degradation requiring immediate climate action. Our challenges have become stark.

10. Yet, we have tended to muddle along, holding meetings, taking some minor stabs at enhancing international cooperation at the margins, becoming

guardians of the status quo. Our inertia is considerable, even when it is clear that collective action is required. We steer clear from action, pleading consensus is required for change.

Madam President,

11. Global cooperation and integration have been critical to the impressive expansion of wellbeing and opportunities that we have witnessed over the past 70 years. Proliferating global problems demand new narratives. If the General Assembly is not delivering all that we want, the solution is not to give up on it. Rather, we must make it deliver results for today.

12. The General Assembly is empowered to discuss any matter within the scope of the Charter - thus assuming the role of the global conscience, where public opinion is focused as an effective force. This opens a vast range of opportunities for all of us.

13. The General Assembly provides venues to address issues. It provides platforms to agree on common rules of the game, channels for exchanging ideas, experiences and practices, so that countries learn from each other.

14. Decision-making in the General Assembly is not a threat to sovereignty. It is an expression of sovereign equality and opportunity for all to influence global problem-solving.

Madam President,

15. The world is awash with new challenges. However, to effectively make a difference, we need to undertake a new journey. A journey which needs to begin soon.

16. Less than two years from now, the 75th anniversary of the United Nations will be celebrated. Perhaps, that provides all of us an opportunity to catalyze our efforts to rejuvenate and revitalize. The Agenda for such revitalization needs to be broad and inclusive, as well as transformative and imbued, with the objective of breathing new life. The General Assembly, with its universal membership, can be a precious asset in this effort for change.

17. As one of modern India's leading figures, Swami Vivekananda once said;

"We reap what we sow;

We are the makers of our own fate;

The wind is blowing;

Those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it and go forward on their way;

but those who have their sails furled do not catch the wind;"

Madam President,

18. The revitalization agenda is a challenge for diplomacy. However, it is a challenge worth taking up, if we want to maximize the prospects for a peaceful & prosperous 21st century.

19. In this effort, India stands ready to provide constructive support.

I thank you, Madam President.
