



INDIA
भारत

General Debate
of the 73rd
United Nations General Assembly

Statement

By

Minister of External Affairs

Smt. Sushma Swaraj

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Your Excellency Madam President,

May I begin by congratulating you on your election as the President of the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly, on my personal behalf as well as on behalf of my country, India. As a woman, I feel doubly proud that you have this honour. I also recall, with equal pride, that the first woman to occupy this eminent chair was an Indian Smt. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, in 1953 during the 8th session. I will also like to thank the outgoing President Mr. Miroslav Lajcak for successfully conducting the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Madame President, we received a very bad news this morning that there was an earthquake and tsunami- both these tragedies occurred at the same time - and from this forum, on behalf of my country India, I would like to express deep condolences to the people and Government of Indonesia; and at the same time I would like to express assurance that India will cooperate in helping during this tragic time.

Madam President,

The United Nations is the world's premier multilateral organization:

- 1: where nations seek balm for the wounds of history, and a platform for solutions.
- 2: where less developed nations sit with their more fortunate brethren to formulate plans that can correct the skewed economic imbalance.
- 3: where new goals are set, and route maps defined, to make our world a better place.

In 2015, we established 2030 as a critically important horizon for 17 Sustainable Development Goals. A common refrain, from 2015, has been that we will reach that horizon only if India finds its way to this destination. Otherwise, we shall fail.

I assure this august gathering through you, Madam, that India will not let you fail. We are totally committed to achieving these objectives for our own people. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has initiated unprecedented economic and social transformation that will help India achieve its SDG goals much before time.

Let me offer a few glimpses of evidence to illustrate what is the world's biggest exercise in poverty elimination and social transformation:

Through the Jan Dhan Yojana, world's largest financial inclusion scheme, over 320 million Indians, who had never crossed the door of a bank before, now have bank accounts. This has enabled the poor to receive allotments from the government's welfare programmes into their personal accounts, through Direct Benefit Transfer, which has ended waste and corruption in the system.

Similarly, Ayushman Bharat, the world's biggest health insurance programme, was launched by Prime Minister Modi a few days ago on 23rd September. This revolutionary scheme will benefit 500 million Indians, who will get an insurance cover of Rs 500,000 per family per year. We have a prayer in India: Sarve Santu Niramaya, which means, all should be healthy. The Aayushman Bharat Yojana is the answer to this prayer.

Similarly, we have launched the largest housing scheme in the world aimed at ensuring that everyone has a roof above their heads. Under the scheme, we have set ourselves a target of nearly 21 million homes by 2022. So far, over five million homes for the poor have already been constructed.

Similarly, two extremely effective schemes have been initiated to raise the skill levels of those waiting to be employed through Skill Development Programme and to turn the poor into entrepreneurs, through the Mudra Programme. I want to stress that over 140 million Indians have taken Mudra loans. The most significant aspect of Mudra scheme is that 76% of the beneficiaries are women.

At the heart of Prime Minister Modi's transformative vision is a radical idea: that the uplift of any nation is best achieved through the all-round empowerment of women. All the schemes that I have just spoken about have the welfare of women at their core. Last year, I spoke about the Ujjawala scheme, in which I am happy to report 50 million free gas connections have been provided so far.

Another such initiative is the Maternity Benefit Scheme, in which women get 26 weeks of paid leave to care for their newborn. Madame President, as a woman, you will understand better than most how vitally important this programme is for every mother. Some developed nations with huge economies do not offer more than six weeks paid leave, leading to a continuing struggle for more time off. In India, we have implemented what women across the world need.

Madam President,

In 2022, free India will be 75 years old. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has pledged to build a New India by then. This New India will be:

- 1: Swachh Bharat, Swasth Bharat (Clean India, Healthy India);
- 2: Samarth Bharat, Surakshit Bharat (Prosperous India, Secure India);
- 3: Shikshit Bharat, Viksit Bharat (Educated India, Developed India);
- 4: Urjawan Bharat, Shaktiman Bharat (Energised India, Strong India).

That is our horizon for India in 2022. We will reach that horizon.

Madam President,

The biggest challenge of our era comes from the existential threats of climate change and terrorism.

Under-developed and developing nations are the worst victim of climate change. They have neither the capacity nor the resources to meet this crisis. Those who have exploited nature for their immediate needs cannot abdicate their responsibilities. If we have to save the world from the adverse effects of climate change, then developed nations must lift the deprived with financial and technical resources. The principle of common and differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities was reiterated in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

India has risen to meet the challenge of climate change. Prime Minister Modi in partnership with France launched the International Solar Alliance. The United Nations has recognized their contributions and conferred on Prime Minister Modi and President Macron the honour of UN Champions of the Earth. I am happy to inform you that 68 nations are now members of ISA. In March this year, India and France chaired the Founding Conference of ISA in which 120 countries participated.

Our Prime Minister has described his vision of Sustainable and available energy in a typically apt phrase: One Sun, One Grid. This breakthrough concept can become the solution we seek to the problems.

Madam President,

I had described terrorism as the second existential threat to humanity. We imagined that the arrival of the 21st Century would bring with it an age of common good, defined by cooperation in the quest for peace and prosperity. But here in New York, the horrific tragedy of 9/11, and in Mumbai the catastrophe of 26/11 became the nightmares that shattered our dreams. The demon of terrorism now stalks the world, at a faster pace somewhere, a slower pace elsewhere, but life-threatening everywhere.

In our case, terrorism is bred not in some faraway land, but across our border to the west. Our neighbour's expertise is not restricted to spawning grounds for terrorism; it is also an expert in trying to mask malevolence with verbal duplicity.

The most startling evidence of this duplicity was the fact that Osama Bin Laden, the architect and ideologue of 9/11 was given safe haven in Pakistan. America had declared Osama bin Laden it's most dangerous enemy, and launched an exhaustive, worldwide search to bring him to justice. What America perhaps could not comprehend was that Osama would get sanctuary in a country that claimed to be America's friend and ally: Pakistan. Eventually, America's

intelligence services discovered the truth of this hypocrisy, and its special forces delivered justice. But Pakistan continued to behave as if nothing had happened. Pakistan's commitment to terrorism as an instrument of official policy has not abated one bit. Neither has its belief in hypocrisy. The killers of 9/11 met their fate; but the mastermind of 26/11 Hafiz Saeed still roams the streets of Pakistan with impunity.

What is heartening is that the world is no longer ready to believe Islamabad. FATF, for instance, has put Pakistan on notice over terror funding.

Madam President,

We are accused of sabotaging the process of talks. This is a complete lie. We believe that talks are the only rational means to resolve the most complex of disputes. Talks with Pakistan have begun many times. If they stopped, it was only because of Pakistan's behavior. There have been many governments in India, by many different parties. Each government has tried the peace option. Prime Minister Modi, by inviting the Heads of the SAARC nations, to his swearing in ceremony, began his attempt for dialogue on his very first day in office. On 9th December 2016, I personally went to Islamabad and offered a comprehensive bilateral dialogue. But soon after, Pak sponsored terrorists attacked our air force base in Pathankot on 2nd January. Please explain to me how we could pursue talks in the midst of terrorist bloodshed? Even now, after the new government came to power, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan wrote to Prime Minister Modi suggesting a meeting between Foreign Ministers in New York. We accepted the proposal. But, within hours of our acceptance, news came that terrorists had killed three of our jawans. Does this indicate a desire for dialogue?

Time and again, Pakistan accuses India of human rights violations. Who can be a greater transgressor of human rights than a terrorist? Those who take innocent human lives in pursuit of war by other means are defenders of inhuman behavior, not of human rights. Pakistan glorifies killers; it refuses to see the blood of innocents.

It has become something of a habit with Pakistan to throw the dust of deceit and deception against India in order to provide some thin cover for its own guilt. The United Nations has seen this before. Last year, Pakistan's representative, using her right to reply, displayed some photographs as "proof" of "human rights violations" by India. The photographs turned out to be from another country. Similar false accusations have become a part of its standard rhetoric.

Madam President,

Each year, for last five years, India has been arguing from this podium that lists are not enough to check terrorists and their protectors. We need to bring them to accountability through international law.

In 1996, India proposed a draft document on CCIT at the United Nations. Till today, that draft has remained a draft, because we cannot agree on a common language. On the one hand, we want to fight terrorism; on the other, we cannot define it. This is why terrorists with a price on their head are celebrated, financed and armed as liberation heroes by a country that remains a member of the United Nations. Cruelty and barbarism are advertised as heroism. The country prints postage stamps glorifying terrorists. If we do not act now, we will have to deal with conflagration later. Once again, I appeal to this August body to come to an agreement, soon, on CCIT as one of the necessary measures in a long running war.

Madam President,

I began by highlighting the unique and positive role of the UN: but I must add that step by slow step, the importance, influence, respect and value of this institution is beginning to ebb. It is time to wonder if we are wandering towards the fate of the League of Nations. If 2030 is the agreed deadline for delivery on Sustainable Development Goals, then it also marks hundred years of the lapse of the League into irrelevance. Surely there is something to learn from this coincidence? The League went into meltdown because it was unwilling to accept the need for reform. We must not make that mistake.

The United Nations must accept that it needs fundamental reform. Reform cannot be cosmetic. We need change the institution's head and heart to make both compatible to contemporary reality.

Reform must begin today; tomorrow could be too late. If the UN is ineffective, the whole concept of multilateralism will collapse. In this session, there has been much debate about multilateralism. We will never weaken the multilateral mechanism. India believes that the world is a family, and the best means of resolution is shared discourse. A family is shaped by love and is not transactional; a family is nurtured by consideration not greed; a family believes in harmony not jealousy. Greed breeds conflict; consideration leads to resolution. That is why the United Nations must be based on the principles of the family. The UN cannot be run by the 'I', it only works by the 'We'.

India does not believe that the United Nations should become the instrument of a few at the cost of the many. India believes that we must move forward together or we sink into the swamp of stagnation.

Madam President,

This year India will celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The Mahatma's favourite bhajan was "Vaishnav Jan to tene Kahiye". The essence is deeply moving and quintessentially important: He who understands the pain of another, and absorbs it as his own, is a good human being. He who sees this pain, and helps without becoming arrogant, is a good human being'.

Madam President,

We have to make this assembly into a platform of understanding, assistance and true justice. We have to understand the pain of other nations, and work with developed nations to ease and eliminate this pain. Arrogance has no place in our scheme of things; arrogance is counter-productive and self-defeating. Let us work for the benefit of the less fortunate. Let us work for a world where there is peace, serenity and shared prosperity; a world that is free from terrorism, tension and violence.

It is with this wish in mind that I end with a shloka from our Sanskrit scriptures:

May all experience well being;
May all experience peace;
May all move towards perfection;
May all enjoy prosperity;
May all achieve serenity.

Thank you, Madam President.