

Address by Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister of India at the
Millennium Summit of the United Nations
New York, September 8, 2000

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Standing at the gates of an important epoch, at a point in our history that joins the past, the present and the future, we the representatives of six billion people must ensure that this Millennium Summit and the General Assembly session that follows will transcend issues of narrow concerns and chart a new course for humanity. A course that will lead to enduring peace, development and security for all.

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Mr. President,

It is apt that the Millennium Summit of the United Nations, which symbolises the confluence of the developed and the developing worlds, should be jointly presided over by the leaders of two vibrant democracies, Finland and Namibia -- one a developed country from Europe, the other, a developing country from Africa.

In your joint presidency, on which I congratulate you, you symbolise the partnership between diversity and the sharing of fundamental values that lie at the core of the United Nations; indeed the very strength on which the United Nations must build itself in the new century.

This unique summit marks the formal entry of the United Nations into the 21st century and the new millennium. More importantly, it reflects the collective desire of peoples living in 189 countries spread across the world to forge a future free of the blemishes of the past.

A future that will guarantee equitable development of all nations East and West, North and South.

A future that will guarantee freedom from want for nearly a quarter of the world's peoples living in abject poverty.

A future that will guarantee freedom from fear of war among nations and conflicts within societies.

And a future in which nations will work together as equals for a new world order based on justice and equality.

Mr. President,

Standing at the gates of an important epoch, at a point in our history that joins the past, the present and the future, we the representatives of six billion people must ensure that this Millennium Summit and the General Assembly session that follows will transcend issues of narrow concerns and chart a new course for humanity. A course that will lead to enduring peace, development and security for all.

Let there be no doubt that the journey to our future, which we begin at the Millennium Summit, is over a very long and winding road. At every turn, we will be challenged by doubts. Overcoming that challenge and forging ahead will be the real test of the resolve that we voice at this Summit.

In spite of human endeavour for peace, prosperity and cooperation among nations in the century gone by, the world is not free of conflict, often with terrible consequences. Much of this conflict is attributable to hostile aggression, lust for territory or, simply, hegemony.

But conflict is also born in failure of equitable development among and within nations. For long it has been established that poverty threatens peace and social cohesiveness within nations. It now needs to be recognised that the continuing poverty of some nations, even while others prosper, not only taunts our conscience; it also threatens peace among nations.

Poverty can neither be wished away, nor accepted as a reality beyond redemption. This affliction that strikes at the core of human dignity has to be cured through the collective will and effort of all nations, rich and poor.

The century we have just left behind is littered with many a turning point in the history of humanity. The last 100 years were both the best of times and the worst of times. There were moments of utter despair and flashes of soaring hope.

In the 20th century we have seen colonialism peak and collapse. We have seen totalitarian and racist regimes rule with an iron fist, only to crumble in the face of assertive desire for liberty and human dignity. We have seen death and destruction caused by wars rekindle humankind's urge for lasting and durable peace.

It has been a century of contrasts. Giant strides in science and technology marking the conquest of new frontiers of knowledge have helped us grow more food, produce life saving drugs and send satellites into space. Yet, millions still go hungry, die of easily curable diseases and are deprived of the enlightenment and empowerment that education ensures.

The emergence of a global economy has led to undeniable benefits like faster growth, higher living standards and new opportunities. The rapid spread of Information Technology, riding the crest of a Knowledge Revolution, has virtually led to the creation of a digital world where the click of a mouse can span vast distances in less than a fraction of a second. A 'New Economy' drives the world today.

Yet, nearly a quarter of the people this Assembly represents have neither prospered nor gained from these developments. Often, they find themselves further marginalised and more vulnerable as development economics gives way to unbridled market economics and social objectives are erased by profit motives.

Mr. President,

Globalisation was supposed to deliver economic equality among all nations through free flow of goods, services and capital. The reality we see today is an asymmetry in the benefits from globalisation between the developing and developed worlds. This asymmetry has further accentuated income disparities, thus increasing the scope of conflict and strife.

If one in four of the world's people still live in severe poverty, there is something wrong somewhere in the manner in which we have been managing global development issues. The situation is made worse by the fact that developing countries with decreasing resources, both natural and financial, are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their social obligations.

Therefore, removing economic inequality, both between and within nations, and ensuring that development does not suffer for want of funds, are two of the challenges that we have to collectively meet in the new century.

We also need to actively consider a fresh global initiative to fight poverty. In a globalised economy, poverty eradication cannot be treated as the exclusive responsibility of individual nations. Therefore, a new global strategy against poverty is called for.

Even as poverty severely inhibits the socio-economic progress of developing countries, the alarming spread of HIV/AIDS drains their productive capacities. The co-relation between HIV incidence and poverty is too compelling to ignore.

It should be the concern of all humanity to generate the resources for concerted awareness campaigns for HIV prevention; for making preventive, palliative and curative drugs affordable; and, for the scientific quest for definitive prophylaxis and cure for the various strains of the dreaded virus. These tasks should not be allowed to add to the already onerous burden that developing countries are carrying today.

Another issue that should be of universal concern is the debt burden of many a developing nation. This burden grows yearly with new debts being contracted to pay off current interest charges. This results in a continual haemorrhage of wealth that further debilitates the developing world.

The United Nations has a signal role to play in this global effort: by focusing attention on equitable development, by ensuring that development is not the preserve of a few.

In the last decade of the last century, we have seen a series of world conferences on various aspects of development - social development, women's issues, population and environment. We now look forward to the conference on financing for development.

Indeed, it is time that we looked at assurance of economic development, growth and distribution together in a high-level UN conference. And, we urge that development be made a cross cutting issue in the work of a reformed United Nations.

In the emerging world order of the 21st century, economic multipolarity will be a critical factor. Globalisation has given birth to an ever-expanding web of inter-dependent economies linked by trade and commerce, apart from unprecedented flow of capital across borders, backed by the Information Technology revolution.

But economic inter-dependence is best when it is based on the principle of non-discrimination. Only then can nations benefit equitably from global trade and commerce. To achieve this, and to ensure genuine economic multilateralism, the tendency of some to rely on non-tariff barriers to preserve markets and perpetuate current balance of trade should be resisted by all.

This can be best guaranteed by ensuring, especially for developing countries, free access to markets and services through more transparent and predictable standards and requirements.

Mr. President,

Global financial integration has encouraged an unregulated and volatile capital mobility across national boundaries and currency zones. This has exposed many developing countries to tremendous risks.

Part of the problem is that we have moved towards an integrated international financial market without fully realising the potential turbulence which could result in weaker economies. Indeed, the 1990s are replete with financial crises striking developing countries and revealing the economically destabilising impact of an uncontrolled global flight of money on developing and transition economies.

The resources of the International Monetary Fund should be augmented to deal with economic crisis created by the globalisation policy being pursued by member countries. Its role in anticipating major crises through improved disclosure standards and enhanced information systems also needs to be strengthened. This would be applicable equally to both developed and developing countries.

The new century needs a new financial architecture to strengthen the role of multilateral institutions responsible for ensuring the stability of the international financial system. Multilateral cooperation should focus more clearly on the need for better policy co-ordination among developed countries to avoid policy misalignment, which can have a destabilising effect on international capital movements.

An inter-dependent world calls for greater participation by developing countries in the major forums of decision making. There is need to increase the share of developing countries in decision-making in international forums dealing with the international financial system.

Mr. President,

We cannot have true development without peace between nations and democracy within them. Indeed, democracy and peace continue to remain the best guarantors for unhindered development - each secures the other.

The continued existence of nuclear weapons is a threat to global security in this new century, as in the century gone by which not only

saw the development but also the tragic use of weapons of mass destruction. The international community has successfully diminished, if not entirely removed, the threat posed by chemical and biological weapons. But not so with nuclear weapons.

In fact, despite all the talk of nuclear disarmament from various forums, the stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, in the custody of those who were the first to build up such a deadly arsenal, remain virtually untouched. It would seem that we are still far away from achieving a goal that can assure the survival of humanity in the new millennium.

India was forced to acquire these weapons in 1998 because the principal nuclear weapon states refused to accept the almost universal demand for nuclear disarmament. Moreover, the spread of nuclear weapons in our neighbourhood made us especially vulnerable.

Nevertheless, our policy is based on responsibility and restraint and we continue to press for universal, verifiable nuclear disarmament with undiminished commitment, even while safeguarding our strategic space and autonomy in decision-making. International peace cannot be divorced from the need for equal and legitimate security for all. We support the Secretary General's proposal for an international conference to address nuclear dangers.

In the interregnum, India continues with its voluntary moratorium on further underground nuclear test explosions. India remains committed to working for the successful conclusion of her security dialogue with key interlocutors on the CTBT. I reiterate our position that we will not prevent the entry into force of the CTBT. At the same time, all other countries which must ratify the CTBT under Article XIV of the Treaty, should do so without condition.

India also remains committed to participate in negotiations on a Treaty that will prohibit the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. We will participate in these discussions in good faith and in order to ensure a Treaty that is non-discriminatory and meets India's security imperatives.

Mr. President,

Of the many other threats to peace, democracy and development, none has become as dangerous as international terrorism, with its links to religious extremism, drug trafficking and the commerce in illicit arms. Plural and open democracies are the target of the scourge of

terrorism that strikes at the very root of tolerance, the mainstay of civil society in a free world.

For more than a decade now India has been a victim of cross-border terrorism that has claimed thousands of innocent lives. We have been fighting this crime against humanity with the weapons available to a responsible democracy.

India calls for united global action against these dangers. We urge the international community to quickly adopt and implement the Comprehensive Convention Against Terrorism that will be negotiated at the UN General Assembly session that follows this Summit.

Many statesman-like words have been delivered from this high tribune. Unfortunately, some of them are an Orwellian mockery. Those who have stifled democracy at home speak of freedom from this forum. Those who have engaged in the clandestine acquisition of nuclear weapons and delivery systems talk of ridding South Asia of these. Those who have repudiated solemn covenants talk of new agreements to prevent war. The authors of a vicious terrorist campaign that has claimed more than 30,000 innocent lives in India, who actively sabotaged a historic peace initiative, are now offering new initiatives for dialogue.

The world must see the reality as it is. The acid test of sincerity of purpose is not words, but deeds. Terrorism and dialogue do not go together.

We also urge the international community to act collectively against the indiscriminate proliferation of, and illegal trafficking in, small arms and light weapons. Countries should cooperate and work closely to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons by adopting an International Programme of Action of Agreed Measures.

Mr. President,

Because there can, by definition, be no equitable development without democracy, it is essential that the United Nations promote democratic norms. And the United Nations should do so not only by monitoring elections or by promoting standards of effective governance, but by example.

The United Nations is a symbol of the aspirations of the peoples of the free world to achieve the noble objectives of peace, equality and honour. The UN Charter envisaged a balance between the three major

inter-governmental organs of the United Nations - the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council.

Over the years, this balance has tilted rather heavily towards the Security Council. It is important that the central role of the General Assembly be respected; this Millennium Summit is a good first step, and we thank the Secretary General for proposing it. We are glad that the Economic and Social Council has again become active in the promotion of development; we trust that the momentum will be maintained.

However, in a world in flux, it is understandable that the Security Council will continue to have a rather special role to play. It is, therefore, all the more necessary that it be made more representative of the large membership.

We hope this Millennium Summit will commit itself to an early expansion and reform of the Security Council, particularly bringing in new permanent members from developed and developing countries, so that it reflects the new realities of the 21st century. This will also strengthen this world body to function more purposefully in the services of all peoples who, as the UN Charter says, constitute the United Nations.

As member States will recall, India has let it be known for some years that we believe ourselves qualified by objective criteria for responsibilities of permanent membership. Indeed, as the world's largest democracy, enormous potential, a rapidly growing economic power and a major contributor to peace-keeping operations, India has a natural claim to a permanent seat in the Security Council.

Finally, Mr. President, at this rare moment of the Millennium, when we touch history, let us pledge to work towards bringing the vast human family closer together. Let us believe in spirit that our destiny is joined.

I end with an ancient Indian invocation:

Sarve bhavantu sukinah

Sarve santu nirmayah

Sarve bhadrani pasyantu

Ma Kaschit dukha bhag bhavet!

May all live happily

May all enjoy good health

May all see auspiciousness

May none experience distress

May peace prevail everywhere!