

*Statement by Mr. Jaswant Singh, Minister for External Affairs on
September 22, 1999*

Mr. President,

It is a particular pleasure to see you presiding over the last United Nations General Assembly of the 20th century. And I consider myself as singularly fortunate, also greatly honoured to be representing my country, India, on the occasion.

I do believe that in the many years that you spent here pursuing the dream of independence for your people, and which, happily is now a reality, you, more perhaps than others have seen the UN at its best. That is why the perspective that you bring to the office of the President, enriched as it is by living through the very articles of faith of the UN, is near unique. I am sure we will all profit from it.

I take this opportunity to also warmly welcome three new members to the UN: Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga. I have no doubt their presence shall enrich our deliberations.

Even as I address this Assembly the century draws to a close, the world prepares to meet AD 2000. It is only appropriate, also instructive, therefore, to look back and to reflect upon the journey that humanity set upon, a hundred years ago. Where did we think we were then headed, and where have we actually reached? Could any then foresee what 1999 would bring? Thus, are there, in the passage of these years that have gone by, any landmarks that could indicate a path for our future? For that we need to assess the 20th century, and there is but one yardstick by which we can judge: the criteria of the stated objectives of the United Nations.

Indisputably the 20th has been the bloodiest of all centuries. But, in contradistinction, it has also been a century of the most profound transformations, of the most significant social, political and technological advancements. This, above all, has been the century of the ascendancy of the individual, of democracy. It is that period in which dynasties vanished and revolutions swept empires off the face of ancient lands; centuries-old colonialism became history against the irresistible heave of the colonised, to reclaim their lands, their souls, so that oppressed humanity could regain a voice in its say in its own political and economic destiny. It is the century in which we plumbed the depths of the oceans, soared into the infinities of space; when man first set foot on the moon, reached Mars and even deeper into

the recesses of the unknown. In a wired up world, the computer has today become what the fountain pen was in the early years of the 20th century. The revolution of the digital has arrived.

Humanity today is healthier, better fed, more sheltered than our forefathers were. But want and hunger, disease and deprivation are still widespread, including in developed societies, too. We have at our command more information than ever before but are we that much wiser? Literacy has spread but is mankind better educated? We are more connected globally but are we as humankind? Has this linkage and interconnection reduced conflict and animosity?

And thus the tabulation of our assets and liabilities of this century flows.

As we improved upon and added to almost everything that we inherited in 1900, so most sadly have we, to violence, too. This century has been the most bloodthirsty, perhaps because it is in the last hundred years that humanity employed science to perfect means of killing as never before. Our passage has seen us move from the Gatling gun to a world menaced today by MIRVs. That early machine gun, the then great mower down of the early 1900s, seems today almost a toy by comparison. We have split the atom but employ the released energy less for peace, more for weapons of unimaginable destruction. Chemical defoliants and sophisticated biological weapons are also this century's contribution.

The century that passes experienced not two but three great wars. Each was a cataclysm, fought globally and at enormous cost. When the First ended, the survivors emerged from the trenches, searching for a better world, so that war did not recur. In response, we created the League of Nations. But war, regrettably, was not avoided. The League failed because we had failed the League. And thus followed the Second great war, at the end of which the world emerged armed with weapons that could destroy all that human genius and ingenuity had created and every vestige of life. But, from the ruins and devastation of the second, also emerged the United Nations, with mandates of broader powers and responsibilities. The third great conflict was the Cold War. This deeply affected, shaped and influenced the development of the United Nations. This war, too, extracted a heavy price, directly and through proxy conflicts, also political and social upheavals, but then these became its epilogue. What significance lies in the observation that no global peace conference has taken place to mark the end of this last war?

The United Nations could have been cast anew, made contemporary, democratized, drawing upon our collective experience to tackle new

challenges with greater responsiveness. Can we, even now, do something, in this last UNGA of this millennium, to correct this? Can we pledge afresh to invest this institution with faith, commitment, political will and the resources that it needs to make it the vehicle capable of realizing the aspirations of all humanity; an instrument that will steer planet Earth into the next century?

We do not enjoy an abundance of options. The sapping of the vitality, or the diminishing of the centrality of the United Nations, must not be permitted. We have, 'but one Earth', and there is but one United Nations.

Another development of this century, of crucial significance, is the transformation that we have experience in the role of the State. From an agency that controlled and regulated all spheres of human activity we move into a phase wherein the State must become more supportive, caring and encouraging of the citizen's individual and collective endeavours; it must release, not contain the energies and genius of its people. It would be an error, however, to assume that the days of the State are over. The state continues to have a crucial role and relevance. Also, therefore, national sovereignties. The UN was not conceived as a super State, it will not ever become so, principally, because there is no viable substitute to the sovereign State. Even globalization can but work through state intermediaries only. To diminish, marginalise or to ignore the state would also be bad practice, because the weaker the State is rendered the less shall it be able to promote the interests of its citizens. The state needs to be strengthened functionally, not weakened. Besides, it is axiomatic that a United Nations of weak nation states can only be a weak United Nations.

Mr. President, globalization is an idea that has re-emerged, but also its reverse - fragmentation. The first is politico-economic, the second entirely political. Let us dwell a bit on it. Obviously, the technology that is driving this process can now scarcely be unlearned; the speed of travel and of communications will only increase; the age of the digital has dawned. However, though globalisation may apparently be driven by impersonal market forces, it is in reality impelled by power seeking political and financial advantage. It is, in essence, a political process, and if history teaches us anything it is that such process are not linear. Simply in terms of economic indicators, the world was as globalised at the turn of the century as it is now. A backlash followed; barriers went up, confrontation replaced cooperation, and the world jostled into the tensions that led to the first great War. Are we for the sake of temporary gain, perhaps even unwittingly, repeating yesterday's mistakes? Political hindsight

tells us that globalization has to be politically directed for creating equal economic opportunity, both within States and among States.

In India, we cherish the creative genius of the people. We do believe that Indian excellence lies in the freedom of the individual. We do not subscribe to constricting choice through State impositions. But can 'free markets' offer true freedom of choice to those that are not even a part of the market? That is why the State continues to have the responsibility to protect the needy, to strengthen the weak. That is a part of our democratic creed, too. We note that human rights have been made a cross-cutting theme of the work of the United Nations. That is important. The flowering, however, of human rights requires economic development and growth because many of the deprivations faced by individuals, whether in the developed or in the developing world, are rooted in marginalisation created by poverty. We believe, therefore, that development should be the cross-cutting theme of the United Nations, and that the multilateral development system, which has been one of its successes, must be strengthened, its focus narrowed to the core challenges of economic growth with social justice, and given the resources it requires to respond to the needs of the developing countries. The international community will find that no investment yields better returns.

I have the honour to address you as a representative of the largest democracy in the world. Even now, as I share these thoughts with you, an electorate of around 600 million, matching the combined populations of the US, Canada and West Europe goes through the exciting process of democratically electing its next government in my country. It is an awe-inspiring spectacle, this unstoppable flow of the great Ganga of Indian democracy. It is a democracy whose economy grew by over six per cent last year, even in the aftermath of the major shocks to the international economy brought about by what was described as the 'East Asian meltdown' of the mid-1990s. We move with the challenges posed by globalization, without either retreating into a fortress India, or abandoning our social objectives. We have worked out our own answers and devised our own policies to meet these new challenges. Because we hold that the sheer diversity of mankind dictates differences in approach, in their respective search for relevant alternatives. A truth borne out by the fact that the 20th Century has been witness to the detritus of many false certainties.

Today, when capital moves without almost any constraint, it is virtually impossible for developing countries to resist either its demands or manage the consequences of its sudden departure. Let us reflect upon the absence of order, system, or any global oversight

upon currency flows, particularly short term flows; even as we attempt to bring order and equity in trade in goods, services and commodities. But how are we to address the problem when currency, instead of being a vehicle of trade, has in itself become a commodity of trade, when the volume of trade in currency - daily - has outstripped global trade in goods and services or even global GNP, manifold.

If globalization is to benefit all, and as we simply cannot accept that wheels of progress should grind down the common man, then surely some new international regulation, some order is needed here. Let the UN take the initiative to urgently hold an international conference on Financing for Development.

In the political domain too, managing change demands openness and reasoned discourse, an essential ingredient of which is abjuring violence. That is why terrorism is the very anti-thesis of all that the UN represents and stands for. Terrorism is the great global menace of our age. In this age of democracy, it is a violation of the very basic precepts of it. Because its principal targets become the innocent, it is a crime against humanity, a violation of basic human rights. It is also now a grave threat to international peace and security. That is why I urge that we strengthen international consensus against terrorism. India has given a call for a comprehensive international convention against terrorism. We hope to make progress on the issue in this session of the General Assembly.

We also know how terrorism uses the international financial system, how it exploits the breakdown of countries and societies, and how it has preyed on the nexus between drugs and proliferation of small arms.

Thus, today, we witness a scimitar of narco-terrorism cutting across the Caucasus to the South Asian sub-continent. Two of the world's largest sources of illicit drugs flank us. Terrorism financed by drugs has for years been the deadly export of our neighbours.

Here the crippling intermixing of cause and effect is cruelly exemplified in Afghanistan. The world has been witness to the decades-old distress of the innocent men, women and children of the country. The disorders of Afghanistan, and the near anarchy into which that country has been pushed is a consequence, chiefly, of the play of external forces; and of a reversion to medieval fundamentalism of the most obscurantist variety. This disorder now overflows, it is also exported. It is not that human rights, particularly of women and children, are routinely violated there, they simply do not exist.

Our relationship with this neighbour is ancient and rooted in a past that we share. That is why we urge this Assembly to be seized of the enormous human suffering of the Afghans, and to encourage and support the early formation of a government, truly representative of all sections of that society and country.

Terrorism is a menace to which open societies are vulnerable; it becomes particularly difficult for democracies to counter when terrorists are armed, financed and backed by governments or their agencies, and benefit from the protection of state power. Cross-border terrorism, sponsored from across our borders, has taken the lives of thousands of our citizens, and ruined those of countless others. We will counter it, as we have done over the past decades, using the methods available to a democracy. India will defeat such forces. That is both our duty and our obligation to our citizens.

Earlier this year India was subjected, yet again, to an act of premeditated aggression.

In February this year, hoping yet again to set aside the sterility of relations of the past half century, to set the South Asian sub-continent on the path of development, with a view to addressing the real adversary of our region - poverty, want and hunger - Prime Minister Vajpayee extended a hand of peace, amity and cooperation to neighbouring Pakistan. The pathbreaking bus journey from Delhi to Lahore followed.

In Lahore were concluded a triad of agreements amongst which was the Lahore Declaration.

It was the route chart of moving towards lasting amity and peace. This act of faith was betrayed. A premeditated aggression by regular forces was committed against India. Not simply was the Lahore Declaration violated, but also the Simla Agreement, which had prevented conflict for more than a quarter of a century. In self-defence, yet with utmost restraint, India took all necessary and appropriate steps to evict the aggressing forces from its territory. Most regrettably, this aggression has set back the Lahore process of peace that we had initiated; for whereas aggression over territory can more easily be vacated, that territory of trust which has been transgressed is infinitely more difficult to restore.

Permit me Mr. President, to draw attention to the fact that this aggression upon India in Kargil was a demonstration of wanting to hold to ransom the world, through an act of aggression. It was also a

manifestation of the larger disorders that the world has been witnessing in Afghanistan.

There is an aspect that I stress. It is of the gross violation of Geneva conventions when Indian soldiers taken prisoner, were tortured, subjected to inhuman treatment and killed in captivity. These violations took place at a time when the international community has repeatedly been trying to establish the rule of law, and stripping away the layers of impunity that have protected those who give the orders that lead to violations of international humanitarian law.

And it is thus, Mr. President, that I find it necessary to reiterate some essential verities of Indian nationhood.

From the earliest days of our struggle against imperialism and colonial rule it has been an unquestionable article of faith with us that India is one nation: a nation of many faiths, a diversity of beliefs, a cultural harmony arranged through the interplay of myriad forms and manifestations but it is a unity, strengthened by its pluralism, that is beyond question. And of this is born India's democratic vitality, too.

Also of this oneness and unity the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part, and shall remain so. Because this is not any territorial dispute; it is the assertion of two antipodal approaches to national identity. India has never represented denominational nationhood it is civic nationalism to which we subscribe. That is why Jammu and Kashmir is not a so-called "core issue", it is at the very core of Indian nationhood.

Yet, the path of the India-Pakistan composite dialogue process is open. No preconditions attend it. The only essential ingredient that remains is abjuring of violence and cross-border terrorism; principles that are integral to both the Simla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration; indeed the very process of peace itself. This process needs to be resumed.

We have been greatly disappointed by this compulsive hostility of Pakistan, because it is an aberration in our region today, where all the other SAARC countries are at peace with each other, and trying, bilaterally and through the SAARC mechanisms, to tackle together the great challenge of development. But we remain unshaken in our vision of cooperation and shared prosperity of the South Asian region, as embedded in the Charter of SAARC, also our faith in the ability, talent and will of the people of the region to take their rightful place in the world community. The destiny of all our peoples is

linked. It is a region with a collective history reaching back to the beginnings of human history and of the highest civilisational accomplishments. In striving to attain the promise of the future in our region, we also see the recovery of a great past.

This is perhaps the right juncture at which to say a few words about pluralism in an age of globalisation. Though we find sterile the debate over universal and regional values, extreme positions are still taken on both sides. In a spirit of engagement, we would urge our partners in the West to be a bit more tolerant, a bit more introspective. While all democratic governments try to promote good governance, human rights and social responsibility, the perspective they approach them from, and their ability to implement them, vary. Rigidly applying, as a universal paradigm, value systems that reflect the state of western economies and societies in the late twentieth century, produces an inevitable reaction, which does not make either for dialogue or constructive decisions.

Globalization has also influenced our thinking on security issues by generating a greater awareness about new security concerns. Equally important, with the end of the Cold War there is a growing realization that peace cannot be maintained through "balance of power" or "hegemonic order". To maintain global peace and security, to deal with threats of a global nature, the international community has to accept the concept of collective security. The United Nations provides a framework for such a contract among nations. With the Cold War behind us, the General Assembly should reactivate this framework.

Global nuclear disarmament was the objective set out by the 1946 General Assembly in the first resolution that it adopted. This objective still beckons us.

I say this as the representative of a country that has been obliged to acquire nuclear weapons because of the failure of the existing non-proliferation regime to address our primary security concerns. Yet, let me also state with full conviction that India's commitment to global nuclear disarmament stands undiluted. India is the only nuclear weapons state ready to negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Convention that will prohibit forever the development, production, stockpiling, use and threat of use of nuclear weapons and provide for the elimination of all existing weapons under international verification.

If this can only be a step by step process, the first step at a technical level is for all countries possessing nuclear weapons to undertake measures that will reduce the dangers of, and provide added safeguards against, any unintended or accidental use; coupled with

this is the political step of re-orienting nuclear doctrines, towards a no-first-use, and then non-use, thus de-legitimizing nuclear weapons globally. Independent expert opinion across the globe has spoken strongly in favour of such measures. In fact, every single study that has been published since the end of the Cold War on the measures to achieve a nuclear-weapon-free-world has highlighted the need for shifting to doctrines based on no-first-use and non-use, and technical measures towards de-alerting, as the inevitable first steps in the process. We have taken initiatives to urge the international community forward on both counts and hope that in this General Assembly, the Indian initiatives will receive the unanimous support that they merit.

Last year, my Prime Minister declared in this Assembly that India was engaged in discussions on a range of issues including the CTBT. These discussions are in process and will be resumed by the newly elected Government. Our position remains consistent. We remain ready to bring these discussions to a successful conclusion. Naturally, this requires the creation of a positive environment as we work towards creating the widest possible consensus domestically. We also expect that other countries shall adhere to this Treaty without any conditions.

Notwithstanding India's readiness to engage in constructive negotiations on a treaty to prohibit the future production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has so far, sadly, been unable to register any forward movement. This, too, is something to ponder over for we all know that an FMCT can only contribute to our shared objective as part of a step by step process. Let us then overcome this reluctance and agree to look beyond the FMCT.

So, at the end of this centennial audit, what is it we would want the United Nations to do in the first few years? It is clear that there are two major problems facing the UN as an institution: Security Council reforms and the UN's financial crisis. These need to be addressed. The Security Council must be made more representative, with developing countries inducted as permanent members, to reflect the changes in the UN membership and today's political realities. As we have said earlier, on any objective criteria, India's credentials for permanent membership are persuasive.

Sustainable and environmentally sound development is a goal to which India continues to attach the utmost importance. In 2002, we will complete a decade of 'Agenda 21' adopted at the Rio Earth Summit, in 1992. I trust that the current Session of the General Assembly will put in place a preparatory process for the 'Rio Plus 10' review. This will enable the Member States to take stock of the implementation of

the commitments undertaken by the Member States in 'Agenda 21' over the past decade. Such a process is vital for attaining our common goal of sustainable and environmentally sound development.

This century has shown us that our challenges are common, they are intertwined. Problems flow across boundaries, they batten on each other. Political, security, economic and social challenges are braided around each other; when they form a knot, that has to be cut by all of us together. Here, and nowhere else, can we do this. It is convenient to look at security issues in the First Committee, at economic in the Second, at human rights and social in the Third, and so on, but we often do not see them together, and so fail to use the UN as we should.

May I, in conclusion, therefore, propose, Mr. President, that in the next decade, the United Nations endeavour to address the most urgent problems that face us today. We have to do this as a unity: of nations as also of issues, for it is evident that solutions in one field would depend on, or be facilitated by, progress in another. Without tackling them together, we will fail to address them at all. Therefore, may I urge this Assembly to consider the following areas for action in the opening years of the next decade:

- , An international conference on Financing for Development;
- , Binding, irreversible steps to reduce the dangers of use of nuclear weapons;
- , Reform and expansion of the UN Security Council;
- , A comprehensive Convention Against Terrorism;
- , Strengthening of the UN development system in this era of globalisation.

I leave you, Mr. President, distinguished delegates, with a sloka from the Rigveda. Though written five thousand years ago, it reaches across time to us as we prepare for this General Assembly. In translation, it reads:

Be of one heart, one mind, and free of hate.

Let your aim be common, your assembly common, United, your mind and thoughts; May you make your resolutions with one mind,

Perform your duties righteously.

Let our hearts be together.