

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE, PRIME
MINISTER OF INDIA AT THE 56TH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 10, 2001**

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on your election as President of the 56th General Assembly.

I also take this opportunity to warmly congratulate the Secretary General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the United Nations on being honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize.

This session of the General Assembly is being held in the shadow of the barbaric terrorist acts of September 11, which dramatically reminded us that neither distance nor power insulates a State from terrorism. They represented an arrogant rejection of the values of freedom and tolerance, which democratic and pluralistic societies cherish.

Even while uniting the nations of the world in their grief, this terrible tragedy has created the opportunity to fashion a determined global response to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, wherever it exists and under whatever name.

We in India know from our own bitter experience that terrorists develop global networks driven by religious extremism. Their operations are supported by drug trafficking, money laundering and arms smuggling. Some States follow a policy of sponsoring and sheltering them. They can only be countered through closely coordinated efforts of the international community.

The UN Security Council resolutions 1368 and 1373 are steps in the right direction, but it requires firm political will of the freedom-loving world to implement them rigorously. The two crucial elements in this would be strict curbs on sources of financing for terrorists and denying them safe havens for training, arming and operation.

We must firmly rebuff any ideological, political or religious justification for terrorism. We should reject self-serving arguments

seeking to classify terrorism according to its root causes, and therefore justifying terrorist action somewhere while condemning it elsewhere. Those that advance these arguments should explain what the root causes of the brutal acts of September 11 were.

Mr. President,

India supports the current campaign against the terrorist networks in Afghanistan. We hope that it reaches an early and successful conclusion. That country's current travails can only end with the establishment of a broad-based, representative and neutral government, which would stop the export of terrorism and extremism. The international community should work towards this even while the military campaign continues, so that we avoid a political vacuum at the end of the campaign.

We must recognize that current structures to facilitate a post-Taleban political settlement are unrepresentative and therefore ineffective. Located as it is in Afghanistan's neighborhood, India's vital national interests are affected by developments in it. We also have traditionally close links with Afghanistan. This is the basis for our belief that India can play a useful role in this process.

The task of reconstruction in post-conflict Afghanistan also merits the urgent attention of the international community. It would require massive external assistance to create an economic situation conducive to the speedy return and rehabilitation of the millions of Afghans who have taken refuge in other countries of this region. Again India stands ready to join international efforts for this.

We have already announced relief assistance of a million tonnes of wheat, medicines and medical assistance for needy Afghans within and outside the country. We have also pledged 100 million dollars to post-conflict Afghanistan for reconstruction. We are prepared to do more.

Mr. President,

Nearly six thousand lives were lost on September 11. But the global economic downturn in its aftermath will take a far larger human toll, mainly in the developing world. The World Bank has estimated that tens of thousands more children will die worldwide and some ten million more people are likely to go below the poverty line of 1 dollar a day.

It is pertinent to reflect on these chilling statistics even as the Ministerial Conference gets under way in Doha to consider WTO issues.

Before we embark on any new initiatives for globalization and sustainable development, we should recognize that political support for them would be determined primarily by the impact of these regimes on poverty.

For most developing countries, the Uruguay Round has done little for economic growth, while poverty levels and income gaps have worsened. Globalization has constrained developing countries in mobilizing public resources for poverty alleviation.

This is why public support for the globalization regime has vanished in developing countries. This is also why we have argued strongly that implementation issues should first be resolved before we try to widen the WTO agenda further. Our public is unwilling to accept another post-dated cheque, when an earlier one has bounced.

Similarly, the movement towards sustainable development has proved a disappointment. Developing countries are unable to realize fair payments for their sovereign biodiversity resources, and traditional knowledge.

The treaties on climate change and biodiversity have also failed to activate the anticipated investment and technology transfers to developing countries.

Industrialized countries have not shown the political will to enhance their overseas development budgets. Multilateral development agencies are also constrained in their resources, of which, in any case, very little is available on concessional terms.

The inevitable conclusion is that for current regimes of globalization and sustainable development to be strengthened - or even to survive - they must be re-engineered to generate large-scale finances for poverty alleviation. The passion for globalization has to be tempered by compassion for its victims.

Sadly, this thought has not penetrated into the thinking of the developed economies. Their actions also do not reflect the realization that there cannot be a sustainable revival of their own sluggish economies unless the globalization and sustainable development priorities are re-oriented and anchored in the developmental needs of two-thirds of the global population.

Mr President,

A year ago, I had suggested, in my speech to the US Congress, a Comprehensive Global Dialogue on Development. The aim of such a dialogue would be to address the highly unstable situation in which one-third of the world's population lives in luxury and condemns the remaining two-thirds to poverty and want. It is a fertile breeding ground for political unrest, economic chaos, and social fractures.

India would be happy to coordinate this dialogue, with the immediate objective of mobilizing resources for poverty alleviation programmes in developing countries. A preliminary agenda for the dialogue could include:

Ø The accelerated liquidation of external debts of low income and highly indebted countries;

Ø Poverty alleviation programmes specifically aimed at developing countries facing financial crises;

Ø Stabilization of international prices of primary commodity exports;

And, most importantly,

Ø Welfare and development programmes for all the world's needy children, for their nutrition, health, education, and protection from degrading and hazardous employment.

The struggle for equitable development and the war against poverty are as important as our campaign against terrorism and our collective search for security. At a time when an external stimulus has motivated us to unite against terrorism and for security, let us summon an equally strong inner resolve for development and poverty alleviation. They are just as crucial for a global order at peace with itself.

Mr President,

This fundamental and seamless linkage between peace, security and development can be recalled in the sage words of the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore:

“From now onward, any nation that takes an isolated view of its own interests will run contrary to the spirit of the New Age, and

will know no peace. From now onward, the anxiety that each country has for its own safety must embrace the welfare of the whole world.”

More than six decades after the poet penned these lines, they ring truer in our age of challenge and opportunity.

Thank you.