



Statement by Dr. Manmohan Singh Prime Minister of India at the
59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York on
September 23, 2004

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election as President of the 59th Session of this August Assembly. May I assure you of India's full support in ensuring its success.

Sir, as we gather here on the 60th year of the United Nations, we might perhaps pause to reflect on the fate of the ideas and ideals of the international community that animated its creation.

The post-war generation had already become aware that the world which had emerged from the ashes of the global war could no longer be a peaceful world unless the underlying forces of conflict were addressed effectively by the entire community of nations as a collectivity.

Nations, therefore, were united together to make the world a safer and more peaceful place, a world in which a free people could together pursue a destiny of shared prosperity.

Mr President, the impulse behind the creation of global institutions nearly sixty years ago has become even more pressing reality today. If we look around us, the single most defining characteristic of our contemporary world is the global, transnational character of the many challenges we confront, whether these are in the realm of international security or development.

Virtually every major issue that we face as nation states, has both a domestic as well as a transnational dimension. It is becoming increasingly apparent as never before that unless we fashion a global response, based on a meaningful consensus, to these challenges, we would not succeed in creating a world that truly manifests the ideals of the United Nations.

Sir, terrorism is one such challenge for which many of us have paid an unacceptable price. We shall not forget that three years ago, it was this great city that witnessed the single most horrendous terrorist act in human history.

About three weeks ago, the world saw another brutal act of terror, in Russia, which took the lives of hundreds of innocent civilians, including a large number of young children.

Terrorism exploits the technologies spawned by globalisation, recruits its foot soldiers on ideologies of bigotry and hatred, and directly targets democracies.

And yet it is a sad reality that international networks of terror appear to cooperate more effectively among themselves than the democratic nations that they target.

We speak about cooperation, but seem often hesitant to commit ourselves to a truly global offensive to root out terrorism, with the pooling of resources, exchange of information, sharing of intelligence, and the unambiguous unity of purpose that is required. This must change, Mr. President.

We do have a global coalition against terrorism. We must now give it substance and credibility, avoiding selective approaches and political expediency.

Mr. President, let me turn to other major challenges we face today, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. There is an increasing reliance on restrictive regimes and the use of punitive action to confront this threat to international peace and security. While India is firmly opposed to proliferation and has an impeccable record in this respect, we believe, Mr. President, that it is only a global consensus of willing nations that would ultimately prove to be the truly effective in this regard.

The Chemical Weapons Convention is a good model to follow in respect of other weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons.

It is through representative institutions rather than through exclusive clubs of privileged countries that we can address global threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

Sir, as far back as in 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had outlined a series of specific steps in an Action Plan, whose central proposition remains valid even today that progressive steps towards the elimination of weapons of mass destruction must be based on a balance of obligations between those who possess such weapons and those who do not.

It is quite evident today that a global discourse is required for evolving a more cooperative and consensual international security order.

India believes that this consensus must differentiate between states whose actions strengthen non-proliferation and those that weaken realization of its objectives.

Mr. President, let me now turn to the central theme for the vast majority of UN members; the challenge of development and the eradication of mass poverty. Globalization has undoubtedly brought enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in the functioning of our economies. It has integrated market places, higher standards of living and a revolution in global connectivity.

But, Sir, there is also the phenomenon of widening economic disparities, both within and among countries. Connectivity also means that the people are painfully aware in real time of how far and how fast they are falling behind in their relative conditions of living.

Development today is no longer a function of domestic resources and national policies alone. It is a process that is vitally linked to the international economic environment that the developing countries face.

Sir, the international community must find ways to contract the circles of exclusion. We need to find innovative sources of financing and access to new technologies that are necessary to assist those who are on the margins of globalization.

Just as prosperity cannot be sustained by being walled in, poverty cannot be banished to some invisible periphery. Development, therefore, must return to the centre of the global discourse.

We must evolve equitable and rule-based regimes to manage global trade, investment flows and movement of services.

Sir, four years ago, at our Millennium Summit, we adopted ambitious global development goals, but it is a matter of concern that we have already fallen behind in their implementation.

While globalization has generated new challenges, it has also given us new technologies to deal with these massive challenges.

The world faces looming pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, but it today also possesses remedies and skills that can rid the world of this scourge. We face problems of environmental degradation in many parts of our planet, but we also have available safe and environment-friendly technologies.

Many countries are beset by problems of hunger and malnutrition, but we possess modern techniques of food production and processing to make a hunger-free world a credible and realistic dream.

Although our excessive dependence on hydrocarbons raises concerns about the long-term availability of energy and about security of supplies, technology has made available many environmentally sound alternative technologies.

What we lack, however, is a truly global concert and a mobilization of the international community to overcome these massive challenges.

Mr President, Sir, the experience of the decades since the inception of the United Nations demonstrates the great significance of democracy as an instrument for achieving both peace and prosperity.

While it is gratifying that the frontiers of democracy have expanded dramatically in the last decade and a half, they still exclude significant numbers.

Only a few months ago, in India's 14th General Elections, our country went through the largest exercise of popular will in the world. I can, therefore, assert with confidence the importance of national articulations in global forums truly reflecting the democratically expressed will of their people.

We choose to overlook the absence of democracy in too many cases for reasons of political expediency.

Sir, democracy's representative nature validates the commitment we take on as countries; it should also determine the manner in which the architecture of international institutions evolves.

For what is required for the international community to successfully deal with global challenges, whether they be security challenges, economic challenges or challenges in the sphere of the environment are the existence of international institutions and a culture of genuine multilateralism.

The United Nations and its specialized agencies are the only instruments available for responding effectively to the challenges we face collect.

But what is missing is our sustained commitment to democratize the functioning of the United Nations.

Sir, it is common knowledge that the UN is often unable to exert an effective influence on global economic and political issues of critical importance.

This is due to its what may be called as "democracy deficit", which prevents effective multilateralism, a multilateralism that is based on a democratically-evolved global consensus.

Therefore, reform and restructuring of the United Nations system can alone provide a crucial link in an expanding chain of efforts to refashion international structures, imbuing them with a greater degree of participatory decision-making, so as to make them more representative of contemporary realities.

Mr. President, Our Millennium Declaration had recognized the urgency of the reform of the United Nations Security Council. An overwhelming majority of the world's population cannot be excluded from an institution that today legislates on an increasing number of issues, with an ever-widening impact.

The expansion of the Security Council, in the category of both permanent and non-permanent members, and the inclusion of countries like India as permanent members, would be a first step in the process of making the United Nations a truly representative body.

Mr President, I would like to make brief references to two countries with which India has had historically friendly ties and whose early return to political normalcy is the focus of the world's attention.

The situation in Iraq causes us great concern. The United Nations has a central role to play in erasing the discord of the recent past and in ensuring that the Iraqi people can soon exercise effective sovereignty, preserving the country's unity and territorial integrity.

An end to the suffering of the Iraqi people and recognition of their aspirations should be the guiding objectives.

Consistent with our longstanding ties of friendship with the Iraqi people, India will contribute to Iraq's humanitarian and economic reconstruction.

Sir, in the past three years, the international community has assisted Afghanistan in pulling back from the brink of chaos and chronic instability.

We sincerely hope that the forthcoming Presidential elections and the subsequent Parliamentary elections will allow the Afghan people to express their will, free from interference and intimidation. India's assistance to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development will continue.

Relations between India and Pakistan have been a matter of attention for the international community. It is known that since January this year India and Pakistan have initiated a composite dialogue to resolve all issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. Sir, I reaffirm our determination to carry forward this dialogue to a purposeful and mutually acceptable conclusion.

In closing, Mr. President, I would like to reaffirm India's commitment to the principles that have brought us together in this Organisation.

These principles retain their relevance and validity even while the global economy and the international political order pose new and very different challenges.

All of us have to grow out of the comfort of the predictable, discard constraining habits of thought and move forward with confidence to meet the demands of the present and the future.

Each of us has to be prepared to take on new obligations and larger responsibilities relevant to the needs of our times.

Sir, I deem it a privilege to say unhesitatingly that India is conscious of the responsibilities that lie ahead. I speak of an India on the move, on the cutting edge of economic, technological and developmental transformations.

This is an India endowed with outstanding human resources, and we are putting in place policies which will respond to emerging and critical tasks. We have the capability and the capacity to take these on, and to participate in the re-structuring of a just and dynamic world order.

We are confident that in an inextricably interdependent world that we live in, our commitment to the common good, which this organization embodies, will be resolute and firm.

In this, we are inspired by the vision of internationalism bequeathed to us by India's first Prime Minister, The Great - Jawaharlal Nehru. His vision of a world order whose pillars are peace, harmony, cooperation and development.

This vision needs to reanimate the collective wisdom of the world community for a new partnership to meet the unprecedented challenges we face.

Thank you.

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