

ADDRESS BY H.E.MR. INDER KUMAR GUJRAL PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC
OF INDIA TO THE 52 ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Mr. President,

It is a particular pleasure for me to see you presiding over this General Assembly. As Ambassador in the former Soviet Union for five years, I have had a long association with the Ukraine, and I retain the fondest memories of my several visits to your beautiful country. You preside over an Assembly that will deliberate on crucial issues before the world community on which your experience and guidance will be invaluable. I would also like to congratulate your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, on the engagement with which he acted during his presidency to carry our work forward.

We are celebrating in India the fiftieth anniversary of our emergence as a free nation. The constitutional moorings and democratic forms, which the new nation-state has accepted and adopted, rest on the vast foundation of civilisational experience and ethos. This explains the stability, coherence and creative unity of the vast Indian society, that is a world in itself. The experience has wrought in us the deep conviction that, while there are universally shared values and striving, there can be no rigid prescriptions. We see the United Nations in this image, as a crucible in which we melt together our individual contributions to a world civilisation, yet in recognition of the variety of historical and cultural experience we bring to it.

The Cold War cast an early shadow on the Organisation, creating a situation of ideological polarisation. The Non-aligned Movement rejected this imposition of rigidity, representing an independent and responsible alternative world view. This still remains so, and NAM retains its validity and relevance, even after the disappearance of block rivalries. Nonalignment was not a by-product of the cold war. Then, it expressed the overwhelming need of previously colonised and dis-empowered nations to a voice a perspective and an agenda in a politically and economically unequal and inequitable world. Today, it

remains a voice of reason and constructive engagement for the times ahead, which demand common purpose and contribution from all sides towards a convergence of intent on vital, even fateful, global concerns.

Mr. President,

Since the creation of the UN Charter, the world should have changed far more than it has in the half century that has elapsed. Decolonisation is almost complete, but the scars of colonisation are still with us. The present bears a heavy burden of the past. South Africa is free, but racism rears its ugly head amidst us, often laced with xenophobia. Development and growth - - and even human dignity - remain for much of the world a distant dream. We must insistently ask ourselves what we can decisively do at the United Nations to make the dreams of the hundreds of millions come true? How can we make the United Nations a more vibrant Organisation for the world community as a whole, at a time when we need it more than we ever have, a United Nations that is better equipped to fully responding to the challenges of the next century?

As an Organisation, the United Nations must also evolve and adapt itself to a rapidly changing environment, the better to serve the core needs of the world community. As a country which places very great store on the UN's capacity to contribute to international peace and security, and to development, the two crucial priorities before the world community, India, like others, has a vital interest in a UN that continually makes itself more responsive to the needs of its member states, and prepares itself to serve them better. This, we believe, is the objective of reform. We are hence very pleased that the Secretary General, immediately after taking office, made reform one of his priorities and we congratulate him for this commitment. Within the first seven months of his tenure, he has produced a series of proposals of impressive breadth and scope. These are before us, and many have described this session as a reform General Assembly.

We judge the agenda for reform by the measure I have described. We are supportive of all proposals that, in our view, will carry forward, or improve, the Secretariat's ability to respond to the mandates of the

international community. We will express our thoughts constructively with the aim of strengthening the process and direction of reform to the collective advantage of the global community and the Organisation which represents it. We do not see reform simply as an exercise to trim the budget of the UN. Instead, reforms should contribute towards a strengthened UN and its capacity to respond effectively to the priorities identified by the overwhelming majority of its membership.

The crisis that confronts the UN manifests itself in many ways. A financial crisis has resulted from the inability of some to fulfil their Charter commitments, and from the laying down of preconditions to meet them. The UN does not have the means to execute programmes that respond to the felt needs and priorities of its membership, precisely at a time when these are sorely needed. As a result, the UN is in danger of being marginalised as the global forum where decisions can be taken that truly respond to the challenges of globalisation. The solution lies not in piecemeal reform, but in building trust between nations, and an acceptance that in international relations democratic principles should be the norm, as much as they are increasingly accepted in national governance.

Mr. President, in our view, international peace and security and development are inextricably linked. The one is impossible to achieve without the other. Over the last six or seven years, there has been a growing emphasis on the political aspects of the tasks of development, such as democracy and human rights. Unless the underlying causes of underdevelopment, poverty and social alienation are effectively addressed and removed, this emphasis will remain unrealised. Therefore, the single most important target that the United Nations should set itself is the promotion of sustained economic growth in developing countries that will lead to the eradication of poverty, and erase the tensions and pressures that have led to the collapse of governance and social order in several states, and to conflicts between others. International peace and stability will be enhanced only when all countries enjoy a minimum standard of economic self-sufficiency and well-being. Therefore, we believe that the thrust of any reform proposals in the UN should make the promotion of sustained economic development the principal cross-sectoral issue for the

Secretariat's programmes. We believe that there are enough intergovernmental mandates to permit the Secretariat to tailor programmes towards this end.

The universality of human rights, to which we all committed ourselves almost five years ago at Vienna, expresses itself at one level in the international norms for the promotion and protection of human rights, and our collective efforts to foster respect for these standards. At a deeper plane, this universality stems from the search in different civilisations for ways of protecting the human dignity of every individual. Next year, as we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, we will reflect whether the ideals enshrined in the Declaration have become a reality for people in all parts of the world. As we do so, we must build confidence in a process that encourages introspection and self-criticism, dialogue and consultation rather than confrontation and judgement. The Declaration calls for the "advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want as the highest aspiration of the common people. " It recognises the importance of economic, social and cultural rights as well as their inter-dependence with civil and political rights. Full realisation of all these rights is what will give true meaning to the quest for human dignity embodied in the Universal Declaration.

India's approach to the observance and promotion of human rights is inspired by the holistic vision of the Universal Declaration and the Indian Constitution, both of which were drafted close to each other. A strong institutional framework, mutually reinforcing safeguards, both within and outside this framework, a policy of transparency and responsiveness to civil society, and co-operation with the UN human rights system, in particular the treaty bodies, are the main elements of this approach in the area of civil and political rights. Equally, if not more important, are the assault on poverty and underdevelopment, promotion of awareness of rights and a policy of affirmative action for the upliftment of socially and economically vulnerable sections of society. This is a complex task, especially in a country of India's diversity, and many times, when the State has faltered, civil society has stepped in. In India, as elsewhere, individuals have wrought miracles by working outside established

systems and going beyond traditional modes of thought. In recent times, the most moving example is that of a frail, sari-clad woman Mother Teresa - whose fathomless compassion and soothing touch would be missed by millions in India. I would like to pay tribute to this apostle of mercy who rendered service to millions of poor and suffering people not only in India but all over the world, and brought them hope.

While development must be our supreme objective, to get there we also need peace, stability and security. The dangers that threaten us have been, for the last fifty years, increasingly more frightening than any that have cast their shadow over mankind in its entire history. Development of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons has made it possible for a country possessing these weapons to destroy whole populations. We have decided as an international community to outlaw the production, possession or use of chemical and biological weapons. However, on the weapons of mass destruction capable of total annihilation of human civilisation, the global community has lived for too long on a diet of empty promises. The pretexts for clinging to nuclear arsenals, which were questionable at any time, have now vanished. Mere non-proliferation treaties, promoted as disarmament measures, only serve to entrench a nuclear monopoly. No credible steps towards striving to realise a nuclear weapon-free world are contemplated, much less taken, by those who should be showing the way. No justifications can be preferred as during the Cold War. The patience of the world community - expressed through the International Court of Justice, enlightened voices from former believers of deterrence, political and general opinion, and weighty voluntary initiatives - is starting to wear thin. Nuclear weapon powers owe it to the world to answer the question why they need nuclear weapons. Global opinion wants a Nuclear Weapons Convention, as already outlined for the class of biological and chemical weapons, and will not rest till it is achieved. We appeal to nuclear weapon states to align their policies to what the world wants. We see the United Nations as the forum in which the international community must continue to demand universal nuclear disarmament, and we expect therefore that the Secretariat's programmes will support this intergovernmental objective.

Under the Charter, the Security Council was constituted as a body on

which the general membership conferred primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, acting on its behalf. In recent years, the Security Council has been able to play a more active role in discharging its responsibilities. However, there is often a perception that the Council's actions have not always reflected the sentiments of the general membership. It is imperative and time, therefore, that the Security Council take on, as permanent members, developing countries equipped to make an important contribution with their world views, historical experiences and civilisational values, so that the decisions of the Council truly reflect the UN's wider membership. Otherwise, the Council's actions will be seen as progressively less representative, precisely at a time when it is being called upon to act far more frequently than before on behalf of the world community.

India has let it be known from 1995, in this General Assembly, that it is prepared to accept the responsibilities of permanent membership. We are the largest democracy in the world, with ancient civilisational values and attainments, and a world view based on a universalist inspiration, participative governance, respect for diversity and pluralism, as well as readiness for constructive engagement in the world's affairs. These strengths, we believe, would be an asset to an expanded Security Council. India's standing as one of the leading economies in the world will be progressively strengthened, and we are prepared to bear in full the responsibilities of permanent membership. India's long-standing participation in UN peace-keeping operations testifies not only to the dedication and professionalism of the Indian soldiers but also to the political will of the Government to actively contribute to these operations.

Mr. President, at the core of our foreign policy is our keenness to pursue close ties, and build confidence and co-operation with our neighbours, recognising fully that we are the largest country in the region, not only in terms of size and population, but also economic capabilities. We extend our hand of friendship not in a spirit of mere reciprocity but in good faith. Where we do expect reciprocity which is unrelated to size and capacity, is mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We seek to advance cohesion,

synergy and mutual goodwill in our neighbourhood so that together we fully participate in and derive benefits from the dynamic changes the world is currently witnessing. Our approach has contributed to the setting in motion of a trend towards cooperation in our region.

As a large and diverse economy, we are developing new partnerships that go beyond the region and revitalise the old cultural and commercial links. Politically, it is expressed in the active interest that we have taken in supporting the Middle East peace process - our ties with the Arab world reaching deep into history - and our strong fraternal ties with developing countries in general and with Africa in particular. In our larger neighbourhood, with which we have a shared history, we have enhanced our engagement with the ASEAN as a Full Dialogue Partner and as a participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum. While maintaining our traditional relationships with the United States, Russia, the European Union and Japan, we have also been strengthening global trends in regional cooperation by actively promoting cooperation among countries of the Indian Ocean Rim and trying to recover the cultural and commercial connectivities that have existed since time immemorial and which were snapped in the colonial era.

Mr. President, the global society is seeking to find an equilibrium between the opposing pulls generated by the forces of globalisation, nationalism and sub-nationalism. Indeed, it is difficult to see just how they can be balanced, yet they must be or else the potential for international conflagration will be immense. Hence, the absolute need for extreme caution to prevent established nation states from being destabilised either through too hasty a push towards globalisation, or the pull of sub-national demands. We see this as a challenge which we will have to face collectively as well as individually.

A global menace that threatens international peace, and to which open democracies are particularly vulnerable, is terrorism. It takes innocent lives indiscriminately, brings fear into the lives of others, and shatters the peaceful existence and the normal growth of entire communities. Terrorism should be anathema to the international community because it is the antithesis of every ideal that the UN Charter enshrines. Its main vehicle is violence, its aim is destruction rather than development, its doctrines are founded on

intolerance, and in the means it uses and the effect it has, it destroys human rights utterly. Incitement to terrorism, and complicity and participation in terrorism across borders, undermine the international system. And even though very few societies are free from its clutches, we still have not developed a global strategy to defeat this evil. The resolve is absent. It is important that we find it, not least because terrorism has a global web, spanning all continents, and quickly building links with the other global menace of drugs. We in India see in our region just how deadly a poison this mix of terrorism and drugs is. The United Nations should take the lead in determined global action to root out these scourges.

Protection and preservation of the environment is an area to which all of us attach the highest importance. The commitment for global partnership for preventing further degradation of the environment, made at the Rio Summit in 1992, was reiterated and the need for effective implementation of Agenda 21 reaffirmed, during the Special Session of the General Assembly in June this year. All the elements of Agenda 21 have to be implemented in full and we need to accelerate the process of such implementation. Any partial or non-comprehensive implementation will be detrimental not only to international co-operation in this area, but also to the threatened stability of the earth's fragile environment. In this connection, it is our hope that the spirit of the convention on Climate Change and the Berlin Mandate will be fully encompassed by the protocol or legal instrument to emerge from the Kyoto Conference to be held in December, 1997.

What has been touched upon, Mr. President, represents huge challenges, beyond the capacity of any country to face on its own. This is why it is so vital for the United Nations, now more than ever before, to be a forum where we can pool creative ideas and lessons from our experience, and to assist us in understanding and coping with these challenges. This is the ultimate rationale of reform. We will be ready to work with other countries to rebuild the United Nations in the image of our collective aspirations and as our trusted instrument to meet the challenges of the approaching millennium.

Mr. President,

Addressing the 15th regular session of the General Assembly, India's first Prime Minister, Pt.Jawaharlal Nehru, said in October 1960:

Quote: "The main purpose of the United Nations is to build up a world without war, a world based on the co-operation of nations and peoples. It is not merely a world where war is kept in check for a balancing of armed forces. It is much deeper than that. It is a world from which the major causes of war have been removed and social structures built up which further peaceful co-operation within a nation as well as between nations. " Unquote.

It is in this spirit that we should approach the tasks before us.

Thank you, Mr. President.