

49th Session
14th Plenary Meeting, 3rd October, 1994

Speech by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee

I congratulate Amara Essy on his election as President of the General Assembly at the forty-ninth session. We are particularly gratified that an eminent son of Africa is leading the Assembly's deliberations this year.

We offer our thanks to his predecessor, Ambassador Insanally, who presided over a year of considerable activity in the General Assembly with great aplomb and finesse. The Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, will be completing three years in office. We wish him well as he continues to lead the United Nations.

We already have welcomed the new South Africa to the United Nations. South Africa today is a reminder of the triumph of the principle of equality of man—a triumph in which the United Nations played a major role. The world community must commit itself to ensuring that this principle is implemented for all time to come. All efforts should be made for the development of South Africa.

Forty-nine years ago a world tired of war declared that at this foundry of the United Nations it would beat its swords into ploughshares. Instead, we have only produced words, while the swords have not disappeared. The words may be important, but unfortunately they have remained mere words. We seem to be stepping into a new world order in a gaping moral void, with no credible promise of peace nor of a non-violent world. And we are approaching 1995: the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations; the fortieth anniversary of Panchsheel—the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; the Year of Tolerance, which is being celebrated by the United Nations; and the one hundred and twenty-fifth birthday of the apostle of peace and moral force, Mahatma Gandhi, whose message only gains in relevance year after year.

Global security today demands a holistic approach involving the promotion of economic and social development; the protection of human

rights; the promotion of harmony and social cohesion in multi-racial and multi-ethnic societies; the combating of terrorism, drug-trafficking and clandestine traffic in armaments; and the enhancing of the capacity of the United Nations, within the framework of its Charter, to prevent conflicts, preserve peace and alleviate suffering. The new agenda of the United Nations must be shaped on the basis of this approach, giving peace and development equal priority and treatment. The General Assembly, with its universal participation and comprehensive mandate, should project such a holistic vision and revitalize that vision into action.

The Secretary-General's Agendas have reminded us of what we should focus on, namely, disarmament, development and peace. I put them in that order because true peace can only follow disarmament and development. The cold war was not war, yet certainly not peace. In its wake, we have seen how, most frighteningly, poverty, disease and a host of miseries affect the cause of peace. They had been there all the time, but were not seen by the jaundiced eye of the cold war. In the new post-cold-war context, therefore, the nexus of disarmament and development with peace becomes crystal clear indeed inescapably clear.

We have to start with disarmament. The slaughter in Rwanda has taken place during the forty-ninth anniversary of the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For almost 50 years, we have lived in fear of general and complete extinction instead of global and complete disarmament. Those who had biological and chemical weapons have given them up under universally binding commitments. We must now go one logical step further and exercise the greatest evil of all, namely, the weapons of mass destruction.

We have had global discussions on nuclear disarmament before, but now that the cold war, which spawned these weapons, is over, and the previous adversaries have been drawn into a partnership for peace, this is surely the time to agree-in regimes which: are global, comprehensive, verifiable and non-discriminatory-on steps to make the world a safer place. Another opportunity will arise when the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) comes up for review next April. We hope that States Parties will use that occasion to refashion the Treaty into a real instrument for global disarmament.

Quite apart from the NPT, it is essential that we examine a detailed implementation process of total and global disarmament, which has been accepted in principle, though in words only thus far.

Last June in Cairo, the Foreign Ministers of the non-aligned countries, at India's suggestion, proposed that a fourth special session on disarmament be convened. We think the time and the circumstances are right for the General Assembly to plan for this special session for next year, or as soon as possible.

But disarmament alone will be inadequate. We are rushing towards another precipice, where the disparities in wealth between nations would trigger violent revolution within States. A global convulsion will come if we continue to disregard the development imperative. The problems of development are global problems and must be addressed by all of us. We must set substantive agenda for development, commit ourselves to it and implement it.

The World Trade Organization, which should soon come into being, must promote what we expected but did not quite achieve so far in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)-non-discrimination, consensus and transparency in the international trade regime. We hope that the multilateral trade negotiations will stimulate economic growth in our countries and in the world economy. It will not if the carefully negotiated consensus, to which we committed ourselves at Marrakesh, is destroyed by the introduction of new conditionalities. Faith in the multilateral system will be shaken if countries use their trading strength and bilateral pressures to weaken and distort agreements to which they have just become parties.

The themes of the World Summit for Social Development focus on the critical issues of poverty eradication together with social integration and the need to increase avenues for productive employment, without which we will not have the broad-based, self-sustaining social and economic development that is the only guarantor of peace and security. If the Summit is to succeed, we must agree upon the commitments for additional resources dedicated to national programmes around the world. We should not be sidetracked from this goal by new concepts which do not command consensus, and do not address the fundamental needs of development.

The United Nations must also re-order its priorities so as to counter several disturbing centrifugal trends which we see emerging. What the world needs is support for the nation-State system on which the United Nations was built. In June this year, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and President Yeltsin, representing two of the largest pluralistic nations in the world, issued the Moscow Declaration on the Protection of the Interests of Pluralistic States. In this Declaration, which has been circulated as a document of the General Assembly, Russia and India have put forward principles which, if acted upon, will, we think, promote greater harmony in the world.

Against this background, there are a few questions for the Assembly to consider. For the 45 years of the cold war, the Security Council was forced into immobility, but when the cold war is ended, it found itself shouldering a stupendous task. As if to make up for years of inactivity, it has rushed into many areas. We must ponder the consequences of the decisions taken over the last few years, which have on occasion sent United Nations peace-keepers in pursuit of objective whose nexus with peace is rather tenuous.

New doctrines justify armed United Nations intervention under circumstances that are not quite defined-not yet at any rate. These initiatives are well meaning but they do not seem to address the problems from the right end. The ultimate human right is the right to live-the right to food and shelter without which life is impossible. The poverty of many nations makes this a problem to which there are no easy answers. If there are circumstances which justify armed multilateral intervention, by the same logic should not the United Nations have the right to enforce the equitable sharing of resources among nations?

The Non-aligned Movement, at the meeting of its Foreign Ministers in Cairo this year, suggested some guiding principles for peace-keeping operations of enduring significance. All means for the peaceful settlement of disputes chosen by the conflicting parties should be exhausted before coercive measures are considered. Peace-keeping operations should strictly adhere to the principles of the Charter, in particular the principles of full respect for the sovereignty of States, their territorial integrity and non- intervention in their internal affairs. Peace-keeping operations should be considered only at the request of the Member States involved. The resources for peace-

keeping activities should not be at the expenses of resources for development activities of the United Nations. There should be no hesitation in ending those operations which have been overtaken by events or become inconsistent with their mandates. It is also important to ensure that the distinction between peace-keeping operations and other activities of the United Nations, including humanitarian assistance, is maintained at all times. While coordination between these activities at the field level is important, their integration could irreversibly alter the basic purposes of these distinct activities and detract from the effectiveness.

Prudence must be exercised in the use of regional organisations in peace-keeping operations. It is the capacity of the United Nations for peace-keeping that must be strengthened.

We have responded positively to the Secretary-General's appeal for the strengthening of the United Nations capacity for peace-keeping by designating a brigade for the stand-by arrangements that are being put in place.

It is true that the work of the Security Council and its role in the United Nations are of the greatest importance. There is therefore all the more reason that the Council should be representative of the international community and have maximum legitimacy. The United Nations needs a Council that is effective, but it cannot be effective if the impression grows that it represents entrenched privileges and that its agenda could vary from those of the general membership. The democracy and good governance which are urged upon all States cannot stop at the gates of the United Nations.

The present-day composition of the Security Council reflects the power balance of the immediate post-war period. Since then, the membership of the world body has increased many times over. There is also a greater diffusion of power. To give the Council's actions greater legitimacy, moral authority and political effectiveness, it is imperative to expand the membership of the Council. Developing countries must be included in the category of permanent members to reflect the universal character of the world body. The number of non-permanent seats must also be increased to give Member States greater opportunity for participation in the work of the Council.

A selective, piecemeal expansion of the number of permanent members would not be prudent. The Security Council is not a corporate board, where equity shares determine the voting power, nor can it be likened to the Bretton Woods institutions, which reflect the wealth of nations. The United Nations is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of nations. Its primary objective remains the maintenance of international peace and security. These elements must find expression in the composition of the Council, which must be able to address the challenges of the twenty-first century.

Durability and resilience, rather than expediency, should determine the time frame of any expansion. On the basis of any criteria-population, size of economy, contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security and to peace-keeping or future potential-India deserves to be a permanent member of the Security Council.

The working methods of the Security Council must be reformed to enhance transparency and to express the democratic aspirations of the vast majority of Member States. We hope that Open-ended Working Group on the question of increase in the membership of the Security Council will duly reflect on these issues in its deliberations next year.

Human rights are the new vogue. The profoundly humanistic traditions of the Indian civilisation, with its emphasis on tolerance, harmony, non-violence and the inviolability of the individual, are in-built in our ethos. Several centuries back, an Indian thinker wrote:

"Man is above everything else. Man is the highest truth. There is nothing above man."

All human rights are sacrosanct in India, guaranteed by a secular Constitution, an independent judiciary, a free press, and public opinion vigorously expressed. India's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights has now received another institutional impetus with the establishment of our National Human Rights Commission, which has begun to function effectively, with its findings published in its annual report. In keeping with our policy of

transparency we maintain a sustained dialogue with important non-governmental organizations, which includes affording greater access to them. We have also invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to visit India.

It is true that much remain to be done on a worldwide basis to further international cooperation to promote and protect human rights. But the problem must be seen in perspective. In India, for instance, we grapple with the problems of development for 900 million people; in the north-west and in the north-east we face brutal terrorist movements, often supported from abroad, which have killed thousands within India, and threatened our sovereignty and territorial integrity. We will face these problems and defeat them. We welcome the support and advice of friends abroad, but we cannot accept the position that all human rights are a privilege of the terrorists. The rights of innocent and unarmed citizens must be protected. We urge that the question of human rights should not be made into a politically motivated slogan insensitive to the rights of those citizens.

Since the toxin of terrorism is deliberately being spread by some countries-and none of us is immune-the international community must come together to defend itself. Terrorism is fast becoming a means, if not a weapon, of mass destruction. Many countries have suffered and many more could be affected. Terrorists have killed far more people in the last decades than the chemical and biological weapons which we have agreed to ban and destroy. Just as the international community decided that a convention was needed to outlaw those weapons, so it must urgently negotiate a convention to counter and eradicate terrorism. We urge the General Assembly to initiate serious thinking on this subject. The international community must also provide the necessary succour to the victims of terrorism, whose numbers are swelling by the day.

The closing years of the twentieth century will see human society poised at a critical juncture as regards the future. Will the end of the cold war mark the beginnings of a new, more stable global order, of freedom and well-being growing on the soil of cooperation, consensus and mutual respect, or will the world instead revert bit by

bit to the mind-set which breeds anarchy and a return to centrifugalism and destruction, to end up once again in the tyranny of imposition and domination? Should we regress to the system of spheres of influence which has led to so many wars over the last two hundred years? These questions have still not been adequately answered.

Many years ago the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had asked what test should guide human endeavour. His conclusion, after long years of struggling on behalf of India's many dispossessed millions, was as follows:

"I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny?"

If the protection afforded its weak, its most dispossessed, people is the measure of community's worth, as indeed it must be, then the millions of refugees, and the conflict, poverty, hunger and deprivation that afflict so many regions of the world today bear stark testimony to the loss of some vital ethical underpinning. If the world today is to redeem a future that seems increasingly mortgaged to greed and hatred, we must recall once again that it is the nobility of our means, and the ends we pursue, that determine our rewards. Our welfare will be determined only in accordance with the values and principles we abide by.

As Mahatma Gandhi and sages before have taught and practised, truthfulness, charity, compassion, non-violence and treating others as we would wish ourselves to be treated are the values that really stand the test of time. These are the values to be inculcated in our great global Organization, the United Nations, to which we are all committed.