

Statement by H.E. Mr. Jaswant Singh, Minister for External Affairs of India at the 55th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (The Millennium Assembly) on September 19, 2000

Mr. President,

India congratulates you on your election as President of the first General Assembly of this Millennium. We are encouraged that you intend to take the Millennium Declaration as the mandate for work of the Organisation during your Presidency.

I take this opportunity to place on record our high appreciation of and to sincerely compliment Foreign Minister Dr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia, for his guidance of the General Assembly in the past year which included three Special Sessions, and of course, meticulous preparations for the Millennium Summit.

I join India's voice to those other delegations in noting with appreciation the dedication with which Secretary General Kofi Annan has served the United Nations at a critical point.

I am delighted on this occasion to warmly welcome Tuvalu as the newest member of the UN.

Mr. President,

Just ten days back, almost 150 Heads of State and Government assembled here for the Millennium Summit. Their assembly in such large numbers was as unique as was the occasion. The Millennium Declaration, that was then adopted, encapsulates a shared vision: that the international community work together in constructive cooperation to meet collective challenges, within the framework of the United Nations. It was in this spirit that my Prime Minister spoke, as did many others, of the need for the United Nations to truly reflect the world of the 21st century, to make it an effective instrument to translate our vision into reality. The United Nations is the house we all share. We must strengthen it, and ensure that it is equal to our collective expectations as also our joint aspirations.

Peace, collective security and development inspire the spirit of the United Nations. We enter the 21st century with extraordinary collective intellectual and technical capabilities. These are our global tools for overcoming the challenges before us. Peace and security for all is not just possible but is well within our grasp.

Stability and development are the essential building blocks for the maintenance of peace and security. Threat to peace can and does arise from different sources. It is not just weapons of mass destruction, or an arms race that endanger peace but also dehumanizing poverty and lack of development.

We must act, as confident nation states, committed to collective action and international cooperation, for they are our effort multipliers of peace and progress. We must reaffirm the principle of respect for state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of countries. Thus, self evidently, we must abjure unilateral action. Whenever circumstances warrant action by the Security Council, that must be firmly rooted in the Charter provisions.

The Brahimi panel's report contains a number of proposals. We recommend that the General Assembly examine this important report carefully and take appropriate decisions to strengthen this vital UN function of peacekeeping.

We support the Middle East Peace Process and find the trend encouraging. The historic Summit between the Republic of Korea and DPR Korea too, augurs well for peace in the Korean peninsula.

Mr. President,

Disarmament, and global nuclear disarmament in particular, is essential to engender a greater sense of security among Member States. India has been, and will continue to be, in the forefront of efforts towards global nuclear disarmament and genuine non-proliferation. We welcome the recommendation of the Secretary General in his report on the Millennium Summit to convene an international conference on Eliminating Nuclear Danger. We urge commencement on negotiations on a Nuclear Weapons Convention to bring about a nuclear-weapon-free world. India remains ready to participate in agreed and irreversible steps such as de-alerting of nuclear forces, thus lowering nuclear danger through accidental use or otherwise; also, a global agreement on no-first-use and on non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states.

Mr. President,

The situation with regard to the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the lack of progress, on a Programme of Work at the Conference on Disarmament, in Geneva,

shows the importance of building a consensus, both within and amongst nations, on issues that affect national and international security. We are conscious that 155 countries are, at present, signatories to the CTBT. We would like to reiterate to them our continuing commitment that India does not wish to stand in the way of entry into force of the CTBT. India volunteered, and continues to observe a moratorium on further explosive nuclear testing. This meets the basic obligation of the CTBT. India also remains ready to engage in meaningful negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament, including on a global treaty to ban the future production of fissile material for weapons purposes.

Mr. President,

Illicit transfer, manufacture and circulation of small arms, particularly by States to non-State actors and to terrorist groups, and their intrinsic linkage with terrorism and narco-trafficking are matters of very deep concern to the world community. When this is combined with religious fanaticism and military adventurism, a threat is posed to global civilized norms, which we strive for. The international community can no longer afford to permit these purveyors of death, outrage and destruction to continue to inflict untold suffering upon innocents. We look forward to a successful outcome of the International Conference on Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, in all its aspects, next year.

Mr. President,

Terrorism is the global menace of our age. For some, it tends to replace ideology and policy. India has been the object of state-sponsored, cross-border terrorism, in its most inhuman manifestations, for more than a decade. Even as the international community works together to curb, control and stamp out illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, we need to continually focus our attention on the users of such weapons: the terrorists. Terrorism is an assault on human decency, a violation of the basic precepts of democracy and the very antithesis of what the United Nations represents and stands for. Because its principal targets are the innocent, it is indeed the most flagrant violation of basic human rights: it constitutes a crime against humanity. It is also a threat to international peace and security, especially when terrorists are armed, financed and backed by governments or their agencies. I urge all members to work to

strengthen the international consensus and legal regimes against terrorism. We have proposed the draft of a comprehensive convention on international terrorism. I urge all members of the United Nations to give their total support to this initiative.

Mr. President, let me now dwell, briefly, on the instrument of our choice to accomplish our global agenda: the United Nations. There is but one United Nations, none replicate it, nor can any replace it.

The membership of the United Nations has increased manifold in the last half century, and today stands at 189. Yet, the Security Council continues to have the same basic structure as in the colonized world of 1945. The need for expansion of the membership of the Security Council, in both permanent and non-permanent categories, is self-evident. The impact of actions of the Security Council is felt, with near total exclusivity, by the developing countries. Yet they have little influence in its decision-making. We have a global consensus that the form taken by the Security Council in the aftermath of the Second World War is out-moded and that it must reflect the logic of an enlarged membership. More than one hundred and fifty states have, at the Millennium Summit, at the highest level endorsed the need for a Council reformed in its representation. An unrepresentative Security Council will lack the range and depth of sensitivity, perceptiveness and understanding of the realities that it will have to deal with, or the moral authority to take such decisions. I would like to reaffirm India's willingness to take on the responsibilities of permanent membership.

The General Assembly is the most important organ of the United Nations. It is here that all States, irrespective of considerations of strength, economy or size sit together as equals, embodying the democratic principle of sovereign equality. There is a growing feeling among Member States that the functioning and role of the General Assembly has to be made more effective. As the revolutions of the digital age reduce distance to the click of a mouse, bringing us together into a new global neighbourhood, as never before in history, and as forces of globalisation inexorably lead us to increasing interdependence, our canvas of international cooperation and collective action has rapidly expanded. It has also become so much more complex. The General Assembly has, therefore, to be central in accepting this new responsibility, this new challenge.

Even as we seek to strengthen democratic principles and practices in the United Nations, and even as the spreading sweep of democracy casts aside dictatorships and authoritarian regimes, we have, unfortunately, witnessed some instances of regression too. Such acts

move against the currents of our times. The international community should oppose these assaults on the spirit of our times and uncompromisingly support and strengthen democratic impulses, practices and norms. It should show its solidarity with the people of such countries. The OAU and the Commonwealth deserve our commendation for the steps that they have taken in this regard.

Developments in Fiji since May 19 this year have caused us deep concern. We appreciate the action taken by the Commonwealth after the overthrow of the constitutionally elected democratic government. We hope that Fiji will return immediately to the constitutional base of 1997 and restore at the earliest, rule of law, by putting an end to racial discrimination. This is in Fiji's own long term interest. We hope that the international community will exercise its collective authority and influence to bring Fiji back to the road of democracy and the rule of law.

Mr. President,

It appears that, sadly, the world has forgotten Afghanistan. The fratricidal conflict in that country continues on account of the Taliban's pursuit of the mirage of military success. It also continues because of outside support, military and financial, to the Taliban. This conflict and the Taliban's mediaeval obscurantist ideologies continue to cause untold suffering to the Afghan people. This impacts adversely on the peace and security of the entire neighbourhood, from West to Central Asia to South Asia. The negatives that emanate from the Taliban controlled areas of Afghanistan, in the shape of terrorism, drug trafficking and the flow of arms, cause justifiable concern all over the world. The Taliban and their mentor must heed the world's demands and abandon the path of conflict. We stand for a comprehensive settlement in Afghanistan that restores peace at the earliest and ensures the interests and aspirations of all sections of that society.

We have consistently called upon the United Nations to increase its development orientation and engagement, which is a core responsibility. We welcome and support the declaration of the Secretary General, last week, to the UNDP Ministerial Meeting, that deficit in development will put in jeopardy all other goals of the United Nations. To address the root causes of poverty meaningfully, we need firm international commitments to re-order and reshape international relations in consequence providing for equitable

opportunities to developing countries for resource earnings. Our call is even more relevant in today's fast integrating world.

Developing countries and their people cannot thrive on a diet of advice and goodwill alone. We hope, therefore, that the forthcoming Conference on Financing for Development would endorse concrete initiatives for mobilization of the required external resources for development, whether from trade or concessional flows and treat this as a shared global goal. In this context, it would be useful to establish the difference that would be made if there was universal adherence to the agreed ODA target of 0.7% of GNP, within a specified time frame.

Nowhere is this more important than in the continent of Africa. Africa's efforts need to be adequately supported by the international community. We believe that issues relating to the development of African countries must remain at the forefront of the work of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

The process of globalization, with revolutionary leaps in communications and the great advance in information technology and, increased mobility of capital, trade and technology has produced new potential for sustained economic growth. The benefits of globalisation have, however, not percolated to the vast sections who live mired in poverty, without shelter, in hunger and in deprivation. Globalization has often been accompanied by enhanced poverty, unemployment and consequent social disintegration. This poses a major challenge. We have to determine an inclusive concept of growth and development. We have to strive for the upliftment of the people, in the largest sense, and not simply in terms of sectoral advances. While GDP growth rates and selective indicators may point to growth in an economy, the elimination of poverty and enhancement of the quality of life and creation of real choices must be integral to the process of assessing the success of development efforts.

In India, we have formulated development strategies on the premise that economic and social policies must subserve the primacy of the human being, and in particular, the poorest. Market forces and growth alone are not the answer. Intervention to guarantee social justice is crucial. Development based on uneven rewards will not be supported by those who are not its beneficiaries. It places great stress on the social fabric. The fullest possible participation of the people in the development process is the best guarantee for the success of any growth strategy.

Many challenges lie ahead of us. Impediments to sustained economic growth of developing countries abound. Protectionist tendencies in developed countries, a lack of political will to implement commitments undertaken regarding development finance, tardy amelioration of the debt burden of developing countries aggravate the situation. Special and differential treatment for developing countries guaranteed under WTO provisions must be translated into operational reality. Developed countries should not seek to restrict market access to goods and services and free movement of natural persons, especially at a time when developing countries are being asked to open up their economies and compete in the international economic domain.

Another challenge relates to reconciling the needs of economic and industrial growth with the need for preservation and protection of environment. A safe and healthy environment for our peoples is an imperative. At the same time, all development cannot be sacrificed at the absolutist altar of environmental preservation. Sustainability of growth strategy and environmental conservation, cannot and should not imply sustenance of poverty.

Developing countries have done commendable work in the implementation of Agenda 21, under an exceptionally difficult global environment. The promised resources from developed countries have failed to materialise. The transfer of technologies on preferential and concessional terms has not been forthcoming. Indeed, impediments are placed on technology transfers even on commercial terms. The Special Session of the UN General Assembly on review and appraisal of the Implementation of Agenda 21 in 2002 should concentrate on finding solutions in addressing the unfulfilled commitments and to give reality and operational content to the declaration that "eradication of poverty is the overriding priority of developing countries".

Mr. President,

Children and issues relating to them are a priority. We hope that the special session of the General Assembly next year would concentrate on the implementation of the Declaration of the World Summit on Children.

Mr. President,

Advancement of the democratic spirit and overcoming challenges to it, growth with equity, economic development with social justice and, as the prize which we seek, the creation of a world where injustice and deprivation give way to fulfillment and welfare for all, are among the goals that we should set for ourselves at the dawn of this new

century. The challenge is nothing less than collective enlightened global ownership.

The General Assembly will once again have a heavy and challenging agenda before it on this long road before us. Let us wish ourselves success in our endeavours.