



**STATEMENT BY HON'BLE MR. ANAND SHARMA
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION
ON
AGENDA ITEM 52: REVITALIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AND
AGENDA ITEM 54: STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM AT 59TH
SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON
OCTOBER 04, 2004 IN NEW YORK**

Mr. President,

We are pleased to participate in this joint debate on the revitalisation of the work of General Assembly and the strengthening of the United Nations system. We thank the Secretary General for the detailed documentation presented under the two agenda items. We express our appreciation for the introductory statement made by the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Frechette.

The Non-Aligned position has already been outlined by Algeria. We would focus on some of the broader issues surrounding the two agenda items.

My delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, for the commitment that you bring with you to the process of revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly and the strengthening of the UN system. We would like to place on record our appreciation for the positive strides made under the President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly on these issues. We will work constructively with you, Mr. President, and wish you all success in your endeavours in this regard.

Mr. President,

The process of reform and revitalisation is necessarily a slow and measured one. We cannot expect results overnight. We need patience and perseverance in our efforts to build agreement amongst all the Member States on issues that often involve sensitive political questions. The strong, steady and purposeful forward movement of a ship perhaps better marks the approach that we need to adopt in this process.

We have made considerable progress in the previous session, involving several rounds of consultations and informal discussions. Progress has been made on the categorisation of items under broad headings, in streamlining the work of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, to some extent, as also the biennialisation, triennialisation, clustering and elimination of items of the agenda of the General

Assembly. Resolutions 58/126 and 58/316 adopted by the General Assembly in December 2003 and July 2004 respectively contain some important steps forward.

We recognise, however, that these steps are essentially the first steps. The ultimate objective of the reform process is to enhance the effectiveness of the Organisation in its responsiveness to the needs of the Member States, especially the developing countries. The progress in attempts to reform and revitalise the UN system would be judged by its adaptation to the efforts of the developing countries to achieve the targets set out in the Millennium Development Goals. Simultaneously, the reform process would be judged by the effectiveness of the UN's response to the global challenges posed by the threats of international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction including the question of nuclear proliferation and disarmament, and trans-national organised crime involving the trafficking in narcotic drugs, arms and humans.

We have a long way ahead of us in reaching our objective. We hope that the high level panel of eminent personalities set up by the Secretary General to report on the threats and challenges faced by the UN and the changes necessary in its institutions and processes would come out with implementable recommendations. We hope the intergovernmental consideration of the recommendations of the Secretary-General on the report of the Panel would give us the opportunity to view the process in a holistic manner, thereby making possible reforms in different parts of the UN system. In the long term, the reforms would be enduring if different elements of the processes move in the same direction.

Mr. President,

The reform process that we are attempting must eventually enhance the prestige, authority and effectiveness of the General Assembly and its ability to deliberate and review policy. This would have to be done in practice, through concrete action. The restoration of the prestige and effectiveness of the General Assembly could be brought about by, as an important first step, returning the thematic debates currently being held in the Security Council to the General Assembly where they rightly belong. Members of the Security Council, belonging to the G-77 or sympathetic to the views of the vast majority of the developing countries about the primacy of the General Assembly, have a major role to play in this respect. The terms of interaction between the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council run without difficulties, but consideration would need to be given to the occasional anomalies that arise in the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The office of the President of the General Assembly has over the last year been strengthened with additional manpower and it would be useful to review the contribution this has made to the working of the President's office. Similarly, an evaluation of the functioning of the General Assembly following the many innovative changes brought about from the beginning of this session would be a useful exercise and would help us choose the direction for the future.

The volume of paper in the UN has been notorious indeed. Those who have to cope with the enormous quantities of documents and resolutions with only a few people at their disposal in their Missions can best testify to the strangulating effect that the

paper work can impose. Even larger Missions find it difficult to keep abreast with the documentation. The documents are crisper now. But the Secretariat needs to continue focusing on making documentation more manageable and user-friendly. Rationalisation and simplification of the language used in resolutions would also be useful. Rationalisation of the language or the number of resolutions would, of course, be possible only with the cooperation of Member States.

It is important in the process of reform not to overlook the rules of procedure already adopted and available to us. The strict observance of the rules of procedure should not be compromised in the revitalisation process. It is also essential to remember the inter-governmental character of the Organisation. Interactions with civil society or other outside bodies undertaken for making the proceedings more broad-based should only be done within the framework of assisting the inter-governmental deliberations and with the objective of increasing the quality of inter-governmental decision-making.

Mr. President,

We thank the Secretary-General for his report in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations.

As the report of the Secretary-General has become available only very recently, my delegation has not had sufficient time to reflect on the proposals made by the Secretary-General. We would, therefore, wish to express our preliminary views on the subject.

Our consideration of the recommendations of the Cardoso panel and the Secretary-General's report on the work of the panel is complicated by the ambiguity on the definition of civil society in the report. The definition used in the panel is at some variance with the elements of 'civil society' identified earlier by the Secretary-General himself and with what has come to be commonly understood by the term. We do not believe that Parliamentarians form a part of civil society; nevertheless, the proposal to engage Parliamentarians in a more intensive manner in the work of the UN is welcome. Their sustained interaction and association with issues of global significance can only help in improving legislation and implementation of policies in their own countries. The idea of "local authorities" as being a part of civil society is also incongruous by any standard; while local authorities are a key element of implementation, they can hardly be identified as civil society.

The proposal to establish a Trust Fund to increase the participation of representatives of non-governmental organisations from developing countries has considerable merit, and deserves further consideration. The sustained efforts of the United Nations system have resulted in significant increases in the number of participating NGOs from developing countries in recent years. The situation still needs further improvement. The creation of a Trust Fund will be a positive contribution to the process. However, clear criteria in establishing the Trust Fund, particularly with regard to donations that are unconditional in nature, will be important for its success.

Mr. President,

We wish to address in greater detail two important issues discussed in the report. The first is the participation of non-governmental organisations in the work of the General Assembly. Though the Secretary-General states that “there is considerable merit in opening the regular work of the Assembly to increased participation by accredited non-governmental organisations”, a convincing case has not been made for this. The nature of the participation and the benefits to be derived from this are not apparent, and we are not persuaded that this would benefit the United Nations or its Member States. This would also militate against both the inter-governmental principle and the principle of democratic representation since civil society NGOs, in the usual, strict meaning of the term, have not been elected.

Further, the interpretation that there is nothing in Article 71 of the UN Charter that would preclude the General Assembly from inviting non-governmental organisations to participate in its sessions is a disingenuous legal interpretation, of which there seems to be a growing trend. In our view, the provisions of the Charter and Article 71 are very clear. The Charter, through Article 71, determines that the principal relationship between the United Nations and civil society will be through the Economic and Social Council. We would be hesitant to tamper with the Charter of the United Nations and would caution against fallacious interpretations for the sake of convenience or expediency.

The second issue which merits comment is the granting of accreditation to non-governmental organisations. The Secretary-General suggests that the General Committee of the General Assembly could be designated for the accreditation process for applications for consultative status. This, in our understanding, would only be applicable if non-governmental organisations were to participate in the work of the General Assembly.

The Secretary-General refers to the comments of the Panel of Eminent Persons on the work of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations. The comments of the Panel are somewhat disappointing in regard to the work of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations. The question has been dealt with at a superficial level. There has been a lack of adequate consultations with members of the Committee, resulting in a lack of understanding of the work of the Committee, or with the wider community of Member States on the usefulness of the Committee’s work. This is indeed regrettable as the opportunity to make meaningful proposals to reform and streamline the work of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organisations for further improving the accreditation process of non-governmental organisations has been lost.

Several proposals have been discussed in the Secretary General’s report with regard to country-level engagement with non-governmental organisations. Due diligence must be exercised to ensure that the mandates of the various United Nations bodies are not exceeded, nor should we lose sight of the fact that Governments are the main interlocutors of the United Nations system at the country-level.

We shall provide more details of our views on the report of the Secretary-General and the Cardoso panel during further discussions.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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