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**STATEMENT
BY**

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**ON THE ITEMS:
REVITALISATION OF THE WORK OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY and
STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM**

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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**STATEMENT IN THE JOINT DEBATE ON:
REVITALISATION OF THE WORK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
and STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM,
MONDAY 4 OCTOBER 2004**

Mr President,

It is my pleasure to congratulate you on your election to preside over the 59th Session of the General Assembly. It is particularly gratifying to see a distinguished son of Africa leading this august body in such an important session. I wish to pledge the full cooperation of South Africa with you in the year ahead.

Please allow me to thank and congratulate your predecessor, His Excellency, Mr Julia Hunte, for his effective leadership in the 58th Session of the General Assembly. I wish to pay a special tribute to him and his efforts in the area of one of the items we take under discussion today, namely, the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly.

Mr President,

My delegation is fully committed to improving the working methods and effectiveness of the General Assembly including the Committees and the Plenary. We believe that the purpose of the reforms is to enhance the effectiveness and the substance of the work of these bodies.

For the past couple of years, our delegation has had the honour to assist with the facilitation of the revitalisation process. During this time, we have seen Member States decide on a number of issues that have already made a significant improvement in the work of our Organisation. Already there is a fixed date for the annual commencement of the General Debate of the General Assembly. The President of the General Assembly, the Chairpersons of the Main Committees and the bureaux of the Main Committees are elected early so that they can prepare for their tasks in good time.

The General Committee has also been engaged in discussing and deciding on the revitalisation of the General Assembly, which has brought the General Committee into a continuing role in the process of helping strengthen the General Assembly.

In the last session, the General Assembly passed resolution 58/316 in which Member States were able to reach consensus on further reforms, designed to revitalise the work of the body. These included the decision to schedule plenary meetings on Mondays and Tuesdays so as to make the work of the whole of the General Assembly predictable. This decision has also made it possible for the Committees to structure their programmes to avoid clashes with Plenary meetings. Also, certain Committees have begun implementing some of the proposals made in the resolution as a way of enhancing their work.

In the coming days, we look forward to comparing the revitalisation experiences of different Committees as a way of distilling and replicating best practices wherever they may be applicable.

However, there is still more to be done if the General Assembly has to live up to what the Millennium Declaration described as "the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations".

Among the outstanding matters raised in resolution 58/316 is the issue of documentation and volume. We believe that documentation has a direct impact on the work of the General Assembly and the Committees and my delegation is ready to participate in the discussions around this issue.

Mr President,

Regarding the Strengthening of the United Nations, we wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the implementation of the Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations – Civil Society Relations.

South Africa places a very high premium on the role and contribution that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the other elements of civil society can and has played in many aspects of society. For this reason, we believe that these organisations have an important role to play in analysing, evaluating and shaping the world we live in, at all levels. It is therefore important for the United Nations to enhance its cooperation with this very important sector of society and we believe that the report of the Secretary-General contains a number of practical and useful suggestions, which we would want to pursue further.

While it might go without saying, we concur with the Secretary-General's re-emphasis of the intergovernmental nature of the United Nations where decisions are taken by its Member States. However, Member States should be able to draw on the best and most up to date information for them to base their discussions and decisions on and civil society can play an important role in contributing in this regard. Civil society also continues to highlight topics and develop the debate around important local, national and global issues. With this in mind, we agree that ways should be found to maximise the contribution that civil society can make towards the work of all the bodies of the United Nations, including the General Assembly and the Security Council.

President,

Taking from my experience as Chairman of the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on Guinea-Bissau and Burundi, our interaction with the civil societies in those countries, we see a significant contribution to ECOSOC's understanding of the challenges faced by these countries and also of different approaches available in dealing with countries emerging from conflict. I was thus pleased that during the last visit to West Africa, the Security Council mission also made it a particular point to interact with the civil society organisations in the countries that they visited, a fact mentioned in the Secretary-General's report.

While these interactions at country level are extremely helpful, it is admittedly not possible to have the same level of contribution from civil society organisations from developing countries in the work of the United Nations here in New York. We are therefore very glad to see that the Secretary-General will create a trust fund to provide financial support to accredited NGOs from developing countries to attend United Nations meetings. We hope that donors will contribute generously to this trust fund as this would be a tangible way to demonstrate the importance that we attach to the contribution of civil society.

We all have seen the significant contribution that civil society organisations can make to the work of the United Nations during summits and high-level meetings. This was demonstrated very clearly again to us in Johannesburg during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in which civil society participated fully in the preparatory process and also during the Summit itself. Since the WSSD, civil society has continued since then to contribute significantly to enriching the debate, and discussions on the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Action.

Mr President,

The Secretary-General has also highlighted the need to find ways to review the accreditation of NGOs as a way to maximise their participation in the work of the United Nations. My delegation believes that this is an important issue and we look forward to exchanging ideas with other delegations on this matter.

Mr President,

The fact that we are addressing the revitalisation and strengthening of the General Assembly together is an admission that a lot of work needs to be done. If we consider the agreement reached in resolution 58/316, there seem to be agreement that we have not yet reached the end of the road of the revitalisation process. And, in addressing the strengthening of the General Assembly, it is clear that this cannot happen by the efforts of Member States alone. We need to maintain a balance between our enthusiasm to improve the work methods of this organisation and discussions of the actual substance we have to deal with in the Committees and Plenary. And my delegation believes this can only happen as we continue to address these issues in the coming months.

I thank you.