

**STATEMENT BY MR. V.K. NAMBIAR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
ON STRENGTHENING OF THE UNITED NATIONS: AN AGENDA FOR
FURTHER CHANGE (AGENDA ITEM: 52) AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON OCTOBER 31, 2002**

Mr. President,

On behalf of India, I am happy to participate in this debate on strengthening the United Nations system and to have the opportunity of offering the comments of my delegation on the proposals made by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "An Agenda for Further Change", under this item. We would like to express our appreciation to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Louise Frechette, for the detailed explanations she gave during various interactions and the informal consultations convened by you on October 24.

2. We would like to convey our deep appreciation to the Secretary-General for coming forward with a set of comprehensive proposals for continuing his reform agenda as a sequel to the proposals that he had presented at the beginning of his first term, in July 1997. The proposals cover various functional areas and working of the Organisation and give suggestions for improvement from both strategic and practical perspectives.

3. Like many other delegations, India too looks upon reform as a continuing process, a kind of 'work in progress.' The United Nations has had several reform exercises, beginning with the expansion of

the Security Council in the mid-Sixties. Planning and programme budgets were introduced in the mid-Seventies; attempts at restructuring the inter-governmental machinery and Secretariat support structures in the economic and social field were made in the late Eighties. Over the last three years, there have been attempts at revitalising the working of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. The reform proposals of the Secretary-General form part of this sequence of exercises. It is for the Member States to try to give effect and substance to this felt need to improve the working of the United Nations.

4. Like many other delegations, India has conveyed broad political support to the process of reforms. We have conveyed this at different levels since the proposals of the Secretary-General for reforms were presented to us last month. This is in line with our belief that the effectiveness of the UN and enhancement of its responsiveness to the priorities of the Member States are critical, particularly for the developing countries that constitute the vast majority of its membership.

5. Before commenting on specific elements of the package of proposals put forward by the Secretary-General, it is pertinent to recall that some of the other

Agenda items being considered by the General Assembly are also related to this item. We have in mind, in particular, the items relating to the revitalisation of the General Assembly and the integrated follow-up to global conferences. It is important to take a holistic view of the structures and processes so that the reforms and changes sought to be introduced under the various items pull together in the same direction and endure in the long run.

6. The Secretary-General has clarified at the outset that the reform proposals should not be seen as an exercise in cutting costs. The reform measures should have the primary objective of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organisation. If, at the end of the exercise, it is found that the costs will go up as a result of the restructuring, Member States should demonstrate the requisite political will to support the reform measures by agreeing to such increase in expenses.

7. We note that there are some reform measures that are within his competence and that these can be given effect to them under his own authority. It is only in those areas where he requires the prior approval of member states or where there is need for joint action with member states, that he will need the General Assembly to provide him specific authorisations. Even here, we discern that there are some measures which could be implemented without much difficulty. There are some areas where a process could be initiated after the General Assembly authorises the Secretary-General to launch these processes. There are still other areas where the Member

States may need to seek clarifications before authorising the Secretary-General to effect changes or initiate processes. We feel that any decision or resolution by the General Assembly on the reform proposals will need to bring out these categories clearly and spell out the position of the member states in some detail.

8. As time is limited, we shall not comment on each of the numerous proposals made by the Secretary-General. Instead, we would give some comments on a few.

9. We agree wholeheartedly with the Secretary-General that no reform of the UN would be complete without a restructuring of the Security Council to make it more representative and invest its actions with legitimacy and authority. We continue to attach a high degree of importance to the reform and restructuring of the Security Council, including expansion of its membership in both the permanent and the non-permanent categories, with adequate representation of the developing countries among the new permanent and non-permanent members.

10. We agree with the Secretary-General in according the highest priority to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. This is a testimony to the priority attached by the Secretary-General to socio-economic development and his commitment to making socio-economic development the centre-piece of the UN's activities.

11. The Secretary-General has spoken for all of us by making calls for fewer

meetings and fewer reports. However, the critical question is to determine what to include and what to exclude. Given the size and diversity of this world body, this is an area that requires careful consideration and agreement at a political level. We feel it would be optimal for the Secretary-General to come up with a set of proposals on reducing both the number of meetings and the volume of documentation along the lines suggested in the chapter on Serving Member States, for consideration by the member states.

12. We agree with the Secretary-General on the need to continuously update the programme of work, and to identify and dispense with mandates and activities that are no longer relevant. The sunset provisions should cover both new mandates and existing activities. If this is not done, we shall have the anomalous situation of subjecting every new initiative and mandate to specific time-limits while those items that have eked out over the years will continue to figure on the agenda of various bodies long after becoming completely obsolete. Without doubt, the General Assembly will have to assume the responsibility of reviewing and renewing mandates through explicit action.

13. We welcome the proposal by the Secretary-General in the field of human rights for initiating processes to rationalise, streamline and reduce the burden, particularly on the developing countries, on reporting requirements. We trust that the High Commissioner for Human Rights will consult member states at the appropriate stage before finalising his recommendations as formulated in consultation with treaty bodies. Similarly, we expect consultations with member

states on the review of special procedures as well.

14. We are somewhat concerned by the proposals in paragraph 50-51 of the report by which the Resident Coordinator system, at the country-level which oversees operational activities for development and development cooperation, would be mandated to incorporate human rights activities at the country-level. Our concern stems from the possibility that the very limited resources currently available for technical cooperation in development areas, particularly in crucial areas of human resources development, would now be diverted to human rights, good governance and other softer areas of development. Although many of the international conferences have pledged additionality of resources for development for capacity-building and for technical cooperation, these have hardly been forthcoming. In these circumstances, entrusting the Resident Coordinator system to promoting human rights at the country-level would only be at the expense of traditional technical cooperation. This would hardly be acceptable to most developing countries. There are two other attendant implications. Firstly, there would be a tendency to shift the focus and resources away from the traditional areas on the pretext of country-driven programming, that is, on the excuse that the UN system is merely responding to changes in the 'demands' of the recipient countries. Secondly, grant assistance would be utilised for advocacy and advice from outside, which is not a welcome development and could at times blur the borderline between advice and decision-

making, an undesirable feature which would tend to undermine the time-tested characteristics of the UN system, namely, neutrality, responsiveness, universality and impartiality.

15. We have taken note of the proposals made in the area of enhancing public information, in particular of those for expanding educational outreach and imparting greater dynamism to the activities of the Department of Public Information. We welcome, in principle, the proposal of the Secretary-General to create regional information hubs instead of the current patterns of UN information centres in Western Europe where these centres drain away a large chunk of the resources of the DPI. However, we would like to study the implications of extending this to the developing country regions where these centres have been performing valuable services. We support other proposals of the Secretary-General for restructuring the DPI and improving oversight of publications. Given its activism, image and leadership, we have little doubt that these initiatives will strengthen the Department's overall effectiveness.

16. The proposals of the Secretary-General to strengthen the effectiveness of the field-level presence in the developing countries include joint programming and pooling of resources. Such attempts have been made in the past too, but not with considerable success. We hope that the current efforts will be more successful.

17. The Secretary-General plans to present a document within the next year clarifying roles and responsibilities in the area of technical cooperation and to

establish a panel of eminent persons to review the relationship between the United Nations and civil society. In the case of the former, we trust that the document would not only clarify roles and responsibilities but would also suggest ways and means of enhancing the technical capacity of the Secretariat units responsible for technical cooperation and identify the needs in this area and means of achieving them. Similarly, in the case of the panel on UN-Civil Society relationship, we hope that the terms of reference of the panel would be so drawn as to preserve the inter-governmental character of the Organisation and clarify the responsibility that ultimately devolves on the governments for the decisions made at the UN and their implementation.

18. An area which requires much deeper consideration and further thought is that of the new planning and budget system which the Secretary-General has proposed. The measures outlined by the Secretary-General for a medium term plan which is co-terminus with the budget period might well be a workable proposition, but it clearly needs more careful and detailed analysis.

19. The Secretary-General appears to advocate the abolition of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, without giving us any alternatives by which the mandate of the Committee could be redesigned so as to respond to contemporary needs and realities. The Secretary-General has asked for flexibility to reallocate resources between programmes and between allocations for personnel and other allocations by up to ten percent within a single budgetary

period. Even within national systems of governments, it is doubtful whether such wide latitude and flexibility would be permitted by the Ministries of Finance to line-Ministries to reallocate resources between budget lines by up to ten per cent within a single budgetary period. This is an area whose implications require careful consideration. We are also concerned that high levels of reallocation without reference to and approval of inter-governmental bodies would have a potential of distorting inter-governmental mandates. Once again, the developing countries might end up as the losers.

20. We have taken note of the proposals made by the Secretary-General for enhancing staff mobility across the UN system and enhancing their levels of motivation. We strongly feel that the experience accumulated over the years by the Secretariat Divisions in charge of human resources management, the International Civil Service Commission, the UN Administrative Tribunal and similar bodies should be fully utilised while undertaking the tasks outlined in actions 25-35 of the proposals.

21. These are some preliminary views of my delegation on the reform proposals

made by the Secretary-General. We look forward to working with other delegations in the discussions and consultations. In a larger sense we agree with the perception so forcefully brought out by the Deputy Secretary General in a recent article that the UN as an organisation needs to provide management and cooperation at the global level to address the broader issues confronting the world, issues that transcend borders. Addressing that challenge calls for three broad initiatives: the need for legitimacy, the development of instruments and institutions that can make connections among a vast array of complex and interrelated issues and, thirdly, passing the test of effectiveness. What is required is the right balance between universal institutions and effective ones. India agrees that if the UN system has to be a crucial part of the solution of the world's problems, it must be provided adequate authority and resources. The Assembly should be in a position to give clear guidance to the Secretary-General so that the process of reform can be taken forward. I wish to pledge the full support of the Indian delegation in ensuring the success of such an exercise.