

Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative
of India at the Meeting of the Adhoc Working Group on the Revitalization
of the General Assembly on 14 March 2011

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Prior to the commencement of our session this afternoon, I had walked up to my distinguished colleague, Ambassador Sumi of Japan and shared with him how deeply saddened we are to see the images of the destruction caused by the massive earthquake and the following tsunami. I join other colleagues this afternoon in conveying our heartfelt condolences. The loss of lives is irreparable.

Japan is a country for which I have deep admiration and respect. Not only because I began my diplomatic career there, much like the first love, but also because Japan is one country which gives us the confidence of having the resilience of being able to not only overcome this very unfortunate act of nature but of coming out stronger.

So whilst we extend our condolences, we have no doubt that the brave people of Japan will be able to overcome this massive crisis that they are facing. And all I can say is that my country, and as indeed several others, spontaneously offered to make available whatever little assistance we can offer. We stand ready and shoulder to shoulder with the Japanese people and Government in their hour of grief.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Let me start by placing on record my delegation's happiness in the decision taken by President of the General Assembly, Dr. Deiss to appoint two distinguished and independent-minded diplomats such as Ambassador Camillo M. Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Ambassador Dalius Čekuolis of Lithuania as Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group on General Assembly Revitalization for this session. I welcome your appointment and assure you of my delegation's steadfast support and constructive participation in the deliberations of this Group.

Permit me also to express appreciation for the excellent work done by the Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Working Group last year, Ambassador Sanja Štiglic of Slovenia and Ambassador Jorge Argüello of Argentina whose active involvement and able guidance ensured that the Assembly was able to adopt the most substantive and forward-looking resolution in the last five years-64/301. Equally, I would like to place on record my delegation's appreciation for the work done by the Algerian delegation as the NAM Chair on this issue as well as for the other negotiating partners who worked in a spirit of cooperation. Naturally my delegation wishes to align itself with the statement made by Algeria on behalf of the NAM.

I must thank Ambassador Gonsalves for drawing our attention to the statement made by Ambassador Menon of Singapore in this very room last week. There is much that Ambassador Menon said which finds ready resonance with my delegation. And let me start with "Similarly, there are some amongst us Member States who need to stop obstructing the reform process." That as you know is something which could be part of an Indian statement on reforms, Security Council reform in particular. He goes on to state, "Instead, we should focus on proposing constructive and pragmatic ideas." That again would be a formulation that would fit well in any Indian statement in any of these discussions. Ambassador Menon says, "There are others who want everything to be dealt with in the General Assembly and nowhere else because they are afraid of losing control." We entirely agree. Ambassador Menon also said, "We have to realize that no institution has the monopoly on seeking global solutions to global problems." And he went on to develop ideas that I am entirely in agreement with, especially the General Assembly's propensity to pass resolutions in numbers which leaves no time even for us to read.

But I want to pick on one issue which has been mentioned by one of the earlier speakers and develop that slightly this afternoon.

When we look at the subject of General Assembly Revitalization I am reminded of the proverb 'putting the cart before the horse'. Co-Chairs this thought that came to me when I had the privilege of accompanying my External Affairs Minister from one thematic meeting to another last September during the general debate section. I wondered how entirely the wheel had turned and we had managed to reverse the established order of things, so much so, that the general debate itself became one of the many events during that jam-packed fortnight here in New York. We have all been brought up in the tradition that you have the general debate as the main focus and then you have one or two side events, high level thematic events. But here the order has been reversed entirely.

Now I wonder, after having spent nearly three months on the Security Council-and I will come back to it in a little while-whether we should create a new proverb or at least suggest one, namely 'putting the horse on the cart' to capture our collective predicament.

Co-Chairs,

The starting point of my delegation's position on the issue of General Assembly revitalization is the firm belief that the General Assembly can be revitalized only when its position as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations is respected both in letter and in spirit.

The GA should take the lead in setting the global agenda and restoring the centrality of the United Nations in formulating multilateral approaches to resolving transnational issues. This was the role intended for the Assembly in Article 10 of the UN Charter, namely that it discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the present Charter or relating to the powers and functions of any organs provided for in the Charter, i.e. the Security Council, ECOSOC, Trusteeship Council, the ICJ as well as the Secretariat.

Co-Chairs,

My delegation participated actively in the deliberations of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Assembly revitalization in the 64th session. We provided a number of inputs at the meetings held during that last session. These inputs were provided in a spirit of constructive engagement and we are pleased that these were taken on board in the negotiations leading to the adoption of Resolution 64/301. While we are generally happy that Resolution 64/301 has been able to highlight some of the important steps required on our collective journey towards a revitalized General Assembly, we firmly believe, Co-chairs that we still have some distance to travel.

You have in your letter of 4th March called on delegations to provide concrete and targeted interventions for the purpose of the Working Group's deliberations this session. I intend to respond to your call and place on record my delegation's considered views on some of the important aspects of the issue of General Assembly Revitalization.

First of all, it is critical that we establish a proper relationship of respect for respective mandates between the General Assembly and the Security Council in the spirit of the Charter.

India joined the Security Council on 1st January this year, after a gap of 19 years. I noted very carefully the statement made by my distinguished colleague from Antigua and Barbuda speaking on behalf of the CARICOM. And if I heard his correctly, the entire CARICOM region has had the privilege of serving on the Council only for three occasions in the last 65 years of the Security Council's existence!

During the time that we have spent on the Council, we have noticed that the Council's agenda is, to say the least, overburdened. This is because the Council busies itself with themes which no doubt and certainly important, are still not directly connected to the real and immediate threats to international peace and security. This has left the Council with less time to focus on the real hotspots that constitute the real threats to international peace and security.

At the same time, however, we believe that remedial measures would only be half complete in the absence of serious introspection on what the General Assembly itself can do to mitigate the situation. Clearly, the Assembly will not be empowered merely by strengthening procedures. More important is the presence of political will to take concrete measures to reinforce the role and authority of the Assembly.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

The Assembly must have a greater say in the process of selection of the Secretary General. The continued circumscribing of the Assembly's role and responsibilities in the process of selection and appointment of the Secretary General needs to change in the interests of the United Nations system in general and the Assembly's prerogatives in particular. And, as it was the General Assembly which limited its own role, it will have to be the General Assembly that claws back its rightful place in the process of selecting the Secretary-General. In this regard, it is also our considered view that in accordance with the NAM position that any mechanism that will be adopted would require a transitional period and would not be applicable to the immediate next process of selection and appointment of the Secretary General.

Co-Chairs,

I would now like to address two other important issues of relevance to our meeting here today.

First, in our view the Charter provisions clearly reflect the desire of the UN membership to have an international civil service which displays the highest standards of professionalism, neutrality and integrity and which is accountable therefore, if not in higher, but at least in equal measure as the Secretary General is to the General Assembly. In addition, we would welcome closer consideration of procedures for selecting, appointing and confirming the heads of the major Specialized Agencies, Funds and Programmes with a view to ensuring transparency, legitimacy and balanced representation.

Second, we believe that the Assembly and other entities that form part of the UN system must reflect diplomatic best practices in its day to day functioning. And here there is a lot of need for interaction and learning to be done from member-states.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

In conclusion, let me re-emphasize the need to discuss substantive measures that would strengthen the role of General Assembly as the chief deliberative, legislative and policy-making and representative body of the international community.

You can expect India's constructive support and participation in these efforts.

Thank You.

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