

STATEMENT BY MR ARUNA KUMAR VUNDAVALLI, MEMBER OF PARLAIMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON AGENDA ITEM 70: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS [B]: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, [C] HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES, AND [E] CONVENTION OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AT THE THIRD COMMITTEE OF THE 62ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 31, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) for his reports, and the Special Rapporteurs and Representatives of the UNSG for their presentations under the sub-agenda items 70 (b), (c) and (e) relating to 'Human rights questions'. I would also like to thank the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for her statement last week before the Third Committee under this agenda item.

Mr. Chairman,

Mr. Jean Ziegler, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, states in his report that the number of victims of hunger and malnutrition around the world increased every year since 1996, and reached an alarming figure of 854 million people. His recommendation that all States should ensure that their international policies, including international trade agreements, do not negatively impact on the right to food in other countries, is timely and pertinent. He also cautioned that conversion of food into bio-fuels could seriously impact on the right to food.

Mr. Arjun Sengupta, Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Right to Development, outlined a three-phased roadmap for developing and refining criteria for periodic evaluation of the global partnership for development as contained in Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 8. There is a gradual acceptance that discussions on Right to Development are no longer in the realm of theory and principles, but have moved into design and implementation of policies leading to its realisation. We support the efforts of the Working Group to operationalize the Right to Development that would contribute to mainstreaming it in the policies and operational activities of relevant actors at the national, regional and international level, including multilateral financial, trade and development institutions.

We also recognize the important work of Mr. Paul Hunt, Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, particularly in developing a right-to-health impact assessment methodology that would aid equitable, inclusive, robust and sustainable policy-making. We are happy that Mr. Paul Hunt has accepted our invitation to visit India in November this year.

Mr. Chairman,

We are once again faced in this Committee by a major challenge in determining most effective approach for promotion and protection of human rights. We need a self-critical appraisal of whether the international community has managed to achieve a genuine improvement in human rights through giving of 'report cards' against countries or even by undertaking intrusive monitoring. No doubt, instances of gross and systematic violations of human rights anywhere in the world must be addressed by the international community collectively and in a holistic manner. However, dealing with human rights situations with a specific bias against certain group of countries and as a matter of routine would not promote the cause of protection of human rights. An approach based on dialogue, consultation and cooperation have a better chance of leading to genuine improvement in the enjoyment of human rights by the people of a country. The need for moving away from selectivity and partial approaches is now greater than ever before.

Mr. Chairman,

A distinction must always be made between a country that is responsive and has functioning democratic institutions, and one that is inherently repressive and is unable, or unwilling, to improve human rights standards. Foundations for a genuinely holistic conception of human rights can be laid only with democracy, development and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our collective efforts should focus on improving the capacity of States so that they can embrace rule of law and democracy as essential ingredients for promoting and protecting human rights.

A democratic, pluralistic society with a secular polity, an autonomous and impartial judiciary, a vibrant civil society, a free media, and independent human rights institutions, helps secure effective guarantees for the protection and promotion of human rights in a country like India. The Indian Parliament has been acting as a vehicle to make economic and social rights justiciable to people, particularly those living in rural areas. Notably, the National Rural Employment Guarantee program launched in 2006 provides 100 days of assured employment annually to every rural household. The Supreme Court of India has recognized the justiciability of the right to food. To widen public knowledge of the decision-making process and to promote transparency and accountability in the working of any public authority, the Indian Parliament has enacted the Right to Information Act.

Mr. Chairman,

The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in December last year marked an important milestone in recognizing disabled persons as rights holders and active members of society, rather than objects of charity. I am happy to inform that India became the seventh country to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. India has been committed to

the elimination of special barriers that persons with disabilities face. The Persons with Disability (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act of 1995 and National Policy for Disabled People of 2006 paved the way for recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities. We recognize that much needs to be done to enable effectively enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Convention by the disabled people in India.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, as the world's largest democracy, we consider it an honour to uphold and cherish the human rights and fundamental freedoms of every citizen. I would like to reiterate India's firm commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights. We look forward to engage constructively with other delegations in working for the noble cause of promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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