



General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

112th plenary meeting

Monday, 10 September 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Holkeri (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 59 (continued)

Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and related matters

Report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council (A/55/47)

Draft decision (A/55/47, para. 34)

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft decision contained in paragraph 34 of the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters related to the Security Council.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft decision?

The draft decision was adopted.

The President: I should like to express sincere thanks to Ambassador Thorsteinn Ingólfsson of Iceland and Ambassador John de Saram of Sri Lanka, the two Vice-Chairmen of the Open-ended Working Group, who have so ably continued during this session to

conduct the discussions of complex negotiations of the Working Group.

I am sure members of the Assembly join me in extending to them our sincere appreciation.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 59?

It was so decided.

The President: I should like to remind delegations that the following agenda items, on which action has been taken at previous meetings, have remained open for consideration during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly: items 10, 11, 12, 17, 20, 26, 32, 40 to 43, 45, 46, 50, 60, 73, 84, 94, 101, 112, 114 to 118, 120 to 130, 132 to 138, 140, 143, 144, 148, 150, 152, 153, 164, 166 to 169, 175, 176, 179, 182 and 185.

As members are aware, these items, with the exception of agenda item 118, entitled "Programme planning"; agenda item 120, entitled "Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency"; agenda item 125, entitled "United Nations pension system"; item 166, entitled "Election of judges of the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia since 1991"; agenda item 168, entitled "Programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999"; agenda item 169, entitled "Scale of assessments for the apportionment of

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the expenses of United Nations peacekeeping operations”; and agenda item 185, entitled “Election of judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and Other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan Citizens Responsible for Genocide and Other Such Violations Committed in the Territory of Neighbouring States between 1 January and 31 December 1994”, have been included in the provisional agenda of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

May I take it that the Assembly considers that discussion of these items at the present session is concluded?

It was so decided.

Closing address by the President

The President: As the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly draws to a close, I feel deeply honoured and privileged to have served as its President. That this session was designated the Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, and that it was launched by the largest-ever gathering of world leaders and included the adoption of the historic Millennium Declaration, made my task a particular challenge.

A year ago, I set prompt and effective follow-up to the Millennium Summit as one of the key priorities of my term. The Declaration was not to be left without attention worthy of its historic status. In December, the Assembly adopted a resolution outlining the follow-up action. Its emphasis was to call for maximum use of existing structures and upcoming conferences and events. For once, new mechanisms were not envisaged.

During the past months, the Declaration has helped set the agenda and outcome of a series of major conferences. From the Conference on the Least Developed Countries through the special sessions on Habitat and HIV/AIDS and the recent conferences on small arms and racism, the Declaration has provided an important backdrop. For my part, I have underlined to each and every conference the importance of the Summit follow-up. I have also advocated an integrated approach in that follow-up. Such an approach should also be reflected in the road-map document prepared by the Secretariat, which is to be issued imminently.

The United Nations is, however, still far from a truly integrated follow-up to the Summit. The same goes for the entire agenda of the last decade’s global conferences, which is too often approached on a piecemeal basis. Unfortunately, both Member States and the respective entities of the Secretariat seem to be unable to break the habit of viewing and considering different issues in isolation. Proper focus is needed, but in the overall context of the global agenda.

To a great extent, the piecemeal approach results from lack of coordination. To improve coordination, my Office convened a series of meetings for representatives of the bureaux and secretariats of the various events so as to exchange information and help them learn from one another’s experiences. Even then, one was not able to avoid reinventing the wheel on a number of issues. This was particularly clear on the issue of civil society participation, where the Organization would clearly benefit from the adoption of more uniform modalities for major conferences. Having been involved in preparations and discussions, as well as having chaired special sessions and participated in different conferences, it has become evident to me that the Organization needs uniform modalities on civil society participation in conferences, now that civil society participation is so much a part of the everyday life of the United Nations.

That brings me to the issue of civil society partnership — another theme that I have kept high on my agenda, in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration. I have advocated strengthened partnerships with civil society, including the private sector, for the Organization to be successful and relevant in the midst of the challenges of globalization. I would like to recognize the valuable work done by civil society, from the field to United Nations Headquarters, working towards the same universal goals as the Organization.

During my term, civil society took an active and visible part in the work of two special sessions of the General Assembly and of the three United Nations conferences. To help delegations make sense of the differing modalities for civil society participation in major conferences, my Office put together a compendium of past practices. I also acted as a patron for a highly productive symposium on the issue of civil society partnerships. Responding to numerous requests from Member States, I have asked that both the compendium and the synopsis of that symposium be issued as official documents of the General Assembly.

During the past year, I have attempted to gradually make the work of the General Assembly more effective and efficient. Many Members have come to know this through the small steps that I have taken. I have tried to be consistent and persistent, dispensing unhappiness in equal doses to all. However, the bigger issue is that the work of making the Assembly more relevant must be continued.

If we cannot reform its agenda and its working methods, the General Assembly will continue to fall short of its potential. The reform resolution adopted just a few days ago must be seen as only a beginning in that respect. In particular, the work of the plenary must be reinvigorated. Furthermore, Member States must show greater restraint in requesting the inclusion of new items on its agenda; otherwise, the work of the plenary will eventually become clogged, and the institution itself irrelevant. The Office of the President of the General Assembly will also have to be given resources and servicing commensurate with its role.

One of the observations that I made early on during my term was the lack of continuity from one presidency to the next. Even if the General Assembly secretariat provides services to the President, a core team of political officers — as called for by last Friday's resolution — will be needed. That will ensure substantive backstopping and continuity, as well as a much-needed basis for networking with substantive departments.

My attention was caught the other day by an advertisement which read, "Teamwork is spelled with two letters: W and E". An organization like the United Nations should be all about teamwork and about a sense of "we". There must be constant interaction between the Charter bodies, each one of them viewing the others as partners. I have had the good fortune of having a very good working relationship with the Secretary-General, and have pursued regular meetings with both the President of the Security Council and the President of the Economic and Social Council. This kind of interaction must be set on a well-established footing. In the spirit of dialogue and openness, I have also established the practice of holding regular monthly meetings with the chairpersons of the five regional groups to inform Member States about the work of the Assembly. To be self-sustaining, however, this kind of cooperation needs to include and have the full support of the Secretariat. I believe that an extra effort is needed within the Secretariat to this end.

Pursuing dialogue and openness has also meant full transparency and accessibility. My doors have been open almost 24 hours a day and I have benefited enormously from the advice and knowledge that representatives have given to me. Maybe now that the President's Office has been listed, at my request, in the United Nations phone directory — though only on page 243 — it will become even more accessible to Member States in the future.

In pursuing transparency, I have tried to make maximum use of my web site. In addition to my statements and messages, a summary of my daily activities has been promptly posted on the web site. Coming from a small, open society, whose success can in great part be attributed to its openness, I am a great believer in the positive-sum effects of maximum openness in any organization.

On the other reform issue, namely, that of the Security Council, I have tried to pursue comprehensive reform on different fronts. On day-to-day business, I have tried to enhance cooperation and coordination on common issues between the two Presidents through our monthly meetings. As President, I have also taken the step of addressing the Security Council on East Timor, a shared responsibility of both bodies. In the context of the Open-ended Working Group, as Chairman of that Group I have tried, together with my two able Vice-Chairpersons, to make progress in identifying the key aspects of the reform process.

As President of the Assembly, I have been mandated to follow up the implementation of the Summit Declaration, and I believe that the Declaration implied that there is a renewed willingness to move forward on the reform. I approached the ministers for foreign affairs of Member States for their help in exploring the best ways to fulfil the mandate of the Millennium Declaration to intensify efforts to achieve a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects.

Based on the responses I have received from the ministers, I should like to make the following observations. All replies stressed the importance of Security Council reform, while recognizing its great sensitivity. In the light of the Summit outcome, many expressed their concern at the slow progress. There is a common recognition that the Council needs to reflect the realities of the twenty-first century to better serve the interests of peace and security.

The foreign ministers also, of course, drew attention to specific aspects which they considered of particular importance. The main question, however, is how to fulfil the Summit mandate and move forward, after eight years of discussion, to a stage of negotiation. The response I received in this respect was multifaceted. There is a general agreement that the Working Group has made some progress and has had an effect on the working methods of the Security Council. But the main issues of the reform are still open. Many ministers stressed that while the Working Group has worked well as an initial discussion forum, the time may have come to consider other avenues that would advance this process.

In this respect, three suggestions raised in the replies become critical. The first was the suggestion that discussion should be moved to a higher political level, be it a special session or high-level meeting, to enable us to generate sufficient political will to reach general agreement on this complex issue. The second suggestion was that while the goal must remain a comprehensive reform of the Security Council in all its aspects, Governments may want to consider approaching this goal in a focused way and move forward step by step, as we have done in the context of General Assembly reform. In any organization, reform can never be final; it is a continuous process aiming to adapt to changing circumstances. Thirdly, the scope of reform as defined in the Working Group's agenda is gathering overwhelming support; hence, the question of the veto needs to be part of these discussions. Finally, all replies stressed that efforts for Security Council reform should continue.

To sustain the impetus of the Millennium Summit and to resolve the stalemate, I urge all Member States to engage more actively in this process in order to move from discussion to negotiation. It should have a high priority on the agenda of the United Nations and its Member States, if we are to maintain the United Nations as the main actor in the maintenance and restoration of international peace and security.

The elements are all discussed in the Open-ended Working Group, and the political will was demonstrated by the Millennium Declaration. We just have to bring them together. It is now up to the representatives of those very same Member States to turn that political will into reality and results. The United Nations cannot afford to fail in the reform of the Security Council.

The Millennium Declaration is a manifestation by world leaders of global consensus and a shared vision and shared responsibility for the future of humankind. Our responsibility is a key dimension of globalization that, in my opinion, has been too often overlooked. One of the most important millennium targets is to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, on less than \$1 a day, by the year 2015. Several other millennium targets are intertwined with poverty and underline its cross-sectoral nature.

To tackle poverty, we need to understand its multidimensional character and address all its root causes in a holistic manner. This cannot be left to markets and macroeconomics alone; neither should the speed of change force us to overemphasize the short-term objectives. Attaining the millennium targets and eradicating poverty require a long-term vision to build human capital and sustainable people-centred development in communities and societies.

The national Governments have the main responsibility for implementing the Declaration, but they cannot be left to handle this enormous task alone; the international community and the United Nations system must assist country-driven processes. In this regard, national and international policies and actions are mutually supportive. At all levels, people's needs should guide our policy-making and discussions.

The millennium agenda on peace and development presents a major policy challenge for both developed and developing countries. These goals are realistic and within our reach through partnership and cooperation. The global community has massive human, technical, technological and financial resources. Our awareness of the policies required is more advanced than ever. In this regard, the issue of development finance is critical and requires the participation of all ministers of finance in next year's conference. We need to put into effect our strong political will and commitment, as demonstrated by the heads of State and Government at the Millennium Summit.

It is my hope that this commitment will also guide the discussion when issues related to Africa are considered during the next session. Having visited the African continent twice during my tenure, and as Chairperson of the open-ended working group on Africa, I feel a special responsibility for development in Africa.

Since its adoption, I considered last December's agreement on the new scale of assessments one of the highlights of the Assembly's work this session. On the part of several delegations, it required painstaking efforts and a unique sense of vision about what would be in the best interest of the Organization. It was to put the Organization on a sounder financial footing.

Lately, this optimism has become somewhat tempered. We are no longer sure whether the historic agreement will become reality in all its aspects. It would be catastrophic for the Organization if it were not. I therefore call on the largest contributor to act without delay in accordance with what was agreed upon, to which its Government has committed itself.

Other key issues on our agenda that we were able to consider successfully included the important report by the Brahimi Panel on peacekeeping, and the subsequent comprehensive review of peacekeeping. We have also launched consideration of the conflict prevention report in all relevant organs of the United Nations, as well as by civil society, and the Assembly will come back to this issue some time next year. The consideration of these reports has reflected a high degree of willingness by Member States to help maintain the relevance of the United Nations. I truly hope that a most important mandate of the Organization, the maintenance of international peace and security, will continue to be high on the agenda of Member States. The many promises made during the Millennium Summit must be kept so that the Organization can meet the challenges it is facing with added resources and improved planning and preparedness.

I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to Member States for their constructive and pro-United Nations efforts during my term. Without their support, my agenda would have remained unfulfilled. I am convinced that this Organization remains, in the eyes of the vast majority of Member States, indispensable.

My thanks also go to all of you individually. Both at the professional and at the personal level, I have been privileged to have the support and friendship of some of the finest people in the diplomatic service.

I want to express my special thanks to the members of the General Committee, to the Chairpersons of the six Main Committees and to the Vice-Presidents of the Assembly, many of whom have presided over the plenary meetings in my absence. I also wish to give special recognition to the Vice-Chairmen of the open-ended working groups, as well as to my facilitators on various issues, in particular, the revitalization of the General Assembly.

I also wish to extend my thanks to the Secretariat, from top to bottom. Mr. Secretary-General, you provide us with inspiration and encouragement and give a human face to this Organization. Your Deputy, whose position was created by the previous reform round, Ms. Fréchette, is indispensable to you in running this Organization, and she has shown great leadership even in difficult moments.

Among the Under-Secretaries-General, a special tribute goes to Mr. Jin Yongjiang, who retired just a few weeks ago and returned to his native China. He and all of his team lent me invaluable support during these past 12 months.

Finally, I wish to extend my very best wishes for success to my most esteemed successor, President designate of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, Mr. Han Seung-soo, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea. I have no doubt that he will make an excellent President of the Assembly. I wish him well, and I once again thank you all.

Agenda item 2 (continued)

Minute of silent prayer or meditation

The President: I invite representatives to stand and observe one minute of silent prayer or meditation.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silent prayer or meditation.

Closure of the fifty-fifth session

The President: I declare closed the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.