



General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

20th plenary meeting
Saturday, 28 September 2013, 6 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6.10 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

The Acting President: I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to join previous speakers in congratulating the President of the General Assembly on his election to serve at its sixty-eighth session. I am confident that his experience in international affairs will contribute to the success of this session. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, for his wise leadership during the last session, and to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his staff for their tireless efforts to promote global peace, security and development.

The United Arab Emirates continues to firmly believe in the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as enshrined in its Charter, calling for the protection of international peace and security, the promotion of peaceful coexistence among nations and peoples through the peaceful resolution of international disputes, respect for the provisions of international law, and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Those goals also call for us to foster a climate

favourable to international relations based on tolerance, non-violence and recognition of others. My country has followed such an approach in its regional and international relations.

However, we cannot conceal our deep concern at the recent events in the Arab region associated with sectarian strife, an escalation in terrorist attacks and growing incitement to violence, which, in turn, have given rise to extreme polarization in the region and among its peoples, severely impacting stability and development. In the Arab Gulf, we see how extremism and terrorism in the Kingdom of Bahrain are threatening to undermine security and stability and destroy a history of tolerance in which sectarianism has never played any role. The situation has been further aggravated by the politicization and exploitation of the religion of Islam by those seeking to use it as a tool to exclude and marginalize other segments of society, which, until now, had all lived in constructive, harmonious and peaceful coexistence.

All of this has led to widespread fears about the fate of the national State and what that implies in terms of the undermining of the pillars of the State, the wasting of its resources and the weakening of its economy. As members may be aware, such difficult conditions have put the young people of the region in jeopardy of falling into the clutches of extremism and violence, especially in a climate of growing despair and lack of opportunities.

That is why the United Arab Emirates gives paramount importance to its efforts aimed at promoting

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a culture of moderation and non-violence and fighting extremism in all its forms. In that regard, I refer in particular to my country's initiative to fight extremism through the Hedayah International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. The United Arab Emirates actually proposed the Centre's establishment at a meeting held here at the United Nations, and today the Centre is seeing the light.

In that context, I can only condemn in the strongest possible terms all cowardly attacks, but particularly the terrorist attack committed at the shopping centre in Nairobi, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of innocent victims.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply disappointed at the international community's inability to put an immediate end to the worsening tragedy of the brotherly Syrian people caused by continual military actions and indiscriminate and systematic bombings by Syrian forces in Damascus. So far, more than 100,000 people have been killed and millions of people have been injured or displaced. This is an extremely dangerous violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

We are deeply concerned at the increasingly serious implications of the conflict in Syria and the entire region. We strongly condemn and reject all crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian regime, especially the chemical attack against Ghouta, Damascus, which killed thousands of civilians, including children. We therefore call upon the international community to take all measures necessary to punish the Syrian regime for its massacring of civilians. The Assembly should be aware of the frustration that we and the majority of countries in the region feel with respect to the dysfunction of United Nations mechanisms that could have prevented the Syrian regime's aggressive acts against its own people. The Organization's failure to act is directly responsible for exacerbating the humanitarian tragedy that we are witnessing in Syria today. It is also responsible for the threat to the Syrian State, Syrian society and the Syrian people.

The United Arab Emirates has fulfilled its responsibilities with respect to ongoing relief operations for the Syrian people and continues to provide all kinds of aid — building hospitals, providing medical supplies and staffing medical teams. It calls for concerted international and regional efforts, directly or through international organizations, to meet the humanitarian

needs of Syrians displaced inside Syria and across the country's borders, with a view to alleviating their suffering.

In that context, we are seeking in these meetings to address the issues of our region, its stability and its future. That the issues and events that take place in Egypt are very important and cannot be overlooked is beyond question. Egypt is a pivotal State whose stability and civil peace signify that the region is beginning to recover. Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates is following with great interest the positive developments that are occurring in Egypt, as we firmly believe that Egypt plays a key role in ensuring stability, development and prosperity. There is no doubt that a stable and calm Egypt is vital to security and peace, not only in the Arab region, but in the world as a whole.

On 30 June, Egypt experienced a second wave of revolution, when tens of millions of Egyptians expressed their resolute will to draw up a road map for a better future for their country. In it the ground is laid for an inclusive democratic path based on the participation of all segments of society without any exceptions, within the framework of a policy characterized by moderation, centrism, non-violence and the non-use of religion as a means to exclude or classify or to foment sectarianism or hatred. The United Arab Emirates therefore believes that the sovereign measures implemented by the Egyptian Government to protect national security and the steps it has taken to implement the road map supported by the people give grounds for optimism and enhance the Egyptian Government's credibility. I would also take this opportunity to urge the international community to stand behind Egypt at this critical juncture and support the sincere efforts of its interim Government to lay the foundations of stability, development and civilian constitutional rule.

The United Arab Emirates recognizes the suffering of the Arab region caused by the interference of others in its internal affairs and the ensuing threats to national statehood generally. We therefore wish to warn of the danger of interfering in the domestic affairs of Egypt and call on everyone to refrain from disrupting the country's march towards stability and democracy.

The issues that the Arab region faces are all interconnected. Everyone in this Hall realizes that peace emerges as a central and relevant issue to all that is occurring there. Although many decades have passed, the Palestinian people continue to look forward

to realizing their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on international legal instruments that recognize their right to establish a State, in line with the 4 June 1967 borders, as confirmed by United Nations resolutions and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that regard, I wish to take this opportunity to welcome the relaunching of peace talks under the auspices of the United States. We hope that those talks will lead to positive results in the form of the establishment of a Palestinian State. We also welcome the European Union's constructive position consisting of non-recognition of the legitimacy of the Israeli settlements and the decision to cease its dealings with them. The United Arab Emirates is ready to contribute to a successful outcome of the new initiative in order to achieve security, peace and economic growth in that important part of the world.

Security and stability in the Gulf region represent a high priority in the balanced policy that we have derived from principles found in the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law, especially those that call for peaceful coexistence, confidence-building, good neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, and the pursuit of peaceful means in the resolution of conflicts and disputes. Based on those principles, my Government expresses, once again, its regret at the continued Iranian occupation of our three islands — Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb — and demands that the undiminished sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates over those islands be fully restored.

We emphasize that all actions and measures taken by the Iranian occupation authorities are considered null and void and are contrary to international law and all norms of common human values. Therefore, we call upon the international community to urge Iran to respond to my country's repeated peaceful, sincere request for a just settlement of the dispute, either through direct, serious negotiations between our two nations or by referring the case to the International Court of Justice, in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law.

Acting from our firm principles in regional and international relations, we welcome the declared approach of Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the

Islamic Republic of Iran. We affirm that our country will sincerely cooperate with him in the interest of promoting security, stability and prosperity in the region.

There has been considerable debate about Iran's nuclear programme. Many suspicions revolve around it. Therefore, we urge Iran to constructively cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency, defuse all scepticism about the peaceful nature of its nuclear activities, and act with full transparency and clarity to avoid any negative consequences that could arise from the absence of such cooperation. The United Arab Emirates does, however, believe that the peaceful use of nuclear energy has become an urgent requirement to meet today's growing demand for energy.

We are proud that we are a nation that has pioneered peaceful uses of nuclear energy, which are surrounded by all possible security and safety guarantees. The United Arab Emirates has opened the way for the introduction of renewable energy and the development of clean-energy technologies as its contribution to humankind in protecting the planet from the negative effects of climate change.

The United Arab Emirates firmly believes in the necessity of achieving human development at the national and international levels. That goal can be achieved only when a number of conditions are met, including respect for human rights and for the equality of all without discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, language or any other ground. That requires due regard for human dignity, the renunciation of violence and the prohibition of torture and abuse. The United Arab Emirates has been encouraged by the positive response to its periodic report by the members of the Human Rights Council, who commended the country's achievements and progress.

Achieving overall human development requires the creation of an environment conducive to tolerance and moderation, free of any incitement to hatred. In that context, it is necessary to support and promote dialogue among different countries and religions, without arrogance or superiority on the part of any culture over another, because each culture has something to give and something to gain with respect to another's culture.

The empowerment of women, the recognition of their vital role in communities and the protection of women against discrimination in various fields are imperatives for the international community.

The United Arab Emirates is proud of the significant measures it has taken in that respect, which have won the United Arab Emirates a high ranking among the countries in the region. Our country has also made significant strides in combating human trafficking, and it has developed national legislation to stand firm against that inhumane crime.

Achieving sustainable development for all people is a major priority for the United Nations and its Member States and one which will require scientific and technical cooperation, as well as the transfer of technology between developed and developing countries, to further the common good of all peoples and countries of the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. K. Shanmugam, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Law of the Republic of Singapore.

Mr. Shanmugam (Singapore): I warmly congratulate Mr. John Ashe on his election as President at the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly and wish him success during his term.

Over the past decade, the world has experienced a string of crises. Development has slowed. Confidence in the global economic system has been shaken. There are signs of recovery, but growth remains anaemic and uneven. Unemployment is high in many countries, particularly among the young. That has exacerbated problems by increasing poverty levels, widening income gaps, adding to social instability and causing public trust in Governments and institutions to decline. Extreme poverty remains a major concern in many parts of the world.

Violence and conflict are as great a threat to global stability as poverty, and the international community must respond firmly to them. In that regard, Singapore welcomes the unanimous adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria. We strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons under any circumstances, as it constitutes a violation of international law. We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Syria, and we hope that the “Geneva II” conference will be convened promptly and will find a political solution to end the conflict and violence. We also offer condolences to the Government and the people of Kenya over the brutal attacks in Westgate Mall, a painful reminder of the need to remain vigilant against terror. All countries must unite against violence and terror in

order to create an environment in which sustainable development can be pursued.

The global ecosystem is under stress from the transnational effects of human development activities. Human progress has come at the expense of the environment and the climate. Deforestation, desertification of land and the transboundary pollution of the sea, land and air degrade our quality of life and threaten human civilization.

We cannot go on with business as usual. We need to rethink and retool our economies and societies and to place poverty eradication and sustainability at the centre of our development agenda. The President’s choice of “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage” as the theme for the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly is therefore particularly timely. The 1987 Brundtland report of the World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. That should remain our guiding principle as we negotiate the post-2015 development agenda.

The United Nations has a critical role to play in the evolution of the post-2015 development agenda. Only the United Nations, with its universal membership and access to global data, has the standing to establish a new global development agenda that is inclusive, effective and adaptable. The United Nations has adopted an inclusive multi-stakeholder approach to gather the views of Member States and harness the energy of civil society. Several mechanisms have been set up, including the High-level Political Forum, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, in which Singapore is participating actively, and the Working Group on Sustainable Development Financing. We strongly encourage the United Nations to demonstrate leadership and weave those strands of discussion into a single, clear framework. That would allow Member States to focus their attention and prioritize their resources to meet critical challenges.

Singapore understands very well the importance of poverty eradication and sustainable development in securing a country’s future. When we became independent, in 1965, we faced several challenges. To uplift our population, which had only a small number of skilled workers and graduates, the Government focused on education and skills development. To create

jobs and alleviate poverty, we also gradually moved our industries up the value chain towards higher-skilled, innovation-focused sectors. Given Singapore's land and resource constraints, sustainable development was a necessity, not just a slogan. At 700 square kilometres, Singapore is slightly bigger than Manhattan but smaller than the five boroughs of New York. To ensure that our city-State remained liveable, we had to ensure that our policies on housing, infrastructure, transport and the environment were well integrated in a long-term and holistic vision.

Over several decades, we have managed to pursue growth while preserving a good living environment. For instance, despite the country's being densely populated and highly urbanized, our greening efforts have resulted in more than 50 per cent of Singapore being covered by vegetation. The Singapore Botanic Gardens, founded in the nineteenth century, is the only city botanic garden in the world to include a tract of original, primary rainforest. And despite our rapid development, we have managed to preserve much of our biodiversity. One of our nature reserves, Bukit Timah, contains more plant species than the entire North American continent.

We have also developed creative solutions to overcome some of our resource constraints. Take the example of water: Singapore now imports slightly more than 40 per cent of our water needs. To meet our drinking and industrial needs, we use a variety of methods, including collecting water through reservoirs, the desalination of seawater, and cutting-edge membrane technology to reclaim waste water into high-grade, ultra-clean water, which we call "NEWater". When Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Singapore in March 2012, he was impressed enough by our water management to make a toast with NEWater, rather than wine, calling NEWater, "something far more valuable — the elixir of life".

Let me now turn to the post-2015 development agenda and suggest three priority areas. First, we should learn from the example of the Millennium Development Goals. We should avoid being prescriptive. As each country is unique, countries should be allowed to exercise flexibility as to which goals they choose to prioritize and how they will achieve them. The new global development road map should have poverty eradication and sustainable development at its centre and should converge around a single, clear set of practical and quantifiable goals. We should keep to that outcomes-based approach and not forget that the

core purpose of the post-2015 development agenda is to improve the lives of people. Today, 1.2 billion people still live in extreme poverty. That is a staggering figure.

Secondly, we should emphasize urban management and the intertwined issues of water and sanitation. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, more than half of the world's population lives in urban areas. By 2050, 7 out of 10 people will live in urban areas. Many cities are already under strain. More than 2.5 billion people lack access to basic sanitation, and another 800 million do not have safe drinking water. Some 2,000 children die every day from diarrhoea. The crisis will be exacerbated as more people move to crowded cities, where the infrastructure cannot grow fast enough to support them. Singapore introduced a draft resolution in July, which was adopted by the General Assembly (resolution 67/291), to designate 19 November as World Toilet Day. We hope that will encourage countries to take a close look at how the nexus of urbanization, water and sanitation can be better managed.

Thirdly, it is important for the views and concerns of small States to be incorporated into the post-2015 development agenda. Small States make up more than half of the United Nations membership; many, especially small island developing States (SIDS), are among the more vulnerable Members of the United Nations family. Singapore identifies closely with the urgent concerns of our fellow SIDS. The third SIDS Conference, to be held in 2014, will be an important milestone, and Singapore has participated actively in all the preparatory meetings to date. At last year's inaugural Conference on Small Island Developing States, which was organized by the Forum of Small States (FOSS), Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon agreed that small and vulnerable States deserved special attention. Singapore will continue to work with the members of FOSS to share the perspectives of small States and ensure that our views are factored into the evolution of the new global development road map.

Although we are a small country, we will continue to play our part in assisting other countries in poverty eradication and furthering the sustainable development agenda. We established the Singapore Cooperation Programme in 1992 to share our developmental experience with our friends — our successes and our failures alike. We believe that technical assistance and capacity-building are more effective in creating the right conditions for growth. More than 80,000

Government officials from 170 countries have received training under the Programme in areas as diverse as sustainable urban development, water management and human-resource development. To support our engagement in the post-2015 development agenda, we will develop and customize new programmes on sustainable development and climate change that meet the needs of SIDS and least developed countries.

Singapore has also been working with other Governments to promote sustainable development internationally. In 2007, Singapore and China embarked on a joint project to develop the Sino-Singapore Tianjin Eco-city, which is envisioned as a city that will be socially harmonious, environmentally friendly and resource-efficient. That will become a model for sustainable urbanization in China. By 2020, the Eco-city is intended to be a low-carbon, green-living environment approximately half the size of Manhattan, housing around 350,000 people. Singapore will continue to share its experience in sustainable urbanization through Singapore-led events such as the biennial Singapore International Water Week and the World Cities Summit.

The only way to secure our collective future is through poverty eradication and sustainable development. The next two years will be critical for the world as we embark on an ambitious journey to map out the post-2015 agenda. The United Nations must play a leading role, and we are fully committed to working closely with other Member States to achieve that.

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Lalić Smajević (Serbia): My delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement made today (see A/68/PV.18) by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, His Excellency Mr. Edi Rama.

We would like to take this opportunity to underline once again before the General Assembly that the consolidation of regional peace, security and stability is a priority of the highest order for the Republic of Serbia. It is in that context that we would like to emphasize that the Republic of Serbia fully shares the approach and

vision of the Balkans working together, as the Prime Minister said, in spite of our history of so much war and conflict.

Unfortunately, in his statement today we also heard references praising a unilateral action that constitutes an infringement of the basic principles of the Organization and a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and the resolutions of the Security Council, as well as being contrary to the core principles and norms of international law. Such an approach is counterproductive and runs contrary to all the efforts that have been invested so far in achieving a sustainable solution to the situation in our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, particularly those made following the signing of the First Agreement on Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations only six months ago.

Let me point out that the Agreement, brokered through the significant facilitation efforts of Baroness Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, provides a framework for reaching practical and sustainable solutions to the issues burdening the daily life of the people in the province and in no way implies a recognition by Serbia of a unilateral pact. As stated by the President of Serbia, His Excellency Mr. Tomislav Nikolić, Belgrade and Pristina have reached agreement only over clearly defined matters such as municipal elections and the establishment of the community of Serbian municipalities in Kosovo and Metohija. The Republic of Serbia has not and will not recognize either *de jure* or *de facto* the independence of Kosovo.

The call for recognition as heard today, at a time when we are in the midst of investing efforts through courage and wisdom, in the words of the Prime Minister of Albania, is contrary to the ongoing process. Furthermore, it will not contribute favourably to the strengthening of confidence and the improvement of relations between the States of the Balkans.

Finally, let me reiterate that the issue of resolving the status of our southern province is one of my Government's foremost priorities. Time and again, we have demonstrated our readiness and willingness to make an active contribution to overcoming the accumulated problems in the aforementioned political dialogue in Brussels. My country has shown great flexibility in trying to bring about a solution acceptable to all and one that takes into account the legitimate interests of all communities in Kosovo and Metohija.

Mr. Alibabae (Islamic Republic of Iran): In his statement at this meeting, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates used a fabricated and unacceptable name for the term “Persian Gulf”. In exercising the right of reply, I would like to very briefly emphasize that, as the Assembly is certainly aware, it is an undisputed historical fact that the full term “Persian Gulf” has always been used as the standard geographical designation for the sea area between the Arabian peninsula and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Countless maps drawn by various regional and international institutions in the past several hundred years all testify to that point. Moreover, the United Nations practice over the past half-century has made it crystal clear that the term “Persian Gulf” is the only geographical designation applicable to that body of water and that it should be used in full without any exception when that body of water is referred to. Therefore, any use of a fabricated name for that body of water is totally groundless and absolutely unacceptable and without any legal basis whatsoever.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates also raised some unacceptable and unfounded claims about the three Iranian islands located in the Persian Gulf, namely, Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb. I would like to state that the Islamic Republic of Iran reiterates its full claim to sovereignty over the Iranian islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb in the Persian Gulf and categorically rejects any claim to the contrary. My delegation underlines that the measures undertaken in those islands by Iranian officials have always been based on the principles of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of my country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has also pursued a policy of friendship and good-neighbourliness with its neighbours. In that context, my country continues to stand ready to undertake bilateral discussions with the relevant officials in order to strengthen those

relations in various fields and accordingly resolve any misunderstanding between our two countries.

Mr. Aljasmi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am compelled to exercise the right of reply in response to the illegal and false allegations made by Iran claiming its sovereignty over islands that belong to the United Arab Emirates — Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb. In that regard, I would like to reiterate that my Government has, time and again, expressed its inalterable position with respect to those occupied islands. We express our strong disappointment over the annual statements made by the Iranian delegation in this Hall and the allegations that run counter to all historical fact and to the demographic, geographical and legal records that prove the ownership of the three islands by the United Arab Emirates.

Consequently, the United Arab Emirates will never abandon its legal, historical and political claim to those islands. We consider them to be under our national sovereignty and to be part and parcel of our territorial unity and integrity. We express our categorical rejection of all escalating and illegal measures taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran with respect to the three islands in the course of the past four decades.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates reiterates its appeal to the international community to urge the Islamic Republic of Iran to solve the problem through the means suggested previously, that is, direct negotiations, arbitration or recourse to the International Court of Justice, so that the matter can be decided in a manner that is consistent with international law.

Once again, we would like to repeat that stability and economic prosperity in the Arab Gulf region necessitate the establishment of good-neighbourliness in accordance with the principles of respect for the independence and sovereignty of States and of non-interference in their internal affairs.

The meeting rose at 6.50 p.m.