



# General Assembly

Seventy-third session

**85**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting  
Tuesday, 28 May 2019, 10 a.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Ms. Espinosa Garcés. . . . . (Ecuador)

*In the absence of the President, Mr. Ke (Cambodia),  
Vice-President, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.*

## Agenda item 7 (continued)

### Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

**The Acting President:** Members will recall that at its 65th plenary meeting, on 22 December 2018, the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 74. In order for the Assembly to take action on draft resolution A/73/L.85, it will be necessary to reopen consideration of agenda item 74.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen consideration of agenda item 74?

*It was so decided* (decision 73/504 B).

**The Acting President:** Members will also recall that, at its 3rd plenary meeting, on 21 September 2018, the General Assembly decided to allocate agenda item 74 to the Third Committee.

To enable the Assembly to take action expeditiously on the draft resolution, may I take it that the Assembly wishes to consider agenda item 74 directly in plenary meeting and proceed immediately to its consideration?

I hear no objection.

*It was so decided.*

## Agenda item 74 (continued)

### Promotion and protection of human rights

#### Draft resolution (A/73/L.85)

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland to introduce draft resolution A/73/L.85.

**Mr. Czaputowicz** (Poland): It is a great honour for me to address the General Assembly under agenda item 74 to introduce draft resolution A/73/L.85, entitled “International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief”. The draft resolution was submitted on behalf of nine countries: Brazil, Canada, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Nigeria, Pakistan, the United States and my own country, Poland.

I would like to warmly thank the core group countries and all other delegations for their engagement throughout the process of negotiations on the draft resolution. The positive spirit of cooperation during the negotiation was vital to the successful outcome.

The world has been experiencing an unprecedented rise in violence against religious communities and people belonging to religious minorities. Over recent months, we have been witnessing appalling acts of violence related to religion or belief. The recent attacks on mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the targeted Christian communities in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday have reminded us in a tragic way that the freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and that hatred towards religious groups may lead to the mass killing of innocent people.

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As reports of civil society organizations estimate, one-third of the world's populations suffers from some form of religious persecution. Religious persecution exists in many forms. Acts of terror are intended to intimidate members of religious communities and, as a result, hold them back from practicing their faith in their chosen places of worship. In some countries, religious practice is forbidden even at home. In others, the representatives of religious minorities are refused funerals. In some other States, organized groups target minority communities. Cases of police abduction and murder of religious leaders, their disappearance, resettlement, torture and beating based on religious belief are only some examples of the persecution and discriminatory behaviours directed at religious minorities.

Poland has a centuries-long tradition of peaceful coexistence of various religious groups. We are therefore particularly sensitive to the protection of religious freedom. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion — commonly referred to as a right to freedom of religion or belief — is a universal right of every human being. This right is a cornerstone of many other rights. Any acts of violence against people belonging to religious minorities cannot be accepted.

The draft resolution before us designates 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief. The establishment of the International Day is being put forward to honour the victims and survivors who too often remain forgotten. The draft resolution relates not to any specific religion or belief, but to all religions whose members are victims of violence. The draft resolution seeks to raise awareness of the importance of respect for religious diversity and inclusion. We strongly believe that the new International Day will help to create an inclusive platform for Member States, international organizations and civil society to engage in activities to commemorate victims and assist survivors. We hope that it will help to combat hate crimes and acts of violence related to religion or belief and will further strengthen interreligious dialogue. The draft resolution may play an educational role as well, by promoting respect for religious diversity, inclusion and mutual understanding between different religious and belief groups.

The establishment of the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief will complement other

important international instruments such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations or the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

Poland will work closely with the international community to safeguard religious freedoms and protect those who are intimidated or persecuted because of their religion or belief, including by various forms of meetings dedicated to the protection of religious minorities in armed conflict. Let us demonstrate together our commitment to ensuring freedom of religion and belief.

I would also like to thank the Member States sponsoring this draft resolution of great importance to the international community, and I look forward to its adoption by consensus.

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/73/L.85, entitled “International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief”.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. De Miranda** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of the draft resolution, and in addition to those delegations listed therein, the following countries have also become sponsors of draft resolution A/73/L.85: Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, the Congo, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Oman, Panama, Paraguay, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, the State of Palestine, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Uzbekistan.

**The Acting President:** May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/73/L.85?

*Draft resolution A/73/L.85 was adopted (resolution 73/296).*

**The Acting President:** Before giving the floor for explanations of position following the adoption of the resolution, I would like to remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Al Khalil** (Syrian Arab Republic) (*speak in Arabic*): My country's delegation has joined the consensus on resolution 73/296, entitled "International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief". Such acts of violence are dangerously on the rise, which requires us to adopt a more serious and effective stance to ensure that they do not become a dangerous phenomenon that would be difficult to contain at the international level.

My country's delegation expresses its deep concern regarding the scale and gravity of such acts of violence in many parts of the world. We caution against certain electoral practices and agendas, as well as provocative calls by extreme political parties, ideological movements and groups based on racism, xenophobia and persecution. Furthermore, my country condemns all hate speech, words of provocation and distortions of religious beliefs intended to incite discrimination, animosity or violence through the print media, the audio-visual press and the electronic media or by exploiting political and religious platforms or any other means. My country, Syria, refuses to accept the pretext of some who defend such dangerous practices, whereby they believe that expressing extreme ideas is part of the freedom of religion or the right to express their opinions.

It is time for all of us to consider taking practical steps that go beyond rejection and condemnation so as to ensure that all Governments prohibit such activities, prosecute perpetrators and monitor any financial support given to individuals and institutions that participate in those activities.

In speaking about the phenomenon of acts of violence based on religion or belief, we cannot fail to mention the dangerous phenomenon of global terrorism. We reiterate our strong condemnation of all terrorist activities and practices, as we are aware of their devastating effects, which prevent people from

enjoying all their fundamental rights and freedoms. In addition, they have direct effects on the stability of States and the prosperity of peoples, as well as international peace and security.

My country's Government believes that respecting the principles of international law, the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and the resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as promoting the genuine, undistorted values and practices of multilateral and preventive diplomacy is now more than ever decisive and necessary in addressing the challenges posed by the erosion in confidence of the peoples of the world in the possibility of establishing a balanced and innovative world order that can eliminate terrorism, violence, hatred, extremism and crime and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals without politicization or double standards, while confronting the policies of certain Governments that have political, economic and global influence. Those Governments impose their will on international activities and exploit the tools at the disposal of the Organization to serve their narrow and private interests and to cover up their practices in contradiction of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, including interference in the internal affairs of other Member States and the use or threat of use military aggression.

In fighting the terrorism carried out by Da'esh, Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups associated with them, the Syrian Arab Republic has seen tens of thousands of its citizens lose their lives. The Syrian people have suffered unprecedented pain at the hands of terrorism and the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters sponsored by certain Governments, while other Governments have closed their eyes to the situation. In addition, the unilateral coercive economic measures imposed by some Governments against the Syrian people are among the main reasons for the paralysis of our economic situation, the destruction of our infrastructure, emigration and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians inside and outside their country.

In drawing attention to those difficult realities, we wish to sound the alarm and make a sincere call for rebuilding trust among our States through seriously and undoubtedly addressing any policies or practices that cause the spread of global terrorism. We should be working together to eradicate the seeds of hatred, violence and extremism.

**The Acting President:** We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position following the adoption of the resolution.

**Mr. Smith** (United States of America): The United States thanks Poland and other members of the core group for their leadership and spirit of cooperation in establishing the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief (resolution 73/296). We are pleased to offer our support to this timely initiative.

Recent tragic events, such as the bombings of Christian churches in Colombo, the killings at mosques in Christchurch, the attack at Poway synagogue in San Diego, the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma, the execution of Sunni Kurds in Iran, and past atrocities like the genocide of Yazidis and Christians in areas controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant underscore the need for the establishment of this day. There is an urgent need for the international community to come together to condemn violence based on religion or belief and remember the many innocent victims of these heinous acts.

Countries must work across borders to advocate for the rights of members of religious-minority communities and to protect freedom of religion or belief wherever it is threatened. The United States is proud of our long history of promoting freedom of religion or belief, domestically and globally, for all — without regard to a specific religion or group of people. Religious freedom is enshrined in our Constitution, and we are committed to building a world in which no one fears violence or persecution due to his or her beliefs.

In July 2018, the United States convened the first-ever Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, bringing together civil society, Government officials, international organizations, and religious leaders to facilitate dialogue and establish areas of mutual cooperation for future action. The Potomac Plan of Action, issued by Secretary Pompeo at the conclusion of the Ministerial, called for the creation of the international day we are now establishing. This summer, we will build upon the momentum established in 2018 by convening the second Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom, in Washington, D.C.

In addition, we are encouraging regional follow-up conferences. The United Arab Emirates and Taiwan have already hosted events, and we thank them again for doing so. We also continue to support the Istanbul

process, which is designed to combat intolerance and discriminatory actions through open dialogue among Governments, civil society and religious leaders, with full respect for freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression. We encourage Member States to consider hosting Istanbul process meetings and workshops to demonstrate their own commitment to upholding freedom of religion or belief. With that, let me reiterate our gratitude for Poland's leadership on this effort.

Resolution 73/296 reminds the world that people continue to suffer all over because of their faith. We continue to call attention to one of the world's most horrific denials of freedom of religion or belief: in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, more than a million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and other members of Muslim minority groups have been arbitrarily detained in camps since April 2017. There are disturbing reports of forced labour, torture and deaths in these camps. Chinese authorities are restricting religious freedom by labelling peaceful religious practices as manifestations of religious extremism and terrorism.

We call upon all Member States to speak out against the egregious human rights abuses and religious persecution by the People's Republic of China. China's repressive campaign in Xinjiang is not about terrorism and follows a long history of religious, linguistic and cultural oppression. The Chinese Communist Party has exhibited extreme hostility to all religious faiths since its founding. This repression has intensified under the current policy of Sinicizing religion. We call on all Member States to press the Chinese Government to close its camps and respect the rights of Muslims, as well as the rights of Christians, Tibetan Buddhists, and Falun Gong practitioners.

The United States looks forward to continuing to work with Member States bilaterally and multilaterally in 2019 and beyond to advance international religious freedom. We stand ready to support Member States in improving their own record of religious freedom and will not hesitate to press countries to reform oppressive laws and policies. It is our goal that individuals from all walks of life and all parts of the world are free to practice — or not practice — a religion or belief of their choosing, without fear of interference, intimidation, or violence.

**Mr. Edrees** (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to welcome the presence of His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland. I also thank Poland very much and other countries for their valuable contributions in preparing resolution 73/296, adopted today.

There has been an unprecedented worldwide rise in acts of violence committed against people based on their religion or belief. In recent times, millions of people have fallen victim to intolerance, discrimination, negative stereotyping, stigmatization and acts of violence based on religion and belief. This is a violation of their basic rights and undoubtedly affects their ability to live in peace, security and freedom in their societies.

One example of this phenomenon is the rise of the right-wing extremist political movements and parties in many countries of the world, which has led to a worrying increase in incitement and hate speech that targets everything different. Those parties and movements operate by establishing political and social programmes that incite hatred and social exclusion against religious, ethnic or national groups. They use distorted ideas, misconceptions and unjustified fears to achieve their narrow political and electoral objectives, leading in turn to an unprecedented increase in discrimination, racism and xenophobia, including against migrants, while leading also to Islamophobia and acts of violence against people based on their religion or belief.

The recent attacks on Christian worshippers in Sri Lanka and before that on Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand, have proved that the phenomenon of targeting people based on their religion or belief has become a global one that is not limited to a certain region, people, group, religion or race; it is rather a phenomenon that threatens humankind in its entirety.

Egypt condemns in the strongest terms all terrorist acts and other acts of violence committed against people based on their religion or belief whatever the motive, place or time, and whoever the perpetrator. Those horrific terrorist acts, which targeted peaceful worshippers, killing and injuring hundreds of them, compel the international community to assume its primary responsibility for making concerted efforts to decisively address terrorism, violence and ideological extremism. We must make genuine efforts to promote and anchor peaceful coexistence, tolerance and acceptance of others, including by prohibiting the use

of modern media by extremists and terrorist groups, while preventing them from promoting ideologies that incite violence against various religious groups.

In conclusion, I want to thank all countries that sponsored resolution 73/296, which emphasizes once again our joint commitment to addressing all acts of violence based on religion or belief. It designates 22 August as the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief and reaffirms our joint commitment to fighting all acts of violence based on religion or belief in order to honour the memory of the victims of such violence.

**Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer** (Brazil): Brazil is pleased to be part of the core group that submitted resolution 73/296 for consideration by the General Assembly, as we join everyone in the Hall today in condemning violence, terrorism and extremism in all its forms, including when individuals are targeted on the basis or in the name of religion or belief.

Today we are remembering people who were targeted for professing their faith. The memory of these victims should live in our hearts and minds every day, not only as a sign of respect, but also as a warning of the nefarious consequences that hatred, bigotry and prejudice can produce if left unchecked. Faith is something that speaks to our very core as individuals. It is often a fundamental part of our identity as individuals and of the communities we live in. This is why these violent acts are so abject — they are directed against the very essence of what makes us who we are. It is our shared values that are on the line, which prompts a call for all of us to stand together in condemning violence, extremism and hate rhetoric.

In an era of turbulence and uncertainty, interfaith dialogue may provide an important remedy to violence. Religious communities offer a reminder of the core principles of our common humanity. The spread of the values of empathy, compassion, forgiveness and altruism are needed today more than ever, and it is through that interfaith dialogue that we can hear one another and learn together how to understand and care for one another.

Brazil's recent history shows that interfaith dialogue should not be feared and that it can actually contribute to development and to a more tolerant society. In the past 30 years, Brazil has increased its religious diversity. A country that was predominantly Catholic has today a population of which 40 per cent profess other religions.

Those changes have happened in an environment of peace and mutual respect. Brazil can therefore serve as an example of the virtuous cycle that can arise from religious freedom, peace and development.

Securing that harmonious coexistence, however, requires continuous effort. As our societies are constantly changing at an unprecedented speed, our commitment to peace should be renewed daily. Poverty, religious radicalism and conflict can interact in the worst way. Conversely, development, peace and religious diversity can reinforce each other in a positive way.

Through the creation of this commemorative event, when we pay tribute to those who have fallen victim to intolerance, let us highlight our similarities rather than our differences, let us remember our unity rather than our discord and let us promote love rather than hatred.

**Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi** (Islamic Republic of Iran): Islamophobia is gradually overtaking other forms of bigotry, hateful speech and attitudes, mostly thanks to populist politicians and media complacency. It is becoming more difficult to practice as a Muslim, to dress as a Muslim and even to look like a Muslim. Muslim women and girls, in particular, are becoming easy targets for hateful and discriminatory attacks.

Islam and Muslims are being scapegoated and victimized across many countries, both individually and in communities that, time and again, have claimed the high ground of respect for human rights and moderation. This stigmatization and discrimination have led many people, particularly young people, to be disenfranchised from their communities.

The United States is a typical case where populist and ultranationalist politicians are stirring up prejudice and intolerance against vulnerable people, including Muslim individuals and communities. When supremacists and neo-Nazis are hailed as “very fine people”, one can easily imagine the consequences.

I conclude by thanking Poland for presenting resolution 73/296 and conducting its negotiations in an open and inclusive manner. Its consensual adoption reflects the global will to stop the victimization of individuals and religions in a world in which tolerance and moderation are under attack by myopic politicians and irresponsible media platforms.

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the observer of Observer State of the Holy See.

**Monsignor Grysa** (Holy See): My delegation would like to thank Poland for its leadership in proposing and negotiating resolution 73/296, entitled “International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief”.

The Holy See follows with great concern the escalation of acts of violence against religious communities. Pope Francis has on many occasions expressed his spiritual and paternal closeness to the victims of such acts, including to the victims of recent attacks in Sri Lanka; Christchurch, New Zealand; Poway, California; and most recently, to the victims of attacks against Catholics in Burkina Faso.

Resolution 73/296 and the international day it establishes are an opportunity for the international community to focus on the victims and to strengthen efforts to eradicate such violence and acts of terrorism targeting persons because of their religion or belief.

The joint declaration, entitled “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, which Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, signed in Abu Dhabi on 4 February, resolutely declares that

“religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood”.

Those tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. Therefore, people, not religions, should be blamed for those acts of violence. The response cannot be any form of retaliatory justice, but must rather be a clear condemnation of such acts and an authentic dialogue among the various religious communities on the basis of the joint and unequivocal belief that killing others in the name of God offends God himself.

**The Acting President:** We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position.

One delegation has asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply. I would like to remind him that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

**Mr. Chu Guang** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China expresses its strong opposition to and dissatisfaction with the statement made just now by the United

States representative, who levelled unwarranted and groundless accusations against China's religious policies and practices.

China is a unified country of multiple ethnicities. We have 56 ethnic groups living harmoniously on Chinese soil. The Chinese Constitution protects the freedom of religious belief. In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, we have been actively promoting and protecting citizens' rights and freedom of religious belief, in accordance with the law.

The Chinese Government has set up vocational education and training centres as a preventive counter-terrorism measure. Their purpose is to eradicate terrorism and violent extremism and to eliminate their breeding grounds so that the people of Xinjiang can live in peace and stability, thereby protecting their human rights and freedoms from attack by violent extremism and terrorism. Another purpose of the vocational education and training centres is to teach the official languages of the country, as well as vocational skills and national laws and regulations, which also contributes to the eradication of poverty.

These centres are boarding schools rather than camps. The trainees can go home every week and be visited by their families, and their religious beliefs are protected in accordance with the law. On a number of occasions since the end of last year, China has invited diplomats from many countries and representatives of international organizations and the media to visit the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, including the vocational education and training centres, after which many have said that the true situation in the centres is vastly different from its portrayal in the Western media.

The United States representative accused the Chinese Government just now of oppressing the culture and language of the Autonomous Region. I must therefore stress that the Chinese Government attaches great importance to protecting the culture and language of ethnic minorities. There are five languages on China's currency, the yuan, one of which is Uyghur. The proceedings of the local Government of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the local people's congress and all of its meeting documents are published in the languages of the various ethnic groups. We also have simultaneous interpretation into the languages of the local ethnic groups when we hold such conferences and use the ethnic minority languages when the National People's Congress is in session.

If that represents oppression of the language and culture of ethnic minorities, I do not know what kind of measures the United States Government takes to promote the language and culture of its own ethnic groups. As far as I know, in the current and previous sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, many indigenous peoples, including Hawaiians and native Americans, have accused the United States Government of killing indigenous peoples, extinguishing their languages and cultures and silencing their voices, even at the United Nations.

On the issue of Taiwan, I once again reaffirm that Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese territory. The United States representative mentioned Taiwan in his statement. I hope that the United States delegation can respect the One China principle.

**The Acting President:** The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 74.

#### **Agenda item 117**

#### **Appointments to fill vacancies in subsidiary organs and other appointments**

##### **Note by the Secretary-General (A/73/876)**

**The Acting President:** Members will recall that the Assembly, in its decision 70/402 of 12 October 2015, approved the appointment of Ms. Heidi Mendoza of the Philippines as Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services for a fixed term of five years, beginning on 15 November 2015 and ending on 14 November 2020.

On 2 June 2016, the Secretary-General informed the Assembly that Ms. Mendoza had assumed her duties on 11 December 2015 and that, accordingly, her term of office would expire on 10 December 2020.

In document A/73/876 of 17 May 2019, the Secretary-General informs the General Assembly that, on 23 April 2019, the United Nations Staff Pension Committee determined that Ms. Mendoza would have to shorten her appointment, with effect from 25 October 2019.

Taking into account the decision of the Committee, the Secretary-General, in accordance with paragraph 5 (b) of resolution 48/218 B, proposes to initiate the recruitment process for the next Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services. Eventually, the

Secretary-General will propose a candidate to succeed Ms. Mendoza. The Secretary-General recommends that the General Assembly take note of his proposed action.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to take note of the Secretary-General's proposed action as contained in document A/73/876?

*It was so decided.*

**The President:** The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 117.

#### **Agenda item 128 (continued)**

#### **Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations**

##### **(z) Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea**

##### **Draft resolution (A/73/L.87)**

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Turkmenistan to introduce draft resolution A/73/L.87.

**Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan) (spoke in Russian):** I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/73/L.87, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea". Throughout the entire negotiating process on the text of the draft resolution, we made every effort to maintain a constructive atmosphere and achieve consensus.

There is an environmental disaster in Central Asia associated with the Aral Sea. Until it began to shrink, the Aral Sea was the fourth largest lake in the world. It had ports, fish factories and a fishing fleet. But since the 1960s, the level and volume of water in the Aral Sea have been rapidly declining due to a drop in the flow from the main rivers feeding into it. In the past 50 to 55 years, the volume of water in the Sea has shrunk by more than fifteenfold and its level has fallen by 29 metres, resulting in the formation of 5.5 million hectares of salt and sand areas on its territory, with a negative impact on the ecology of the region and the health and lives of its people, flora and fauna.

The impact of the Aral Sea disaster is being felt all over the world. Toxic salts from the Aral region have been found on the coasts of Antarctica, in the glaciers of Greenland, the forests of Norway and many other parts of the globe. The most important task right now

is reducing the destructive impact of the Aral Sea crisis on the environment, health and very existence of the millions of people living in the Aral Sea basin.

In 1993, the Heads of State of Central Asia established the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea with the aim of dealing with the environmental crisis and improving the social and economic situation in the Aral Sea basin, which the world community has recognized as one of the worst disasters of the twentieth century. On 24 August 2018, under Turkmenistan's chairmanship, the Council of Heads of the founder States of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea held a meeting in the city of Turkmenbashi attended by Heads of State of Central Asia and representatives of specialized United Nations structures and regional organizations. During the summit, the Heads of State discussed a wide range of issues of cooperation for the future improvement of the water-management, environmental and socioeconomic situation in the Aral Sea basin. They also noted the significant contribution that the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea has made in this area in the 25 years of its existence. The summit resulted in the adoption of a joint communiqué by the Council of Heads of the founder States of the Fund.

With today's draft resolution, the sponsoring countries want to draw the attention of the States Members of the United Nations to the fact that without the support and assistance of international financial institutions and developed countries, and a leading role on the part of the United Nations, this problem cannot be solved. The draft resolution takes into account the fact that the negative humanitarian, environmental and socioeconomic consequences of the Aral Sea basin tragedy extend well beyond the region and represent a global problem.

In that regard, the draft resolution affirms that achieving international cooperation in solving international problems of an environmental, economic, social and humanitarian nature is one of the purposes of the United Nations. We believe firmly that the draft resolution will provide more opportunities for strengthening cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

In conclusion, I would like to express our hope that this important draft resolution will be adopted by consensus. We call on all countries to support it and to join the list of sponsors, which will give our shared

efforts additional momentum. I would also like to thank the countries that have already joined the list of its sponsors.

**The Acting President:** The General Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/73/L.87, entitled “Cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea”.

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

**Ms. De Miranda** (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I would like to announce that since the submission of draft resolution A/73/L.87, in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have also become sponsors: Austria, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Papua New Guinea, Poland, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand and Turkey.

**The Acting President:** May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to adopt draft resolution A/73/L.87?

*Draft resolution A/73/L.87 was adopted (resolution 73/297).*

**The Acting President:** I now give the floor to the representative of Kyrgyzstan, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted.

**Mrs. Moldoisaeva** (Kyrgyzstan) (*spoke in Russian*): The Kyrgyz Republic would like to inform

the Assembly about its position on resolution 73/297 on cooperation between the United Nations and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea.

In 2016, the Kyrgyz Republic adopted a decision on ending its participation in the activities of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea and its entities, owing to its ineffectiveness and the lack of progress in reforming it. The talks held in 2010 and 2011 between experts from the States of the region on the issue had no results, due to the unconstructive positions of various States. The problems of reforming the Fund requires the joint efforts of all of its member States and must be discussed and promoted outside the context of the Fund, including its board of directors, by experts from the countries of the region. The Kyrgyz Republic is ready for expert discussion of the issues regarding reform of the Fund with the participation of representatives of every Central Asian State. We hope that the Central Asian countries will be able to achieve the necessary reform of the Fund with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of its activities and bodies, in accordance with the interests and the urgent needs of all the States of Central Asia.

**The Acting President:** May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (z) of agenda item 128?

*It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.*