

Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, at the Meeting of the Adhoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General Assembly on April 19, 2012

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

Let me start by placing on record my delegation's happiness at the decision taken by you to convene this meeting to discuss the role and authority of the General Assembly and its relationship to the principal organs of the United Nations and other groups outside the United Nations.

Today's discussion is both important and timely, and so a few home truths are clearly in order.

Let us acknowledge that UN reforms have been a consistent sore spot over the last few years and no specific issue has epitomized this more than GA revitalization.

But what do we do, Co-Chairs?

As true prisoners of habit, we meet every year and steeped in our own convictions, ritualistically recite our *mantras* on the issue of General Assembly revitalization while refusing to listen to our partners and being resigned to reiteration for its own sake.

But the world outside has moved on in the last few decades in ways no one could have imagined even in their wildest dreams.

So the principal order of business, as far as my delegation is concerned is to determine whether there exists a consensus amongst us here and today that the time has come for the General Assembly, the G-193 to take remedial action.

If we can at least acknowledge that further delay would not only exacerbate the prevailing apathy but also strengthen trends to look for solutions elsewhere, we would have made some progress, if not we can very well make a ritualistic beginning same time next year!

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

At the outset, let me align myself with the statement by Algeria on behalf of the Non-Aligned Group. And let me amplify of some of the main aspects in my national capacity.

India has consistently held the view that the General Assembly can be revitalized only when its position as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations is respected in letter and in spirit.

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

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

A perception that the prerogatives and authority of the General Assembly have been undermined, in particular by the Security Council has not only gained ground, but I believe has entrenched itself.

First, the Council is increasingly encroaching on issues that traditionally fall within the Assembly's competence, such as the process of standard-setting and codification of international law and by holding of thematic debates on issues that frequently fall within the purview of the General Assembly or the ECOSOC.

Second, the Council's annual report continues to be a mere statistical compilation of events, a bland summary and listing of meetings and outcome documents which merely informs without educating, illustrates without elucidating. We associate ourselves with such concerns.

As is to be expected, such concerns have led to calls for urgently recalibrating the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council.

The Council would therefore do well to eschew the tendency to give extremely creative and permissive interpretations to the consideration of what constitutes a threat to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression and to the situations under which it can take action under Chapter VII.

And in terms of its reporting obligations, the Council should not only inform the Assembly of the decisions taken, but also the rationale, efficacy and impact of the Council's decisions, in terms of crystallized take-aways for the membership.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

At the same time, however, we believe that remedial measures would only be half complete in the absence of serious introspection on what the General Assembly itself can do to mitigate the situation.

Clearly, the Assembly will not be empowered merely by strengthening procedures. More important is the presence of political will to take concrete measures to reinforce the role and authority of the Assembly.

Foremost in this regard is the need to properly appreciate and then correctly situate the Assembly within the plurality of multilateral mechanisms that deal with global issues. In our view, the primacy of the Assembly flows from the universality of its membership as well as the diligent application of the principle of sovereign equality of all its members. Ownership therefore, of the Assembly's decisions and activities, is reflected in the degree of participation by member-states. So, if there is a foreboding sense of apathy towards the work done in the Assembly, the member-states are also partly to blame.

If the member-states, instead of engaging in substantive deliberations in the six main committees that could result in setting new norms, spend considerable resources on procedural issues they will only encourage the usurpation of their role by other institutions both within and outside the UN.

We also call for enhancing the oversight role of the Assembly vis-à-vis the UN staff and as reflected in the working of the Fifth Committee.

Distinguished Co-Chairs,

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

You can expect my delegation's constructive support and participation in your efforts.

Thank You.

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