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Fifty-first Session

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Official Records

President: Mr. Razali Ismail (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Tofilau Eti Alesana, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Western Samoa

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Western Samoa.

Mr. Tofilau Eti Alesana, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Samoa, Mr. Tofilau Eti Alesana, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Alesana (Samoa): Samoa congratulates you most warmly on your highly acclaimed election. It is a particular pleasure for me to express to you our full confidence in and support for your presidency. I want also to pay tribute to His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal for his outstanding service and leadership during the historic fiftieth session of the Assembly.

Samoa welcomes the adoption by this Assembly of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which I will sign on behalf of my Government later today. We are signing the Treaty because it is what we have all sought for so long. We applaud and thank Australia for the initiative to bring the Treaty directly to the General Assembly. For us in the Pacific, the CTBT brings to an end a long and unsatisfactory situation. Too many nuclear weapons, far too many, were tested in our region, and we remain fearful of the consequences, especially to our fragile environment and marine resources. Like others, we acknowledge the shortcomings of the CTBT and regret that it was not possible to reach the required consensus in the Conference on Disarmament. But that must not be allowed to stand in the way of the work that remains to be done. The CTBT is a mark of critical progress. We must all now employ the most serious effort in moving the disarmament process further, including bringing the CTBT into force.

Today the international community is united, perhaps more so than at any other time, in recognizing the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons as a fundamental goal. Samoa is deeply committed to this goal, and we will continue to work for its achievement together with other members of the United Nations as well as with members of civil society.

It is a matter of the greatest encouragement to my Government to have the favourable opinion of the International Court of Justice on the question of the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. We

welcome in particular the Court's very timely reminder of the obligation to pursue in good faith, and to bring to a conclusion, negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament. We accept entirely the important opinion of the Court that nuclear disarmament, in all its aspects, must be under strict and effective international control.

I should also acknowledge the signing earlier this year by the United States of America, the United Kingdom and France of the Protocols to the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. The prompt ratification by France is appreciated, and we look forward to full adherence by all nuclear-weapon States. We believe that their full participation will not only inspire confidence within our region, but will also carry a message of hope for the rest of the international community.

We place considerable faith in the importance of nuclear-weapon-free zones and the vital role they play in the disarmament process. During this session, along with other delegations, Samoa will support efforts aimed at developing links and enhancing cooperation among southern hemisphere nuclear-weapon-free zones.

We are from a region which treasures peace and security, and we seek for ourselves the highest measure of peaceful coexistence with all countries. We therefore share in full the anguish of our fellow humans in all countries who are being denied the conditions to live and to develop in peace and in fulfilment.

My Government welcomes the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the implementation of the Dayton Agreement. Our hope is that the recent elections too will serve to provide confidence and trust among all the parties.

We continue to pray for lasting peace in the Middle East. We commend President Clinton for initiating the recent Washington meetings, and we urge all sides, in the renewed negotiations now taking place in the region, to make every effort possible to restore stability and direction to the peace process in the spirit of mutual respect.

We are also a country which cherishes the United Nations Charter and the fundamental principles for which our Organization stands. This is the basis for our support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China.

We have faith in the elaboration of rules to regulate international behaviour and cooperation. Increasingly, developments in the international system require both State

and citizen to submit to international scrutiny. One area that calls for attention concerns serious humanitarian offences and crimes of international concern, including terrorism. Samoa fully supports the early establishment of an international criminal court to deal with these crimes.

Reforms of the United Nations were given a great deal of focus at the fiftieth session and much has already been said during this general debate, and rightly so. At almost every level, the Organization remains in need of substantial change and improvement. My own country is fully committed in its support for the ongoing efforts to strengthen and revitalize our Organization to make it more democratic, fair and representative. I must say, however, that having only a small delegation to cope with the multifaceted work being carried out in the five high-level Working Groups, we feel both disadvantaged and, at times, dispirited about the pace and often the direction of the discussions.

The membership of the Security Council must be enlarged to reflect the realities of the present time and to enhance the Council's effectiveness and legitimacy. There is need to give particular consideration to the case of Japan and Germany. My Government is also giving the most serious thought to proposals, such as that of Italy, that would ensure the proper and regular representation of small States and their concerns in the work of the Council. We think the discussions during this session should try and focus on areas with regard to which there is reasonable chance of progress and on which significant consensus can be consolidated. We do not see the point in endless open-ended discussions.

We share fully the concerns voiced about the very serious and unsatisfactory financial situation of the United Nations. The payment of assessed contributions is a freely accepted responsibility and a solemn duty that all States must discharge promptly and without condition. Samoa willingly accepts this duty and will continue to meet its own financial obligations. However, we must say again that the current floor rate has rendered the present scale of assessments inequitable for small and least developed States like my own. A recent report of the Committee on Contributions has given attention to this anomaly, and we feel that timely action must be taken to work out a fairer system of assessment based on capacity to pay in real terms.

Next year, during your presidency, Sir, we shall have to undertake the five-year review of Agenda 21. It will be a first and timely opportunity for comprehensive

assessment and for giving momentum to sustainable development. Given your prominence at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, we shall have to look to you for an extra measure of leadership to ensure solid results from the review and effective performance from the institutions charged with implementing Agenda 21.

Samoa, together with other small island States, continues to emphasize the importance of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It is a realistic plan for our sustainable economic development. While our endeavours to implement the Programme of Action have been greatly assisted and facilitated by United Nations organs, achievement is ultimately a matter of national effort and perseverance. With the crucial support of the international community, we must continue to hold high the ethic of self-sufficiency.

The sea and its resources provide real prospects for our development. The legal regimes that govern them and their use are matters of vital importance to Samoa. They will continue to receive our closest attention. We welcome the election of members of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and the establishment of the International Seabed Authority. We think it is appropriate to grant United Nations observer status to the Authority and we will support the efforts to strengthen the organization of the Authority and to ensure its financial viability.

The preservation of our environment is a major preoccupation for my country. We will continue to make every effort to be engaged in international discussions and to contribute to the development of international environmental principles and modalities to ensure that our concerns are adequately reflected. Recourse to international law and to effective international mechanisms is the ultimate protection and security for small States.

The global climate is changing, and the impact of this, especially the rise in the sea level, pose the most serious dangers for Samoa and for all small islands. As a member of the Alliance of Small Island States, we have pressed and will continue to press our concerns for immediate and effective international action.

The second assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change confirms what we have long feared: human activity is warming and changing the climate system. Ministers of the Environment who attended the second Conference of the Parties in Geneva in July this

year endorsed the report as the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment of climate science.

The Panel's report underlines the real urgency of the climate change negotiations mandated at Berlin last year. Current commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Convention will not be enough to arrest global warming, and additional and effective commitments by industrialized countries extending beyond the year 2000 must be established. In 1994, the Alliance of Small Island States submitted possible solutions as set out in its draft protocol. It remains the only complete proposal on the table.

We now have barely a year before the need to finalize negotiations of a protocol or another legal instrument to strengthen the Convention on Climate Change for adoption at the Conference of the Parties next year in Kyoto, Japan. We call on all Convention parties to move with all seriousness and urgency on the matter.

The General Assembly has a full and comprehensive agenda before it. Under your leadership we have every reason to look forward to firm and positive results.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Western Samoa for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Tofilau Eti Alesana, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malawi, His Excellency The Honourable George Nga Mtafu.

Mr. Mtafu (Malawi): Let me begin, Sir, by extending to you my heartfelt congratulations on your election to the high office of President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly. Malawi holds you and your great country, Malaysia, in very high esteem. Your election to preside over this important session, soon after the special commemorative session, surely demonstrates the confidence that the international community as a whole has in you and your country. I have no doubt that you will guide the deliberations of the Assembly to a successful conclusion.

Let me also pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, for

the very skilful manner in which he conducted the deliberations of the fiftieth session. As we all know, the earlier part of that session coincided with the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, an occasion which attracted an unprecedented gathering of world leaders as well as other high-level representatives. In spite of the demands which the ceremony imposed on the Organization, Mr. do Amaral met the challenge with admirable tact and tenacity. To him we wish to say "well done" for a job brilliantly executed.

The fiftieth session of the General Assembly was a milestone in the life of the United Nations. It not only symbolized the coming of age of the Organization but gave delegations an opportunity for serious reflection and appraisal of the various aspects of the Organization and its operations. It was therefore not surprising to us that reform was, and continues to be, the main theme of the deliberations.

My delegation is pleased to note that reform of the Organization is being pursued with vigour and a renewed sense of direction. Indeed, we cannot wish away the inspiring words of wisdom that came out of the statements of the world leaders who addressed the Assembly during the Special Commemorative Meeting. The United Nations needs to be strengthened for it to respond fully to the many political and economic challenges that face the world today.

We all agree that now is the time for the Security Council to be democratized in such a way that its composition corresponds equitably with the increase in the membership of the Organization. Its working methods and procedures also need to be enhanced in order to bring about more transparency and accountability. The continuing debate on this subject has clearly revealed to us the essential issues to be dealt with. We are encouraged by what seems to be an emerging spirit of accommodation on the subject. It is our sincere hope that the hurdles that remain ahead will be surmounted in the same spirit of give and take. More significantly, it is necessary to bear in mind that while the relevant Working Group is open-ended in space, it is not open-ended in time. The sense of urgency with which world leaders addressed the question of reform during the commemorative ceremony demands that work on this matter move forward resolutely.

Even the most reformed United Nations cannot perform without the necessary resources. It is no secret that the operations of the Organization have in recent years been hampered by financial constraints. We are encouraged by the progress so far achieved in the High-level Open-ended

Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations. We, however, would have liked more sustained, action-oriented progress so that we could put to rest a matter which has greater implications, including for the morale of the staff of the Organization. We trust that the deliberations will continue to address the issues in an open and transparent manner. At the same time, it is our sincere hope that Member States will continue to honour their existing obligations without introducing linkages.

Two years ago, the President of the Republic of Malawi, His Excellency Mr. Bakili Muluzi, stood here at this very rostrum to herald the dawning of a new era in Malawi on 17 June 1994, when Malawians ushered in their first democratically elected Government after 30 years of dictatorship. It is common knowledge that the new Government inherited a multitude of problems with debilitating consequences for the socio-economic development and welfare of the Malawian people.

Undaunted by these enormous challenges, the new Government, soon after assuming power, put into place policies with the overall aim of reducing poverty and improving education and social services, particularly among people living in rural areas. Two and a half years on, the wide-ranging economic and structural reforms that the Government embarked upon are increasingly yielding positive results. General economic activity is expanding at a remarkable pace, inflation is coming down steadily, public finances are in the process of being restored to sustainable levels, and the situation of the balance of payments and foreign reserves continues to improve, thus gradually restoring confidence in the economy.

Most significantly, the liberalization of markets and relative prices in commodities have increased work and production incentives and opened opportunities for many Malawians. We remain committed to removing the few remaining rigidities in the economy, which in the past have tended to cause discrimination against the common man in the village. The opening up of the economy and the expansion of opportunities for all will continue to guide us in pursuing our economic agenda. We are, however, the first to realize that there are many stumbling blocks ahead.

Malawi is a very small country, and is landlocked. Like other countries, we too have our own vision of a better and more prosperous Malawi. Through our own 2020 Programme, we hope to solicit the views of the various sectors of the national populace and chart the direction of the country's development to the year 2020.

So far, the public has shown considerable enthusiasm in the ongoing consultations, in the same way that they participated in the political transformation of the country two years ago. It is our desire and commitment to control our economic destiny. The level of expectation created by the democratic dispensation needs to be matched by economic empowerment and social development. To have it otherwise would be to compromise democracy.

The Government and the people of Malawi appreciate and are thankful for the assistance which the international community is rendering our country. We are hopeful that the international community will continue to help Malawi realize its dreams and its vision. We call upon our development partners to continue to augment the assistance that they are currently extending to the people of Malawi. We also wish to appeal to our cooperating partners to come and invest in our country. The economic and investment climate is now more conducive than ever before.

Malawi has welcomed with enthusiasm the launching by the international community of programmes which aim at encouraging development in Africa. For the past few years, hope in the continent was fanned by the adoption of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. The much talked about diversification of the economies of African States was warmly received as a move which would strengthen the predominantly primary raw material-producing basis of the countries' economies. It is sad to note that the financial resources required for the programme have not matched the enthusiasm that revolved around the launching of the New Agenda. My delegation sincerely hopes that the mid-term review of the Agenda, which has just concluded, will reignite the enthusiasm of us all and enhance the political will of all the cooperating partners.

More recently, my Government welcomed the launching by the Secretary-General of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. Malawi is particularly pleased with the innovative nature of the Initiative. The conferring of the leadership of the programme on the Africans themselves only confirms what we have always desired to see happen. In addition, the specificity of the objectives sought under the Initiative is a move in the right direction. We commend the international community for this programme and call upon the lead institutions not to waver at the implementation stage. For our part, we stand ready to cooperate fully with the other implementing partners, and so far that is precisely what we are doing.

Malawi is following with interest the current work on the elaboration of an Agenda for Development. My delegation notes that the basic guidelines for an Agenda for Development are well known and have already been negotiated and agreed upon in the various United Nations conferences and summits. What remains is essentially the implementation of the action plans in a more integrated and innovative way, entailing political commitment by all active members of the international community. We look forward to an early conclusion of an Agenda for Development. We in Malawi see all these initiatives as complementary to our own ongoing efforts to improve the well-being of our people.

Malawi notes with satisfaction the important role that the United Nations plays in the maintenance of international peace and security in various parts of the world. We welcome the steady progress which has been achieved in Angola and hail the Government for honouring its commitments. At the same time, we wish to appeal to the leadership of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) to adhere to the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol and related agreements. We have always maintained that peace in Angola will be beneficial not only to the people of Angola, a people tired of war, but also to our southern African subcontinent as a whole.

My Government remains disturbed by the recent developments in Burundi. The July 1996 *coup d'état* was a major setback to the democratic process, and we support the position taken by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the countries of the Great Lakes region. We denounce the *coup d'état*. Malawi does not condone any takeover of power by any party through unconstitutional means. Quite frankly, we in Africa are sick and tired of this "disease". We want the ballot box to be the referee in African politics, once and for all. *Coups d'états* have contributed negatively to the fame of our otherwise rich and beautiful continent. We remain convinced that the Arusha process is the only credible way of bringing about peace in Burundi. We therefore call upon the military rulers in Burundi to pave the way for the resumption of the Arusha peace negotiations.

The installation in August 1996 of an interim Government in Liberia led by Mrs. Ruth Perry gives us all hope that the warring factions have chosen the way of peace and reconciliation after years of the senseless killing of innocent civilians. Malawi commends the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for having successfully brokered the

peace plan among the warring factions. We reaffirm our faith in the Abuja Agreement and express the hope that the implementation schedule agreed upon recently will lead to successful elections next year. We call upon the international community to closely monitor developments and assist the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in the noble work that it is carrying out in Liberia.

There remains cause for genuine concern over developments in Western Sahara. My Government has noted that for a long time now, progress has stalled over the identification of eligible voters in the referendum. The repeated extension of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) is a show of commitment by the international community which should not be taken for granted. Malawi therefore calls upon the principal players in the process to show some flexibility so that an amicable solution to the current impasse can be reached.

Developments in countries of the former Yugoslavia have recently been encouraging. The cessation of hostilities in the Balkans under the Dayton Peace Agreement signed early this year and the recent elections have generated considerable hope within the international community. It is the hope of my Government that no reckless moves will be taken which could jeopardize the existing momentum towards stability.

During the past few years considerable progress towards a comprehensive peace settlement has been made in the Middle East. We have in the past expressed support for the peace initiative which, since its birth at Madrid on 30 October 1991, has grown steadily and has given rise to important agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). We remain convinced that the path that was started in Madrid is the way forward. We therefore urge all the parties concerned to abide by their previous commitments and move forward to achieve the aspirations of the people of the region and the world. The recent disturbing developments only show how thin the dividing line is between peace and violence.

The international community has recently been reminded, through violent clashes, of the volatile situation that exists in divided Cyprus. The division, which arose over two decades ago, remains a constant reminder that the international community has yet to boldly tackle the situation there. My Government hopes that the issue of Cyprus will be pursued with commitment by both the mediators and the parties concerned.

It is the wish of my Government that the long-standing question of the international status of the Republic of China on Taiwan will be peacefully resolved in a manner acceptable to the Governments on both sides of the Taiwan Strait. We are encouraged by the recent reported indications that the two sides are ready to talk to each other. However, the Malawi Government wishes to reaffirm its commitment to the promotion of freedom, human rights and democratic principles and therefore supports the aspirations of the more than 21 million Taiwanese people to recognition and full participation in all the activities of the international community.

We and our prestigious Organization should be preventing and resolving conflicts. We should not sit by as confrontation builds. Instead, we should find the time to initiate dialogue and lasting solutions, and not always have to wake up and respond to emergencies. The benchmark should not always be to please the stronger; it should also be to support the weak and vulnerable and those under stress. But apart from our trade interests, our moral obligation must be renewed every day.

Let me conclude by reaffirming our faith in the United Nations. We believe the United Nations has a vital role to play in the maintenance of international peace and security. Many areas of tension remain the world over. We urge the United Nations to act more resolutely in dealing with these many troubled areas. The United Nations has made and continues to make a difference in the lives of millions of people in many countries, including my own, Malawi, in many areas of human endeavour. We have no doubt that a reformed United Nations will contribute more to making the world a better place to live. We are confident, Sir, that under your stewardship of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, we, the peoples of the United Nations, will have taken another bold step towards a revitalized and reformed United Nations, a United Nations capable of fully responding to the challenges of the twenty-first century. Our prayer is, let us boldly resolve and go forward together to the next millennium.

Address by Mrs. Ruth Perry, Chairman of the Council of the Liberian National Transitional Government

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Chairman of the Council of State of the Liberian National Transitional Government, Her Excellency Mrs. Ruth Perry.

Mrs. Perry, Chairman of the Council of State of the Liberian National Transitional Government, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the Chairman of the Council of State of the Liberian National Transitional Government, Her Excellency Mrs. Ruth Perry, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

Mrs. Perry: Permit me to express on behalf of my country, Liberia, our sincere congratulations to you, Sir, on your unanimous election as President of the General Assembly. It is our expectation that your tenure will be marked by the same distinction that has characterized your service to your country, Malaysia.

I express our sincere appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of Portugal, for efficiently conducting the proceedings of the historic fiftieth session of the General Assembly.

I also wish to congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his continuing dedication to the cause of world peace and social justice, which has provided the United Nations an opportunity to enhance the dignity of all mankind in spite of the odds that continue to frustrate our common aspirations and our efforts to build a better world.

Liberia bears its share of responsibility for finding solutions to the problems of our one world through this Organization. Regrettably, the situation in Liberia has not afforded us the opportunity to participate as actively as might be expected.

It is an honour and privilege for me to stand before this world body as Africa's first female Head of Government. However, it is sad to note that I have assumed this leadership at a time when my country, Liberia, is experiencing a tragic and senseless war.

The Liberian civil war, which began more than six years ago, has unleashed one of the worst man-made disasters in recent memory. It has claimed over 250,000 lives — about 15 per cent of the population; forced over 800,000 Liberians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries; and left several hundred thousand others internally displaced.

Regrettably, the most vulnerable groups — women, children and the elderly — continue to be victimized by the

ravages of disease, hunger and malnutrition, which are commonplace under such conditions. The wanton killing of civilians and the destruction of basic infrastructure, which intensified in April of this year, continue to retard economic activities and deprive the people of their fundamental human rights.

The painful reality of our child soldiers, child labourers and abandoned children in the country point to the formidable task that lies ahead as we seek to rehabilitate them into productive citizens.

The displacement of large segments of the rural population has curtailed agricultural production. Before the war, agriculture accounted for 38 per cent of the gross domestic product and 75 per cent of total employment. As a result of continued hostilities, other potentially high economic sectors such as rubber, timber, iron ore and minerals remain inaccessible.

Since 1990, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has deployed a peacekeeping force in Liberia, in keeping with Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations. It had been hoped that this initiative, the first by a subregion, would receive the full support of the United Nations. Unfortunately, the assistance of the international community has been both slow and inadequate, thereby imposing severe pressure on the scarce resources of the member States of ECOWAS.

While ECOWAS, in the spirit of African brotherhood and solidarity, has taken the initiative in Liberia, its efforts must be complemented by the international community through the provision of substantial material and financial support to facilitate the implementation of the peace process in the country. It is therefore my appeal that the United Nations assume its share of the burden of peacekeeping in Liberia. The subregion is facing extreme economic hardships due to external factors beyond its control.

After the failure of several peace agreements, the member States of ECOWAS convened a meeting in Abuja, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in August 1995. At that meeting, a decision was taken to include for the first time the leaders of the three major warring factions in a six-man Council of State. Accordingly, a ceasefire was implemented, and Monrovia was maintained as a safe haven. The members of the Council of State were inducted into office on 1 September 1995.

In April of this year, the resumption of fighting, with the accompanying carnage and illegal seizure and destruction of property, dealt another set-back to the peace process. At this juncture, I extend the profound regrets of the Liberian Government and people to the international, intergovernmental, non-governmental and other organizations that sustained losses as a result of the April fighting. I pledge that our Administration will do all that lies within its power to prevent the reoccurrence of such lawlessness.

The events of April enabled the leaders of the subregion to identify deficiencies in the Agreement and to take measures to prevent the reoccurrence of such breakdown in the implementation of the peace accord. Although they reaffirmed the Abuja Agreement as the best framework for finding a lasting solution to the Liberian conflict, they nevertheless resolved that a change was necessary in the leadership to restore confidence and enhance its performance.

The parties unanimously selected me to lead Liberia from a devastating war to conditions of peace. The selection of a woman is a decision that deserves commendation; for it is a major victory and a recognition of the active involvement of Liberian women in the peace process. The resolution of the Liberian conflict is therefore a challenge not only to me but also to all Liberian women and to the women of Africa and the world, whose advice and continuing support I deeply appreciate.

Our leadership is challenged with the difficult task of pursuing national reconciliation, national reunification, repatriation and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons, and the creation of an enabling environment for the holding of free and fair democratic elections by May 1997. Additionally, and more demanding, we must ensure the successful disarmament of combatants and their demobilization and reintegration into civil society.

This task requires us, as a matter of urgency, to first disarm our children and redirect their lives. We also have to address the immense suffering that the war has inflicted on our people. We must establish an independent elections commission to conduct free and fair elections under international supervision.

I am confident that, with the support of the United Nations and the international community, the tasks ahead will be achieved. All of the parties to the conflict have pledged to me their commitment to the implementation of the revised schedule. Despite some signs of retrogression,

our timely intervention and appeals have been heeded, thus averting the derailment of the process. We are aware that our efforts to maintain the ceasefire must be sustained at every stage of the peace process by timely intervention and insistence that the terms and conditions of the peace agreement must be respected by the parties.

There is a renewed hope for peace in Liberia as a result of the decisions taken at the last Abuja summit. The failure over the past six years to achieve peace in the country made it imperative that long overdue measures be taken to ensure the final and successful implementation of the Abuja Agreement.

First, due care and consideration was given to the selection of the Head of Government, with the view of ensuring effective leadership and a sense of purpose. Secondly, provision was made for the regular monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the peace Agreement. This responsibility was assigned to the special representative of the Chairman of ECOWAS and the ECOWAS Committee of Nine on Liberia. Thirdly, ECOWAS member States agreed to impose sanctions on any person or group of persons obstructing the implementation of the peace Agreement. These necessary measures will equally require the support of the international community.

The Government and people of Liberia share the conviction of the member States of ECOWAS, as well as the international community, that the Abuja peace Agreement provides the best framework for the resolution of the Liberian conflict. As Chairman of the Council of State, I reaffirm my total commitment to the full implementation of the ECOWAS peace plan for Liberia. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as well as to other member States of ECOWAS, for their untiring efforts and sacrifices in the quest for peace in Liberia.

We also extend our gratitude to the Governments of the United States of America, the Netherlands and Germany for their recent assistance to the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). We thank other friendly nations that have made, and continue to make, contributions to the resolution of the Liberian conflict. The Liberian Government appeals for assistance to enable the deployment of additional troops to sustain the new focus on disarmament and demobilization as well as ensure thereafter the rehabilitation and reconstruction of our war-torn country.

In order to facilitate the rehabilitation of these children, we appeal to friendly Governments to help us rebuild our educational institutions, especially those providing vocational and technical training. As a caring mother, I urgently need to rehabilitate and grant relief to these children. It is one of my principal concerns. In this regard, I express appreciation to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their assistance. It is my hope that all mothers and all humanitarian, governmental and non-governmental organizations will support this worthy undertaking. The Liberian children, indeed the children of our world, are our future.

As regards the international situation, while we will continue to accord priority to the civil war in Liberia until genuine peace is restored, we have not lost sight of other important issues that are of vital concern to the international community.

It is encouraging to note that since the end of the cold war, Member States have increasingly taken measures in support of general and complete disarmament, including nuclear weapons. The establishment of zones of peace in most regions of the world and the recent adoption of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which my Government has already signed, are positive developments in the field of disarmament. It is hoped that further progress will be made in the total elimination of nuclear weapons within a given time-frame.

Liberia, which is emerging from conditions of war, is concerned about the unrestricted use of conventional weapons, including anti-personnel landmines. The international community must also focus its attention on conventional disarmament, since these deadly weapons are usually resorted to in most conflicts.

Internal strife in several countries resulting from ethnic, religious and racial differences continues to cause death and destruction in Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and my own country. In order to spare the lives of innocent civilians, we appeal to all parties to enter into dialogue and seek a political settlement of their differences.

As we move towards the twenty-first century, we are encouraged by the growing concern about the persistently slow and unbalanced growth of the world economy. We have experienced the direct impact of the uneven distribution of resources both among and within nations. The crisis in Liberia today is an expression of this

unevenness, which has a direct relationship to poverty and instability.

It is worth mentioning that in every attempt at finding a solution, such issues as the debt crisis and the decline in official development assistance continue to hamper our efforts to bring about the required reform in favour of the development of our people. This situation continues to undermine development in many regions of the world, especially Africa. Today, Africa remains the only continent where the level of poverty is causing increasing hardship and despair, despite the courageous efforts by many countries to undertake reforms.

Regrettably, programmes proposed by the international community have yet to receive adequate donor assistance to move Africa's development forward. We recall the priority programme for Africa's economic recovery and other measures to address the critical situation facing the continent.

It is in this light that I commend the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa launched earlier this year. The initiative requires commitments amounting to \$25 billion over a period of 10 years, to be realized through the reallocation of existing resources, and complements the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

We therefore plead with the United Nations and its agencies, international financial institutions and bilateral donors to re-examine their attitudes towards Africa's development aspirations. We hope that a solution will be found to the extreme burden that debt now imposes on all countries, but especially on those coming out of crisis.

In spite of the difficulties facing Liberia, it has continued to consider the role of women as crucial to the development process by advocating an improved status for women. Liberia has supported the decisions emanating from conferences on the advancement of women, particularly the Beijing Conference held in 1995. My presence here today as Chairman of the Council of State is a testimony to Liberia's support for its women and for the rights of women everywhere.

I take this opportunity to say that it would be advantageous to all Member States of this Organization if we, as world leaders, committed ourselves to a policy of mutual respect for one another and for our respective peoples and their legitimate aspirations in life. I am convinced that prospects for a peaceful world will be

made greater if we summon the courage to equitably share without restraints the material and technological resources that represent our common inheritance on earth.

Once those considerations become our cherished preoccupation and the noble focus of our collective undertakings, the world will enjoy a better future: a future that will know no bounds for the collective happiness of mankind; a future that will be devoid of terrorism and war; and a future that will not occasion famine, starvation and human degradation; a future without jealousy, hatred or envy.

We can make tomorrow better or worse. The question is: which will it be? The United Nations system and the entire international community will be judged on the basis of their response to this important question.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Chairman of the Council of State of the Liberian National Transitional Government, Her Excellency Mrs. Ruth Perry, for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Ruth Perry, Chairman of the Council of State of the Liberian National Transitional Government, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The Acting President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Her Excellency Mrs. Roza I. Otunbayeva.

Mrs. Otunbayeva (Kyrgyzstan) (*interpretation from Russian*): Guided by feelings of great respect for Malaysia, which plays an increasingly significant role in regional and world affairs, I welcome the election to the presidency of this session of the General Assembly the experienced and well-known representative of that country, Mr. Razali Ismail.

We, the newly independent States of the former Soviet Union, are celebrating this year the fifth anniversary of our independence and national statehood. My country is successfully concluding a stage in its structural reforms and has achieved macroeconomic stabilization. We have managed to halt the decline in production and this year we expect an increase in production of 3 to 4 per cent. The annual rate of inflation is not expected to exceed 26 per cent. We are finalizing the legal basis for a market economy and for building new institutions. The goal now is to join the World Trade Organization.

Regional cooperation is gaining in strength. In the context of the Central Asian Union, the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States, we are creating conditions conducive to the free movement of goods, capital, services and labour. Entirely new areas are now linked by transportation lines, and the groundwork is being laid for long-term, comprehensive efforts to ensure the sustainable development of the Central Asian region.

We, the newly independent States, are rapidly becoming involved in the globalization process of the world economy; we are deriving clear benefits from this as well as significant damage and losses. Alongside the liberalization of trade and the opening of State borders, our fragile economies are being affected by transnational organized crime, including drug trafficking. Drug dealers are corrupting State institutions and are eroding the basis of our young statehood.

Drug trafficking and arms trade are flourishing in conflict areas. It is evident that powerful international criminal forces, which are reaping profits from this, are interested in the continuation and exacerbation of conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Drugs have a destructive effect on weak and powerful countries alike. Local capacities and international assistance from donor countries to fight drug trafficking pale in comparison to the scale and geo-economic destructive effect of the drug trade.

Five Central Asian countries were the second group, following Eastern European nations, to sign a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. We continue to fight this evil through regional cooperation. A subregional programme for Central Asia provides an opportunity to develop projects that provide legitimate alternatives to people engaged in the cultivation and transport of illegal crops. My country welcomes consideration of this issue at a special session of the General Assembly to be held in 1998, and is convinced that the world community will triple its support to programmes to stop the flow of drugs to the countries of the North.

Sustainable development formed the basis of the national human development strategy prepared on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Mr. Askar Akayev. During the past decade, from Vienna to Istanbul, the international community, under the aegis of the United Nations, has defined goals, tasks and priorities for world social development. Kyrgyzstan

intends creatively and fully to implement the decisions taken. We look forward with great interest to the discussions on Agenda 21 that are due to take place at the special session of the General Assembly to be convened in 1997.

Countries with economies in transition are going through a difficult period of economic rehabilitation. The problems of attracting direct foreign investment are particularly acute. We are inspired by the experience of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that have successfully managed the transition to a market economy. Many of them have joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and established national export and import banks and State insurance facilities for private enterprises abroad. Today it is becoming increasingly clear that timely and adequate assistance and credits from the international community, combined with enormous efforts by the countries themselves, are enabling countries in transition to emerge rapidly from their crises and thus join the group of development donors. The effect of such a multi-layered approach to resolving common development problems is clear, and there is no doubt that several post-Soviet independent countries could shortly be in the vanguard of this progress.

For a long time much has been said about the need for cooperation between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions in strengthening peace and resolving economic development problems. In recent years a huge number of regional alliances have come into being in response to contemporary challenges, and they are actively cooperating with one another. Today, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of their role in resolving inter-ethnic disputes and conflicts and developing trade, transport, communications and sociocultural relationships in these regions. The United Nations could systematize and summarize the successful work of these unions and alliances, which are like blood vessels in the way they link the United Nations system with the World Bank, regional banks and the International Monetary Fund, offering an effective regional approach to dealing with the entire range of complex issues on today's world agenda.

Geo-economic regions such as the Fergana valley are facing a great number of acute problems, including unemployment, environmental deterioration, poverty, inequality of women and all types of crime. They can, and should, be a focal point for the attention and effort of all countries concerned in Central Asia, for the United Nations system, and for donor countries. Consistent and vigorous efforts to resolve the urgent development problems of this

densely populated valley will also act as necessary preventive actions to strengthen security, stability and peace between the States of the region.

My country wholly supports the efforts of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, to bring about a peaceful settlement in the inter-Tajik conflict. We commend the contributions made by Russia and Iran, and welcome the mediating role of Turkmenistan, which has opened a goodwill office for conducting the inter-Tajik talks.

Every conflict has a recognizable identity. It is time for the United Nations to synthesize and develop the legal basis, procedures, and methods of work for each party involved, whether they are representatives of international organizations, the parties to the conflict or various working groups. The United Nations should have regular consultations with the countries in the region and with the regional alliances.

Because of the protracted nature of the crisis, which has caused enormous suffering to innocent civilians, and given the widespread consequences of the hostilities for neighbouring countries, we believe that a solution to the inter-Tajik conflict should be the basis for the long-term sustainable development of that country and for the whole of Central Asia.

The exodus of refugees from Tajikistan is continuing. This is a painful subject for the people of Tajikistan, and we feel for them in their suffering. The ratification by Kyrgyzstan this year of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol was not merely a demonstration of our respect for human rights but reflected our willingness to share the international community's burden of responsibility for providing assistance to people who are forced to leave their homes to seek protection for themselves and their children. The conference on the problem of refugees and displaced persons in the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva in May 1996, demonstrated the international community's full support for refugees from Tajikistan.

The humanitarian situation remains critical, particularly in mountainous areas, which are very hard to reach, and especially now, with winter approaching. We are convinced that not only the United Nations and its

specialized agencies but the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development will work together successfully to promote a peaceful settlement of the conflict and alleviate the hardship and pain of the long-suffering Tajik people.

With regard to recent events in Afghanistan, we believe that a comprehensive political settlement must be found to the Afghan conflict, that territorial integrity cannot be ensured and that non-interference in the internal affairs of this sovereign country must be respected. We call on the Security Council to work for national reconciliation among the warring factions and to seek an end to the long, debilitating war that has destabilized the Asian continent as a whole.

Half a century of experience of world political development under the aegis of the United Nations leads us to conclude that there should be more non-conflict, sustainably developing nuclear-weapon-free zones. This would guarantee peace and security. The long-awaited hour has come: the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has been signed by an overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations. When I signed the Treaty on behalf of my people, as the representative of a country that until recently had been squeezed from both sides by two of the world's largest nuclear-weapon-testing areas, I experienced a special feeling of satisfaction and hope for the future of my country and for the whole world.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty are major milestones on the road to a future nuclear-weapon-free world. We are resolved to make Central Asia a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Support and appropriate guarantees from the nuclear States would constitute an important prerequisite for that achievement.

The Kyrgyz Republic is in favour of reforming the United Nations. The permanent membership of the Security Council should be enlarged to include Germany, Japan and representatives of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Equitable geographical representation would also mean an increase the number of non-permanent members of the Council. The nature of the interaction between the Security Council and the General Assembly should also change, and become more transparent.

Since becoming Members of the United Nations less than five years ago, the newly independent States have become full-fledged members of the United Nations family.

We, like others, were pleased about the establishment of peace in Haiti and Bosnia, and paid tribute to the many people who lost their lives, in whatever part of the world. With regard to regional alliances, we are developing our relations equally with West and East, South and North. Three countries of our group — Kyrgyzstan, Kazakstan and Uzbekistan — are creating a Central Asian peacekeeping battalion to act as a future reserve force of Blue Helmets. On a basis of mutual respect, Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan this year concluded a treaty on confidence-building measures in the military sphere on the border with the People's Republic of China. We are determined to learn every step of the way. We, together with the other Member States, are on the road to the twenty-first century. By combining our efforts we shall be worthy to meet its new challenges.

The Acting President: I now call on the distinguished Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Mr. Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu.

Mr. Oyono Ndong Mifumu (Equatorial Guinea) (*interpretation from Spanish*): At the outset, Sir, allow me to join with earlier speakers in congratulating Mr. Razali Ismail on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. His election is unquestionably a recognition of the role that his country has been playing in advancing the ideals of our Organization. It is also a great honour, and a personal tribute to his well-known experience as a diplomat. We wish him every success in his work during this session.

We are aware of the substantial number of topics for discussion during this session, and their subject matter. First, however, I wish to discharge the duty given me by the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, His Excellency Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, and convey to the representatives of the friendly countries meeting here today his greetings and wishes for success in their work during this session.

A rapid review of our agenda reveals that many of the issues go to the heart and central purposes of the United Nations. However, it is also true that most of them have been the subject of broad-ranging and thorough debate at many other sessions of the Assembly. To avoid repetition, therefore, I shall briefly sum up my country's position on these main issues.

During the past 50 years the United Nations has constantly worked to heighten the awareness of the

international community and the conscience of the world with respect to international peace and stability, justice, equality and development throughout the world. We do not wish to sound pessimistic, but this session of the Assembly is taking place in a context of great uncertainty. Some are even questioning whether the United Nations still has the ability to contribute to solving the problems that have arisen on a daily basis in recent years. For this reason, the first problem that we must face is whether what we have been building over the past 50 years is valid when tackling these issues. For Equatorial Guinea, the answer is "yes" in principle. However, we must also acknowledge that the system we invented 50 years ago must be adapted to current realities.

Apart from considering the various options for reforming the United Nations system, we must ask ourselves seriously whether we are prepared to provide the Organization with the legal machinery to make its important decision-making bodies — the General Assembly and Security Council — more democratic. My country believes that the credibility of the United Nations is at stake. We have within our grasp an opportunity to make the United Nations the centre for the global harmonization of our endeavours to achieve the common purposes articulated in the Charter. When making decisions that affect all the countries in our Organization, therefore, the necessary consensus must prevail for us to find appropriate solutions. Given this belief, I wish to make a modest contribution on certain issues that we consider vital to the Organization.

Reform of the Security Council is an extremely important and complex issue, which calls for very careful thought. Equatorial Guinea is in favour of establishing machinery to allow for broad consensus in the decisions taken by that body. We therefore support the arguments of those who believe that there is a need for an increase in the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council.

We believe that, as others have said, exercise of the veto should evolve towards mechanisms that will make its use more objective. The United Nations should also keep in mind the fact that the cooperation that will make sustainable economic development possible in the developing countries is not just an option; it is an imperative, if we wish to eradicate the poverty and destitution that breed violence and socio-political instability in many countries and regions of the world.

Present-day Equatorial Guinea has learnt the hard lesson of what it means to live in democracy and pluralism

in a difficult socio-economic climate. Therefore, we believe that the preservation of peace and stability and the fostering of democracy are closely linked to the right of all the world's peoples to development.

For that reason, Equatorial Guinea is concerned about the fate that the resolutions adopted at four important world summit meetings of recent years — the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at Rio de Janeiro, the World Summit for Social Development at Copenhagen, the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing and the World Summit for Children at New York — can expect at the hands of the international community. Are we once more going to fail to fulfil the hopes of our peoples, who had rejoiced to see the Organization take such salutary initiatives? The debt problem remains unresolved, although timid steps have recently been taken by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Where my country's domestic affairs are concerned, we are building a participatory democracy founded on the people, by the people and for the people. Thus, our development policy is concentrated on the welfare of our citizens. Indeed, within that approach the Government of Equatorial Guinea is pursuing a programme to promote human rights, with the technical and financial assistance of the United Nations Centre for Human Rights. In this connection, a number of courses and seminars are being offered for public order and security personnel as well as for administrative and judicial authorities responsible for law and order.

We are daily and progressively enhancing the degree of democratization of State political structures at the rural community, municipal, parliamentary and governmental levels to facilitate transition.

In the economic sphere our efforts are directed to reforms that will be an impetus to sustainable development that can improve the standard of living of our population. Nevertheless, we must note here my country's concern at a trend in the international community to erect barriers that hinder the efforts being made by many developing countries to harness the resources needed for development.

In recent years, in fact, we have witnessed a contradictory phenomenon: on the pretext of calling for the restoration of unquestioned principles of democracy and respect for human rights, many developing peoples are being deprived of the resources that will enable them

to meet their basic needs. The donor community must, once and for all, learn to distinguish between the demands of certain selfish political interests and the aspirations of peoples to freedom, democracy and development.

In the case of Equatorial Guinea, our aspirations to consolidate a State based on the rule of law, democracy and development are held hostage to certain intransigent and radical political groups that are deliberately flooding the international community with disinformation that runs counter to my country's present-day socio-political realities.

For a number of years now, either out of ignorance or because of vested interests, the donor community has wielded the weapon of economic blockade, which has made it impossible to establish democracy on a sure footing in a number of countries.

However, we are pleased to inform the Assembly that our ideals of peace, republican order and healthy social coexistence have enabled Equatorial Guinea today to attract world interest. Foreign investment is increasing at a rapid rate, cooperation with friendly countries and international economic institutions is growing and economic growth will exceed 7 per cent by the end of this year. We believe that ultimately Equatorial Guinea will be able to lay the foundation for the country's overall development in all areas.

We would therefore like to take this opportunity to appeal to the international community gathered here to judge Equatorial Guinea by what is actually happening there, and thus to confirm the objective reality of our movement towards progress and prosperity.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal, His Excellency The Honourable Prakash Chandra Lohani. I invite him to make his statement.

Mr. Lohani (Nepal): On behalf of my delegation and on my own behalf, I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Razali Ismail on his unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, and to express my happiness at seeing a fellow Asian, from Malaysia, with which my country enjoys the best of relations, guiding our deliberations. I pledge to him the full cooperation of my delegation. I wish also to thank Mr. Diogo Freitas do Amaral for having guided the fiftieth session of the General Assembly to a successful conclusion.

My profound appreciation and gratitude also go to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his tireless efforts in quest of a world of peace, progress, justice and humanity.

The past five decades have seen the United Nations striving to fulfil its Charter objectives. Yet peace and prosperity — mankind's highest dream — remain unrealized. Conflicts, enormous cruelty, poverty, hunger and, of late, population and environmental problems, have been relentlessly on the rise. The United Nations, which has limited resources at its disposal and is thus ill-prepared to deal with such situations, has become the target of increasing public criticism. The tendency to focus on the Organization's set-backs while ignoring its record of real and substantive success threatens to undermine the *raison d'être* of the United Nations.

Those formidable odds notwithstanding, the world body has achieved a great deal of success in the field of peace, democracy and human rights. It has many recent achievements to its credit, in Namibia, Mozambique, Cambodia, Haiti and El Salvador, to name but a few. Thanks to the efforts of the United Nations, the hope for stability and democracy has been a living reality in those countries.

The presence of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization continues to make a difference in the Middle East. Similarly, the United Nations has exerted efforts to keep and mediate peace in many countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America through use of its good offices and through peacekeeping operations. In spite of perceived setbacks suffered by the Organization in some peacekeeping operations, which were undermanned and lacked clear-cut mandates, we must not forget the real good that has been achieved through the prevention of further genocides, the provision of massive humanitarian relief and paving the way for political settlements.

A year ago, many world leaders gathered here to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. With a deep sense of optimism, they took stock of the past and present performance of the Organization, as they also pondered the future course that it may have to traverse. They reaffirmed their faith in the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter, renewed their commitment to the world body and pledged their support to enable the Organization to come to grips with new realities and challenges. No doubt the fiftieth anniversary

underlined the need to reactivate the United Nations as the centrepiece of international relations, thereby further deepening our hopes in the world body.

Nepal takes comfort in the fact that the Dayton peace process has provided the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina with a chance to realize their long-cherished dream of a peaceful homeland. The recently concluded elections, we hope, will contribute to a lasting peace in the Balkans, and we take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to all who contributed to this election process. We are equally happy to be part of this peace process through our contribution of civilian police monitors to the International Police Task Force and the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium, under the United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We hope that the next local elections will also be held peacefully.

Last year in this Hall I said that the peace process in the Middle East had become irreversible. That is still the view of Nepal, but the recent aggravation of the situation, involving heavy loss of lives and consequent negative implications for peace, has given us deep concern. It is my earnest hope that the recent Washington summit meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Chairman Arafat will restore trust between the two sides and be instrumental in the immediate resumption of serious negotiations within the Middle East peace process.

More than any other country, the landlocked country of Afghanistan has been a victim of the cold war, and the Afghan people are still suffering from its far-reaching consequences. We hope that peace prevails in that country. Nepal, however, was deeply concerned at the flagrant violation of the United Nations sanctuary.

We believe that United Nations peacekeeping operations are indispensable in the maintenance of international peace and security. Nepal has been a major troop-contributing country to peacekeeping missions of the United Nations. Over the years we have participated in various peacekeeping operations with a total of 30,000 troops and hundreds of civilian police. Our commitment to United Nations peace initiatives continues undiminished.

Nepal supports ongoing efforts for the establishment of a rapidly deployable Headquarters team in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of the United Nations Secretariat, within the framework of a system of stand-by arrangements to enhance the rapid response capabilities of the United Nations — a system to which

Nepal has made a stand-by commitment to provide up to 2,000 troops and 200 police monitors. Work on such a Headquarters team should proceed in a transparent manner and involve all interested Member States, particularly troop-contributing nations. We believe that it should be composed of staff recruited by the United Nations.

The United Nations is unfortunately beset with a chronic financial crisis, which has seriously impaired the Organization's ability to perform well. Despite the year-long meetings of the High-level Open-ended Working Group on the Financial Situation of the United Nations, the financial health of the Organization is still precarious, and cross-funding of the regular budget from the peacekeeping account is becoming almost the rule rather than the exception. The continuation of such practice, which invariably results in late reimbursements to the troop-contributing countries, is detrimental to the rapid deployment capability expected of the United Nations. The capacity of the United Nations to plan and execute peacekeeping missions will be greatly undermined if the present financial crisis persists. Without a secure financial base, the international community cannot expect the United Nations to play the role demanded of it in the maintenance of international peace and security.

Modern peacekeeping missions, involving complex intra-State conflicts combined with massive humanitarian relief operations, expose peacekeepers to an unprecedented level of danger. It is therefore only fitting that those brave harbingers of peace who are put in harm's way be treated on an equal footing by the United Nations. We hope that a just system of death and disability compensation, as mandated by the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, will be established soon.

For Nepal, the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a landmark in the history of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control. We hope that it is the culmination of our efforts to ban nuclear testing once and for all. We believe that the conclusion of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty brings us a step closer to our dream of a nuclear-weapon-free world. It is precisely for that reason that Nepal supported the Treaty, to which I put my signature yesterday on behalf of my country.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is only a partial fulfilment of our Treaty commitment to pursue in good faith the goal of the total elimination of nuclear

weapons. With the adoption of the Treaty, it has become more urgent than ever that we seriously consider other priority issues of nuclear disarmament in a practicable, time-bound framework. In this regard, Nepal wishes to underline its support for the programme of action recently put forward by 28 non-aligned and neutral countries for the elimination of nuclear weapons through a phased programme.

In recent times, substantial progress has been made in the creation and expansion of nuclear-weapon-free zones. The Treaty of Bangkok and the Treaty of Pelindaba have established South-East Asia and the continent of Africa, respectively, as nuclear-weapon-free zones. Indeed, these are steps, in the best tradition of the Treaties of Tlatelolco and Rarotonga, that could contribute greatly to the cause of nuclear disarmament and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. We earnestly hope that efforts will be intensified in the Middle East and in our own region of South Asia so that the goal of nuclear-weapon-free zones becomes a reality in those regions as well.

We are of the view that our efforts towards the goal of total nuclear disarmament must be matched by efforts to achieve the non-proliferation of other weapons of mass destruction. We therefore fully support measures aimed at imposing a total ban on chemical, biological and other inhumane weapons, including the production, sale and export of anti-personnel landmines. In this regard, I am glad to say that Nepal is now at the final stage of completing the necessary constitutional process in order to ratify the chemical weapons Convention, which we have already signed.

As host to the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, my delegation wishes to emphasize the need for institutional arrangements for the strengthening of the World Disarmament Campaign. The Kathmandu Centre has contributed to international, regional and subregional dialogue aimed at transparency and confidence-building in the areas of disarmament and security.

In his annual report on the work of the United Nations, the Secretary-General notes that the past year witnessed a determined effort by the international community to take action to end the scourge of terrorism. I would like to reaffirm the commitment of Nepal to the Declaration on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism adopted by the General Assembly two years ago.

The reform of the Security Council is considered necessary to make that crucial organ of the United Nations more reflective of contemporary realities. We agree that any expansion of the Security Council must accommodate the interests and concerns of the bulk of the total membership, to redress the existing imbalance and anomalous representation. Any agreed formula for expansion, in our view, must take into account the issue of equitable global representativity. The selection of the members of an expanded Security Council should be guided by the contribution of Member States to the maintenance of international peace and security.

Having said that, I want to emphasize that since the Security Council is the principal instrument of the international community in the area of collective security, no expansion or reform should diminish in any way its capacity for prompt and effective action to maintain international peace and security.

The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) following the conclusion of the Uruguay Round has made it clear that no country can ignore the globalization process, which is gaining tremendous momentum. At the same time, the acceleration of this process of global economic integration has failed to narrow the gap between the developed and the developing countries. The economic situation of many countries of Africa and the least developed countries is further deteriorating, and those countries are being marginalized because of unfavourable conditions prevailing in the global market in the trade of their exportable products. Furthermore, those countries lack national capacity in terms of technology and product development capability and also face various tariff and non-tariff barriers to their exports abroad.

The situation of the landlocked developing countries among the least developed countries is further exacerbated by the high costs associated with the production and transportation of their exportable commodities and their difficulty in maintaining the tight delivery schedules demanded by the global market. Without direct access to the sea and given the absence of a significant market base within their boundaries, those landlocked countries cannot offer any of the comparative advantages so essential to attracting foreign investment. Additional financial resources and the transfer of appropriate technology, accompanied by concrete measures to offset those built-in handicaps, are the bare minimum requirements. We expect that the WTO ministerial meeting at Singapore will take this reality into account and ensure that the

products of the least developed countries are given free and unrestricted access to world markets in order to facilitate the integration of those countries into the liberalizing and globalizing world economy.

It is with great distress that the developing countries, and in particular the least developed countries, witness the steep decline in the resources of United Nations operational activities for development. The least developed countries need the enhanced support of those agencies more than ever, since most of them have embarked on far-reaching reforms. In the absence of the flows of direct foreign investment now available to many developing countries, the least developed countries that lack basic physical infrastructure and material resources have nowhere else to turn. The efforts of the organs of the United Nations system engaged in providing technical and advisory assistance to the least developed countries, particularly the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), need to be supplemented adequately by the Bretton Woods institutions and regional financial institutions to arrest and reverse the declining economic and social situation of the least developed countries.

The solidarity of the support received from the representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of 77 during the recently concluded ministerial meeting of least developed countries is an expression of understanding and an acknowledgment of the responsibility of the international community to the least developed countries. We are confident that the emphasis given by the leaders of the Group of Seven at the Lyon Summit on the need to assist the least developed countries and to integrate them in the global economy will be backed by concrete actions.

South-South cooperation is another important component of international economic cooperation that should be further explored and promoted. The Government of Costa Rica deserves our appreciation for its generous offer to host a South-South conference on finance, trade and investment in January next year.

In recent years we have witnessed a decline in the economic conditions of more and more people, especially those from the developing countries, who now comprise a population of 1.3 billion people living in poverty. The Declaration of the year 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty and the Declaration of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty, beginning in 1997, must be taken seriously if poverty is to be eradicated with renewed vigour and dedication. The

eradication of poverty must be a priority agenda for all multilateral development institutions.

In this regard, we express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his initiative to establish, through the Administrative Committee on Coordination, inter-agency task forces to oversee coherent implementation by the United Nations system of various cross-sectoral issues covered in recent major international conferences. It is heartening to note that one of the task forces, which is on the creation of an enabling environment, is chaired by the World Bank. We look forward to the reports of the task forces, which are expected in April 1997.

We are confident that the special session of the General Assembly on the Rio Declaration to be held in June of next year will be successful in achieving the objective of acquiring new and additional resources to implement Agenda 21. We urge the developed countries to honour the commitments they have made at major international conferences, including those at Rio, Cairo, Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul. We are deeply concerned at the declining level of official development assistance to developing countries, in particular the least developed countries.

We are happy to see that the Framework Convention on Climate Change has entered into force and is being implemented effectively. We are at the same time concerned about the Convention on Biological Diversity, which has not been ratified by many countries. I am especially pleased to say that the Parliament of Nepal has already ratified the International Convention to Combat Desertification.

We are firmly committed to the Charter obligation to promote and protect fundamental human rights for all, without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion. My delegation is closely following the negotiations that are taking place in the Third Committee working group established to oversee the recommendations of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

The Fourth World Conference on Women was a landmark in reaffirming the equal rights of women, and focused our attention on the important aspect of the equal participation of men and women in development activities. We in Nepal are serious about implementing the outcome of that Conference, with the creation, initially, of a separate Ministry of Women and Social Welfare.

Political strife, ethnic conflicts and the denial of basic human rights in many parts of the world have resulted in an influx of a large number of refugees, mostly women and children. We express our appreciation to the High Commissioner for Refugees for her untiring and continued efforts to take care of refugees around the world, despite the limited resources at her disposal. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) deserves our special praise for providing

necessary food and other services to some 100,000 refugees in the camps in eastern Nepal. His Majesty's Government of Nepal upholds the right of every refugee to return to his or her homeland safely and with dignity. The Government will make every effort to solve the problem of refugees from Bhutan through mutual discussion and understanding.

As a critical part of our broad policy of peace, cooperation and friendship with all countries of the world on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and the principle of non-alignment, Nepal is pursuing a policy of promoting regional cooperation and understanding under the umbrella of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Association last year. The seven countries of the Association are engaged in various areas of cooperation, including the suppression of terrorism and drug abuse, environmental preservation, poverty alleviation and the promotion of regional trade. It is a fact that SAARC is far behind other similar regional cooperation arrangements, but the countries of the Association, particularly Nepal, are persevering in their determination to develop both the habit and concrete measures of cooperation, understanding and peace among the South Asian partners.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.