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President: Mr. Han Seung-soo (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 (continued)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gints Jegermanis, Chairman of the delegation of Latvia.

Mr. Jegermanis (Latvia): It is my honour to address the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September, the struggle against terrorism has become a clear priority on the international agenda. The United Nations is playing a key role in coordinating joint measures to eliminate international terrorism. My country reaffirms its commitment to be vigorous in handling this matter.

We must act on all levels — global, regional and national — if we are to succeed in combating terrorism. Today, the need for international cooperation has assumed new dimensions. To achieve sustainable results in eliminating terrorism, joint international action is mandatory.

Latvia strongly welcomes and supports Security Council resolutions 1368 (2001) and 1373 (2001). Latvia is convinced that full and unconditional implementation of Council resolution 1373 (2001) is imperative for success in the suppression of terrorism. The financing of terrorism has to be prevented and eliminated. All action or inaction by States or individuals that allows the practice of terrorism has to

be stopped. Cooperation and information exchange among States concerning terrorist activities has to be strengthened. Latvia welcomes the establishment of the Security Council Committee to monitor the implementation of resolution 1373 (2001).

Latvia supports efforts undertaken by other international organizations acting on the regional level. As an aspiring member of the Euro-Atlantic community, Latvia plays its part in the common activities carried out by the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In order to harmonize regional measures to prevent acts of terrorism, an action plan for Central and Eastern European countries was adopted at the recent Warsaw conference on combating terrorism. Another important European framework for combating terrorism is the Council of Europe, which has already formulated a wide range of legal instruments intended to fight terrorism.

My country fully shares the position of the European Union that we must redouble our efforts to fight international terrorism. That includes both our commitment as members of the international community and the “homework” we have to do as individual States.

A high-level task force has been established in Latvia to coordinate national efforts against terrorism, including implementation of Security Council resolutions 1368 (2001) and 1373 (2001). Latvia has initiated the national legislative process of ratifying the International Convention for the Suppression of the

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Financing of Terrorism, and it is foreseen that we will sign the Convention by the end of this year.

The Latvian Government has approved an action plan for combating terrorism. This is a set of measures aimed at strengthening my country's ability to prevent its territory, banking system and other assets from being used by terrorists. There should be no place where terrorists can hide from justice. Latvia has already formulated legislation in the area of preventing money laundering. Banks and other operators are obliged to report on suspicious transfers. The Government has submitted to the parliament a package of further amendments to the banking law and the law on the prevention of the laundering of proceeds derived from criminal activity.

As it defends the world from terrorism, the international community has to do its utmost to spare the innocent people of Afghanistan further suffering. Latvia fully supports the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, and other parties in their efforts to bring about a fully inclusive political system in Afghanistan. My country welcomes Security Council resolution 1378 (2001). The Latvian Government has also taken the decision to provide humanitarian aid to the Afghan people through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

We believe that the priorities that existed before 11 September are all the more valid today. A year ago, heads of State or Government adopted the Millennium Declaration, which renewed the spirit of the United Nations and which clearly demonstrated that the world and its peoples need this Organization. Latvia attaches great importance to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, especially in relation to issues of human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rights of the child and conflict prevention. We consider that the follow-up process to the Millennium Summit should be an integral part of the work of the United Nations. International relations in the twenty-first century have to be based on values and principles set out in the Declaration.

The fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly demonstrated that the commitment that was put into the Millennium Declaration was genuine. The results of the General Assembly's special sessions on human settlements and on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and

Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and the Durban World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance have set a number of goals at the State, regional and global levels. The process has started, and Latvia is actively participating in pursuit of the common goals.

The United Nations is the only global Organization charged with the fundamental task of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war and with the maintenance of lasting peace and international security. One of its most important tasks, therefore, involves peacekeeping operations.

My country has actively participated in United Nations-mandated peacekeeping operations since 1996. This year Latvia is continuing to provide support to stabilize the situation in the Balkans and is participating, with troops and personnel, in all United Nations-mandated, NATO-led operations in the Balkans, as well as in other operations and endeavours of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Latvia, which attaches great importance to peacekeeping operations, voluntarily increased its contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping budget starting in 2001.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court has been one of the priorities of the United Nations for a decade. My country signed the Rome Statute in 1999, and the Government will present to Parliament the ratification bill of the Statute and drafts of the necessary amendments to our national legislation as soon as possible. Latvia also hopes to be among the first 60 States to ratify the Statute.

This is an important session of the General Assembly for Latvia and for its people. This year marks a decade since Latvia joined the United Nations as a free and independent country. The United Nations was the first international organization that Latvia joined, after 50 years of occupation. The United Nations has a special meaning for Latvia. Latvia's joining the United Nations demonstrates the commitment of my country to rejoin the international community and to take an active part in international events and processes.

In these 10 years, Latvia has made great headway in its development, and this growth encompasses a variety of realms. Latvia's foreign policy is rooted in

the observance of international law, the development of human rights and democracy and the protection of universally accepted human values. The top priorities of Latvian foreign policy continue to be joining the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. These are not goals in themselves, but, rather, means to ensure sustainable development. Our foreign policy priorities also include good-neighbourly relations, bilateral cooperation and active participation in international organizations.

I have the honour to announce that Latvia is changing its status from that of aid recipient to that of donor country, in order to provide its support to others through both financial assistance and the sharing of experiences. Latvia has begun to elaborate its concept of a donor country. We are looking forward to the implementation of this concept and are assisting those who are in urgent need of our help.

In conclusion, I would like to congratulate the United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of the work that has been carried out. I am convinced that we, as Member States, will continue to spare no effort in safeguarding the principles and ideals for which the United Nations stands.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John Dauth, Chairman of the delegation of Australia.

Mr. Dauth (Australia): Sir, let me begin, like others, by congratulating you on having been elected President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Let me also very warmly commend you on your commitment to making the most efficient use of the Assembly's time, including — if I may say — by beginning meetings punctually. I also want to join other speakers in congratulating the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and the United Nations more generally on their heartily deserved receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September in Washington, D.C., and here in New York City were not just attacks on the United States. Australia, along with more than 80 other nations, lost innocent civilians. We are united in our grief for the victims and their families. Australia condemns these attacks and reaffirms unequivocally that terrorism is never justified and must never be tolerated.

Australia has joined the international coalition against terrorism. We have invoked our mutual security pact for the first time with the United States, and we are contributing military forces to the campaign against those responsible for the 11 September attacks.

The international community is obliged to close ranks against terrorism. We must starve terrorists of their support — financial, political and moral. We must deny terrorists safe haven. We must bring terrorists to account.

Australia commends Security Council resolution 1373 (2001) of 28 September, which targets comprehensively the terrorist menace. We will work closely with the Committee on Counter-Terrorism of the Security Council.

Australia has introduced new measures to prevent and suppress the financing of terrorism and is already party to all but one of the 12 international counter-terrorism instruments.

A comprehensive convention against terrorism is potentially a very important symbol of global commitment on this issue. As the Assembly is aware, Australia has taken a leading role in the negotiations, reflecting our strong commitment to strengthening the international legal framework. While we are encouraged by the progress this past month, we join the Secretary-General in urging the parties to conclude the convention without delay.

The events of 11 September underline how important it is that we maintain and strengthen international non-proliferation regimes governing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. If we want to prevent the spread of ballistic missiles and associated technology — and if we want to strengthen mechanisms relating to conventional weapons — then we also need a stronger commitment to other arms control and disarmament instruments as well.

Let me turn now to East Timor. We all have a deep interest in a stable, secure, viable and democratic East Timor. East Timor is no longer an emergency, but, instead, an emerging nation.

However, much more needs to be done. East Timor remains vulnerable, and the role of the United Nations is not complete. We need, after independence, an integrated United Nations mission of civilians, police and peacekeepers, under a single Security

Council mandate funded from United Nations assessed contributions.

Australia therefore welcomes the Security Council President's statement of 31 October endorsing the Secretary-General's recommendations for a United Nations successor mission in East Timor. We look forward to working with others over the coming months to set a solid and sensible mandate for a successor mission.

Cooperative relations between East Timor and Indonesia are key to East Timor's longer-term security and to that of the region as a whole. We very much welcome steps by both sides to resolve outstanding issues.

We welcome progress by the Indonesian Government to resolve the situation in refugee camps in West Timor, and we urge continued efforts to ensure security and to facilitate the safe return of refugees.

Justice and reconciliation are important to East Timor's longer-term stability and prosperity. Australia welcomes steps by President Megawati Soekarnoputri to expand the jurisdiction of the ad hoc human rights court and her Government's commitment to bring to justice those who have perpetrated human rights crimes in East Timor. That commitment was reconfirmed in a most welcome way in the Assembly yesterday by the Foreign Minister of Indonesia, Mr. Hassan Wirajuda.

Australia will continue to support East Timor generously. We have an agreement to share resources from the Timor Sea. We are helping to reduce poverty in East Timor and we are building East Timorese capacity to govern peacefully and democratically. We urge others to support East Timor. This is our chance, collectively in the international community, to ensure that the United Nations historic mission in East Timor is remembered as a success.

Let me talk about what we in Australia call "people-smuggling". Australia has a proud history as a major country of migration. We are, as a result of over a century of planned and managed legal migration, a tolerant multicultural society. We will continue as a country of migration and we will continue to take more than our fair share of refugees.

Regrettably, Australia is also increasingly a favoured target for illegal migration, assisted by individuals and criminal syndicates engaged in the pernicious crime of people-smuggling. Many other

countries — as either transit or destination countries — are also affected by this problem. As with other transnational crimes, combating the phenomenon of people-smuggling requires not just national, but also concerted regional and multilateral action.

People-smugglers are primarily organized crime syndicates. They exploit their victims. They find their clients among people who have experienced conflict or persecution, economic downturn or extreme environmental breakdown. They target those desperate for a better life. The loss recently of more than 350 lives, when a people-smuggling boat headed for Australia sank, is a tragic reminder of the human costs involved and of the callousness of people-smugglers.

Irregular migration, facilitated by people-smuggling, undermines the integrity of the international protection system. All countries share an interest in protecting and strengthening the international protection system. To do so, we must tackle the problem of people-smuggling. A year ago, at the Millennium Summit, leaders committed us to fight people-smuggling and other transnational crimes. We should redouble our efforts to do so. We need coordinated, comprehensive approaches and concerted international action to address all its aspects. Root causes in source countries need to be addressed. The humanitarian and other needs of displaced persons in countries of first asylum need to be addressed. Transit countries and countries of destination need to cooperate more effectively.

Australia is working closely with its neighbours in the Asia-Pacific region to strengthen our capacity to prevent and deter people-smuggling and to bring perpetrators to justice. This will continue to be a high priority for my Government. We will also continue to contribute to broader international efforts to deal with the causes of irregular migration. These efforts, which have the protection needs of refugees at their core, will continue while we work with others in our region and internationally to combat illegal migration and people-smuggling.

Afghans fleeing the devastation of their homeland pose a particular challenge to the international community. A renewed focus and a more coordinated response are needed. Australia supports the efforts of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and those of the countries of first asylum to protect refugees in South-West Asia. We have

advocated, consistently and strongly, a comprehensive response to the Afghan situation and substantially increased our assistance to displaced and vulnerable Afghans in South-West Asia.

The international community faces grave new challenges that threaten global peace and prosperity. At the same time, as the Secretary-General said in his statement, the challenges that faced us before 11 September — poverty, disease, development — have not diminished. The need for international cooperation has never been greater. It is therefore tremendously important that agreement was reached in Doha to launch the development round of world trade liberalization. Free trade, including in agriculture, offers benefits for all countries and is crucial for developing countries to overcome poverty.

Finally, I want to say that Australia stands ready to support international efforts to combat international terrorism and the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Australia stands ready to ensure that recent United Nations successes — such as in East Timor — help create vibrant and sustainable democracies in which people can be assured of their future and that of their children. Australia stands ready to contribute to sustained international action against people-smuggling at source, in transit and at destination. Australia urges that this fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly makes substantial progress towards those same goals.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Said Abdella, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Eritrea.

Mr. Abdella (Eritrea) (*spoke in Arabic*): Please allow me to extend to you, Sir, on behalf of the delegation of Eritrea, warm congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. I am confident that, under your wise and able leadership, our deliberations will come to a fruitful conclusion. The Eritrean delegation assures you of its full cooperation and support.

May I also extend to your predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland, our deep appreciation for the skilful and wise manner in which he conducted the deliberations of the fifty-fifth session.

I also wish to take this opportunity to extend heartfelt congratulations, on behalf of the people and Government of the State of Eritrea, to Mr. Kofi Annan upon his well-deserved election for a second term. I am

certain that our Organization will benefit immensely during his second term, as it did during his first, from his vision, wisdom, competent leadership and selfless dedication. I also wish to congratulate him and the United Nations on their well-deserved awarding of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

Allow me to express, on behalf of the people and Government of the State of Eritrea, profound sorrow and to extend sincere condolences to the people and Government of the United States of America in this their time of grief following the hateful attacks of 11 September. We also wish to extend our heartfelt sympathy and condolences for the victims of the painful aeroplane crash of 12 November.

The Government of Eritrea condemns the barbaric act committed against innocent civilians by a few craven terrorists. From the outset, we declared solidarity with the people and Government of the United States against those heinous acts.

Terrorism violates the most basic of human rights: the right to life. Therefore, we must all unite in the protection of all our citizens against these dastardly, desperate acts perpetrated by individuals or organized terrorist networks. There should be no impunity for such criminals.

Humankind entered the new millennium with optimism and hope — and for good reason. It had recognized, through bitter experience, the folly of war and conflict and the virtue of peace, good-neighbourliness and cooperative relations. It had had the opportunity to review past achievements and errors and to identify sources of strength and weakness. It had evolved lofty norms, values and principles. It had established refined procedures and created effective mechanisms to guarantee their implementation.

Unfortunately, however, humankind had not yet mustered the necessary determination or the collective will to translate that vision into reality. It is evident that it has not yet learned the ways of comprehensive peace. The full blooming of a culture of peace and development remains so near and yet so distant.

Consequently, two years into the new millennium, we continue to witness with dismay immense poverty and want in the midst of massive wealth in the world, deprivation in spite of the enormous advances in science and technology, wilful violations of human

rights and manifestations of mutual hatred and hostility.

The statistics are dismal. Yet, we must not be unduly alarmed, if only because it is too early to be discouraged by unfulfilled and unkept promises. On the contrary, we must decide to confront the challenges, including the depressing disparity between the rich and the poor, and issues of war and peace and violations of human rights.

We must collectively address the new forces that are being unleashed by science and technology, including globalization. Globalization can serve as an effective instrument for establishing an equitable and just relationship between the rich and the poor and for promoting sustainable development to the mutual benefit of all. However, this can be achieved only if a cooperative mechanism is established immediately, during this critically early stage of the twenty-first century, before we are overtaken by the speed of the technology and information revolution. It is equally important that the capacities of the poor nations be increased without delay in order to ensure their effective participation in the global economy.

It must also be acknowledged that peace, security and stability are closely linked to development. It need not be emphasized that there is no development without peace, and no peace without security. To this end, all efforts must also include development concerns.

The world continues to be plagued by wars and conflicts that have spilled over from the previous century, in spite of the international community's efforts and full commitment to peace, security and stability.

The African continent has perhaps fared the worst in the last few years, as it has been beleaguered by repeated economic catastrophes, political disruptions and inter-State and intra-State conflicts.

It is a source of deep concern to us that globalization has had a severely negative impact on African economies. It has deepened their marginalization and kept them from benefiting from the global economy. Africa suffers more than any other region from extreme poverty and, indeed, from recurrent famine. Plagues like malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, diarrhoea and a host of other debilitating and fatal tropical diseases have, in many cases, reached biblical proportions. The decimation of populations has

had horrendous consequences on many already weak economies.

In addition to economic crises and poverty, conflicts, wars and civil strife have prominently afflicted Africa during the past decade and a half. In 1999, close to 20 conflicts were wreaking havoc on the continent. It was in acknowledgement of the gravity of the matter that the Organization of African Unity Summit, held in Algiers in 1999, decided to declare 2000 as the year for ending conflicts and giving momentum to peace.

It was an auspicious year. There were encouraging signs in the Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and a comprehensive peace agreement was signed between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Yet much remains to be done. It is encouraging to note that Africans are making great and sustained efforts to resolve the conflicts in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, the Great Lakes region, Somalia and the Sudan at the regional level.

In the same vein, a just and durable solution to the problem in the Middle East must be found through the creation of a fully independent Palestinian State.

The international community must be involved more meaningfully in assisting the peoples of these countries. Yet, the primary responsibility for resolving conflict, achieving national reconciliation and establishing peace, security and stability lies with the peoples and leaders of these countries. It must also be emphasized that, while any regional assistance rendered is to be appreciated, it must be predicated upon the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the assisted countries. Such assistance should be based on lofty principles and aimed at serving the interests and well-being of the countries in question.

The Horn of Africa has been a zone of conflict for the past four decades. Peace, security, stability and development are the collective responsibility of the States of the region. It behoves them to earnestly promote, protect and consolidate cooperative relations on the basis of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, renunciation of the threat or use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, good-neighbourly relations and peaceful coexistence.

Since its independence in 1993, the State of Eritrea has espoused national security and development

policies and programmes based on the premise that our security and development interests are closely linked to regional security and prosperity. To this end, it actively engaged itself in the revitalization of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the propagation of IGAD's new mission. IGAD is now fully engaged in peacemaking and conflict resolution and coordinating cooperative efforts among its member States. In this context, my delegation wishes to extend special thanks to President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti for their dedicated, unbiased and untiring efforts to bring peace to the Sudan and Somalia respectively.

The search for durable peace, security and stability must be the collective commitment of all member States of IGAD and it must be anchored solely in the welfare and best interests of the peoples concerned. Peace in Somalia is vital, and it should not be held hostage by any Government under the pretext of preserving its national security. History and the Somali people will make them responsible if they become an obstacle or try to hinder peacemaking efforts in the region.

The world welcomed the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, a comprehensive peace Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia. It has expressed the hope that the implementation of the Agreement will proceed smoothly and will lead to a durable peace.

Both countries owe it to their people and to the entire international community to establish a durable peace as soon as possible. We face the challenge of meeting the hopes and great expectations of our people and of the international community. Eritrea solemnly reiterates not only its abiding commitment to the peace Agreement and its speedy implementation, but also its undertaking to fully cooperate with all its partners in the peace process.

The peace process has made significant progress. However, I should like to inform the Assembly that key provisions of the peace Agreement remain unimplemented because the Government of Ethiopia has failed to comply with its obligations. It has, to date, obstructed the establishment of the temporary security zone and the establishment of a direct air route between the capitals of the two countries. Moreover, it has refused to submit operationally useful information

on its minefields in the temporary security zone and to release civilian detainees and war prisoners.

It has also resumed the deportation of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin, in blatant violation of the comprehensive peace Agreement between the two countries. The last round of deportation occurred on 25 June 2001 and was strongly condemned by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Under these circumstances, it is surprising that Ethiopia has recently accused Eritrea of placing its army on high alert and of deploying its troops along the common border. This baseless accusation, refuted by the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Eritrea and Ethiopia, is designed to hide Ethiopia's plans and intentions to sabotage the peace process by provoking hostilities.

The Government of Eritrea has consistently undertaken, in good faith, to comply fully with the provisions of the Algiers Agreement, in spite of the intransigence of the Government of Ethiopia and its violation of it.

The Government of Eritrea wishes to extend sincere appreciation to, and applauds the effort of, the peace partners, particularly the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization of African Unity and the Governments of the United States and Algeria. It also extends its profound thanks to the friends of UNMEE for their immense contribution to the peace process. At the same time, it urges the international community to exert extra effort to persuade the Ethiopian Government to fulfil its legal obligations under the Algiers peace Agreement and the United Nations Charter without delay.

Eritrea has always been consistent in its condemnation of terrorism, irrespective of the perpetrators or victims. It has itself become the victim of terrorist attacks by elements organized, financed, trained and armed by the Ethiopian Government. These terrorists are often joined by Ethiopian troops and militias in their heinous crimes against innocent civilians. We urge the international community to condemn these barbarous acts and to demand that the Ethiopian Government cease its activities and hostile acts as soon as possible.

In conclusion, despite its regrettable experience with the United Nations in the early days, Eritrea is fully convinced that the Organization has played a crucial role in the maintenance of international peace and security and has contributed immensely to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as to economic development and social progress.

Eritrea is fully and unequivocally committed to strengthening the United Nations. To this end, we believe that the United Nations must proceed with a process of change and reform that will reinforce the principle of equality among all its Members and guarantee its impartiality and neutrality. Hence, we fully endorse the position of the Non-Aligned Movement on membership of the Security Council and the question of a periodic review of its structure and functions. We are confident that much will be achieved under the visionary leadership of Mr. Kofi Annan during his second term of office.

The President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Antonieta Rosa Gomes, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Mrs. Gomes (Guinea-Bissau) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me, on behalf of the Government of Guinea-Bissau and its delegation, to express sincere condolences to the people and Government of the United States and to the people and Government of the Dominican Republic for the tragic event of 12 November in New York, resulting in great loss of life.

Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, which will certainly be crowned with success thanks to your experienced diplomatic skills and deep understanding of this universal Organization.

The delegation of Guinea-Bissau, which I have the honour of heading, would like to assure you at this time of its full cooperation in carrying out your noble mandate. I also extend my warm congratulations to your predecessor, Mr. Harri Holkeri of Finland, on the constructive way in which he led the work of the last session.

In addition, I would like to reaffirm my Government's confidence in and regard for the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his clear

leadership of the United Nations and his incessant search for peaceful and realistic solutions to the various conflicts and problems that affect humanity.

The Nobel Peace Prize, awarded in October to our Secretary-General and to the United Nations, which he so ably leads, proves not only his commitment to the attainment of peace and security, but also his important role of working in the interests of humanity. For this reason, I extend to him my most sincere congratulations and wishes for success in the second term of office to which he was elected, and encourage him to continue his efforts to reform and adapt the Organization to the needs of our time, in the service of peace, progress and international cooperation.

In this vein, I urge the widening and deepening of the reforms already undertaken and appeal once again for a reform of the Security Council to increase the number of both permanent and non-permanent members and to bring the right of veto into line with the needs of today.

This first General Assembly session of the twenty-first century represents, as was stated in the Millennium Declaration, a historic challenge for the building of new international relations. At the Millennium Summit, our dignitaries worked hard to envision the role that the Organization must play in the twenty-first century. They solemnly reaffirmed their commitment to the noble ideals of the United Nations, as well as their conviction that the role of the United Nations is indispensable in the service of peace, progress and international cooperation, and in support of the primacy of law. During that event, our heads of State and Government also discussed new perspectives from which to confront the great challenges of globalization for the promotion of a new international human order.

In this context, the year 2001 was marked by important international conferences: the recent World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which took place in Durban, and whose final Declaration not only defines slavery as a "crime against humanity" but also launches an appeal for appropriate and efficient measures to reverse the consequences of slavery. It also recognizes that those "historical injustices" contribute to poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, social exclusion, economic disparities and the insecurity of many peoples, especially in developing countries.

Despite those prospects for a new historical perspective, this session takes place at a moment of deep disquiet for our countries and peoples. In fact, the wave of attacks perpetrated on 11 September this year against the Pentagon in Washington and the World Trade Center in New York, just a few kilometres from the Assembly, is reason for great concern for my Government and the President of the Republic, Mr. Kumba Yalá, who promptly and strongly condemned the cowardly terrorist acts perpetrated against the United States of America. Today I reaffirm before the Assembly our unreserved condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, wherever or whenever it occurs and whatever its origins, since it constitutes a threat to security, peaceful relations between States, democratic institutions and the fulfilment of human rights.

Today more than ever before, it is necessary to adopt a broad strategy for the entire international community to combat terrorism. In that context, Guinea-Bissau appeals for greater international cooperation on the issue of terrorism, specifically, through the ratification of already existing regional and international instruments and the approval, within the context of the United Nations, of a comprehensive convention that covers all aspects of terrorism, from a universally accepted definition to its suppression.

It is in precisely this regard that my country, Guinea-Bissau, became a party to the Organization of African Unity Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, adopted in 1999 at Algiers, and to the Dakar Declaration on this same scourge, issued last October. We are determined to accelerate the ratification and implementation processes of all the agreements that seek to fight terrorism.

The beginning of the twenty-first century, which coincides with the threshold of the new millennium, is marked by areas of tension and armed conflict that threaten peace and security and fuel the proliferation of and illicit traffic in small arms. In this context, the subregional and regional organizations, with the support of the international community, through the United Nations, are fully engaged in the search for political solutions to conflicts. From Sierra Leone to Angola, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Burundi, from Somalia to Kosovo, from East Timor to the Middle East, the ghosts of conflict still hover as we seek to find solutions to existing conflicts.

At present in Sierra Leone, a country of our subregion, the Lomé Agreement, concluded under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the subsequent success of the United Nations-supported programme for disarming the parties involved in the conflict, allow us to hope for a legitimate peace.

In Angola, a member of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, cruel and destabilizing acts continue to take place, causing enormous pain to our Angolan brothers, who have endured the nightmare of four decades of war. I would like to express our solidarity with the Angolan people and Government, and appeal for dialogue as part of the solution to that conflict.

In East Timor, with the elections for the Constituent Assembly already held, an important step was taken in the transition to the independence that will be proclaimed in May next year, and towards its acceptance as a fully fledged member of global society. We hope that the international community will continue to offer its valuable assistance to our Maubere brothers, who can finally aspire to rebuild their country in peace.

In the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and Palestine is at the crux of the situation. It is in that context that we appeal to the parties, in accordance with the Mitchell plan, to implement the accords without delay and reaffirm the fundamental principles established at Madrid and Oslo, as well as the subsequent agreements. This requires the parties to abstain from all actions that endanger the peace process and all activity that is contrary to international law.

Finally, the embargoes imposed upon certain countries, such as Cuba, continue to be a source of concern because of their very negative repercussions on the vulnerable populations of those countries, above all women and children. The populations involved appeal for dialogue with a view to a definitive solution to those issues.

The sombre scene characterized by areas of conflict and tension in the world, particularly in Africa, places on us a moral obligation to continue to act with even greater determination and courage to end those conflicts and the sources of those tensions. Along these lines, allow me to congratulate the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on his last report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable

development in Africa, a document of great interest for the African continent.

The global economic situation — particularly after the events of 11 September — and its negative impact, felt especially in the least developed countries, is also an issue of concern for my Government. The solutions to the specific problems on the international agenda require not only concerted action, but also both bilateral and multilateral contacts, which Guinea-Bissau has always supported. My Government believes in concerted and combined efforts with a view to fostering economic growth and full employment in a fairer global economy. Bearing in mind that a majority of African countries have agriculture as their economic base, we appeal to our development partners, such as the European Union, the United States and Japan, among others, to open their markets to the flow of agricultural products from our countries.

By virtue of its important mission to generate an authentic North-South dialogue, the United Nations is our universal conscience, whose highest priority is to meet the needs of developing countries. The programmes of action originating from the series of major conferences of the last decade and from other important meetings which took place this year are of special importance in that they contribute to identifying needs, formulating objectives and defining strategies for the realization of sustainable development rooted in sustainable economic growth, social justice and the protection of the environment. We are now waiting for those results to be translated into concrete benefits, thus opening the way for a better global economic situation.

As all Members know, Guinea-Bissau continues to live with the effects of the absurd and disastrous armed conflict of 1998 and 1999, which, apart from the irreparable loss of human lives, caused deep trauma to our entire society and destroyed or damaged the country's existing basic infrastructure. In addition, the marked decline in foreign aid and the slump in export prices of cashew nuts, our main export commodity, constitute the basic reason for our lack of resources and for the increase in poverty. This runs counter to the interests of our citizens and makes them more vulnerable.

However, an unshakeable will to rebuild the country has led my Government, together with some development partners, to redouble its efforts to define a

strategy for sustainable development and to take measures in the realm of human rights and reconciliation. The programme for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure and for national reconciliation, the multi-year convergence programmes for stability, growth and solidarity elaborated in the framework of the West African Economic and Monetary Union, the programmes of demobilization, reintegration and social reinsertion of combatants, the fight against poverty, the fight against AIDS and other programmes are clear examples of the will and commitment of the Government to create a new reality for society and a new action programme intended to effect change in that society. The President of the Republic, Mr. Kumba Yalá, is the main mentor and guarantor of those programmes by virtue of the sacred responsibility given to him, the highest ranking official, by the voters of Guinea-Bissau.

The programme of action requires not only internal but also external efforts. That is why the Government is strengthening its cooperation with other countries at the subregional, regional and international levels. Despite all its efforts, Guinea-Bissau continues to need the valuable assistance of its development partners and of the international community to face the difficult economic and social challenges that lie ahead. In that regard, we appeal to the international community to bolster its support for Guinea-Bissau and to make donors aware of the importance of participating actively in next year's round table on assistance to my country.

The celebration this year of the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations and of the International Year of Mobilization against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, which coincides with the fifty-third anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is a cause for satisfaction for my Government. This is reflected in the creation of a inter-ministerial committee on human rights tasked with overseeing respect for human rights in our country and promoting education and awareness programmes on human rights issues.

Since his landslide election to the presidency of the nation, the President of the Republic, Mr. Kumba Yalá, has increased his contacts at various levels, with friendship visits to Guinea, the Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Morocco, Sierra Leone and other countries with the aim of strengthening cooperation and

contributing to peaceful solutions within the subregional framework.

It is in that same spirit that the authorities of my country have maintained vigilance in the area of the border with Senegal, with the objective of guaranteeing the security and tranquillity of our populations in that northern zone.

In this first year of the new millennium and of the twenty-first century, despite certain echoes of optimism, poverty and underdevelopment unfortunately persist and have been aggravated in many areas of the world, particularly in the least developed countries, among which is Guinea-Bissau. The developing countries, in particular the least developed among them, continue to be marginalized in the world economy and to be victims of extreme poverty, due mainly to decreased official development assistance, to the lack of productive human resources, to the weakness of domestic and foreign investments, to the slump in commodity prices, to the problems of debt, to HIV/AIDS and also, obviously, to armed conflicts.

To overcome this situation it is imperative to ensure the integration of developing countries into the world economy and to oppose the marginalization of those countries, ensuring sustainable, accelerated and durable economic development as well as the elimination of poverty, inequality and misery. In that context, we are pleased at the results of the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which took place in May this year at Brussels. We are certain that the results of the International Conference on Financing for Development, to take place at Monterrey, Mexico, in March 2002, will be translated into concrete action that can reverse those negative trends.

Cooperation frameworks include the Lomé Convention of the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries; the Tokyo International Conference on African Development; the United States African Growth and Opportunity Act; and the Genoa decision of the Group of 8 on the creation of a fund for the fight against contagious diseases and AIDS on the African continent. We look forward to the latter group's next summit on African problems.

Because of the particularly difficult economic situation it faces, Africa continues to look for realistic solutions for the continent and is giving clear proof of

its determination to improve the economies of the countries of the continent. Beyond the programmes of structural adjustment and other development programmes that have been adopted for the continent, the New African Initiative, resulting from the merger of the plans presented by the heads of State of Senegal and of South Africa, has come at an opportune time. It is an African plan for Africans that provides developed countries a historic opportunity to forge a genuine partnership based on mutually beneficial self-interest. The Initiative, adopted unanimously at the most recent summit of the Organization of African Unity, held at Lusaka, should be implemented with the utmost speed. We appeal to the entire international community, and to our development partners in particular, to support the Initiative, which encompasses the relaunching of our economies, debt reduction and the fight against AIDS.

It is regrettable that the response of our development partners has not always been commensurate with the degree of sacrifice that has been endured or with the dimensions of the problems that have been identified. That is a paradox. It is also a paradox that the decisions of major international conferences should not be reflected in practical, concrete measures to implement those decisions.

The new collective challenge is to bring to light the image of a world of equality, dignity, equity and international solidarity, all translated into economic and social cooperation and genuine social adjustment with the human being as its central point of reference.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia.

Mr. Ilves (Estonia): First of all, allow me to congratulate Secretary-General Kofi Annan and all of my colleagues on having received the Nobel Peace Prize. There is no doubt that without the United Nations, our world would be much less secure, with far fewer prospects for resolving conflicts. I would also like to commend the efforts that have been made during the last few years to reform this Organization so that it can better deal with the new challenges it has to face. In addition, please allow me, Sir, to congratulate you on having been elected President of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September, it became apparent that, when we are all confronted with a common threat, many existing disputes and

differences become insignificant. The United Nations Member States together have condemned the terrorist acts. It is of the utmost importance to maintain that unity and persistently to reinforce it with concrete actions. Terrorism is the ultimate challenge to our common values, and our struggle against that threat has only begun.

The destruction and elimination of terrorist networks is a time-consuming task for which there are no instant solutions. The United Nations does, however, have effective measures at its disposal for fighting terrorism: the international conventions that the United Nations has adopted over the years and the sanctions that can be applied to hamper terrorist activities. The ratification of those conventions and the enforcement of those sanctions by every United Nations Member State is, at this moment, one of those truly important tasks that it behoves all Members to carry out. I am glad to be able to confirm that Estonia has either already ratified, or is the middle of the parliamentary procedures for ratifying, all of the appropriate United Nations conventions. Estonia has taken all necessary steps to apply Security Council resolutions 1333 (2000) and 1373 (2001).

Estonia has improved and intensified cooperation and the exchange of information with its neighbours and partners. We have expressed our solidarity and unreserved support to the United States in the fight against terrorism. We have aligned ourselves with the European Union's 21 September anti-terrorist summit's final document and action plan. With our neighbours Latvia and Lithuania, we have also formulated common measures for preventing possible terrorist attacks and for applying coordinated tactics in case we become the victims of terrorist activities. We have intensified international border controls and police cooperation.

Many programmes that had been adopted earlier are now proving to be extremely useful in the struggle against terrorism. The Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering, for example, has given a high rating to Estonia's anti-money-laundering legislation. A recent audit shows that Estonian banks have no contractual relations with any organization or individual alleged to be connected with international terrorism.

The international political atmosphere in Estonia's immediate vicinity, the Baltic Sea region, is, I

am glad to report, peaceful, which is conducive to stable development and good-neighbourly cooperation. Up to now, Estonians have hardly had to deal with the direct results of terrorism. But this fall's terrorist attacks were aimed directly at international peace and stability. This means that now we, too, keenly sense the danger that faces us all. This places the United Nations, as the world Organization, at the centre of the ongoing struggle.

The reform processes launched during the last few years to reorganize and reform the United Nations are also appropriate for dealing with current problems. Now, however, we must ask ourselves if there is some way that we can speed up and intensify these reforms so as to better deal with the urgency of the prevailing situation. In our new situation, I would bring forth three well-worn and proven principles that apply not only specifically to the United Nations, but to other aspects of international cooperation as well.

First, we must once again ask ourselves how exactly each of us can make the most fruitful contribution. Secondly, what can we do to increase the efficiency of the Organization? And thirdly, I would like to stress the principle of openness.

First of all, let us deal with the matter of every Member's individual contribution. The United Nations brings together Member States with a wide range of resources and capabilities. Even the most successful nation's reserves and capacities, however, have a limit. Therefore, it is only natural that every Member State carefully evaluate how it can be the most useful. It is equally important for Members to realistically assess how high a level of development they have achieved, and, when appropriate, to refrain from accepting aid in favour of those who need it the most.

This is the flip side of development. As one rises out of poverty and underdevelopment, one should also grow up and become more responsible, acknowledging that obligations rise along with living standards. Last year, for example, Estonia decided to relinquish its right to pay reduced contributions to the peacekeeping budget. For Estonia, to give up the rights to such a discount was not a step taken lightly — it was a decision based on the Government's realization that with our rapid development, we had acquired new responsibilities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had, after all, found that Estonia had developed to the point where the UNDP could

terminate the activities of its mission in Estonia in December 2000.

Of course, we miss working together with such a useful cooperative agency as the UNDP representation in Estonia. Yet we realize quite well that there are many regions in the world which badly need their assistance, while for Estonia the presence of the UNDP mission is no longer essential. In other words, maintaining the representation would be irresponsible on our part, as it would use resources for which there is a greater need elsewhere. This means that Estonia's cooperation with the United Nations and its agencies has qualitatively advanced to a higher level. This has been clearly demonstrated by the founding of the United Nations Building project in Estonia. The intention is to have the representation of various United Nations agencies all under one roof. The fact that the United Nations is gaining importance in the eyes of the Estonian public is evidenced by, inter alia, the fact that the Estonian United Nations Association has been steadily increasing its activities.

During the last few years, Estonia has clearly progressed from an aid recipient to an aid provider. This transformation has been confirmed by, among others, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee, which, in its 2000 yearbook, lists Estonia for the first time as a donor nation. Therefore, those who assisted Estonia during its now completed transition phase can clearly see now that their aid has borne fruit. We, in turn, are willing to share the experience that we have gained in the course of the last 10 years. As a matter of fact, we have already established cooperative efforts of this nature with several countries.

I spoke earlier about how every Member State has an obligation to evaluate how it can best help the United Nations in its endeavours. Of equal importance are the ongoing efforts to increase the effectiveness of the Organization as a whole. In this light, I would emphasize two aspects: reform of the Security Council and the Brahimi report on improving United Nations peacekeeping operations.

We must ensure that our cooperative efforts for solving the urgent problems confronting us do not become entangled in the deficiencies of the structure or the working order of the Security Council. We all know very well what these deficiencies are, and therefore our

common goal is quite clear: to increase the representativeness, transparency and efficiency of the Security Council. The enlivened discussions and the shift towards greater openness in the work of the Security Council give us hope. We supported the strenuous efforts of Harri Holkeri, the General Assembly's previous President, to intensify the activities of the Working Group dealing with reform. We share the view that it is time to move from discussions on to the negotiating phase.

Estonia supports the enlargement of the Security Council in both the permanent and non-permanent categories of membership, just as we support reform of the Security Council's decision-making process. In the confrontational context of the cold war, the veto in the Security Council was a means for the great Powers to protect their interests. Even then it was avoided, and any light-handed use of the veto resulted in condemnation by the international community. Now, however, the sense of trust among the Security Council members has grown immensely, and a limitation of the use of the veto would be an appropriate reflection of this improved atmosphere.

The composition of the Council, which still reflects the power relationships that prevailed in 1945, is another issue that cries out for resolution. From the inception of the United Nations that year until just a decade ago, the people of my country were afforded only rare glimpses of the goings-on at the United Nations through fissures in the iron curtain. When we finally established our independence in 1991, we emerged into the international arena only to discover that the Security Council, judging by its composition, was still stuck back in the year 1945. This strikes Estonia as being anachronistic, if not wrong-headed. The guarantors and greatest contributors to stability in the world have, in the course of half a century, changed fundamentally. We need not fear opening a discussion on whether the moral and legal reasoning underlying Security Council membership in the wake of the Second World War is still appropriate in the post-cold-war era — or this post-11 September era. Nothing underscores the need to come back to this question more than the challenge that we are currently facing.

Participation in the United Nations peacekeeping operations is an inseparable part of Estonia's national security policy. We therefore fully support the endeavours outlined in the Brahimi report concerning the reformation of United Nations peacekeeping.

Estonia is in full agreement with the report's comprehensive and long-term approach to the prevention and solution of conflicts. Although we often talk about the need for limiting expenditures, in this case it is clear that in order to increase efficiency, means must be found for increasing the budget of United Nations peacekeeping operations. We are pleased to say, as I mentioned earlier, that we have contributed to this effort to increase those expenditures.

Let me proceed to my third theme, namely, openness. Openness and transparency are essential for many reasons. Terrorist attacks have been directed at everyday interpersonal relations and at our usual means of communication, such as the postal system and air travel. Therefore, we need to make concerted efforts to ensure that the movement of people and ideas will not suffer from the threat of terrorism. Terrorism itself is fed primarily by misinformation, disinformation and misperceptions. Here too, openness is important; it is essential to communicate our intentions and ideas both to those who support us as well as to those who doubt us.

Openness is also essential in more conventional situations, for example, in the traditional political decision-making process, be it in the international or domestic arena. Here, Estonia can share experiences in the sphere of information technology. Last year, the Estonian Government began to hold its cabinet meetings electronically. All information concerning government activities now moves through electronic channels — through the Internet. In addition to speeding up decision-making and providing monetary savings, information now becomes available to the general public through the Internet, much faster and more efficiently. More and more Estonians are making use of the opportunities offered by the public sector — the services of the revenue office, local governments and federal agencies — through the Internet. Having now connected all Estonian public schools to the Internet, the Government also plans to bring all public libraries online. This last summer, the Estonian State Chancellery launched a unique new project by opening a direct democracy portal called "Today I Decide". This portal allows everyone to present ideas, initiatives and proposals, as well as to comment upon proposed legislation. New ideas that have been proposed by portal users are passed on to the appropriate government offices and agencies for action. Many of

you may be interested in finding out more about the initiatives I have described, and we are more than happy to share our experiences with you.

Finally, I would like to stress the fact that the grave events that have affected all of us in the last few months will not prevent us from moving ahead. Our decisiveness and sense of unity have only been reinforced by what has happened. We must not discard or forget all the common projects initiated before 11 September. In many parts of the world, nothing has changed for those who suffer from poverty, hunger and persecution. Thinking about our projects for the future, I am especially pleased that the United Nations special session on children, which was postponed owing to the terrorist attacks, will nevertheless take place in May next year. The goal of this upcoming special session, to create better conditions and opportunities for children everywhere, continues to be of the utmost importance to us. It is precisely for initiatives of this kind, which endeavour to achieve a better future for mankind, that the United Nations Organization has earned the Nobel Peace Prize.

In conclusion, please allow me to express my personal condolences and the condolences of all Estonians to the families of those who perished in the air tragedy that occurred just a few days ago in the borough of Queens.

The President: I call on Mr. Peter Chkheidze, Chairman of the delegation of Georgia.

Mr. Chkheidze (Georgia): Let me congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the demanding job of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session. It is a fitting recognition of Korea's role in the international community and of your extensive experience and able leadership.

I would also like to extend our congratulations to Mr. Kofi Annan and the United Nations for the much deserved award of the Nobel Peace Prize. It should serve as an added source of inspiration for him in his second term as Secretary-General and for all of us here.

The fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly runs parallel to dramatic events for the development of mankind. On behalf of the Government and the people of Georgia, I wish once again to express my sincere condolences and compassion to the American people for the tragic events of 11 September.

Ominous threats we had been talking about for so long have become real. Georgia, a country that over the past decade has suffered terribly from different manifestations of terrorism, is an active participant in the campaign against terror. The time is ripe for increased cooperation from all States and peoples of good will in this fight against terror.

I am referring not only to cooperation in the military field. Overcoming this evil requires close cooperation in development, the protection of human rights, eradicating poverty and in many other fields. Today's realities are a lesson to mankind on the consequences and cost of indifference and a lack of attention to what is happening all around the world.

The United Nations is certainly a unique Organization, where we, the Member States, can shape common strategies to combat many of the ills and problems of the day. These strategies and action plans are worked into various United Nations resolutions, decisions and declarations.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration is a great achievement in this regard. It is virtually a pledge on the part of nations to a common fight against the manifold challenges we face today. Without any further delay, Georgia, its people and all the peoples of the world need a clear demonstration of readiness to implement the commitments made in the Declaration. We are hopeful that the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration" (A/56/326), will become a guide for Governments around the world.

Strengthening the capacity of the United Nations in the area of conflict settlement is crucial to the creation of a new world order based on common values and principles. The world order of the twenty-first century is clearly incompatible with the widespread violations of human rights, and this could lead to a destabilization of the international system.

The reforms should also encompass United Nations peacekeeping operations. Georgia supports the measures to enhance the effectiveness of United Nations preventive mechanisms. In the same context, the early deployment of peacekeeping contingents should be more coherent and systematic in order to quell conflicts in their early stages. The launching of a peacekeeping operation or a change in its mandate requires the consent of all sides involved. We are

inclined to think that this approach requires revision. The cause of peace should rank as a higher priority for the United Nations than the consent of any side involved in the conflict.

In the words of the Secretary-General,

"the international community must remain prepared to engage politically, and if necessary militarily, to contain menace and ultimately resolve conflicts that have got out of hand. This will require a better functioning of the collective security system than exists at the moment. It will require, above all, a greater willingness to intervene to prevent gross violations of human rights."

Internal conflicts spawned by separatism are no less dangerous to international security than the confrontations of the cold-war period or conflicts of international character. The reformed United Nations must be more concrete and decisive in terms of employing the compulsory measures provided for in Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Georgia fully shares the view that there is a need to improve the United Nations rapid response system. We support the timely creation of a United Nations rapid deployment force, whose utilization in the early stage of peacekeeping operations would contribute to the prevention of many conflicts.

I would like in particular to note the work of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other structures under the United Nations umbrella in Georgia. Their assistance is many-faceted, and these structures in particular are making a great contribution to the process of Georgia's democratic transformation. However, a new agenda for cooperation is also required.

I wish to underscore the joint initiative of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund with regard to creating a programme for the eradication of poverty. Georgia is one of the most active participants in this programme. An interesting part of its effort is the elaboration of a programme of employing internally displaced persons in small businesses. All of these processes are taking place under very difficult conditions and in an environment of numerous problems.

Over the past two years the perspectives of rapid development in Georgia have been countered by the

absence of progress in the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia. It is time to put an end to the spiritual and physical suffering of the people of Georgian, Abkhaz and other nationalities who have been forced from their homes and lands by the tragedy of war. Most importantly, we cannot instil hatred and enmity in the coming generations. The value of peace in the region is too high to be sacrificed to the political and commercial ambitions of a single group.

The time has come to react duly to the ethnic cleansing carried out in Abkhazia, Georgia. The separatists, with the help of outside forces, expelled about 300,000 people from their places of residence. The inalienable right of people to live in their homeland is still being flagrantly trampled.

On numerous occasions Georgia has expressed its deep concern about the presence of uncontrolled regions within the territories of the sovereign State, ruled by *de facto* separatist regimes. The encouragement of these regimes is totally unacceptable and fraught with dangerous consequences. The tragic downing of a United Nations helicopter over Abkhazia, Georgia, is one such heartbreaking example. I wish to take this opportunity to once again express our deep condolences to the families of the victims, who paid the ultimate price for upholding the noble principles of the United Nations.

I would like to use this important rostrum to bring to the Assembly's attention the danger of large-scale provocation that Georgia is facing today. I am referring to the violation of Georgia's airspace and the bombing of our territory. Such attacks have taken place before as well, but, despite our protests, no adequate reaction was forthcoming. Georgia views these acts as an infringement of our sovereignty and an attempt by some forces to subvert the peace process.

All of this is taking place at a time when the United States, together with the international community, is mobilized against the most evil enemy of humankind: international terrorism. Georgia clearly visualizes its place in this fight, and President Shevardnadze has repeatedly expressed readiness for cooperation. But it is unacceptable that some States use this noble cause of fighting terrorism as a disguise in order to reassert influence in the post-Soviet context.

The Government of Georgia reiterates its commitment to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. We believe that the use of force

runs contrary to our political interests, in particular the interests of our multi-ethnic population, including the Abkhazians. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Government of Georgia to dissuade those people who have lost their faith in a peaceful resolution of the conflict from using other means.

We are offering a special programme for resolving the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, to all our political partners, the Security Council and the European bodies. This programme has to be implemented without delay, notwithstanding changes it may undergo or substantial concessions it may require from the parties involved in order to reach agreement and to put the programme into action.

For two years the document on the distribution of constitutional competencies between Tbilisi and Sukhumi, drafted by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, has been kept within the confines of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia. This document has to constitute the basis for meaningful negotiations on the scope of autonomy for Abkhazia.

The Government of Georgia is ready to grant Abkhazia the widest form of autonomy practised around the world today. Considerable international support is needed to restore confidence between the parties, as indicated in the Declaration of the Yalta meeting that took place with the assistance of brotherly Ukraine.

Let me stress again that we attach great importance, and we are anxious to begin discussing, the economic rehabilitation strategy for the region. We also look forward to carrying out projects beneficial to all and to preserving the unique Abkhaz people.

We need working relations with Russia that are both cordial and at the same time equitable. Russia is a country with which we have cultural and friendly ties that are centuries old. We can only value its special role as the regional leader, member of the international anti-terrorist coalition, permanent member of the Security Council and the facilitator of the peace process in Abkhazia, Georgia. We expect that all this will be utilized in the best interests of all the people of Georgia. The continuation of misunderstanding and confrontation is unacceptable.

We must exert every effort to put an end to the use of separatist regimes by certain countries as a way of exerting pressure on neighbouring nations.

We support the dialogue among civilizations as a means of achieving better understanding between all the peoples of the world. We would be honoured to host a forum dedicated to this issue. As a country on the crossroads between Europe and Asia, Georgia, with its ancient and multifaceted culture, is an appropriate place for such a meeting.

In closing, let me stress again that it is dialogue and cooperation that should determine the fate of mankind. For that purpose we need a United Nations with broad, coherent and determined capabilities.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate. Before making my own concluding remarks, I shall call on those representatives who wish to speak in the exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind Members 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. Itoki (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): This morning the General Assembly heard a new and regrettable tirade by the representative of the bloody Government in place in Kigali. In fact, what needs to be known is that under the presidency of self-proclaimed President Paul Kagame and his Akazu, Rwanda has become an aggressive, terrorist and hoodlum State. At a time when there are promising prospects for a return to lasting peace in the entire Great Lakes region — in particular with the conclusion of the second phase of the disengagement and redeployment of forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — and when the Security Council has just endorsed the start of phase III of the deployment of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) according to the concept of operations set out by the Secretary-General, the faction in power in Rwanda continues to distinguish itself by its retrograde and barbaric attitude.

Rwanda remains the only country that has not begun any sort of withdrawal of its forces. Namibia has completely withdrawn its forces from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Angola has already withdrawn

80 per cent of its forces. Uganda and Zimbabwe have begun the process of gradually withdrawing some of their units. On the other hand, and in defiance of the international community, Rwanda has considerably strengthened its presence in the provinces of Kivu and Maniema in order to continue to pursue a policy of terror against the Congolese civilian population in those provinces under occupation.

I would like to inform the Assembly that two days ago in the province of East Kasai, the occupation forces opened fire indiscriminately against the population in a military barrage that killed and wounded numerous students, teachers and innocent bystanders.

Rwanda continues to try to hoodwink the international community under the guise of so-called security concerns arising from the activities of Rwandan citizens who are either part of the former regular army or members of the Interahamwe militia, whose memory evokes such sadness.

We should point out the real reason for the various invasions carried out by Rwanda during more than four years. All those invasions resulted in senseless large-scale massacres of men, women and children. We can no longer count the number of extrajudicial killings, summary executions, instances of deportation of entire populations, hostage-taking, systematic rape, the burying alive of women, grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and the criminal and deliberate spread of HIV/AIDS. I shall stop there.

Horror has become a familiar feeling for the people of my country because of the will of the single man I mentioned and his Akazu. Mr. Paul Kagame is the only obstacle to the return of peace to the Great Lakes region. We dare to repeat that the hatred this man has for most of his own fellow citizens does not permit him to see that it has long been high time to establish and strengthen peace, justice and democracy in our region, for the benefit of our peoples.

The representative of the bloody Government in Kigali had the audacity to insult the intelligence of members of the General Assembly by asking the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to take part in an undertaking to murder Congolese citizens by participating in the joint special force of the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Mouvement de Libération de Congo (RCD-MLC),

which has set itself the task of tracking and crushing all opposition to the occupation.

I wish to recall for the benefit of the representative of Rwanda the provisions of Security Council resolution 1376 (2001) of 9 November 2001. Paragraph 11 of that resolution condemned the establishment of that joint special force in Kindu and stressed that the disarmament of that Congolese city should take place on a voluntary basis and in a neutral environment. Paragraph 12 (iv) of the resolution called on Rwanda in particular to create the appropriate conditions to facilitate the voluntary disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of the armed groups concerned by assuring the protection of the personal safety of the members of those groups, their civil rights and their economic reintegration, including with the assistance of the donor community. One could not be clearer than that.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the representative of Rwanda to faithfully convey to his masters my demand that the city of Kisangani immediately be demilitarized in accordance with all the relevant Security Council resolutions pertaining to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and that the Rwandan mercenaries we know as the Rwandan Patriotic Front be unconditionally withdrawn. Let those evil individuals exercise their patriotism in their own country.

The truth is that Rwanda is in Congo for purely economic reasons. In order to achieve its aims, Rwanda is currently trying to carry out an *Anschluss* of the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Indeed, the Rwandan authorities envision a possible annexation of the eastern territories of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a way of enabling Rwanda to keep part of its population outside Rwanda proper while at the same time asserting the supremacy of one ethnic group over all the other tribes of the region. As we have denounced unceasingly here at the United Nations, the objective of the Rwandan authorities is the dismemberment of Africa in order to establish monoethnic micro-States, gain economic and ethnic dominance and control major commodity resources along a swath running from the northern mining province of Katanga, south of Sudan, and passing through the forests of the province of Maniema, the Ruzizi Valley, in the province of South Kivu, North Kivu and the Eastern Province. Those

areas contain great quantities of natural resources and such strategic minerals as gold, diamonds, oil and niobium and coltan.

It must be well understood that our entire population has suffered far too much from this senseless and useless war. Our entire population aspires to a peace that will make it possible for it to renew the relations of friendship, confidence and peaceful coexistence it previously enjoyed.

The United Nations and Africa, through the Lusaka Agreement, offer a possible way out of this war of aggression. We must succeed on the political track, through the inter-Congolese dialogue, as well as on the military track, through the programme of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation or resettlement and the orderly withdrawal of all foreign forces. All the belligerent parties, with the obvious exception of Rwanda, are committed to the path of peace. The community of nations would do well to help Rwanda, perhaps by peaceful means, perhaps through the application of appropriate sanctions, to get more involved in the process, so that all together, hand in hand, we can restore peace in our long-suffering region and create propitious conditions to enable present and future generations to flourish.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia): Ethiopia has only one strategic enemy. Eritrea is not that enemy; the enemy I am referring to is poverty and backwardness. We therefore want to use all our resources, both human and material, to fight poverty. However, we cannot do so if we have a neighbour whose leadership is unable — as it has been to date — to move from being just a guerrilla movement to building a State, with all the responsibilities that that involves. The leadership in Eritrea, which is mired in a serious internal crisis, is resorting once again to actions that may lead us to unnecessary conflict. It wants to cover up its internal problems by externalizing them. But as far as Ethiopia is concerned, we are determined not to give them that chance.

The Foreign Minister of the Eritrean Government said earlier that Ethiopia had failed to comply with the Algiers peace Agreement between the two countries. I should like to make just one or two points concerning the Algiers Agreement, which brought about the ceasefire in that unnecessary conflict. Last March, Ethiopia signed what is referred to as a status-of-forces agreement with the United Nations. As I speak, Eritrea

has still not done likewise. Ethiopia has allowed free movement for the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), but Eritrea has not. The most recent UNMEE statement confirms that fact.

They talk about prisoners of war; it was only last week that, through the International Committee of the Red Cross, scores of Eritrean prisoners of war were released. They talk about the temporary security zone; although it has been established, it is not functional, and they put the blame on Ethiopia. There is a saying in some parts of Ethiopia that the mother gets the blame for the father's actions. I am not, of course, trying to say that we are the mother — that is just a saying. But in our societies, women and mothers are always blamed for the faults of men and husbands.

The Agreement has not been functional, as it should have been, because, under its terms, Eritrea was allowed to have a reasonable number of police and militia. The militia, by the way, are groups of peasants and farmers who are armed in order simply to protect their villages; they are not supposed to be armed to the teeth with mechanized vehicles and all sorts of heavy weapons. Hence, Ethiopia has said — we informed the Security Council today — that regular forces numbering in the thousands are in the temporary security zone, which was established under the Agreement to separate the forces. Today our two forces are not separated. We are face to face along several areas of the front, so I do not understand how we can still call it a temporary security zone. It is not functional, as it should be, because the other side, which has been allowed to maintain its police force and militia, have used that pretext to bring in regular forces.

I would like to provide another example. The unfortunate policies of the leadership of that State have continued to put the people of that country and the region in a very dangerous situation by continuing to arm and to conscript people, whereas, to date, on our side, we have demobilized over 64,000 troops. We have not, in fact, heard about or seen anything from the other side. All we know is that they are increasing their forces, so that almost 10 per cent of their population of 3.5 million is now under arms. What is the purpose of that? It is certainly not a group of armed men going on a picnic.

The Foreign Minister talked about a direct air route between Addis Ababa and Asmara being

sabotaged or subverted by Ethiopia's refusal to put it into operation. At one time we proposed — and the United Nations accepted — the idea of providing alternatives to the route that was initially suggested. That route was the one used by our airlines when the two countries were one, and it passed over heavily populated towns. One of those towns, Mekelle, was bombed in the early part of the conflict in 1998, and more than 50 schoolchildren were killed. That is why we do not want that direct route to be used. We suggested — and the United Nations accepted — the idea of changing the flight path to anywhere east or west of the original route. At one time the United Nations came up with a detour that would have added less than two minutes; it was rejected by the other side. So we are saying, here in the Assembly, that Ethiopia will accept all routes except one, whereas they are saying that they will reject all routes except one. I leave that issue to the judgement of the Assembly.

Another issue that was mentioned was the question of Ethiopia's having failed to submit operationally useful information on minefields. We were actually the first to submit the information on minefields. We submitted all that we have. What more could be asked of someone who says, "We do not have any more information"? We cannot give something that we do not have. The United Nations has accepted that, for its own good reasons. Of course, for propaganda purposes, the other party to this unfortunate conflict wants to go after it. But there is no more minefield information that we have or can submit, and the United Nations has accepted that.

Finally, I just want to say that the war was imposed on us. Of course, they denied that, until the Organization of African Unity organized a fact-finding mission and the former United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, in a report to Congress, stated who started it. But more devastatingly, their own former Defence Minister last week confirmed that it was by order of their President that Ethiopia was invaded.

So I would say that Ethiopia, like before, wants peace in order to concentrate on alleviating poverty. We were doing precisely that before we were invaded and during the conflict and have done so since its end. In fact, as one example, this year alone we registered 8.5 per cent growth in our gross domestic product. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund figure for that same period is 8 per cent.

We desire to continue along this route. It is Ethiopia's hope that we will be allowed to do so and that the other party — in this case, the Eritrean leadership — will heed our advice that we concentrate on working to alleviate the poverty that in fact marks both countries, and that we work for our peoples and on the peace process and not pay mere lip service to it.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): I am taking the floor in exercise of my right of reply to the statement delivered on 12 November 2001 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Mr. İsmail Cem, who, regrettably, did not hesitate to engage once more in the well-known rhetoric, replete with threats and misrepresentations, concerning the situation in Cyprus. Mr. Cem expressed the well-known exceptions to the accession of Cyprus to the European Union, referred to the so-called realities on the island and misrepresented the position of President Clerides with regard to the proposal made by the Turkish Cypriot leader, Mr. Denktash, for face-to-face negotiations.

Let me make a few things clear. First, the accession of Cyprus to the European Union is a process that involves the European Union and the Republic of Cyprus. I remind Mr. Cem that the European Union has clearly established that no third party has a right to veto Cyprus' accession, which will be based on the merits of its case. The European Commission, the European Union member States and the United Nations Security Council have made it abundantly clear that there is no legal obstacle to the membership of Cyprus to the European Union. Membership does not constitute union with another State and thus does not violate the provisions of the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, as claimed by Turkey.

Secondly, the so-called realities are those stemming from a clear violation of international law by the Republic of Turkey with its invasion, subsequent occupation and policy of ethnic cleansing inflicted on the Greek Cypriot population, along with an array of human rights violations that have been clearly documented and led the European Court of Human Rights to issue its landmark decision of 10 May 2001 in the case of *Cyprus v. Turkey*, finding Turkey in violation of articles 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights and articles 1 and 2 of its Protocol No. 1. The so-called realities of which Mr. Cem speaks are nothing more than the faits accomplis created by Turkey in Cyprus through the use of force and based on the forceful separation of the two

communities of the island in pursuit of secessionist aims.

Thirdly, with regard to the letters exchanged between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash, I wish to inform the Assembly that President Clerides responded immediately, on 8 November 2001, explaining that a tête-à-tête meeting in Nicosia would be a good idea immediately after the acceptance by both sides of the United Nations Secretary-General's invitation to talks. Let me recall that, on 5 September, Mr. Denktash refused the invitation of the Secretary-General to resume the process which he had abandoned a year earlier. The Security Council expressed its disappointment on 26 September this year at the unjustified rejection of the invitation by the Turkish side. President Clerides wrote to Mr. Denktash that they should not be abandoning the mission of good offices of the Secretary-General and the process in which he and his Special Representative are involved. Following a response from Mr. Denktash on 12 November, in which he indicated that his aim was not to abandon the mission of good offices, President Clerides expressed his readiness to have direct talks in the presence of the representative of the Secretary-General in order to keep the Secretary-General informed of what is being discussed and what progress is being made, so that the Secretary-General would in turn report to the Security Council. We are not yet aware of any response from Mr. Denktash, but we express the hope that he will now display the necessary political will and seriously engage in negotiations in good faith to find a just and lasting settlement to the Cyprus problem within the parameters set by the Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Tekle (Eritrea): I shall respect the dignity of the General Assembly by refraining from the purple language employed by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia. I also have no intention of engaging in issues that are not germane to the statement of the Foreign Minister of Eritrea. I am not here on a propaganda campaign and I shall be brief and focus on only two or three issues, if only because I addressed yesterday, in another exercise of the right of reply, most of the issues raised by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia. Also, I shall not engage in a discussion of the internal problems of a country, if only because this is in the public domain. The newspapers and the web sites will tell you what has been going on in Ethiopia over the last six or seven months. One should take the mote out

of one's eye before talking about the chaff in someone else's.

We heard that the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) has been happy with the information given to it by Ethiopia with respect to landmines. Now I shall read what the Special Representative of the Secretary-General said in regard to that when asked about it in one of his interviews:

“We are pressuring everybody to give us landmine information. Eritrea has given us records for mines. Ethiopia has given us several hundred maps. We have never hidden the fact that we have been persuading Ethiopia to continue to cooperate with us in order that we can get all the records, all the maps, all the information they have so we know where these mines are, so people can live there safely.”

Now the Ethiopian Government does not want to give the necessary information on landmines for a simple reason: it does not want the people who have been displaced by this aggression to go back to their villages and their farms.

The issues of the police and militia and of demobilization were also handled by my delegation yesterday. The second issue concerns the direct air route between Addis Ababa and Asmara that had been requested by UNMEE. UNMEE proposed an air route. We accepted it; Ethiopia rejected it. Ethiopia claims that it has offered alternative routes.

First, contrary to what had been asserted, these alternative routes are not deviations of an insignificant quantity. They are deviations of 10 to 15 minutes, and 8 minutes in one direction. This information was given to the Security Council by the Eritrean delegation this morning.

Secondly, what the Ethiopian Government is proposing are the routes that these planes had taken to attack the Port of Massawa, kill people, bomb the electricity supply and Asmara itself, using a route from which they hit civilian centres and the airport, where one of the pilots, Colonel Bezabeh Petros, was captured.

The President: Ethiopia has again requested to exercise the right of reply. I call on the representative of Ethiopia.

Mr. Hussein (Ethiopia): We have already made our points. What we want is to fight poverty. We do not want to engage in polemics here. We do not want to dignify the other party by doing so. We would like to leave it to you and the Assembly here to judge.

The President: The general debate at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly has come to an end. Before closing it, I would like to make some concluding remarks.

The general debate of this session has been held in a most extraordinary setting, unprecedented in the history of the United Nations, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. As I said in my opening remarks a week ago, in view of the seriousness of the circumstances, I think this general debate bears for all of us a special meaning and a heightened sense of responsibility. Thus I am particularly pleased and heartened to see a very successful conclusion to the debate.

We had the honour of hearing statements by a total of 188 speakers. Among them were 31 heads of State, 11 heads of Government, 9 Deputy Prime Ministers and 96 Foreign Ministers. I would like to extend my deep appreciation to all of them for honouring this Assembly by their participation as well as active and constructive contribution to the debate. I am also grateful for their cooperation in efficiently conducting the meetings under such unusual arrangements as the extended meeting hours and the limited time for statements.

The issues we have addressed during the last week were of great importance and urgency, particularly in light of the current international situation. Secretary-General Kofi Annan began by giving us an excellent outline of his priorities for the coming years, along with a review of the fundamental guiding principles of the United Nations.

Almost without exception, speakers during the general debate highlighted the need for concerted common action to combat terrorism. A majority welcomed the swift response of the United Nations to the 11 September terrorist attacks and expressed support for General Assembly resolution 56/1, as well as Security Council resolutions 1368 (2001) and 1373 (2001). A number of delegations also underscored their support for the current military campaign in Afghanistan. Many expressed the view that a broad-

based post-Taliban Government should be established, representing all the Afghan people.

Amid widespread emphasis on the need for effective multilateral cooperation to address the immediate threats posed by terrorism, the importance of directly linking the wider goals of the United Nations with the fight against terrorism was also recognized. In this regard, it has often been stressed that terrorism can be eliminated only if the conditions creating a fertile breeding ground for it, such as poverty and social and economic marginalization, are removed. Some speakers also pointed out that a lack of democracy and persistent violations of human rights could lead to the emergence of terrorist movements, while others saw a link between acts of terrorism and the lack of progress in resolving long-standing disputes, particularly with regard to the Middle East conflict. As for the role of the United Nations in counter-terrorist activities, several specific ideas have been presented, including one to establish a centre for coordinating assistance to States in resolving crises caused by terrorist acts.

The question of the definition of terrorism was also a major theme. There was general agreement that acts of terrorism could never be justified, regardless of the cause, motive or perpetrator. However, some delegations made the point that any definition must distinguish between acts of terrorism and acts in the exercise of the legitimate right to self-determination and defence against foreign occupation. In this regard, I would like to remind Member States that at the end of the plenary debate on measures to eliminate international terrorism in early October, I requested the Sixth Committee to expedite its work with a view to concluding the pending conventions on international terrorism. I would like to appeal once again to all those concerned to exercise flexibility and strengthen cooperation so that we do not lose the momentum created thus far.

The broad consensus on addressing terrorism went hand in hand with recognition of the need to deal in parallel with the many concerns that were on the United Nations agenda before the events of 11 September and that are often at the root of conflict and social disintegration. These include the fight against poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, disease, and other economic and social problems.

It was widely agreed that the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the heads of State and Government one year ago, provides a valuable blueprint for tackling global issues and that the international community needs to proceed expeditiously with its implementation. A number of delegations welcomed the Secretary-General's road map in particular as providing useful guidance in implementing the Declaration.

Many speakers drew attention to the role of the United Nations as a focal point of multilateralism, especially in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September, and as a forum for cooperation in pursuing the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. Emphasis was placed on the central position of the General Assembly and the need for continuing reform of the Organization in order to enable it to deal successfully with both old and new challenges.

On the economic and social side, concern was expressed that the current global economic downturn made the achievement of the poverty reduction goal more difficult. In addition to a resumption of economic growth, meeting this objective would require the mobilization of new resources for economic and social development. The need to deal more effectively with globalization was highlighted, along with the importance of humanizing this trend, encompassing, *inter alia*, the United Nations role in international cooperation in response to globalization.

As the impact of the economic slowdown is felt most acutely by developing countries, especially the least developed countries, it is therefore even more urgent to address issues relevant to this problem. These include the continuing lack of full access to markets of developed countries for products from the developing countries, especially agricultural and textile, and other trade barriers; insufficient and declining volumes of official development assistance; unsatisfactory levels of foreign direct investment; and unsustainable debt levels.

Many speakers saw in the just-concluded ministerial meeting in Doha an opportunity to tackle imbalances in the international trade system. It is particularly noteworthy that the World Trade Organization member States agreed to name the new round of multilateral trade negotiations the Doha Development Round. I believe that the new trade round

will be able to provide powerful impetus to global economic growth.

Likewise, high expectations were expressed with regard to two conferences scheduled for 2002: the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Both are expected to provide strong support for implementing the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

The threat of HIV/AIDS was also a focus of concern. A number of delegations welcomed the achievements of the General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS of June 2001 and commended the Secretary-General for his initiative to establish a Global Fund for HIV/AIDS and other diseases. All relevant actors were called upon to contribute to this fund so as to support developing countries in their fight against the pandemic.

Concerning the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in an era of globalization, it was widely acknowledged that these technologies offer new opportunities for many developing countries, but that, at the same time, greater efforts are needed to deal with the digital divide. In this regard, the United Nations ICT Task Force should be a catalyst in harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies for development.

Several speakers welcomed the adoption, by the thirty-seventh summit of the Organization of African Unity, of the New Partnership for Africa's Development as an expression of leadership for Africa's development, and a number of countries pledged their support for its implementation.

The general debate has also witnessed renewed commitment to gender equality and the implementation of Beijing and Beijing+5, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Several delegations highlighted national action to ensure equality of opportunity for women and men, while others called for programmes and measures

for the empowerment of women, including in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Finally, let me remind the Assembly that my intention in these remarks was to offer a brief personal observation on the general debate, recognizing that a more thorough presentation would not be in keeping with my duties. I regret that it is not possible for me to reflect in these short remarks the rich ideas, profound insights and far-reaching vision that have been presented by some of the best minds of our world.

I would like to emphasize, therefore, that we share the responsibility to maintain and nurture the spirit of commitment and cooperation at the high political level that has been demonstrated in the general debate. We should direct our future work in the plenary and the Main Committees in such a way as to best reflect the concerns, hopes and aspirations expressed by all delegations over the past week. I trust that our collective commitment will ensure that this task is successfully completed.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the representatives of all Member States who have expressed support for my presidency, along with their kind words addressed to me and to my country.

Last but not least, I wish to thank once again, on behalf of the General Assembly, the United States Government and our host city, New York, for their hospitality and security arrangements during the general debate. My heartfelt thanks also go to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Under-Secretary-General Chen Jian and his able team, and all United Nations security personnel, as well as the entire staff of the Secretariat, for their untiring devotion and outstanding professionalism.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 9?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.