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Twenty-seventh session

REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ADDITIONAL ITEM IN THE  
AGENDA OF THE TWENTY-SEVENTH SESSION

MEASURES TO PREVENT TERRORISM AND OTHER FORMS OF  
VIOLENCE WHICH ENDANGER OR TAKE INNOCENT HUMAN  
LIVES OR JEOPARDIZE FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

Further to his note of 8 September 1972, by which he requested the inclusion in the agenda of the twenty-seventh session of an item entitled "Measures to prevent terrorism and other forms of violence which endanger or take innocent human lives or jeopardize fundamental freedoms", the Secretary-General has the honour to circulate herewith, for the information of delegations, the text of the statement he made today before the General Committee in support of his request.

STATEMENT MADE BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AT THE 199TH MEETING  
OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE, ON 20 SEPTEMBER 1972

Mr. President,

I am most grateful to you for giving me the floor at the end of this meeting.

As you know, on 8 September I requested that the General Assembly inscribe on its agenda an additional item of an important and urgent character for the forthcoming session, an item entitled "Measures to prevent terrorism and other forms of violence which endanger or take innocent human lives or jeopardize fundamental freedoms". In proposing this item I had in mind the increasing incidence of acts of violence directed at national leaders, diplomatic envoys, international passengers and other innocent civilians. These acts of violence have created throughout the world a climate of fear from which no one is immune. In the hope of facilitating the Committee's deliberations tomorrow on this item, I wish to make a few remarks in addition to the brief explanatory memorandum which accompanied my request for the inscription.

I am fully aware that the problem of terrorism and violence is an immensely complex one to which there are no short cuts and no easy solutions. I know that a number of Governments will have difficulties in formulating their approach to this problem.

I proposed this item, nevertheless, because there is deep and general concern with the phenomenon of international terrorism, because the scope of terrorist activity as well as its underlying causes have become increasingly international, and because modern technology has added a formidable new dimension to this ancient problem.

In proposing this item I had the general problem in mind, and not any specific incident or situation. I feel strongly that we in the United Nations should face up to the international - I repeat - international, aspects of this very difficult problem and that, if we do not do so, the climate of fear, which is already an ominous feature of our times, will inevitably become worse. We risk also a steady erosion, through indiscriminate violence, of the already tenuous structure of international law, order and behaviour, in which innocent people, often completely unconnected with the issues involved, will increasingly fall victims. Such a development will inevitably also endanger international relations and make even more difficult the efforts of the United Nations and of Governments to achieve peaceful solutions of serious problems. These were the main reasons which impelled me to request the inscription of this item.

In passing, I would like to call the attention of the General Committee to the observations made by the International Law Commission of the United Nations in the report which it adopted on 7 July 1972 and which will be before this session of the Assembly. While the Commission is dealing specifically with the question of the inviolability and protection of diplomats and other persons entitled to special protection under international law, it has recognized that this is but part of the wider question of the commission of acts of terrorism. In paragraph 65 of its report (A/8710) the Commission has inter alia remarked that:

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"The over-all problem of terrorism throughout the world is one of great complexity but there can be no question as to the need to reduce the commission of terrorist acts even if they can never be completely eliminated. The General Assembly may consider it important to give consideration to this general problem."

Obviously it is no good to consider this very complex phenomenon without at the same time considering the underlying situations which give rise to terrorism and violence in many parts of the world. It is these underlying causes that make the problem so appallingly difficult to tackle owing to their variety and different natures, and which also make it so difficult for Governments to agree upon the kind of measures which could reverse the current trend to violence. The roots of terrorism and violence in many cases lie in misery, frustration, grievance and despair so deep that men are prepared to sacrifice human lives, including their own, in the attempt to effect radical changes.

Let me also make it quite clear that it is not my intention, in proposing the inclusion of this item, to affect principles enunciated by the General Assembly regarding colonial and dependent peoples seeking independence and liberation.

It would be unrealistic to suppose that quick solutions to such a large and complex problem can be agreed upon. Nothing could be less productive in achieving the basic objectives which we all have in common than an acrimonious debate. It is for this reason that I have suggested that the item first be referred to the Legal Committee for a measured and calm analysis and discussion. I hope that, if the General Committee agrees to this course, a start can be made and a frank, full and responsible discussion can be held. I also hope that in this process some common ground can be found, so that the world community, here in the General Assembly, can begin to combat the feeling of general helplessness which peoples and Governments all over the world have so often experienced in recent years in the face of indiscriminate violence.

Since I became Secretary-General I have often had the feeling that over serious international issues we in the United Nations are criticized if we do act and criticized if we do not act. I believe that as Secretary-General I should, when faced with this dilemma, choose the former alternative. That is why, after careful consideration, I decided to request the inscription of this item. I hope that the members of the General Committee and of the General Assembly will understand my reasons and will support this proposal.

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