



General Assembly

Fifty-fourth session

79th plenary meeting
 Wednesday, 15 December 1999, 10 a.m.
 New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Tribute to the memory of Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia

The President: Before taking up the items on our agenda, it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the late President of the Republic of Croatia, His Excellency Mr. Franjo Tudjman, who passed away on Friday, 10 December 1999. On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representative of Croatia to convey our condolences to the Government and the people of Croatia and to the bereaved family of Mr. Tudjman. I invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of Mr. Franjo Tudjman.

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

The President: I call on the representative of Cameroon, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon)*(spoke in French):* It is my sad privilege to associate myself, on behalf of the Group of African States, with the tribute being paid by the peoples of the United Nations to Mr. Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia, whose heart stopped beating on the night of 10 December 1999. The permanent missions of the African States extend their most heartfelt condolences and express their profound sympathy to the Permanent Mission of Croatia, to the family of the deceased and to all the Croatian people.

We do not have an eternal city here on Earth. The Apostle to the Gentiles has warned us it is so. Human life is indeed ephemeral. Nonetheless, certain lives are eternal — those who live on in the memories of human beings, who have stood out because of their brilliant and constructive actions.

Mr. Franjo Tudjman's life was one of these. He was a man of science and culture. He has left to posterity many works on contemporary history, international relations and military arts. A man of conviction and commitment, he gained renown very early on during the Second World War in the struggle for independence of his country. History will remember him as he was — the creator of the Croat nation, the father of independence of Croatia and the first President of his country. His people cannot conceal their distress or their anguish.

May the seeds that were sown germinate and fulfil the hopes of all the Croatian people. It is up to the people of Croatia to complete the work begun by pursuing his determined march on the road of democracy — in other words, on the road of peace, harmony and prosperity. The Croatian people have the capacity to accomplish that — they have the means, and they have the determination.

The President: I invite the representative of Bangladesh, to speak on behalf of the Asian States.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Bangladesh, as the Chair of the Asian Group for this month, is honoured to join the nations of the world in paying our tribute to the

departed leader of Croatia. The world has lost an astute leader with the death of President Franjo Tudjman. President Tudjman will be admired as an ardent defender of democracy and the right of the people.

He was a far-sighted statesman who heralded dynamic changes, not only in his country, but also in the region. His untiring efforts and statesmanship earned him the respect of a world leader. He changed the image of his country from a war-ravaged one to a peace-loving, progressive country. Throughout his life, President Tudjman made a tremendous contribution to his country in the consolidation of democracy and establishment of the rights of the people of his country. He had to embrace imprisonment several times to defend these ideals. He was barred from travelling abroad. However, a man of his genius can never be stopped.

Mr. Tudjman's life is a glowing tribute to that universal assertion. He was recognized by his people as their leader, and they made him the President of Croatia in 1990.

Mr. Tudjman will be remembered as the architect of Croatia. Under the most difficult times of his nation, he did not give up hope, and, in the end, he successfully steered his country out of danger towards prosperity and peace.

On behalf of the Asian Group, Bangladesh extends heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family of Mr. Tudjman and to the Government and the people of Croatia for the loss of their leader.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Czech Republic, speaking on behalf of the Eastern European States.

Mr. Galuska (Czech Republic): On behalf of the Member States of the Eastern European Group, I would like to express our sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Croatia on the passing away of President Franjo Tudjman. We would like to extend our sympathy also to the members of the family, to friends and collaborators of the first President of the Republic of Croatia and, indeed, to the whole Croatian nation in grief.

President Tudjman lived a life of courage and devotion to his nation and its cause. He lived with dignity through the trials and tribulations which had visited upon his nation and the whole region in the last seven decades. From the anti-fascist struggles of the Second World War, through the academic accomplishments and later the descent into

political imprisonment, he steadfastly followed his vision, which ultimately brought independence to Croatia.

President Tudjman symbolized modern Croatia and steered its course in the last decade. An important chapter in this region's history is coming to an end with this fighter, scholar and politician.

As his legacy, we would like to wish Croatia every success in the continued building of a democratic, peaceful and prosperous European nation. At this moment of mourning, we stand with the Croats, and we pay our respect and tribute.

The President: I now call on the representative of Saint Lucia, speaking on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Hunte (Saint Lucia): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group in tribute to the late Mr. Franjo Tudjman, President of the Republic of Croatia.

Mr. Franjo Tudjman, born to humble beginnings in Veliko, Trgovišće, a village in the Croatian Zagorje, on 14 May 1922, lived a life based on the purest moral conviction of liberal democracy, and peace. A selfless man, he devoted himself to the relentless pursuit of truth and the liberation of his people. Realizing that goal, Mr. Tudjman was rewarded with the greatest honour and responsibility he could have envisioned — Croatia's vote of confidence in the 1991 free elections.

Mr. Tudjman has earned himself an indelible place of honour in the hearts and minds of the world as a learned scholar and author, activist, military general, statesman and humanitarian. Conviction, truth, honour and the unyielding need to stand for that which is right should shine brightly as the beacon for which we should define our goals and activities in the hallowed halls of this great institution where we honour him today.

His name has through the years become synonymous with conviction and honour. These two inescapable tenets of his life were apparent from the tender age of 19, when he became involved in the national democratic movement. He survived the Nazi scourge, the reign of terror, the indignity of being stripped of his inalienable human rights, suffocation and a horrid repression perpetrated by those who called themselves Communists. Left in the world without a mother at nine, the example of his father

and brother example formed his development into the man he became.

He endured jail sentences when he spoke out against the repression his countrymen suffered. His stance on nationalism and history were punctuated with an unmatched candour which the world and the propaganda machinery were unwilling to tolerate. His conviction was always the proverbial thorn in the side that got him into trouble with those who would have him either quiet or dead. But as the wise adage says, "That which is worth having is worth fighting for". I believe Mr. Tudjman would have agreed that the suffering he endured is nothing compared with the good his life has afforded the people of Croatia. The Croatian Democratic Union under his guidance spearheaded the drive for democracy and independence for Croatia and, under his able leadership, secured an impressive mandate for reform.

The world as we know it today, though riddled with problems and injustices, is blessed ever so often with individuals of the calibre of His Excellency the late Mr. Franjo Tudjman. On behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States I extend condolences to his family and to the Government and people of Croatia. May his soul rest in peace.

The President: I now call on the representative of Luxembourg to speak on behalf of the Western European and other States.

Mr. Wurth (Luxembourg) (*spoke in French*): We meet here in sad circumstances. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States to convey our condolences to the people of Croatia and, more particularly, to the members of the Permanent Mission of Croatia to the United Nations.

The head of State of the Republic of Croatia has passed away. This Assembly, which brings together the peoples of the world, is today conveying its feelings of sympathy to the Croatian people. The late President launched the movement towards independence and towards the integration of his country into the community of nations and, more especially, into our Organization.

A leader who has shouldered this role in the history of his country occupies, and will continue to occupy, a pre-eminent place in the heart and the memory of his people. They will always be profoundly grateful to him.

His strong personality has left its imprint on the tumultuous events in the region that has known war and tragedy. After the end of the conflict President Tudjman worked hard to build a republic whose citizens leave no doubt as to their great hope to become part of the vast family of the States of Europe and their wish to share the values and life which are their own, at the dawn of the new millennium.

Franjo Tudjman was President when this journey began, but he left his countrymen without being able to see the full success of their efforts. We are confident that they will move forward with assurance in developing partnership at the regional and international levels.

We share the pain of the people of Croatia at the loss of their President, and our country and this entire Assembly stand by them and assure them of our willingness to cooperate with them.

President Tudjman suffered much during his long illness. He bore his trial with courage, without, however, any weakening in his determination to serve his country. Our compassion goes out today in particular to those who were by his side in his last struggle, the members of his family and those near to him who felt and saw the pain of a dear one without being able to keep him in their midst. We pay tribute to them and we salute his memory.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Mr. Holbrooke (United States): I am honoured to represent the United States today and to speak for the first time from this historic podium to commemorate and mark the passing of President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia.

I knew him well and worked with him closely. He was a major historical figure, and he has written an important page in the history of Europe. That role will be long discussed and long debated, but his importance cannot be denied. He has left a lasting mark on the region.

I met him first in 1995 and met him at least a hundred times after that, including many intense meetings during the 21 days of the Dayton negotiations that brought an end to the war in Bosnia. History must record that without his decisive involvement in Dayton, the

peace that was forged there would probably not have been possible.

But as I said a moment ago, the history of this region is still being written and argued about. Indeed, the arguments over history are part of what has contributed to the terrible drama of Southeast Europe and the wars in the former Yugoslavia. And so when we mark President Tudjman's passing, we also mark the fact that the issues that brought him to the fore have not yet been resolved. We pray for the people of Croatia, of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of Macedonia, of Kosovo, of Montenegro, of Serbia that they will be able to find the peace they deserve in the next century.

President Tudjman's dream of an independent Croatia has been realized, and he will be for ever remembered for that achievement, but the rest of the dream — peace and coexistence with all the neighbours of the region — is far from achieved. Ethnic division — stupid ethnic division, unnecessary division based on alleged ethnic differences, and I stress the word alleged — still plagues the region. To those people in the region who are watching this important memorial at the General Assembly today, I say to you: It is time to put these divisions behind you. None of the countries of the region can live in peace unless they all do.

Franjo Tudjman had a dream for Croatia that has been substantially, but not entirely, realized. The next generation of leaders in Croatia will, I hope, live up to that vision and carry it forward for freedom and democracy, for a successful election in Croatia — which is forthcoming soon — for full implementation of the Dayton peace process, for a solution to the unresolved questions of Kosovo and for a multi-ethnic Bosnian and Herzegovinian neighbour to Croatia, one in which Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims can live together.

That is what I hope the legacy of Franjo Tudjman will include. I will remember him personally as an effective and tenacious defender of his national interests to whom his people owe an immense amount, as a person with whom I worked closely, as a friend, as a major historical figure in the post-cold-war history of Europe, and as a man whose ultimate legacy, I hope, will be that he contributed to peace and stability in the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Croatia.

Mr. Šimonović (Croatia): I am thankful, Mr. President, for your kind words of sympathy and for those of the colleagues who have expressed their condolences.

Seven and a half years ago, Mr. Franjo Tudjman addressed the General Assembly from this very place after the accession of Croatia to the United Nations. Croatia's citizens were deeply moved then just as they are today, having parted with their first democratically elected President.

Franjo Tudjman lived Croatia's turbulent twentieth century as passionately as could be said for any of its citizens. He was not merely a witness to the passing events that occurred in Croatia over the 77 years of his life. Rather, he was an active participant and, in the past decade, a leader who was instrumental in achieving an independent Croatia. He was perhaps the last of the contemporary European leaders to have directly participated in the anti-fascist struggle during the Second World War. However, he will undoubtedly be remembered for the last 10 years of his life, when he came onto the international stage as a statesman. In the overall context of his life, this final period was merely the result of many decades of political idealism and activism and fighting for justice, equality and, ultimately, self-determination.

In 1969, he became one of the leaders of the great liberalization movement known as the Croatian Spring. After the brutal crushing of that movement he was sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Upon his release he was stripped of his civil rights, including the right to speak in public, to travel outside the country and to publish. In 1977, he violated that ban by granting an interview to a European television station. Following that he was put on trial again.

At that time, I was a student. I remember how, together with others, we defiantly copied and illegally distributed the brave and brilliant statement that he had made at the end of the show trial against him. He was then sentenced to three years imprisonment and the loss of all civil rights for eight years. It was during that sentence that he was named a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International.

At elections held in April and May 1990, the political party that he led won power and he was appointed President. In the months that followed, Croatia continued to seek an accommodation with the other republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the basis of equality, as guaranteed by the federal Constitution. However, the continued disintegration of the former federal State, the belligerence of Serbian authorities and severe military aggression against an

unarmed population led Croatia to declare independence on 25 June 1991.

Following the adoption of Croatia's first democratic Constitution, Tudjman was elected, and subsequently re-elected, to the post of President. At the time of his passing, he was serving his final constitutionally designated term of office.

I thank all of you for the sympathy, understanding and support you have expressed, which at this moment are once again so much needed in my country.

Agenda item 45

Global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/525)

Draft resolution (A/54/L.61)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Lesotho to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.61.

Mr. Mangoela (Lesotho): I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution on the global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, contained in document A/54/L.61. Although this draft resolution is submitted under the name of Lesotho alone, it has been the subject of wide consultations. After the text had been agreed, some delegations indicated that they still wished to co-sponsor it. I should therefore advise those delegations that wish to do so that there is still time to become a sponsor by signing up with the conference officer.

For a little more than a year now the Economic and Social Council's Working Group on Informatics has worked assiduously to focus the attention of the international community on the dangers posed to the global economy by the date change problem of computers. In this regard, the Working Group organized a global conference of national Y2K coordinators, and more than 120 Member States met at the United Nations in New York on 11 December 1998. At that conference the participants exchanged views about addressing the Y2K problem in their respective Member States and regions, as well as at the international level, and agreed that a major international effort had to be undertaken over the next 12 months to minimize the effects of Y2K. They endorsed the guidelines for addressing the

year 2000 problem adopted by the Economic and Social Council and called for their wide dissemination.

The participants also agreed the matter had to be accorded the highest priority by their national Governments in order to ensure the Y2K compliance of critical systems. At the same time, they underlined the responsibility of all levels of government and the private sector to take the necessary steps to ensure that their systems are ready for the year 2000. Finally, they highlighted the fact that, given the interconnections in international networking in the modern world, cooperative international efforts and agreements were essential to address the Y2K problem globally. Accordingly, Governments were encouraged to accord attention to the problem at all appropriate international meetings throughout 1999.

Convinced that the range and complexity of the Y2K problem required immediate and concrete remedial action commensurate with the magnitude of the problem, the assembled Y2K national coordinators advised that consideration should be given to establishing a coordinating mechanism with support staff funded by voluntary contributions. This coordinating mechanism could also encourage the public sharing and disclosure of important information relating to the year 2000. Pursuant to that concern, the International Y2K Cooperation Centre was created in February this year under the auspices of the United Nations, with funding from the World Bank. Its mission is to promote increased strategic cooperation and actions among Governments, civil society and the private sector to minimize adverse Y2K effects on the global economy and society.

The International Y2K Cooperation Centre, under the leadership of the international Y2K Steering Committee, which I have the honour to chair in my capacity as Chairman of the United Nations Working Group on Informatics, set about to coordinate the efforts of Member States in six regions of the world. The evaluation made by the Steering Committee shows that the world is mostly ready for Y2K, across all infrastructure sectors and across all regions. In addition, the international community is prepared to tell the world what is happening during and after the date change, and to respond to Y2K emergencies, should any arise. In a few days, the world's Y2K preparations will be put to the test.

Full readiness for Y2K means having fixed and tested systems and having prepared and tested contingency plans. While not every country or

infrastructure strictly meets this standard, most countries' critical infrastructures will function adequately over the date change and in the early part of January.

This general statement masks a variety of specific situations. Industrialized countries are highly dependent on digital systems. In general, these countries have spent a great deal of effort preparing those systems for the date change and have made elaborate contingency plans. Developing country infrastructures are less dependent on digital systems. In general, those countries are less far along in fixing systems. However, they are made less vulnerable to system failures by their everyday use of manual and analog procedures and real-life contingency operations.

Y2K's effects will last beyond early January. Errors in systems that have not been fixed, and unexpected errors in fixed systems, will lead to degraded performance in infrastructures in the weeks following the date change. The extent and duration of this kind of infrastructure degradation will depend on a complex set of factors, including the degree to which Y2K system repairs have been completed and tested, the complexity of the affected systems, the availability of skilled personnel to find and solve the causes of the errors, to what extent other systems depend on data from the error-producing systems, and the infrastructure operator's ability to work around the errors for an extended period. The world will be well into January before a considered assessment can be made of Y2K's medium-term effects.

The International Y2K Cooperation Centre is monitoring progress in nine critical infrastructure sectors: energy, telecommunications, finance, transportation, health and hospitals, government services, customs and immigration, food, and water. With two exceptions, the assessment has revealed that, around the world, these infrastructures will function as well as they normally do in the first days of the new year. However, some infrastructures can be expected to experience degradation in the ensuing weeks.

There are two notable exceptions to this benign short-term prediction, namely health and hospitals, and government services. Particularly in developing countries, and in smaller organizations worldwide, these infrastructures present a real risk that Y2K-caused disruptions could adversely affect public health and safety in the early days of January.

Over the past year, an incredible amount of collaborative work has been done in the International Y2K Cooperation Centre's eight regions, representing 196 countries. Notwithstanding all the Y2K preparations, however, some things will go wrong. In some cases, the problems may be serious enough to exceed the capacity of a country to respond to them. To assist in those kinds of cases, should any arise, a set of international networks is being established.

The responsibility to respond to Y2K-caused problems rests primarily with the local and national infrastructure operators and authorities. Where those organizations encounter Y2K technical problems that they are unable to address, regional sector networks are being established to share common problems and solution approaches. Each of these networks is organized somewhat differently, depending on the sector and the region involved. For example, in the Asia region, Japan has organized energy providers throughout the region into a phone and e-mail contact network. In southern and eastern Africa, a variety of networks are being established. In South America, six critical sectors have a well-established phone network and contact procedures for all 10 countries in the region. The sectors of finance, telecommunications and aviation are being organized on a global basis through public- and private-sector organizations.

Should local and regional resources prove insufficient to address Y2K technical problems, the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the G-8 countries and other donor nations, is establishing the capacity to mobilize sector experts to assist national Y2K coordinators in assessing the problem.

These diagnostic teams will be funded with donations from Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and other countries. The United Kingdom has taken leadership in the health sector, working on a global basis to establish both regional and global capacity to respond to requests for Y2K technical assistance. In general, in the period following the date change, the International Y2K Cooperation Centre will receive and catalogue requests for technical assistance from national Governments and will refer the request to its own volunteer teams, to the World Bank or UNDP, or directly to donor countries for response. Should long-term or high-cost technical assistance be needed, the World Bank will assist countries in obtaining the necessary funding, in cooperation with national Governments and international organizations.

Y2K is a unique event in human history. While those who are working on the problem on a daily basis believe that Y2K's adverse effects will be moderate, the world has never experienced an event so ubiquitous and simultaneous. In addition, it is possible that some will try to take advantage of Y2K to create non-Y2K disruptions in digital systems or in society. For these reasons, in an abundance of caution, nations and international institutions are preparing as they would for a serious emergency. The Working Group on Informatics is both hopeful and confident that Y2K will instead prove to be an example of the best traits of human cooperation and hard work in resolving an important problem.

I should like to conclude by pointing out that in the seventh preambular paragraph of the draft resolution before us, the word "continued" was inadvertently omitted. That paragraph should read,

"Emphasizing also that continued coordinated efforts by Governments and private, public and international organizations are required to address the year 2000 problem".

Mr. Khare (India): Allow me at the outset to thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive report on the steps taken within the United Nations system to resolve the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers. We would also like to express our appreciation to Mr. Ahmad Kamal, the former Permanent Representative of Pakistan, and to Mr. Percy Mangoela, the Permanent Representative of Lesotho, who as Chairmen of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics have played a constructive role in facilitating interaction among Member States. India would of course be privileged to be a sponsor of the draft resolution drawn up under the guidance of the representative of Lesotho.

As my delegation outlined last year, the Government of India is committed to averting and controlling the Y2K crisis in critical Government sectors and public and private organizations and services. Serious efforts have been made to sensitize all such entities for strict compliance in a time-bound manner. A high-level action force on managing the impact of the Y2K problem in India was established, with representatives from the Government, industry associations, banks and financial institutions, the defence services, utilities and other public service organizations, the railways and other sectors.

The action force held three meetings and advised each central Government department to set up Y2K action

groups for assessing the status of preparedness regarding Y2K problems in that department and any public undertakings or attached offices under its administrative control, and proposed future actions. In the context of the overall Y2K preparedness of the country, the Y2K action force has been closely monitoring the preparedness of critical sectors, such as those of finance — including banking and insurance — power generation, the petroleum industry, telecommunications, civil aviation, railways and other surface transport, including ports, and space research, atomic energy and defence.

The Department of Atomic Energy is Y2K-ready. All the organizations functioning under it have also prepared detailed contingency plans, and an emergency control room has been established, which operates around the clock. It will be placed on a higher alert during the transition period to the year 2000.

The Reserve Bank of India has also taken major initiatives to ensure the year 2000 preparedness of banks and financial institutions. All commercial banks have reported the full Y2K compliance of their internal systems. Furthermore, all the non-banking subsidiaries of commercial banks have reported Y2K compliance. Contingency plans drawn up include the maintenance of hard copies of bank accounts, with print-outs to account holders being provided from tomorrow, 15 December; the maintenance of adequate cash supplies; and the establishment of event-management centres.

The civil aviation sector is Y2K-ready, including with regard to navigation and landing systems, monopulse secondary radars at all eight international airports and a new cargo management system at Indira Gandhi International Airport. All meteorological services for aviation have been assessed, tested and made Y2K-compliant by the Indian meteorological department. Aviation fuel service providers have been assessed and confirmed free from any Y2K problems. All airlines — Air India, Indian Airlines and other private airlines — have completed procedures for the assessment, testing and necessary modification of their hardware and software systems. The aircraft and airborne certificates from vendors and manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus Industries have been obtained, confirming Y2K readiness.

Passenger facilities such as reservations, check-in and boarding equipment, aerobridges and escalators have been attended to and made Y2K-compliant. The Airports Authority of India has also drawn up contingency plans for international as well as domestic flights in Indian air

space to deal with any Y2K-related problems which may arise. Contingency plans for domestic and international air traffic routes and air traffic procedures, including increased longitudinal separation between flights, have been finalized in coordination with the International Civil Aviation Organization's Asia and Pacific regional office. The Airports Authority of India will also set up national Y2K air traffic management centres from 1330 hours Indian Standard Time on 31 December 1999.

Of the 23 stock exchanges operating in the securities market, 16 Y2K-compliant exchanges have more than 95 per cent of daily turnover. The remaining seven, which are non-compliant, contribute only 5 per cent to the turnover and are being constantly monitored. The Reserve Bank of India has already worked out a detailed contingency plan and has directed these institutions to develop their own contingency plans to assure the continuity of business as an integral part of the institution's year 2000 preparedness.

The telecommunications sector, too, is Y2K-compliant. Control rooms at national, state and telecommunications district level will be set up for high-risk dates. Special operations staff will be positioned to manage any Y2K eventualities. In the railways sector, the highest-priority area is the passenger reservation system. Most of the work related to this system has been completed, and a contingency plan has been worked out. Major ports in India have already taken necessary action and a lot of progress has been achieved. To date, the ports sector does not anticipate any threat on this account. The power sector has been considered the top-priority sector to avoid any cascading effect. The total installed generating capacity in the country is 93,239 megawatts, with an effective capacity of 92,904 megawatts. Only 31,708 megawatts will be influenced by Y2K. The controls of the remaining 61,196 megawatts are of analog character and therefore their operation is not influenced by Y2K.

Relevant utilities in central and state sectors are Y2K-ready, and provisions have been made for control rooms that will function from midnight on 30 December 1999 to 3 January 2000. The petroleum sector, too, is largely in control of its own Y2K programme. It is fully Y2K-compliant, with the sole exception of one digital control system at the gas sweetening plant at Hazira.

Regarding space research, Y2K compliance has been attained for the on-board segment of satellites and launch vehicles, ground stations, the launch complex, central computer facilities, systems supplied to user agencies, laboratory instruments and office automation applications.

Indian Space Research Organization global positioning system (GPS) receivers performed normally during GPS roll-over. Contingency plans have been put in place for the transition period should any unforeseen disruptions occur.

In the spirit of transparency and democracy, and since the Y2K problem is as much a management and information problem as a technical one, regular reports on India's Y2K status are freely put out on the Internet. We trust that we are well prepared to meet the Y2K challenge, even though the nature of the problem is such that no one, including us, can be fully sure that no disruptions will occur.

Besides the mission-critical sectors I have mentioned, which have been reviewed intensively, the health sector is also fully prepared to face the Y2K problem. Major referral hospitals have taken care of Y2K problems, and in minor hospitals Y2K is not a serious issue. Water supply and sewerage will not pose any problem. Other economic sectors, such as revenue including excise, customs and direct taxes, chemicals and fertilizers, steel and mines, and the like, are also Y2K-ready.

Mr. Farar (United States of America): The United States is pleased to be part of a major international effort to respond to possible Y2K problems. We recognize the importance of global cooperation on this issue. With the rollover a scant 16 days away, there is still work that we all must focus on for now and for after 1 January. The United Nations has an exceptional track record on this issue, dating back to last year, when Ambassador Kamal, former Chairman of the Working Group on Informatics, took a leadership role in bringing together all Member States for the first worldwide meeting of national Y2K coordinators. The progress made since that 11 December 1998 meeting has been carried out in large part through the efforts of the regional coordinators. Bulgaria, Chile, the Gambia, Japan, Mexico, Morocco and the Philippines are to be congratulated for their role in guiding regional action to address the Y2K problem.

Other mechanisms under the rubric of international organizations have contributed in a major way to dealing with this challenge that faces us all. The International Maritime Organization, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Telecommunication Union and others have proved useful in addressing specific sector-related Y2K problems. The United Nations humanitarian

organizations too have made great progress over the past year in preparing for possible Y2K emergencies. Additionally, regional organizations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Group of Eight economies, the European Union and the Organization of American States have played key roles in supporting these international efforts. Wherever possible, the United States has sought to join with its regional counterparts to participate in Y2K remediation and response planning activities. By working together, the world has shared the burden of addressing this vexing challenge.

As we stand on the threshold of the date change, the importance of regional cooperation cannot be overstated. Our neighbours will be the first to feel the effects of any Y2K difficulties we may experience and will be the first to notice any problems we may suffer. In responding to these situations, it is neighbours that will be able to respond fastest, by virtue of proximity. Despite the cooperation and the significant information-sharing that have been accomplished to date, there is still important work left to do, including preparing to handle whatever situations may arise after the rollover.

January first has not yet arrived; now is the time for all to focus on last-minute contingency planning to minimize the effects of possible disruptions. It is also the time to continue to forward information to the proper international-sector organizations so that the most current data will be available.

The United States looks forward to continued cooperation with other members of the Assembly to assist other nations, and ourselves, in final preparations. All nations should continue to work within the international and regional mechanisms available to them as we all strive to be as prepared as possible for whatever may occur.

While national endeavours are of prime importance, cross-border assistance efforts help us to recognize the globalized nature of this problem. In addition, it is important for all of us to encourage the private sector to continue its role in the international arena for maintaining the emphasis on capabilities for contingency planning and for pre-positioning responses. The private sector has played an important role in remediation and information-sharing, a role which is so vital to our efforts. The private sector will have a very important role in any recovery efforts that may be necessary in the early part of next year.

As we move closer to the rollover, we need to continue our forward-thinking approach and consider how

best to respond to requests for technical assistance should there be severe difficulties. The International Year 2000 Cooperation Centre, created with funding from the World Bank at the request of the participants in the first United Nations meeting last December, has agreed to serve as a coordinating mechanism to ensure that the response to requests for technical assistance is timely and well choreographed. This will minimize duplication of efforts and ensure quick assistance. The United States encourages all Member States to take advantage of the coordinating mechanism that the Centre affords us and to provide regular status reports to it in the format agreed to by most Y2K coordinators.

Efficient, timely and well-organized responses to requests for technical assistance will not only help to showcase the good work we have done up to this point, but, more important, will also limit the disruptions that might be felt worldwide.

The same is true for humanitarian assistance. We must be able to respond to any needs that may arise as a result of Y2K. Through already-established mechanisms, the United Nations and all members of the international community must be committed to providing appropriate assistance if and when it is required. In addition, we must be sure that humanitarian agencies are aware of credible reports of Y2K-related emergencies. As with any humanitarian emergency, and in keeping with General Assembly resolution 51/194 of 10 February 1997, the United States urges all Governments, non-governmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations to share reports on Y2K emergencies with Reliefweb, the premier disaster-reporting Web site of the United Nations. In similar fashion, all humanitarian agencies should monitor the site as well; it can be found at <http://www.notes.reliefweb.int>.

We as a world body have done a lot of work regarding this enormous issue. It might prove useful for us to think about what this means for the future: that is, after Y2K. The close cooperation and the coordination efforts that have occurred during the past two years might well translate into successful endeavours for dealing with the information technology challenges of the future, particularly in developing countries and for combatting threats to information security, as well as for promoting electronic commerce. We have seen the benefits of working well together, and it would be a testament to the good work we have done on Y2K if we were to take this momentum and drive this endeavour, focusing it on the

new information technology issues that are now emerging worldwide.

I want to state strongly the commitment of the United States to dealing with Y2K as part of the international community. We would like to praise Ambassador Percy Metsing Mangoaela for following Ambassador Kamal in his efforts to focus activity on the first challenge of the next century. We strongly encourage all countries to continue their open policies of information, sharing their efforts to remediate any problems and their thoughtfulness in preparing for contingencies. We are fully committed to the draft resolution now before the Assembly, and we look forward to continued cooperation on Y2K with all members of this body.

Mr. Forner-Rouira (Andorra): In the field of computer technology Andorra has made its contribution to the United Nations since our membership in 1993. The Permanent Mission of the Principality of Andorra proposed to the Group of Western European and other States in 1994 to study the possibility of the computerization of the Group's archives. As a result of his mandate, renewed in 1996, the President of the Government of Andorra, Mr. Marc Forné Molné came to the United Nations in May 1998 to present a programme, carried out by our National Centre for Informatics, in which the Group's archives were finally computerized.

President Forné has offered on several occasions the assistance of our country to the other regional groups and the different institutions of the United Nations that might want to share our experience in that field. Every effort has been made to make this system compliant. In Andorra, the same National Centre of Informatics has already verified that the 40,000 different programmes used by the Government are also Y2K compliant. For almost three years, the Government has striven to arrive to the year 2000 with almost 100 per cent of the systems fixed.

Last year the General Assembly adopted resolution 53/86, in which it requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps to ensure that all computers within the United Nations system be Y2K compliant. We have read the report of the Secretary-General very carefully, and we congratulate the Secretariat for all the steps and initiatives taken to that end. We encourage it to make an additional effort to solve the 21 per cent of applications that still need correction. We would like to underline the excellent work realized during two years by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics, led by its Chairman, Ambassador Kamal, especially in convening a meeting

where representatives of more than 120 countries could share their worries and national experiences with regard to the year 2000 compliance.

The first day of January 2000 is around the corner. In order to evaluate the possible implications of the Y2K problem, one should consider the region of the world that it is going to affect. On the one hand, in developing countries — which have fewer computers per square mile, mainly because of the lack of economic resources — almost 50 per cent of the population has never seen or used a computer in their entire life. These countries seem safer from Y2K consequences for the simple reason that their way of living does not depend vitally on technology, but precisely the lack of it continues to make their lives less comfortable. On the other hand, in developed countries, with more computers per square mile, a five-year old child already spends a lot of his or her time in front of a screen playing video games. It seems less likely that these countries will be affected by the Y2K problem, since their Governments have already been spending large amounts to be prepared for the eventuality. However, in these countries, where every little aspect of our lives is linked to a machine, the most insignificant problem could make us spend hours at the airport, or in the worst case in the hospital, and it could also affect our credit cards, thus reducing our capability to acquire primary goods.

This paradox deserves a deeper consideration. This century, humanity has spent a lot of energy and funds in the search of new technologies that could improve its well-being. However, and precisely because of this thrust, the gap between the poorest and the richest is widening, and we are becoming less sensitive to the sufferings that afflict other people around the planet. Perhaps we have overlooked or misunderstood the issue, and we should have been sharing our improvements in technology with those that do not have any before taking another step.

As President Forné already stated, the world of the new millennium will be: “a world which will create a new group of marginalized people: those who are geographically challenged, who have less economic resources or who do not have the cultural capacity to access information and to transform it into useful skills”. To prevent that we not only have to promote education but also to share among ourselves what we have learnt so far. The transfer of information is a critical issue for the equilibrium of inequalities.

Y2K is not the end of the world; it is just the end of a millennium. We must shake hands with every single

person around the globe and use the coming 1 January as the starting point to cooperate with each other.

Mr. Stuart (Australia): My delegation is pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the item concerning global implications of the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, and we welcome the report of the Secretary-General. We wish to thank Ambassador Mangoela and Ambassador Kamal for their efforts in focusing attention in the United Nations system on the year 2000 problem.

Australia commends the United Nations proactive facilitation of international cooperation towards addressing Y2K. In particular, recognition should be given to the contribution of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics, the International Y2K Cooperation Center headed by Mr. Bruce McConnell and the work of United Nations specialized agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Australia has strongly supported resolution 53/86 on international cooperation on the Y2K problem. We participated in both meetings of the National Y2K Coordinators convened by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics and the Second Global Y2K Summit in Manila in March 1999. We have been working closely with regional partners, including at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Y2K symposium in Singapore in April 1999 and the Asian Regional Y2K Coordinators meeting in Tokyo in September of this year. Throughout this year, Australian ministers have regularly discussed Y2K with a wide range of overseas counterparts. In addition, the Australian Government and industry have been working closely with regional partners on Y2K cross-border infrastructure areas, particularly aviation, shipping, power and telecommunications. Australia has been pleased to provide assistance to Pacific Forum island countries, focusing on identifying and helping to address strategic sectoral Y2K problems.

Within Australia, the cooperative effort between government and industry has enabled us to implement comprehensive Y2K preparations. These have been included in examples of the world's best practice.

Japan, as a regional coordinator, has been discussing with the International Y2K Cooperation Centre and with partners in the Asia-Pacific region the scope for assisting, through the United Nations Development Programme,

developing countries in our region to address possible Y2K failures after the date change. Australia would be pleased to examine its capacity to provide technical assistance for that purpose. The type of assistance required would clearly depend very much on the scope and nature of any problems identified. Australia contributed to a recent APEC initiative to identify government and private sector contacts in areas of key cross-border sectoral importance. These contacts could be used to identify the scope to provide technical expertise.

Australia will be one of the first countries to enter the year 2000. As a result, we are conscious that there has been a degree of international interest in our experience. Information on Australia's progress through the year 2000 date change will be collected, coordinated and disseminated from a Year 2000 National Coordination Centre which will operate from 31 December 1999 to 7 January 2000. The Year 2000 National Coordination Centre, in Canberra, will be part of a network of Government coordination centres being established in each capital city.

A key role of the Coordination Centre in the first 24 hours of its operation will be to prepare national summary bulletins based on information obtained from state and territory governments and from the private sector. On 1 January these national bulletins will report Y2K status at 4 a.m., 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. The reports issued by the centre will be posted on the web site www.y2kaustralia.gov.au, and will be provided to the global status watch Web page of the International Y2K Cooperation Center.

Australia has been pleased to actively support the United Nations efforts to encourage international attention to the cross-border impacts of Y2K, to facilitate direct sector-to-sector contacts and to urge all Governments to widely share with the public detailed information on their country's Y2K readiness. We have supported the United Nations efforts to work with regional partners to intensify cooperative efforts on contingency planning and to cooperate on appropriate mechanisms for early advice to the public on Y2K problems as they occur during the Y2K roll-over period.

The role of the United Nations in facilitating international cooperation on these issues clearly extends into the year 2000. There has been significant progress, particularly in the last six months, in international preparedness, including contingency planning. Just what the impact of the international problems will be remains

very difficult to assess. Their duration and gravity will depend on the level of remediation and the integrity of testing, on the nature and effectiveness of contingency plans that have been developed, and on the capability of key service sectors in individual countries to resume operations quickly. In many countries the impact of Y2K problems may be limited or negligible, but in some others it may be more severe.

Although some Y2K problems are expected to be manifest early in the year 2000, many international experts expect that the incidence and impact of these problems may well extend into the first half of next year. Hence it will be important for Member States to continue to work together to provide to the public early advice on Y2K problems as they occur during the roll-over period. It will also be important for Member States to continue their close cooperation in meeting any ongoing challenges in the year 2000.

Mr. Hughes (New Zealand): At 5.45 on the morning of 1 January 2000, the sun will begin to rise over the east coast of New Zealand. New Zealand's easternmost city, Gisborne, will be literally the first city to see the light of the new millennium. New Zealand is 13 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time and 18 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, which prevails in New York. The transition to the new millennium is the object of much positive anticipation around the world. It is ironic, however, that the new age also brings with it a threat of our own making: the "millennium bug".

The worldwide battle against that bug graphically demonstrates that dependence on technology is not just a developed-world phenomenon. All countries have grappled with the year 2000 problem, and all have realized just how much a part of life the tiny computer chip now is.

The United Nations has taken a lead, both in raising awareness of the problem and in helping nations address it. The Secretary-General's report in document A/54/525 summarizes steps taken by the Organization itself, and in conjunction with Member States. My delegation wishes to commend the Working Group on Informatics, particularly Ambassadors Mangoela and Kamal for their work in drafting best-practice guidelines for assessing and solving year 2000 problems and for establishing contingency plans at the national and international level.

New Zealand's own planning has had a similar focus. A national committee, the Y2K Readiness Commission, has the primary role in coordinating awareness-raising activities.

A recent survey indicated that 99 per cent of the public are aware of Y2K, and two thirds of them have already made plans to deal with the sort of localized, short-term problems that may occur.

Business, too, is well prepared, with 87 per cent confident they have done everything necessary to maintain essential services for customers. Equally importantly, the providers of services such as electricity and telecommunications are confident of their preparations and are expecting minor disruptions at most.

The Readiness Commission has also played a key role in ensuring sharing of information and experience between sectors and with the Government. Independent audits of Government departments have been conducted throughout 1999, and ministers have made public a "scorecard" of results to demonstrate the high degree of readiness of central and local agencies.

New Zealand has also taken a regional approach to the year 2000 issue. We have worked with our Asia/Pacific neighbours on joint approaches to alleviate the risks faced. It was in Auckland that Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders expressed their commitment to contingency planning as a matter of the highest priority, especially in relation to cross-border issues and critical sectors such as financial services, telecommunications and power distribution. New Zealand fully endorsed that approach.

A number of donors have already been active in offering advice and assistance to the small and vulnerable South Pacific island States in respect to Y2K issues. Should our help be sought to deal with urgent problems arising in the new year, we stand ready to assist within the resources and capacity available under our official development assistance programme.

New Zealand will be a focus of world attention in the early hours of the year 2000, not just because the international media will be letting millions share the first sunrise with us, but also because we can provide insight into the possible effects of the "millennium bug" on a computer-reliant infrastructure, and possibly give others a few vital hours of notice of what they might expect.

We have put in place detailed procedures to monitor the impact of Y2K on New Zealand at the millennium. The Ministry for Emergency Management is undertaking a national incident-monitoring function. It will gather information through a national incident monitoring system

and forward this to our national Y2K Status Centre in Wellington. That Centre has responsibility to ensure that during and beyond the transition to the new century the Y2K status of New Zealand is regularly assessed and that the status is communicated to the Government, key sectors of the economy, the news media and the New Zealand public.

From 10 p.m. on 31 December through 6 p.m. on 2 January, the Y2K Readiness Commission and the Ministry for Emergency Management will operate joint Internet web sites containing regularly updated status reports which will include an overall comment on New Zealand's performance to date; the Y2K status of key sectors of the economy; whether any interruptions to essential services are insignificant, significant or severe; and estimated recovery time. The web site addresses are set out in the copy of this statement now being distributed. We have circulated to all missions details of these procedures in our note of 9 November 1999.

Similar status information will also be communicated to the International Y2K Cooperation Center in Washington, D.C., to which the United States delegate referred earlier this morning. The information provided to the Center can also be accessed by other Governments and the world media. The United Nations and the United States, which is hosting this Center, are to be congratulated for their positive response when the first United Nations meeting of national Y2K coordinators identified the need for such a global coordination point. The Center will play a critical role in providing Member States with an overview of the world's response to the "millennium bug".

The draft resolution before us today stresses the need for global cooperation to ensure a timely and effective response to the year 2000 challenge. This was not a challenge foreseen by the founders of this Organization, but it is a truly global challenge which the United Nations system is well placed to address through the range of measures set out in the Secretary-General's report: sharing information, knowledge and skills; engaging the private sector and civil society; applying regional mechanisms; and being prepared to respond to any humanitarian emergencies that could result from serious year 2000 failures.

New Zealand looks forward to joining the consensus on this draft resolution and to working with other Member States to meet the year 2000 challenge.

Mr. Tchoulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation is of the opinion that the

Secretary-General's report on steps taken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve the year 2000 date conversion of computers deserves high appreciation. It is with great interest that we have studied the very detailed information on the degree of readiness of the various parts of the United Nations system, its network of field offices throughout the world and the international organizations.

It is difficult to overestimate the role played by the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Informatics of the Economic and Social Council in raising countries' level of awareness of the year 2000 problem.

The unprecedented meetings of national coordinators on the year 2000 problem held over the past two years have enabled experts from more than 150 countries to have a direct dialogue, to exchange experience and to discuss joint actions in preparing for the computer millennium transition.

We highly appreciate the activities of the technical subgroup of the Working Group, headed by the former Permanent Representative of Pakistan, Mr. Kamal, and the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Lesotho, Mr. Mangoaela, which ensured the implementation of a number of measures to improve the access of Member States to United Nations documentation and the databases of its divisions. One important achievement of the subgroup was the opportunity provided to the majority of permanent missions in New York to enjoy free access to the Internet.

The solution of the problem of possible computer failure at the transition to the new millennium is deemed a priority State task in the Russian Federation. To prepare computer networks in Russia for the change of millennium, the appropriate decrees of the President and Government have been issued. Work is proceeding in accordance with the national plan of action to address the year 2000 problem in the Russian Federation, developed by a government commission for the year 2000 problem. To implement these tasks, a vertical structure has been set up. Federal, local and municipal authorities have formed commissions and working groups to address this problem. They are also working at the sectoral and inter-sectoral levels at enterprises and sites. A network of such bodies was established first in the most vulnerable industrial areas, such as oil and energy, transport, finance, social services, telecommunications and defence.

The comprehensive methodological basis for addressing the year 2000 problem was developed and brought to the attention of managers and technical staff. In order to raise public awareness and prepare the population for the transition of computer systems to the new millennium, a series of television and radio programmes has been broadcast and a number of press publications have been prepared. In our country, all possible efforts are being made to avoid or to minimize the probability of any negative consequences of the transition.

We are aware of the concern of the international community regarding the year 2000 problem in the sphere of nuclear energy, in which, for well-known reasons, Russia is as interested as all others. Intensive work is being undertaken in our country in this area. The Kola nuclear power station may serve as an example: its readiness for the year 2000 has been assessed and acknowledged by the specialized commissions, with the participation of United States experts in September 1999 and of representatives of the World Association of Nuclear Operators in November 1999, who offered positive appraisals.

The preparation process for the new millennium in the fuel and energy complex as a whole is being implemented successfully in Russia and we are ready to continue to meet our international obligations on gas and oil deliveries. In this field, we are taking such measures as the fine-tuning of storage circuits, emergency testing and the coordination of the functioning of the pipeline systems with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Baltic States and Eastern Europe.

We are also aware of the concern of the international community over the military aspect of the year 2000 problem. We have undertaken a number of steps in this direction with our partners at the multilateral and bilateral levels. In particular, we have agreed with the United States to the establishment of a channel of direct communication between the centres for the maintenance of strategic stability in connection with the year 2000 problem. The ministers of defence of our two countries signed in September a joint statement on the establishment of the Center for Y2K Strategic Stability in Colorado Springs. Consultations with the United Kingdom on military aspects of the solution to the problem of the transition of computer systems to the new millennium were held in Russia in October.

Russia also participated in the discussion of the year 2000 problem at G-8 summits in Birmingham in 1998 and Cologne in 1999 and in a number of meetings of G-8

experts on this issue in Germany and Italy this year, at which the parties exchanged information and opinions on the state of progress in addressing this problem and overcoming the negative consequences of possible computer failure. Thus, we can declare with confidence that Russia is generally ready for the transition of information systems to the new millennium and to overcome its possible negative consequences.

In conclusion, the Russian delegation is ready to support the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.61.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): It was long hoped that the technological and telecommunications revolution would bridge the gaps that divide us. We had hoped the year 2,000 would open the door to an interconnected world, eroding the old lines between geographic haves and have-nots.

But now, as we look on the information emanating from sources across the globe and from the global meetings of national year 2000 coordinators, an unfortunate message emerges from the year 2000 bug. It threatens technologically to widen the very fissures we had hoped to close. It further distances nations from one another. At this point, if reports are correct, we can assume that at least some of the greater dangers of the year 2000 bug — threatening loss of industry and even human life — will simply not be solved when the clock strikes midnight.

We wish to add our voice to the nations advocating a shift in emphasis at this juncture to focus now on recovery efforts over the first few months of the new year. We welcome the model in the Secretary-General's report on steps taken within the United Nations system and with Member States to resolve the year 2000 date conversion problem of computers, in which there is a focus on mission-critical operations, where there is a risk of crisis.

The new millennium will not be worth celebrating if it heralds disasters in any nation anywhere on the globe. Just as we could not rely entirely on information technology to break down the world's barriers, we dare not rely on its innovations alone to prevent disaster. I repeat: parallel contingency measures must now take primary focus outside the sphere of information technology. Mobile generators, alternative power sources, public awareness campaigns, international coordination — all these are now as essential as any corrective measures.

An investigation by the Israel Y2K Coordination Committee has looked into which areas, in any national infrastructure, are most likely to be affected and in need of recovery, even with preparation efforts. The warning zones are: electric companies, water resources, transportation of all types and hospital equipment. Failure to place emphasis on these areas could lead to a catastrophe. For these reasons, organs with responsibility for these sectors of national infrastructure should have a central role in the planning process.

From this podium I invite Member States to join us in the coming months in multinational efforts to help one another recover from whatever crises may emerge and to repair any damage. Let us hope that we can celebrate the new year and start the new millennium with confidence, peace of mind and the dawn of a new era in which technology will bridge differences, and not create them.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly shall now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.61, as orally revised.

I should like to announce that since the introduction of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, Gabon, Greece, India, Ireland, Italy, Mauritius, Norway, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.61, as orally revised?

The draft resolution, as orally revised, was adopted. (resolution 54/114).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 45?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 174

International recognition of the Day of Vesak

Draft resolution (A/54/L.59)

The President: I call on the representative of Sri Lanka to introduce draft resolution A/54/L.59.

Mr. De Saram (Sri Lanka): On behalf of the delegation of Sri Lanka, I have the great honour today of introducing in the General Assembly the item "International recognition of the Day of Vesak".

When addressing the General Assembly in the plenary debate on 23 September this year, the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka, the Honourable Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar, conveyed to the Assembly, pursuant to a decision taken at an international Buddhist conference in Sri Lanka, a hope that was later endorsed by the Government of Sri Lanka that the United Nations would find it possible to give international recognition to the Day of Vesak, the most sacred day in the calendar of several hundred millions who, in a number of countries in a number of regions of the world, follow the teachings of the Buddha.

As the present millennium draws to a close, and the world awaits and prepares for the opening of the new millennium, the United Nations may wish to recall, it was hoped, the teachings reaching back two and a half millennia of the one known as the Buddha, the Enlightened One, who believed and taught that true and complete relief from the sufferings of the human condition lay in one's own true and complete understanding and control and purification of one's own thoughts and desires, and that this state of mind would lead one to the path of compassion for and service to others, and to a state of true and complete happiness. "One may conquer millions in battle, but he who conquers himself is alone the greatest of conquerors" was one of the Buddha's sayings, chronicles have recorded. The teachings of the Buddha brought then, and continue to bring now, understanding, happiness and solace to the lives of millions, originally in the countries of South Asia, South East Asia and East Asia, but now, also, to additional millions in other countries in other regions of the world.

The General Assembly, in the universality of its membership and in the universality of its terms of reference, has in the past recognized many of the diverse concerns of our complex world. In so doing, the Assembly has acted in the knowledge that peoples in all regions of the world look fervently to the United Nations, and in particular to the General Assembly, for at least an acknowledgment of their concerns, hopes and beliefs.

It is in that spirit that the International Buddhist Conference in Sri Lanka looked to the United Nations for international recognition of the Day of Vesak, the Day of

the Full Moon in the month of May on which over 150 million Buddhists around the world commemorate the birth, the attainment of enlightenment and the passing away of the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

The Buddha — born to royal comfort and privilege as Prince Siddhartha Gautama in the sixth century before the beginning of the Christian era, at a place known as Lumbini, now in the modern State of Nepal — was so troubled by the sufferings of humanity that he renounced the comforts and privileges to which he had been born and devoted himself, sustained only by the basic necessities for life, thought and meditation, to years of wandering and reflection, in search of a complete and true understanding for himself of the sufferings of the human condition and a complete and true understanding of how relief from the suffering of the human condition may finally be completely and truly realized.

The Buddha's life and example so moved his contemporaries that his teachings were remembered and passed on through the centuries, moving the great warrior emperor Asoka of India, in the third century before the Christian era, to eschew wars and conquests and to give himself to the teachings of the Buddha. It was the great emperor Asoka who sent his son Mahinda and his daughter Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka with the teachings of the Buddha. Sanghamitta also brought to Sri Lanka a sapling of the Sacred Bo Tree, under which the Buddha had sat in teaching, in thought and meditation almost three centuries earlier.

The sacred sapling and the teachings of the Buddha flourished in Sri Lanka through the thousands of years that followed, and to this day. The sapling, now the Sacred Bo Tree of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka, still stands and is loved and venerated or respected by all the people of Sri Lanka, be they Buddhists or followers of the other great religions of our land: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. It is a sacred tree, engaging and uniting those of all faiths and religions in a spirit of religious understanding and tolerance that we pray will continue to flourish in Sri Lanka through the millennia.

The sponsors of the draft resolution before the General Assembly — and here I convey to all sponsors deepest gratitude for their support — would very much wish the Assembly, in adopting it, to recognize Vesak as the most sacred day in Buddhism, commemorated by hundreds of millions of Buddhists around the world, and to allow for appropriate arrangements to be made for observances of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and at other United

Nations offices. Arrangements for such observances would be made in consultation with the Secretariat and with such Permanent Missions and delegations as may also wish to participate, in order to ensure that such arrangements are appropriate and without cost to the United Nations.

On behalf of all the sponsors of the draft resolution, I am honoured to be in a position today to warmly commend this draft resolution on International recognition of the Day of Vesak. The following delegations are sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.59: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus, Grenada, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Seychelles, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Thailand and Ukraine. The delegations of Greece, Mauritius, Norway and Turkey have also asked to be included as sponsors.

The President: I now call on the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Wirasamban (Thailand): It is a privilege to speak under this agenda item entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak" as a representative of the world's largest Buddhist kingdom in our religiously diverse family of nations. For Buddhists worldwide, the Day of Vesak, or Visakha in the Thai language, is of special significance. It marks the day when three important events in the life of Lord Buddha converged; his birth, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away. It is thus the single most important day in Buddhism.

Thailand, together with many other countries representing the full diversity of humankind's faiths, is proud to be a sponsor of this draft resolution on the international recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. We are calling for the General Assembly to accord international recognition to Vesak and for the appropriate arrangements to be made for the international observance of this day at the United Nations. The observance will be without cost to the Organization.

The universal message of peace, goodwill and compassion preached by Lord Buddha more than 2,500 years ago has never been more relevant today. Mutual understanding, kindness to fellow human beings and compassion are the hallmarks of the Buddhist faith.

Buddhism has always stressed the path of peaceful resolution of disputes between individuals or communities. Excessive competition is to be avoided. Violence in all forms and manifestations is shunned. By and large, therefore, Buddhism is synonymous with peace.

Because Buddhism firmly believes in freedom of choice for the individual and cherishes the diversity of human thought and ideas, it rejects the imposition of ideas on others. Tolerance is thus a central tenet in Buddhism. In Thailand, tolerance, particularly religious tolerance, is enshrined in our Constitution and, more importantly, ingrained in the Thai way of life. We are proud to have believers of all religions — Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs — coexisting peacefully in our country, with His Majesty the King of Thailand as the Upholder of all Faiths.

Lastly, Buddhism preaches moderation. The “Middle Path”, as Buddhists call it, is a way of life which seeks to avoid the pitfalls of extremism. The sense of moderation serves as a foundation for the actions of Buddhists towards others and, we hope, guards against excesses which all too often manifest themselves in our global village.

The United Nations prides itself on being an organization that is universal and promotes respect for the diversity of ideas and beliefs throughout the world. The dialogue among civilizations is just one manifestation of this respect for diversity. It would reflect well on the universal character of the United Nations if it were to accord recognition to Buddhism, one of the world's oldest religions, and to millions of people in all parts of the world who practice it.

I therefore ask Member States to lend their support to this draft resolution on the international recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. This small but highly significant gesture would go a long way towards not only according recognition and respect to Buddhism and millions of Buddhists worldwide but also to reaffirming our strong commitment to the principle of respect for diversity which the United Nations and we Buddhists cherish.

Ms. Lee (Singapore): My delegation is of the view that the consideration of this agenda item is an appropriate mark of respect for the Buddha, a great spiritual teacher of compassion and humanity whose teachings provide guidance and inspiration to nearly a quarter of the world's population. In fact, his teachings also provide us with inspiration and lessons in our ongoing efforts in the United

Nations to achieve peace and respect for each other's values.

Vesak Day, or the Flower Festival as it is sometimes known, is also celebrated in Singapore and is one of our four major festivals. About one third of Singapore's population are Buddhists. Vesak Day is a public holiday in Singapore, enabling Singaporeans of other religious denominations, such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism, to name a few, to join in the celebrations of their Buddhist friends. This celebration of the rich variety of religions coexisting in Singapore is also a reflection of the diversity of races which live in harmony together.

My delegation therefore commends the initiative for several reasons. First, it is a fitting statement of the United Nations work on the eve of the third millennium. After all, the General Assembly has proclaimed the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace and declared the decade from 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. One of the hallmarks of the Buddha's teachings is the promotion of peace and non-violence.

Secondly, the initiative provides us with an opportunity to pave the way for another General Assembly decision. The United Nations has also proclaimed the year 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Through this international recognition of the Day of Vesak, other civilizations can gain knowledge about the Buddhist civilization and culture, which can only help deepen mutual understanding amongst us. The ever-growing interaction amongst peoples of different faiths makes it more imperative that we move forward to learn about one another's cultures and civilizations at a deeper level. Civilizations have always been enriched by the exchange of knowledge and arts. As the Buddha himself once said,

“There is no problem in existence which cannot be resolved with the right understanding and the right effort. Every problem, however, intricate, however complex, contains within itself the means for its own resolution.”

Thirdly, the initiative represents our collective wish to cherish the diversity in our efforts to discover shared values. There is no doubt that globalization of technology, finance and information has resulted in people in different parts of the world being directly affected by each other's actions. But faster electronic interaction does not

automatically lead people of different cultures to understand and respect one another. Other steps must complement electronic interaction. In a diverse organization such as the United Nations, only interaction between people of different faiths and cultures, understanding and respect for different civilizations can lead to a common approach to dealing with international issues. Therefore, this agenda item is one more step for the enrichment of the United Nations and us all.

Mr. Ali (Bangladesh): At the outset allow me to associate the delegation of Bangladesh with the statement made by the representative of Sri Lanka on International recognition of the Day of Vesak. My delegation considers it a privilege to speak on this item.

My delegation had the honour to speak on this item in the General Committee on 1 December 1999 when the members of that Committee assembled to consider the inclusion in the agenda of the fifty-fourth session the item entitled "International recognition of the Day of Vesak". We are gratified that the General Committee was able to recommend the inclusion in the agenda and subsequently the General Assembly agreed by consensus. Bangladesh had earlier joined others in proposing inclusion of this item through a co-signed letter.

In Asia and other parts of the world, people observe the Day of Vesak to celebrate the most sacred day in Buddhism. Millions of Buddhists all over the world commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha on this day.

Bangladesh is historically connected with the Buddhist civilization. We have a sizeable Buddhist population. At the national level, we celebrate Buddhist festivals such as the Day of Vesak — Buddha Purnima, in our language — as national holidays.

As we are entering a new millennium, it is fitting that the world body is considering today the international commemoration of the Day of Vesak. This will give us opportunities to relive the age-old sublime teachings of the Buddha aimed at bringing about, and understanding, happiness and solace in the world. We are happy that the General Assembly is recognizing the Day of Vesak as a sacred day. We are also happy that the Vesak will be observed at United Nations Headquarters and also at United Nations duty offices all over the world in an appropriate manner.

I would like to mention here that my country is one of the sponsors of draft resolution A/54/L.59, which we hope will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Pradhan (Bhutan): My delegation is delighted that the General Assembly has decided to take up the issue of international recognition of the Day of Vesak at the United Nations. We wish to express our gratitude to Sri Lanka for having taken the first steps to initiate the process.

The introduction of this item at the General Assembly is timely and will contribute much towards the success of other ongoing initiatives at the United Nations. The year 2000 has been designated by the General Assembly as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, which will prepare the ground for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001. Both these years usher in the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. The promotion of tolerance and of respect for diversity is a common thread that runs through all these cross-cutting commemorations. It is my delegation's belief that international recognition of the contributions that Buddhism has made and continues to make to the world will strengthen and further the objectives of these processes through the advancement of greater understanding and appreciation of the diversity in our societies.

Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In Bhutan and in the region of the Himalayas, this day is known as Sagadawa, and as Vaisakh in the Sanskrit and Indian tradition. This day, one of the most sacred to millions of Buddhists throughout the world, falls on the day of the full moon around May each year and marks three important events in the life of the Buddha. It was on this day that he was born, in 563 BC. It was on this day that he subsequently gained enlightenment, and it was also on this day that he entered the realm of Nirvana.

Siddhartha Gautama, more widely known as the Buddha, lived and preached from 563 BC to 480 BC in northern India, making Buddhism one of the oldest religions of mankind. His life and teachings have had a significant impact on other religions and on philosophy, morality and ways of life, beginning in Asia and spreading across to other continents.

The teachings of Buddhism are considered to be universal in nature. Buddhism propagates moderation in one's life, nonviolence, peaceful coexistence and tolerance. It teaches humans to safeguard and preserve resources and their natural environment as a means to respect the lives of all sentient beings. Many of these principles are akin to those of other major religions and to the fundamental principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.

My delegation looks forward to participating in the international observances of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters and other United Nations offices. In view of the significance of this day to millions across the globe, we are confident that draft resolution A/54/L.59 will be adopted by consensus.

Mr. Flores (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation is a sponsor of the draft resolution on International recognition of the Day of Vesak at United Nations Headquarters because it believes that the Organization is a preferred forum to bring together the different religious, cultural and philosophical traditions that co-exist on our planet.

Recognition by the United Nations of the contribution made to humanity's spiritual patrimony by the various religions of the world is an indication of the commitment of Member States to the preservation of that patrimony in a spirit of active tolerance aimed at encouraging mutual understanding.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): The Charter of the United Nations calls on us to practice tolerance and to live in peace with one another as good neighbours. The culture of tolerance eliminates a culture of violence and begets a culture of peace.

Lord Buddha teaches us the virtues of tolerance, compassion and peace. The teachings of Buddha have moved millions of people and have had a profound influence on the thought and life of the human race. Buddha's message of tolerance, compassion and peace provides the ethical and moral basis of many societies around the world.

H.G. Wells stated that Buddha gave a message to mankind that was universal in character, and that many of our best modern ideas are in closest harmony with it. Thus Buddhism, like other major religions, has contributed substantively to the prevalence of peace. It is most fitting that the United Nations, whose ultimate objective is also peace, provides us with an opportunity to bring the day

most sacred to millions of Buddhists to the attention of the international community.

Furthermore, we believe that discussion of this item in this unique forum, in which different civilizations are represented, will contribute to a better understanding of the concept of a dialogue among civilizations.

The Day of Vesak — the Full Moon Day of May — is the most sacred day in Buddhism. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that the most significant events of Buddha's life uniformly fell on this particular day. It was on the Full Moon Day of May in the year 623 B.C. that a noble prince, destined to be one of the greatest religious teachers in the world, was born in Lumbini Park. After six strenuous years of struggle and search for the ultimate truth, again on the Full Moon Day of May, in his thirty-fifth year of ascetic life, Buddha attained enlightenment by his intuitive knowledge, enabling him to rid himself of all defilements of life.

After he attained Buddhahood, without keeping enlightenment to himself, Buddha devoted the remainder of his worthy life to the service of humanity, conveying his message of tolerance, compassion and peace to the human race. His service to humankind, his wisdom and compassion, and his exemplary personal life became the principal factors that compelled millions of people to hail Buddha as one of the greatest religious leaders that ever lived on earth. After having incessantly and tirelessly striven for the benefit of humankind, Buddha passed away on the Full Moon Day of May in his eightieth year.

As it is sacred to all Buddhists of the world, the Day of Vesak is a sacred occasion in Myanmar also and celebrated as Buddha's Day for its significant nature. A famous ceremony is held in Myanmar to commemorate Buddha's Day: the ceremonial watering of the Bo Tree, the tree under which Lord Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment. The ceremony takes place either early in the morning or in the evening of the day, with girls and women in their finest dresses carrying water in earthen pots in single file and watering the Bo Tree. The ceremony is accompanied by the playing of wind and percussion musical instruments, thus reflecting the auspicious nature of the Day.

Nearly 90 per cent of the population of Myanmar is Buddhist. As a sponsor of the draft resolution before us, we are encouraged by the support for giving the Day of Vesak the international recognition it deserves. We believe that the adoption of the draft would constitute a

concrete acknowledgement of the contribution Buddhism has made for the benefit of mankind.

Mr. Shah (Nepal): Vesak Purnima, or the Full Moon Day of May, is a thrice-blessed day. On this auspicious day, in a span of 80 years over two and a half millennia ago, Gautama Buddha was born at Lumbini, attained enlightenment at Bodh Gaya and passed from physical form at Kusinagar.

The essence of Buddha's teachings concerns humanity, peace, compassion, tolerance and non-violence, the equality of all human beings, and respect for and non-denigration of each other and each other's beliefs — ideals so eloquently accented in the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and ideals which are as relevant today as they have ever been over the centuries.

The unique significance of so sacred a day has made Vesak Purnima a symbol of the light of Buddha's teachings, which have travelled through the ages, beyond the high Himalayas and across continents, and inspired the lives of millions and millions of people who strive for, and believe in, the institution of peace and justice.

Lumbini today is a prominent World Heritage Site. The United Nations has historically been involved in the preservation and development of this holy Site. The International Buddhist Summit, held at Lumbini in December of last year, declared the birthplace of Buddha to be a fountain of peace. Vesak Purnima is also recognized in Nepal as Lumbini Day and observed as a national holiday — a day of non-violence on which all public slaughter of animals is officially banned.

As the inheritor of this great cultural and religious legacy, Nepal is more than honoured to be a sponsor of the draft resolution contained in document A/54/L.59 on "International Recognition of the Day of Vesak". It is most fitting that the draft resolution would have the United Nations commemorate the Full Moon Day of May each year. By adopting this draft, the General Assembly will have taken one additional step towards a culture of peace and cross-civilizational understanding.

Mr. Haque (Pakistan): The land of Pakistan has historically been a meeting ground for different peoples, religions, cultures and ideas. Geographically, Pakistan sits astride the traditional routes that link the peoples of South Asia with their neighbours in West Asia, Central Asia, China and the lands beyond. The interaction between the many influences and civilizations that commingled in the

area has led to the evolution, over centuries, of a rich, complex and intricate social and cultural texture and ethos in my country.

The north-west of Pakistan was the home of the famous Buddhist Gandhara civilization, which flourished around the first century B.C. This period also saw the birth of Gandhara art through a fusion of Greco-Roman art and Buddhist traditions, resulting in the depiction in stone of various aspects of the life and teachings of the Buddha, which adorned thousands of stupas and monasteries in the area.

The influence of Buddhism is not confined to our region; it extends to all parts of the world. The universal appeal and message of Buddha finds its resonance in many corners of the world. The contribution of Buddhism to the culture, art and civilization of the peoples of South Asia and beyond has been profound. The message of peace, compassion and truth given by Buddha is shared by most religions and systems of belief. His sublime vision of the Middle Path, calling for the avoidance of sin, acquiring of merit and purification of the mind, reflects his noble message and his noble spirit.

My delegation is a sponsor of draft resolution A/54/L.59. We strongly support international recognition of the thrice-sacred Day of Vesak, commemorating the birth of Buddha, his attainment of enlightenment and his passing away. The recognition of the Day of Vesak by the United Nations would be a fitting acknowledgement of the contribution of Buddhism to the spiritual development of mankind.

Mr. Sharma (India): Although we spoke on this issue in the meeting of the General Committee when the proposal to observe the Day of Vesak came before it, we are taking the floor once again to convey to the full membership our deep satisfaction that the proposal by the delegation of Sri Lanka for international recognition of the Day of Vesak has been adopted by the Committee.

The appearance of the Buddha was one of the transformative events in the history of mankind and has shaped the spiritual, moral and ethical values of the world. As such, it is appropriate that a day of recognition for this transcendent and defining occurrence in our shared civilizational heritage should be earmarked, and that it be honoured and observed in this most representative of all bodies of the global community, which seeks to inform its actions with universal moral and ethical concern.

In fact, universalism of enlightenment, which can be reached through individual effort by any person, is at the core of the Buddha's teachings, which have touched countless millions of lives with salvation and hope. To recall such ennobling and eternal legacies in our shared heritage is to inspire us in seeking the highest goals of our collective striving. We congratulate the delegation of Sri Lanka for its initiative, and we hope to participate actively in the observance of Vesak within the United Nations.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.59. I should like to announce that since its introduction, the following countries have become sponsors: Greece, Lesotho, Mauritius, Nicaragua, Norway, Turkey and the United States.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/54/L.59?

The draft resolution A/54/L.59 was adopted (resolution 54/115).

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 174?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.