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STATEMENT BY
BY
HON'BLE EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER,
MRS. SUSHMA SWARAJ
AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
70TH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,

The United Nations is completing 70 years this year. Therefore, this General Assembly is historic. I congratulate you on behalf of the Prime Minister and people of India as well as on my own behalf for assuming the responsibilities of the post of the President of this historic General Assembly. I hope that this year will also be historic for the United Nations from the perspective of outcomes. I would like to assure you that you will get India's full support in your efforts.

Mr. President,

70 years ago the foundation of the United Nations was laid on the western shores of this country through the San Francisco Charter. India was one of the countries which signed the Charter although we were not independent at that time. We got our independence two years later. When the United Nations was established, a rather diminutive looking man with the powerful weapon of non-violence was writing out the final act in a struggle that would become a symbol of hope for the colonized and the oppressed everywhere.

I am grateful that the United Nations has declared the day this extraordinary man was born as the International Day of Non-Violence. It is a pleasant coincidence that we will be celebrating this day tomorrow. Gandhiji had said, "The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems". This message of his fits most appropriately in the context of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

In the life of any human being the 70th year is a milestone where one can look back to reflect as to what one has achieved and what one has lost. Similarly, for people associated with an institution the 70th year gives an opportunity to analyse whether the institution has been able to fulfil the purpose for which it was formed, and whether it has been able to achieve the goals for which it was established. Today all of us need to ask ourselves

whether we have been able to fulfil the purpose and achieve the goals for which the United Nations was established 70 years ago.

When I ask this question to myself, I get an answer in the affirmative for some questions and in the negative for some. For example, United Nations has been successful in preventing a third world war, in assisting decolonization and dismantling apartheid, in combating global epidemics and reducing global hunger, and in promoting democracy and human rights.

Yet, when we ask ourselves whether we have been able to prevent conflicts taking place in several parts of the world, the answer is no. If we ask whether we were able to find permanent solution to these conflicts, the answer is no. If we ask whether we were able to show the path of peace to a world which is going on the way of violence, the answer is no. On these parameters, the United Nations appears as an ineffective institution in the area of international peace and security. It has failed to effectively address the new challenges to international peace and security.

Mr. President,

Today, the world is ravaged by war in three continents with the Security Council being unable or unwilling to stanch the flow of blood. Traditional solutions that emphasize force have only proven to exacerbate problems. We must ask ourselves if we have the political will to craft alternatives to conflict and to pursue them with commitment and single-minded dedication.

Nowhere is such a goal more important than in the peacekeeping process. Under the blue flag, several men and women are constantly working to prevent conflict, protect civilians and sustain peace processes. With 180,000 peacekeepers deployed so far, India has been the largest provider of international security by the UN. Even today, about 8000 Indian military and police personnel are participating in 10 Missions, operating in highly challenging environments.

India remains committed to continue supporting the UN Peacekeeping Operations and even enhance our contributions, as announced by our Prime Minister at the Leaders' Summit on Peacekeeping. Our new

contributions will cover all aspects of peacekeeping – personnel, enablers and training.

At the same time, it is necessary that there be no dilution of the cardinal principles of peacekeeping. It is a matter of concern that there is no role of troop contributing countries in the formulation of mandates, which are often amended without consultations. This is a clear violation of Article 44 of the UN Charter. It has also been our view that peacekeeping operations cannot substitute for political solutions. This has been underscored by the Horta Panel as well.

As we mark the 70th anniversary of the UN, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to more than 3,300 peacekeepers including 161 from India who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We stand ready to contribute to the Peacekeepers Memorial Wall, which has been approved by the 69th General Assembly.

The safety of our peacekeepers, the security of our nations, indeed the future of the international community itself is now dependent on how we respond to the greatest threat that we face today: terrorism. A threat that India has lived with for more than a quarter of a century was tragically brought home to this very city in the autumn of 2001. Since then, the proliferation of terrorist acts, the rise of extremist ideologies, and the impunity of states that back it have not been adequately countered.

International terrorism can only be defeated by organized international action. The world must demonstrate that it has zero tolerance for terrorists who kill and maim innocent civilians with action based on the principle of prosecute or extradite. Countries that provide financing to terrorists and safe havens for their training, arming and operations must be made to pay a heavy price by the international community.

Equally importantly, an international legal regime, under the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism can no longer be held up. 19 years ago, in 1996, India had made this proposal at the United Nations but we have been unable to adopt it and entangled ourselves in the issue of definition. We have to understand that there can be no distinction between good and bad terrorists. Neither can terrorism be linked to any religion. A terrorist is a terrorist; one who commits crimes against

humanity cannot have any religion. Therefore, my appeal to all of you is that we should come together in this 70th anniversary year of the United Nations and pledge to unanimously adopt the CCIT.

While on the subject of terrorism, I take the opportunity to share the challenges that we face in our ties with Pakistan. None of us can accept that terrorism is a legitimate instrument of statecraft. The world shared our outrage at the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which citizens of many nations were helplessly butchered. That the mastermind behind the attack is walking free is an affront to the entire international community. Not only have past assurances in this regard not been honoured but new cross-border terrorist attacks have taken place recently, in which two terrorists from across the border have also been captured alive. We all know that these attacks are meant to destabilize India and legitimize Pakistan's illegal occupation of parts of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir and its claim on the rest of it.

Let me use this occasion to spell out our approach clearly. India remains open to dialogue. But talks and terror cannot go together. Yesterday the Prime Minister of Pakistan proposed what he termed as a four-point new peace initiative. I would like to respond. We do not need four points, we need just one - give up terrorism and let us sit down and talk. This was precisely what was discussed and decided by the two Prime Ministers at Ufa this July. Let us hold talks at the level of NSAs on all issues connected to terrorism and an early meeting of our Directors General of Military Operations to address the situation on the border. If the response is serious and credible, India is prepared to address all outstanding issues through a bilateral dialogue.

Mr. President,

Even as we counter the menace of terrorism, we must acknowledge that real social and economic progress remains a critical goal. The elimination of basic human want leads almost invariably to more peaceful societies, as is evidenced by a map of the conflicts that engulf parts of the world.

Mr. President,

Just a few days ago we adopted the new Development Agenda, with the Sustainable Development Goals at their core, a blueprint more comprehensive and holistic than the Millennium Development Goals. However, their successful implementation will require political resolve and an inclination to share - both technology and financial resources - while simultaneously improving our delivery mechanisms.

As a woman and an elected Member of Parliament, it has been my firm conviction that there is a shortcut to real social change - empowering the girl child. Our Government's policy of *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* (Educate the Girl Child to empower her) was conceived with this vision. Similarly, with the transformative power of technology and the resources available to the international community, we now have the ability to glimpse a future which provides basic human dignity for all of the world's people. Whether we can reach that goal depends on how we act.

Mr. President,

Our future must rest on building a sustainable planet for our children and our children's children. As we prepare to meet in two months time in Paris, the world expects us to deliver an ambitious and credible agreement on climate change. We have a duty for common action but in doing so we must keep in mind the larger historical contribution of some and the differentiated responsibility of others.

If today Mahatma Gandhi was among us, he would ask if we have used the resources of the planet for our needs or for our greed? Also if adapting our lifestyle choices and reducing extravagant consumption would help us correct the course. For this reason, the agreement in Paris needs to be comprehensive and equitable, while delivering concrete action. Developing countries can do more if they are enabled in their efforts with the provision of finance, technology transfer and capacity building support from developed countries. India has always been and is a willing partner in global efforts towards this goal. We will play our due role in reaching a meaningful, equitable and effective agreement in Paris.

India's reverence for the environment is based on our traditions that have always held nature as sacred. The health of the planet is tied to our own well-being and it is this holistic approach that guided us in our call for the First International Day of Yoga, celebrated with much fervour in 192 countries of the world – indeed in this very hallowed institution. I thank the international community for their enthusiasm and support for this occasion. I hope that the seed that has been planted will grow into a magnificent tree.

I also congratulate the States for their prompt action in tackling the threat of global epidemics. By linking our efforts, we have managed to eradicate small pox and, nearly, polio. HIV/AIDS has been controlled and more recently, Ebola, though not before an unacceptably high price in lives had been paid. The Ebola crisis is an important example of how national action and international support can resolve a global crisis. We are proud that India played its due part in these efforts. But we must be inspired by our successes and redouble our efforts at eradicating other health crises, whether it be tuberculosis or malaria.

As with health emergencies, natural disasters and man-made conflicts also deserve our coordinated response. In recent months, the international community has been found wanting on the refugee crisis due to the conflict situations in Syria, Iraq and Libya. A swift response backed by political will is the need of the hour. Our own response in our neighbourhood to humanitarian crises has been quick, responsive and holistic. Whether it was Nepal or Yemen, India has emerged as a net security provider, assisting not only our nationals but those of other countries that sought our help. India would be hosting the first Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in November 2016 on Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Mr. President,

Like the UN, India too has walked a long way these past 70 years. As 1.25 billion of my countrymen would attest, we have done so under the rambunctious joy of our deeply embedded democratic traditions. But every once in a while there is a need for a transformative change – one that can reinvigorate the nation and redeem its spirit. Ever since the new

Government of Prime Minister Modi took office a year and a half ago we have committed ourselves to this renewal, one that has enabled India to play its rightful role in international affairs while also becoming the fastest growing major economy in the world. The driving force of this comprehensive renewal has been premised on the motto of *sabka saath, sabka vikas*, an emphasis on the welfare of all our people.

At the same time, we have initiated an energetic outreach to all our partners in the international community. Our efforts have focused, first and foremost, on our immediate neighbourhood and the results have been truly transformational. We have reached out to our extended neighbourhood as well, renewing ancient linkages and constructing modern economic partnerships, including, most recently, a Summit with 14 Pacific Island nations. The Act East policy has replaced the earlier Look East one, with more vigorous and proactive engagement with an economically vibrant region. This complements our Link West engagement. We remain committed to the Middle East Peace Process which is the key to prevent further radicalisation of the region. We have also qualitatively upgraded our relations with all the major powers.

Africa is a region with which we have historical bonds, a solidarity born out of a common struggle against colonialism and the belief in a future of shared prosperity. Later this month, we will host the 3rd India Africa Forum Summit, the first time that the leaders of all 54 countries of the continent have been invited.

As a nuclear weapon state, India is aware of its responsibility and its support for global, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament has not diminished.

Mr. President,

As with nations, so with institutions. It is only a periodic renovation that provides an organization with meaning and purpose. In a world that continues to be dominated by wealthy and influential nations, the notion of sovereign equality of the UN has permitted the developing world to question some unfair norms. But it has not permitted a fundamental challenge to the inequity of a system built for a world that longer exists.

If we are to preserve the centrality and legitimacy of the UN as the custodian of global peace, security and development, the reform of the Security Council is its most urgent and pressing need. This is the need of the hour. How can we have a Security Council in 2015 which still reflects the geo-political architecture of 1945? How can we have a Security Council which still does not give place as a permanent member to Africa and Latin America?

We have to include more developing nations in the decision making structures of the Security Council. And we need to change the way it does business by doing away with outdated and non-transparent working methods. Imparting more legitimacy and balance to the Council would restore its credibility and equip it to confront the challenges of our times. We are happy that during the last one year under the leadership of H.E. Mr. Sam Kutesa and H.E. Mr. Courtney Rattray we have achieved what we could not do so over two decades of discussions – a text to negotiate, unanimously adopted by consensus in the General Assembly under Decision 69/560. This first, but critical step, must be the springboard for action in this historic 70th Session of the UNGA.

Mr. President,

For an organization like the United Nations, 70 years has a unique significance. It is an occasion for revitalization and for renewal. I invite all of you to contemplate the idea of the United Nations as a Banyan Tree. In the Eastern tradition, the Banyan is a tree that signifies wisdom, yet is non-judgemental and all-encompassing. It has not one trunk, but many, growing outwards, each connected to the other, and the sky and the earth. Its expansive branches provide shade and relief, and its base has always been a place for discussion and debate.

Unlike the men and women who may have planted its seed, the banyan is still a young tree at 70. But without constant regeneration and expansion, it withers away. This could be the fate that awaits the UN. We have a historic opportunity to permit a renewal of this critical institution or we can condemn it to irrelevance and a tragic withering. We can easily lose ourselves in a labyrinth of our creation. But if we seize the day, we will see a United Nations that will grow to its full potential, a United Nations which

reduces the deficit between what it does and what it is capable of doing, a mighty banyan tree providing the canopy for a peaceful and prosperous humanity. I end my speech with the hope that the United Nations will grow into such a banyan tree.

Thank you.