



STATEMENT BY MR. PRANAB MUKHERJEE, MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE OF 15TH NAM MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN TEHRAN, IRAN ON
JULY 29, 2008

Your Excellency Mr. Chairman

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, may I thank the Government and people of Islamic Republic of Iran for the warm and generous welcome extended to us and the excellent arrangements made for our meeting. I would like to compliment HE President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad for his inspiring inaugural address. Please accept my felicitations, Mr. Chairman, on assuming the Chair of this Conference. There is no doubt of its success under your wise and able guidance.

2. I also bring the best wishes of the Government and people of India to this meeting being hosted by Iran, a country with which India shares civilizational affinities and traditionally warm and friendly relations. I would also like to record our deep appreciation for Cuba's chairmanship and effective leadership of our Movement during a period of challenge and promise for all of us.

3. As a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, India remains strongly committed to its purposes and principles and will continue its active and constructive

engagement within it. India will always work to strengthen solidarity and cooperation among the Member States of NAM.

Mr. Chairman,

4. The theme of this Conference, "Solidarity for Peace, Justice and Friendship", reflects the basic purpose of the Non-Aligned Movement. Solidarity is central to our quest for a fair and equitable world. The theme also reminds us of the five fundamental principles - "Panchsheel" - enunciated by India's first Prime Minister and a principal architect of our Movement, Jawaharlal Nehru. These principles constitute the eternal cornerstone of NAM and it would be timely to recall them. They are: respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non aggression; mutual non-interference in domestic affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful co-existence. It is only through the application of these principles of "Panchsheel" that fair and just solutions to the issues that divide the world today and challenge global peace can be found.

5. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, while chairing the 7th NAM Summit in New Delhi in March 1983, had described the Non-Aligned Movement as the "largest peace movement in the world". By avoiding involvement in the power struggles and block rivalries of the Cold War, the Movement sought to create political space for States to consider issues on their own merits, not from the narrow prism of pre-defined positions of power blocs. Consequently, NAM was able to play an active and crucial role on significant global issues and causes, such as decolonization, apartheid, Palestine and a non-discriminatory approach to disarmament and development. We can be justly proud of our Movement's work for seeking to usher in a more peaceful and just world order and in promoting friendship among nations.

6. Today, when the world is undergoing rapid transformation, the role of the Non-Aligned Movement is as vital as it was in the decades that followed its founding in 1961. With 118 members, the Movement represents more than half the world's people and almost two-thirds of the UN membership. It provides an independent point of view on international issues, and functions as a platform from which its members collectively address key issues of common concern.

Excellencies,

7. In order to build an international order characterized by greater peace, harmony, justice, equality and mutual respect, our Movement needs to overcome the social and economic difficulties arising out of the simultaneous impact of crises in food, fuel and finances, as well as threats to our political and security systems. These and other challenges facing the international community make it more imperative than ever before that our Movement collectively projects the central and universal values that bind us and focuses on issues that unite us. We must focus on matters that concern the lives of our people, particularly the poorest among them. In this context, our energies should be devoted to sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, hunger and disease; environment protection; energy security; social justice; fighting pandemics such as HIV/AIDS; disaster management; and the long overdue reform of international institutions, including the United Nations and the Bretton Woods Institutions. In the framework of these and other major contemporary priorities for our Movement, the need for substantive South-South cooperation and solidarity, as also for enhanced and constructive North-South engagement, can hardly be over-emphasized.

8. Nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all its aspects has been a long-standing priority for our Movement. India's commitment to universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament is consistent and firm. We share the belief of our friends in NAM that all states should commit to early negotiations on the complete and verifiable elimination of all nuclear weapons. We also firmly believe that all states have the right to develop peaceful uses of nuclear technology in accordance with their obligations. In this context, the advantages of nuclear power as a clean and affordable source of energy are well known.

9. Excellencies, the evil of terrorism is one particular challenge that faces us all. Terrorism is one of the most serious threats to global peace; it negates the fundamental principles of justice. An act of terrorism anywhere is a threat to peace and stability everywhere. There can be no justification whatsoever for any act of terrorism. Three weeks ago, terrorists attacked the Indian Embassy in Kabul, killing five Embassy personnel, including two diplomats as well as over 60 Afghan civilians, including young girls on their way to school. Over the last three days, terrorists have targeted innocent men, women and children in the Indian cities of Bangalore and Ahmedabad, killing over 50 and wounding more than 200. In Ahmedabad, their targets included hospitals as well, where the injured were being treated. The terrorists' intention, quite clearly, is to rupture India's resilient social fabric. But India's resolve and capacities are strong and can withstand all that these terrorists can do. The terrorists may claim to act on behalf

of religion, but in truth they have no religion, because the essence of religions is peace and universal brotherhood, and not violence and the violation of human rights.

10. Excellencies, Dear Colleagues, we shall be remiss in our commitment to the theme of this Conference if we do not send a strong message that our Movement stands resolutely for international cooperation in bringing the perpetrators, organizers, financiers and sponsors of all acts of terrorism to justice. In this context, I would particularly underline the need for concerted efforts by all of us to work towards early finalization and adoption of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, a draft for which was presented by India at the United Nations as far back as 1996.

Excellencies,

11. We have always been successful when we have shown unity, commitment and perseverance. The history of our Movement is a testimony to that. With unity and commitment, there is no doubt that we will achieve our goals and objectives.

12. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had eloquently observed that when we march step-in-step with history, success will be ours. I quote: "... the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now. That future is not one of ease or resting, but of incessant striving so that we might fulfill the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today." Unquote.

13. Let me conclude by reaffirming that India will remain steadfast in its earnest endeavours to further strengthen friendship, solidarity and cooperation within our Movement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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