

Statement by Amb. Koonjul on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait
17 October 2002

During this two-day debate, there has been a very rich and much-needed exchange of views on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait. We welcome the participation in this debate of such a large number of countries from the general membership. This was a clear indication of the wish of the membership to see this issue discussed within this multilateral setting. We thank the representative of South Africa, who, in his capacity as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, requested this meeting. Mauritius fully supported this request.

We have noted a convergence of views on several important points, and one on which there is complete unanimity is the fact that Iraq must dispose of all of its weapons of mass destruction in compliance with Security Council resolutions 687 (1991) and 1284 (1999).

Following the adoption of resolution 687 (1991), Iraq ought to have completely disposed of its weapons of mass destruction and inspectors ought to have been allowed to complete their work. However, by choosing to reject the return of United Nations inspectors and by using other delaying tactics, Iraq defied the international community and the authority of the Security Council. Such defiance has not helped either the Government of Iraq or the people of Iraq, who continue to live under the regime of United Nations imposed sanctions. Yet the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) made significant progress, and if resolution 1284 (1999) had been duly complied with, the situation today could have been altogether different.

The almost four-year absence of United Nations inspectors has not only caused a serious break and delay in resolving the whole issue of the disarmament of Iraq in the area of weapons of mass destruction, but has intensified the uncertainties regarding the actual state of the Iraqi programme of weapons of mass destruction. With its delaying and evasive tactics, Iraq has created greater doubts and suspicions about its possession of weapons of mass destruction.

Admittedly, Iraq is not the only country with regard to which the issue of the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction arises, and we certainly support all actions aimed at eliminating

all such weapons throughout the world. But on the basis of past actions by Iraq, the Security Council has determined that Iraq's possession of such weapons constitutes a real threat to international peace and security. It is therefore imperative that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction be completely destroyed.

Notwithstanding the track record of Iraq, we are pleased that there has been a positive evolution in the Iraqi position in the last few weeks. Following the intervention of the Secretary-General and Arab States, and appeals from the international community, Iraq has been persuaded to accept the return of United Nations inspectors. We welcome the decision of the Government of Iraq to accept the unconditional return of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC). We also welcome the outcome of the recent talks in Vienna between, on the one hand, Mr. Hans Blix, Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC, and Mr. Mohamed El-Baradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and, on the other, the Iraqi authorities. We also note with satisfaction that agreements have been reached on a wide range of issues pertaining to the modalities and practical arrangements for the return of inspectors.

Iraq must now stand by its engagement. It must fully respect the commitment it has undertaken. We appeal to the Iraqi Government to extend its full cooperation with the inspection teams. Iraq must understand that if it is to provide all the necessary cooperation and information required by UNMOVIC, it will enable the Council to lay this matter to rest and review the sanctions regime imposed on the country. The return of the inspectors to Iraq is in the interests of all, especially the Government and the people of Iraq.

As many delegations have pointed out, on a purely legal basis no new resolution is necessary for the return of the inspectors. However, if in its collective wisdom the Council feels that the inspection regime needs to be reinforced in order to provide greater clarity and, inter alia, to give inspectors immediate and unfettered access to all sites, including presidential sites, as well as to ensure Iraqi cooperation, Mauritius will give careful and positive consideration to such an initiative, which we believe should take into account the principles and objectives of the Charter, including respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iraq and for the dignity of the Iraqi people.

It will also be important for such a resolution to enjoy the full support of the Council as a whole, since, as we all know, the Council's action is most effective when it acts in unison. It is our expectation that Iraq will fully cooperate with the inspectors and comply with any such resolution that the Council might adopt.

Mauritius considers it important that UNMOVIC resume its activities in Iraq as soon as possible. Exactly one month has elapsed since Iraq expressed its readiness to allow, without any conditions, a United Nations inspection team into Iraq. We should not be perceived as delaying the process. Instead, all efforts need to be made to expedite the departure of UNMOVIC and the IAEA with clear and defined mandates. Here, let me express my delegation's full support for and confidence in Mr. Hans Blix and Mr. ElBaradei, who, guided by the principles of professionalism, independent vigour, impartiality and transparency, will carry out their task with efficiency and credibility. We should avoid prejudging the effectiveness of their work, as well as that of their respective multinational and independent teams. Nor should we – as the Permanent Representative of Singapore said – try to micromanage them and their teams.

It is equally important that Iraq also address all the outstanding issues pertaining to Kuwaiti prisoners of war and the return of Kuwaiti property, as well as the question of missing third party nationals, so that there can be a complete normalization of relations between Iraq and its neighbour.

As much as it is important for Iraq to comply with Security Council resolutions and to cooperate with weapons inspectors, it is equally important that in the event of any non-compliance, the Security Council retain its centrality and authority in deciding the most appropriate course of action to obtain compliance. There is clearly a strong determination on the part of the international community to enforce compliance. There is equally a strong desire to exhaust all diplomatic efforts in that regard, and Mauritius will continue to support such efforts.

Mauritius has full confidence that in case of non-compliance and on the basis of an appropriate report by Mr. Blix, the Security Council would collectively take the required action in full compliance with the principles of international law, taking into account the geopolitical realities. All of that can be avoided if Iraq takes the right steps.

Mauritius reiterates its view that it is the duty of all United Nations Members to comply with Security Council resolutions, in accordance with Article 25 of the Charter. There should be no exceptions, and the Security Council should show even-handedness and impartiality in dealing with all those who defy its resolutions.

With its immense wealth in agricultural and petroleum, with the qualities of its men, its women and children, with its culture, Iraq can and should have a positive influence on the region and its stability and future. Unfortunately, that is not the case today. Iraq today is at the confluence of all crises.

Our debate over the last two days has confirmed the importance that the United Nations community attaches to questions concerning international peace and security.

Cameroon has noted and shares the twin challenges facing the United Nations of carrying out its peace and security missions, promptly and effectively, and its ongoing concern to ensure that in doing so, its actions are legitimate, credible and transparent.

The problems involved in the question of Iraq very clearly demonstrate this dual concern of the international community.

My delegation notes and condemns that in many ways the Iraqi authorities have not always respected the letter and the spirit of the numerous resolutions adopted by the Security Council, neither on the situation between Iraq and Kuwait nor on the disarmament of Iraq.

Iraq must demonstrate that it does not possess weapons of mass destruction. The challenge of our debate today is precisely the disarmament of Iraq.

Despite some promising actions on Iraq's part, especially since the recent Arab League Summit of March 2002, we must note that crucial problems such as the restitution of Kuwaiti property; Kuwait's veritable national memory, including the national archives; and the return of Kuwaiti and third country nationals, as well as the remains of the deceased, are issues still pending.

Iraq's blatant non-compliance with Council resolutions has been noted by all. It is unacceptable because it undermines the credibility of the United Nations and could pave the way for an undesirable and very harmful unilateralism, which could plunge us into relations governed by the law of the jungle and displace us from our organized world based on the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

Today's debate, going beyond the important question of disarming Iraq through United Nations inspections, poses questions of principle. I would like to talk about two such principles. The first and most important is the obligation of every United Nations Member State to comply unconditionally and without delay with the decisions of the Security Council. The other, which is linked to the first, is the Council's obligation to act quickly and fairly in deciding the measures it deems necessary, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter.

Coming back specifically to the need to see Iraq without the proscribed weapons — biological, chemical or nuclear — my country is in favour of an immediate and unconditional resumption of inspections for the disarmament of Iraq by the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Iraqi position, as found in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General dated 16 September 2002, indicates considerable progress; it is a large step in the right direction by Iraq, in keeping with what is demanded of it by the Council.

It is the interest of all that the inspections be carried out in strict respect of the relevant Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 1284 (1999) and 687 (1991).

We all believe that Iraq question is the one of greatest interest to the international community. The international community's expectations contain two hopes: that Iraq does not possess weapons of mass destruction and that the world will not wake up tomorrow to a widespread military conflagration.

Those hopes create an extraordinary responsibility for the inspection teams led by Mr. Blix, Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC and Mr. ElBaradei, Director General of IAEA.

For that reason, Cameroon believes that it would be highly useful for the Council to reaffirm in a new resolution its firm and total support for Hans Blix and his colleagues at UNMOVIC, as well as for the teams of IAEA, before their departure for Iraq.

This new resolution is therefore more a political opportunity -just as is our present public meeting - than a legal necessity.

Beyond reiterating firm support for the inspectors, the new resolution must define once again the practical details of the inspections so as to remove any ambiguities that have arisen on the question. The effectiveness of the inspections depends on it. Also, the resolution must clearly indicate that the Council will take the appropriate measures if it observes once again that Iraq does not respect its decisions. The resolution must, in addition, without prejudice to Iraq's conduct, contain provisions foreseeing the possibility of suspending or even removing all relevant sanctions, if Iraq meets all the Council's demands.

Demonstrating the consensus of the large United Nations family, this resolution must be a message of support for the inspectors, but also and especially a message of firmness to Iraq.

On behalf of Cameroon, I would like to invite the Iraqi authorities, as they have already committed to do, to cooperate fully with the inspectors who will soon be deployed to Iraq. It is the only way for Iraq to prove its sincerity and good faith and to spare the world one more conflict, which would only exacerbate the suffering of the Iraqi people, who are the main if not the sole victims of the procrastinations and posturing which have been frequent in this episode in the history of international relations over the last 12 years. Iraq, then, could reassume the vocation contained in its name: a country of water, a country of life.

It is clear that one more refusal by Iraq to comply with the Security Council's requirements would be one refusal too many, because the Council would then have to take appropriate measures to ensure compliance with its decisions, in accordance with the provisions of Article 42.

I appeal to Council members to remain united, given the grave circumstances, and to show confidence in our body to resolve this issue, this crisis, and to do so in a consensual fashion.

I am pleased to note that during the consultations, all Council members, bar none, clearly assured me that they would undertake nothing against Iraq without the Council's explicit approval. Therefore, I have good reason to remain particularly optimistic.