

Statement by H. E Mr. Paul Berenger to the forty-seventh session of the General Assembly –1992

Mr. President,

I bring to the General Assembly the greetings of the people and Government of Mauritius. I assure you, Sir, of the unstinted cooperation and support in discharge of the important task that you have assumed upon your election to the high office of President of the General assembly at its forty-seventh session. I join those who have already congratulated you on this singular honour, which is also a tribute to your country.

I should like also to offer my felicitations to all the other officers of the Assembly and to wish them success as they take the reins for the current session. In addition, I want to put on record our appreciation of the masterly manner in which your distinguished predecessor conducted the affairs of the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session, which was held at a time when the most crucial transformation on which the Organization has embarked was taking place. He can take pride in the commendable achievements of the Organization under his wise guidance.

It is an equally pleasant duty to welcome the 13 States of Eastern Europe that have joined our ranks as members of this comity of free nations. Their membership in the United Nations can only reinforce the foundations of the Organization and make a positive contribution to the new agenda that it has assumed.

The beginning of the current session of the General Assembly follows a year which was very eventful on the international scene but, more important, within the Organization itself. Indeed, during the past year the United Nations has witnessed, and in some cases has triggered, major developments.

When I addressed the Assembly during the general debate last year, I referred to the selection of a new man to take the helm of the Organization. I said that we were in a new era and that the new Secretary-General would have to tackle a different agenda and face new challenges as we approached the twenty-first century. I also said that it would be appropriate to have a Secretary-General from the South and, indeed, from Africa. In that respect r» have been served well.

It is therefore with pride that I record as one of the important developments in our system the brilliant choice of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Secretary General, which has kindled in many a Member Nation fresh hope that its just aspirations will be addressed and fulfilled.

Mr. Boutros-Ghali's election to lead this world body has been welcomed with elation by the international community and with great expectation by those of us who are from Africa. We take pride in the fact this wise man of proven distinguished leadership and excellence is an Egyptian son of Africa.

Mauritius would like to associate itself with all those who have commended the Secretary-General on the laudable actions he has undertaken so far in his bid to initiate the much-needed reform of the Organization. It is conceded that reform of an organization like the United Nations is not an easy task, but it is more than overdue, especially at a time when the cold war has definitely been laid to rest. The drop of the curtain on the cold-war era has brought the reform and restructuring of the United Nations within the realm of possibility. The task is mammoth for sure, but it is one that is imperative, given the new priorities on the international agenda.

The Secretary-General deserves all the encouragement possible in his endeavours along this difficult path. His task becomes even more exacting when it is placed in the perspective of the forthcoming fiftieth anniversary of the Organization in 1995, which, incidentally, is also the year when the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will come up for renewal. The years leading up to 1995 are, to our mind, absolutely crucial for the United Nations. Now, more than ever before, it is of paramount importance that the United Nations address, with renewed vigour but within the parameters of the Charter, the various and complex issues that preoccupy the international community.

It is with those preoccupations in mind that we in Mauritius have welcomed the Secretary-General's "Agenda for Peace" submitted under the mandate issued at the end of the historic and first-of-its-kind summit meeting of the Security Council held on 31 January last. We share the Secretary-General's optimism when he states:

"A conviction has grown, among nations large and small, that an opportunity has been regained to achieve the great objectives of the Charter - a United Nations capable of maintaining international peace and security, of securing justice and human rights and of promoting, in the words of the Charter, 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.

Yes, we agree that this opportunity must not be allowed to pass, must not be squandered. It is for us Member States to ensure that the Charter is strengthened to create the appropriate conditions for the Organization to assume the role to which we want it to aspire. Our faith in the United Nations should be reinforced, and we should match our words with action to give the innovative structures proposed by the Secretary-General a chance to work, and thus move the Organization out of the paralysis that characterized it during the cold-war era. The first steps out of this paralysis have been taken, but there are still miles to go. In our endeavours to achieve the redefined objectives meant to ensure international peace and security we must be wary that no attempt is made, deliberate or otherwise, to overstretch the interpretation of the Charter to suit any hidden political or even economic agendas.

The universal membership of the United Nations should make it possible for the international community to discuss with equity, fairness and justice any issue that is likely to jeopardize or bring into question the atmosphere of international peace and security in which we aspire to live. In that perspective, I should like to commit the

support of Mauritius to the proposals of the Secretary-General with respect to preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping and confidence-building measures envisaged for the United Nations and its executing organs. But, as the Secretary-General has said in his annual report, the demands on the United Nations are not matched by an equivalent provision of resources, especially by those who can well afford such resources. The Secretary-General's report informs us that since 1988 13 new peace-keeping operations have been organized and that the Organization is at present administering 12 peace-keeping operations in various regions of the world, operations that are estimated to cost close to \$3 billion in the current 12-month period.

If we expect the United Nations to fulfill the new role that we are designing for it we must collectively ensure that we provide as well the financial support that it requires. It is only with secure financial foundations that the United Nations will be able to respond adequately and satisfactorily to our aspirations. I should therefore like to appeal to fellow Member States to honour their financial obligations within a reasonable time and thus remove the current pecuniary constraints faced by the Organization. I must also add that my country, which is among those Member States that religiously pay up their annual assessed contributions, will give favourable consideration to the Secretary-General's proposals to deal with the cash-flow problems, as outlined in his report.

I should not like to leave the issue of reform of the Organization without joining my voice with those that have called for a review of the responsibilities of the Security Council in this changed environment of ours. We must be cautious lest we fall easy prey to the dangers that a unipolar world can trigger. It is evident that a new world order is emerging. Let us commit ourselves not to take a limited view of this new world order or, indeed, give it a limited concept. We welcome the ever-increasing activities of the Security Council to the extent that, as the Secretary-General informs us in his report, during the first 7 months of this year, 46 resolutions were adopted by the Council compared to 14 in all in 1987. We should, however, beware of allowing ambiguities to crop up in those resolutions, ambiguities that may make it dangerously possible for various interpretations to be given to those resolutions, the implementation of which may perpetuate the situation of conflicts that unfortunately pervades our globe. Indeed, criticism has been leveled at the Council for its seemingly ad hoc approach to matters relating to international security. There is therefore a need to define set considerations, which, in turn, would determine what situations constitute threats to international peace and security requiring action by the Security Council.

Furthermore, it has been rightly and forcefully argued that while a more vigorous and dynamic role is being envisaged for the Security Council, this magnified mandate of the Council should be matched by enhanced transparency and democracy. We fully concur with the Secretary-General, who, in the introduction to his report, while arguing that the current international situation requires an Organization capable of dealing comprehensively with the economic, social, environmental and political dimensions of human development, underlines that: "This requires the full application of the principles of democracy within the family of nations and within our Organization." In this context, we await with keen interest the results of the deliberations of the high-level Working

Group for the Restructuring of the United Nations set up by the recent summit meeting of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Earlier on I said that while 1995 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization, it will also be the year when the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons will come up for review and renewal. Last year in my address to the Assembly, I dwelt at length on the issue of disarmament, principally because it constitutes - especially to us smaller States of the world - the only path to lasting security. I expressed the hope then that in the wake of the dramatic announcements made by President Gorbachev, the leader of the then Soviet Union, President Bush and President Mitterrand the disarmament race would be confirmed. It is with deep satisfaction that my country notes the tremendous progress achieved over the past year in that race. We welcome the vote by the United States Senate two months ago for a nine-month moratorium on United States nuclear testing and an end to all such tests by September 1996, which came in the wake of the French and Russian moratoriums. Those developments lead us to assert that the time has now come for all of us seriously to consider a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, the more so in that the international community hailed the agreement by Presidents Bush and Yeltsin in Washington D.C. in June of this year to cut the number of long-range nuclear-missile warheads on the United States and Russian sides by about two thirds.

Another encouraging event in the field of disarmament has been the promise kept by China and France, which have deposited their instruments of accession to the non-proliferation Treaty. Speaking of that Treaty brings me to reiterate the dire need for an informal dialogue to be undertaken between now and 1995 between States Parties to the Treaty and non-party States, with a view to addressing in the best possible way those provisions of the Treaty that have so far prevented it from acquiring a universal dimension.

We also look forward to the establishment in 1993 of the Preparatory Committee for the 1995 nuclear non-proliferation Treaty renewal Conference and are confident that it will have fruitful and conclusive deliberations.

We applaud the progress that has been achieved in the formulation of a chemical weapons convention and congratulate the negotiators in Geneva who have put in arduous hours to ensure that the target date of 1992 for the completion of such a convention be met. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that Mauritius will cosponsor with others the resolution on that convention and will be among its original signatories when it comes up for ratification.

We believe that, with the end of the cold war and in this new era complete nuclear disarmament and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction are no longer a dream but are now very much in the realm of reality. On the way towards that ideal objective, Mauritius will support all plausible initiatives, including the elaboration of a convention providing for a "cut off" in the production of fissile nuclear material for weapons purposes, as well as an international convention on negative nuclear security assurances.

While we welcome the positive elements in the field of disarmament, some of which I have just mentioned, we deplore the continued movement of highly dangerous nuclear material on land and on the high seas. We have also taken cognizance with grave concern of the movement of plutonium and other toxic matter across the world. We exhort the countries involved in such trade to refrain from such actions and pay heed to the genuine concerns that have been expressed and continue to be voiced by the international community.

Mauritius deplores the fact that some private companies based in Europe shamefully exploiting the situations of disarray and complete chaos prevailing in Somalia to dump toxic waste on its territory, thereby adding to the calamities that are already claiming a heavy toll of human lives. The international community should, with a single voice, condemn such abominable actions. It is indeed regrettable that while we, within the context of the new role of the United Nations and other regional organizations, are trying to resolve the conflicts that beset the world, others, with no qualms whatsoever, are exploiting those conflicts for their own material benefit.

As regards the situation of conflicts throughout the world, a sad sight unfolds before our eyes. In certain areas, especially after the historic collapse of one ideological bloc, new dangers loom heavily over entire populations enmeshed in ethnic and nationalist bickering. Their release from long years of repression seems to have given way to an unfortunate lust for self-destruction.

We are particularly concerned at the utter lack of consideration for the value of human life and property that has become an everyday occurrence in certain parts of Eastern Europe. It is very difficult for us to accept that ethnic, religious, and nationalist feelings could be so strong as to render entire populations expendable, or that political leaders should encourage such murderous and genocidal sprees when it ought to have been possible for them to thrash out their differences peacefully through civilized negotiations. The sadness of the matter is that, while the various political groups - often motivated by a misguided and exaggerated sense of territorial expansion, turn whole areas into wargrounds of desolation and lay to ruin entire cities and towns, it is the innocent civilian population that has to hold the thorny end of the stick.

I do not need to retell the countless stories of atrocities being perpetrated daily in many parts of our world to convince anybody of the kind of manmade calamity that afflicts us. Every God-given day is turned into a nightmare by the needless killings perpetrated in the name of supremacy.

On the one hand, we do everything in our power to rid ourselves collectively of oppressive regimes and superficial ideologies; but on the other, once that goal is achieved we turn the guns on one another. Entire nations have crumbled over the past few months, principally in Europe and Africa. Entire populations have been decimated. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia are indeed sad and disgraceful examples of the kind of cruelty and brutality of which man is capable. On both counts, the international community has been shamefully slow in addressing the issues with a view to bringing an end to the

senseless killings that have characterized the daily evolution of the situation in those countries, whose victims have been the innocent and helpless populations.

What a sad reflection this is on humanity. For months we have remained impassive to the images of desolation and despair, of emaciated fellow beings too sick and too weak to move, of mutilated people degenerating into apparitions of skin and bones - images brought to us in the comfort of our living rooms on the small screen. The Somali human rights disaster - for Indeed that is what it is - has been left to simmer for months unheeded. This brings me to address another area of priority on the international agenda - the issue of human rights.

It has been known since time immemorial that man as an individual has a capacity to go to extremes. As capable as he is of displaying a depthless sense of compassion and love, he is just as able to manifest a diametrically opposed and excruciating sense of cruelty and oppression towards his fellow being. But when such harassment and privation of man's basic rights become institutionalized, it is a matter of distress that should be the concern of the international community.

One cannot talk of economic development and progress on the one hand without on the other hand ensuring that man - who remains at the centre of development and therefore of progress - is not prevented from enjoying his dignity, nor divested of his basic freedoms and rights. The promotion and upholding of human rights should remain high on the international community's list of priorities. In fact, as the Secretary-General reminds us in his report, the Charter of the United Nations makes the promotion of human rights one of our priority objectives. Constant dialogue with a view to defusing any situation in which human rights have been breached should be encouraged and welcomed at all levels.

Human rights are indivisible. Political, social, civil and economic rights are fundamental to humanity in its quest for progress and its endeavours towards the economic and social improvement of its environment. That is why we in Mauritius staunchly support those who believe that concern for human rights and the promotion and defence thereof cannot be considered as interference in the internal affairs of a State where that State displays an arrogant disregard for the basic rights and freedoms of its people. We believe that violations and gross abuse of human rights should be decried forcefully.

In the same manner that the international community has with one voice condemned apartheid as a human rights abuse, it should be free and honest enough to point the finger at those who continue to thwart the efforts of man to assert his dignity. If we can without restraint declare ourselves against such scourges as apartheid, racism and xenophobia, we should equally be at full liberty to denounce those who - for archaic or obscure reasons but often out of self-interest - deny their fellow beings the freedom to exercise their basic rights.

We therefore condemn without reserve those who, for political expediency and/or survival, find it necessary in the normal course of events to deprive their people of civil

and political rights to the extent of imprisoning and even exterminating those who militate for such rights. We also view with grave concern those cases in which human rights monitors, local or international, have been arrested, jailed, or even killed while trying to come to the assistance of populations that are victims of human rights deprivation.

However, we should like to appeal to the donor community to ensure that, while withholding or cutting off aid and assistance to any country or region as a punitive measure against regimes guilty of gross violations and abuse of human rights, nothing be done to exacerbate the plight of innocent people whose lives are already miserable as a result of their being deprived of their basic rights. After all, human feelings and therefore humanitarian compassion should transcend political considerations.

A people afflicted by severe human rights abuse should not be made to endure further suffering by being deprived of much-needed assistance. With a view to addressing serious human-rights-abuse situations in certain territories in a positive and constructive manner, we are fully supportive of the idea that the General Assembly or the Security Council should be able to entrust the Secretary-General with mounting fact-finding missions to those territories, either at the request of the Government thereof or at the behest of the appropriate organ of the United Nations itself - subject, of course, to prior arrangements having been made with the States concerned.

We must here commend the work done by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and Human Rights Committee, the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as the various non-governmental organizations which have been playing a crucial role in the protection and enhancement of human rights. We must also place on record our appreciation for those States that have legislated appropriately to give human rights the protection of the law and make their enjoyment a matter of course.

In the context of the international concern for human rights, we hope that the opportunity provided by the second World Conference on Human Rights, to be held in Vienna in June 1993, will be seized by all concerned to pledge themselves to the universal upholding and promotion of human rights. Respect for human rights must become a cardinal characteristic of all Governments. A passionate debate is currently on regarding the relationship between democracy, development and human rights, as indeed on the issue of human rights and sovereignty. We believe that the 1993 Conference will be the perfect platform to debate these issues sufficiently for universal norms thereon to emerge. I should like to seize this opportunity to wish the Preparatory Committee in Geneva success in the work it has started.

The upsurge of racism and xenophobia in certain countries of the West is also a matter of great concern to us, and we consider the discrimination in the treatment of migrant workers and foreign students in those countries a human-rights violation. It is a matter of deep regret that some countries that have come to the fore as champions of human rights

should themselves be found wanting on that level. Let them put their human-rights house in order first before decrying and acting on violations beyond their frontiers.

Similarly, some countries that are quick to denounce human-rights abuse do not always abide by the consistency that is required in such matters. We firmly believe that the same approach should be applied in all cases of alleged human-rights abuse, whenever they may occur. No political or economic interest should interfere with that approach. Picking and choosing between countries will only make a farce of the human-rights issue.

I now wish to touch briefly on a few issues that are of specific importance to us in Mauritius. The unfortunate turn of events in South Africa, in particular the Boipatong massacre and the Bisho killings, has dampened the ardour with which we were anticipating the accession of the Republic of South Africa to the fold of free and democratic countries of the world. We call on all the parties concerned in the South African arena, and especially those currently in power, to recast their bearings in as positive way as possible to ensure that the objective we dream of for that country is achieved in the not-too-distant future, so that every citizen of the nation that will emerge can start working towards its reconstruction based on Freedom, peace, equality and justice. We are hopeful that the wisdom of the leaders involved and the encouragement of the international community will make it possible for the stalled negotiations to be resumed, for the benefit of all South African citizens.

In neighbouring Mozambique, a breakthrough had appeared at hand as all parties concerned declared their readiness to work for the progress of that country in the wake of the recent negotiations aimed at ending years of civil strife. We hope that last-minute snags will be overcome in a spirit of compromise so that peace can at last prevail in the better interests of the population.

Similarly, we are encouraged by the ongoing Middle East peace talks. We must, however, constantly remind ourselves that the crux of the matter remains an equitable and just solution to the Palestinian issue.

The scourge of famine and drought that continues to take its toll of lives on the African continent, especially in its southern part and in the Horn of Africa, is a matter of deep concern. We would like to see the international community act more urgently to stop the dreadful loss of life that has become a daily occurrence in many countries of that region. Mauritius is ready to contribute within the possibility of its means to any action aimed at alleviating the plight of those unfortunate and often forgotten souls.

Another issue that is of great importance to us in Mauritius is the need to respect the territorial integrity of nations. I should here like to place once more on record the appreciation of my country to all those countries that have consistently expressed their support of our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia.

We should like to inform the Assembly that we have resumed exchanges with the United Kingdom on this issue. In my address to the Assembly last year, I expressed the hope that

the leaders of Fiji would redress the situation that prevails there by amending its present Constitution to the satisfaction of all the citizens of that sister island nation. Mauritius draws comfort from recent assertions by the Prime Minister of that country that he is morally committed to reviewing the Constitution of the land. We are confident that the Fijian Government will now act on the basis of those assertions and make it once more possible for the Fijian citizens, irrespective of the community to which they belong, to work hand in hand for the progress of their nation.

Similarly, we commend the authorities of that other neighbourly sister island of Sri Lanka for the efforts being deployed to put an end to the unfortunate strife that has ravaged their country and taken such a heavy toll of human lives. We are confident that with a reasonable degree of compromise on all sides, peace and harmony will prevail anew there.

Finally, allow me to reiterate the continued faith of my country in the collective wisdom of our Organization and pledge anew our unstinting support for its laudable efforts, under the skilled and enlightened leadership of Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to address the political, social and economic obstacles that remain strewn on the path to harmonious coexistence and global progress.