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President: Mr. Opertti (Uruguay)

Address by The Honourable Mr. Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, His Excellency The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Ramgoolam (Mauritius): Our presence here today is, for my delegation and my country, cause for some celebration. This is the thirtieth anniversary of our first participation in the General Assembly. Upon the attainment of our independence in 1968, the father of the nation, the then Prime Minister Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, addressed the United Nations.

I join the speakers before me in congratulating Mr. Opertti on his assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

I would also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Udovenko, for the manner in which he conducted the work of the previous session.

I wish to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his wise leadership and vision, which have been a source of renewed confidence in the future of this Organization. We welcome his efforts to lead a reformed and more effective United Nations into the

twenty-first century to better carry out our mission of peace, development and human rights. We wish to assure him of our total support in the continuation of the reform process.

We are alive to the intense debate on the reform of the Security Council. We reiterate our position that the Security Council should be enlarged and made more democratic and representative. In this respect, we reaffirm our commitment to the stand taken by the Non-Aligned Movement at the recent Summit in Durban.

In recent years the world has been profoundly transformed by the powerful forces of globalization and liberalization.

All countries are now inextricably linked as distances between them become increasingly immaterial through great leaps in information technology and communications.

The tremors triggered by the crises of the South-East Asian economies and, more recently, the turmoil in the world financial markets have shown in a dramatic way the dangers of the contagion effect. Even those countries which are trying to be efficient and competitive face the possibility of external shocks because of the volatility of capital markets.

I believe that the world community should devise creative and effective mechanisms to prevent emerging economies which have put in hard work from losing the fruits of liberalization.

We must not go back to the inward-looking strategies of the 1960s. We must continue to open our economies, but with greater caution.

This is a great challenge for a large majority of nations, particularly the least developed ones. We know only too well that a number of developing countries are among the most vulnerable and are not yet ready to integrate into the global economy.

When I last addressed this Assembly, I dwelled at some length on the generally grim situation in Africa, which remains one of the most intractable challenges to the world community. It is a continent rich in natural resources and yet afflicted by widespread poverty.

Peace and development in Africa have been, for more than a decade, the subject of endless debates and resolutions at the United Nations. But we know that sustainable development in Africa is conditional upon the achievement of a strife-free continent. It is sad indeed that year after year the number of potential flashpoints seems to grow more numerous. The situation in many regions of Africa remains a cause for great concern.

The peoples of the continent can ill afford the pointless strife and violence visited upon them at a time when the priorities should be economic and social development.

We in Africa naturally have to bear the primary responsibility for assuring lasting peace for our peoples. This is precisely what the leaders of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are striving to achieve.

In his statement to this Assembly, on Monday, President Nelson Mandela, current Chairman of SADC, mentioned the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This difficult problem figured prominently on the agenda of the summit which Mauritius hosted a few days ago, after it was addressed earlier by the Victoria Falls meeting and the Pretoria special SADC summit.

I wish to renew here our appeal to all parties involved in this conflict to solve their differences peacefully through political dialogue and diplomacy. In the Indian Ocean region to our immediate southwest, Mauritius is participating fully in the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and of the countries of that region to seek a peaceful resolution to the crisis facing the Comoros on account

of separatist activities by a group on the island of Anjouan. Mauritius fully supports the unity and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of the Comoros.

Fortunately, however, all is not gloom when we survey Africa. We note with satisfaction the continuous positive economic growth that most sub-Saharan countries have enjoyed lately.

I had the privilege to participate in a round table together with the Deputy President of South Africa earlier this year, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, on the new competitive Africa. The consensus was that Africa stands at the threshold of a new era – an era of opportunity and dynamism. We are at the dawn of an African renaissance.

Governments in Africa are becoming increasingly democratic and responsive, putting more emphasis on economic development, greater openness, market-oriented policies and greater economic reform.

Regional cooperation is another positive feature of the new Africa, working through groupings such as SADC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to facilitate cross-border trade leading to the ultimate establishment of an African Economic Community.

But for Africa to realize its full potential, several serious constraints will have to be overcome.

The international economic environment should be made less hostile to Africa. Africa's shares of world trade and foreign direct investment still remain at a paltry level.

The debt burden has become in itself a crippling factor and needs urgently to be alleviated.

We also cannot sufficiently emphasize the importance of official development assistance in this regard. We therefore deeply deplore the decline in the levels of official development assistance among the major donor countries. Today, they stand at a historical low. We are now, more than ever, far off the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product recommended by this Assembly. This trend must be

reversed.

Mauritius took the initiative recently of highlighting the specificities of small island economies in the context of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the negotiations of a successor agreement to the Lomé IV Convention. As a result, recent ministerial declarations adopted by both the WTO and the OAU now contain explicit references to small economies and their high vulnerability. This reality is now gaining recognition within the Bretton Woods institution.

For the reasons I have just mentioned, small economies require time and space to adjust to the new world trade order. We therefore reiterate the need for the maintenance of non-reciprocal trade regimes until such a time as we are adequately prepared.

The Lomé Convention is a model of North-South cooperation. The proposed United States African Growth and Opportunity Act could become another. Together with the other members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), we would like to reaffirm our total support for its passage.

Mauritius has always accorded the highest priority to regionalization to break out of its insularity and enlarge its economic base. Mauritius was a major player in launching, 15 years ago, the Indian Ocean Commission and, more recently, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation.

The Assembly will appreciate that an island State like Mauritius would be interested in the protection of the marine environment. We recommend for the particular attention of the General Assembly the report of the Independent World Commission on the Oceans, according to which the very survival of the human race over the long term is jeopardized by the abuses to which the world's oceans are subjected.

We have to address as a matter of priority the three most immediate dangers identified by the Commission: the overexploitation of marine biological resources, the dumping of toxic waste and the harmful effects of global warming. While much has been achieved since the Rio Earth Summit, we deplore the fact that the initial momentum and urgency appear to have been lost in sterile and fractious debate. I urge

that we address these questions, on which our very survival depends, with renewed earnestness and a greater sense of shared responsibility.

(spoke in French)

In December we will celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption and proclamation by this Assembly of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For us, that will also provide an opportunity to recall another milestone in the history of human rights: the adoption by the French Constituent Assembly of the declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen more than two centuries ago.

At this historic moment, we wish to recall the preamble of the Charter of our Organization, which proclaims our

“faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”.

We also reaffirm our profound belief in the equality of all rights – social, economic and cultural, as well as civil and political. Today, Governments can no longer flout the rights of their citizens without being subjected to the censure of the international community. Yet millions of inhabitants of many parts of the world remain deprived of their fundamental rights by oppressors and tyrants who govern by force. We have observed with horror the atrocious crimes against the dignity and worth of the human being committed during recent conflicts. My Government therefore welcomes the recent adoption in Rome of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

(spoke in English)

My Government believes that respect for human rights is but one facet of the indispensable foundation of the harmonious development of a country. Democracy and transparent and accountable government, as well as effective participation by civil society, are the other essential ingredients for successful development. Considering the complex sociocultural and ethnic mix of our population, we have taken great care to ensure that all our citizens, regardless of their origins or gender, have equal

access to education, adequate health care, proper housing and employment opportunities. We will soon introduce in our own National Assembly a protection of human rights bill, which will provide for the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission.

At the continental African level, participants at the Third Conference of African Women Parliamentarians, which Mauritius was privileged to host, adopted the Port Louis Declaration, calling for increased political commitment at all levels for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. We in Mauritius are taking legislative measures to translate our commitment into practical reality.

We have now become even more aware of the need to seek global solutions to our common problems. Climate change, illicit drug-trafficking and terrorism are problems which require a coordinated international approach. No nation can live under a dome, with its climate isolated from the rest of the world. No country can on its own fight international drug traffickers or terrorism. We therefore condemn unequivocally all forms of terrorism and call for enhanced international cooperation to combat and prevent its occurrence.

While social, economic and trade matters are increasingly – and with good reason – occupying centre stage in international forums, crucial problems of security and disarmament continue to retain their capacity to derail our efforts for development.

Earlier this year we were reminded of the dangers for humanity of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the attendant risks of a new arms race. No country can feel genuinely secure as long as the threat of nuclear weapons exists from any quarter. In this respect, we welcome the stand taken by both India and Pakistan in exercising self-restraint. We reiterate our position that any international instrument for the elimination of nuclear arsenals should be non-discriminatory in nature. Security for all will be achieved only when that threat is completely eliminated. Global nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction must remain our ultimate goal.

Finally, as on past occasions, we would like to bring up once more before this Assembly our lasting claim on the sovereignty of two territories which were taken from our patrimony: the island of Tromelin and the Chagos archipelago. We reiterate our call to the former colonial Powers to enter into constructive bilateral dialogue with my Government for the early restoration of those territories to the sovereignty of Mauritius.

Regarding the Chagos archipelago, this Assembly should also be reminded that some 1,500 inhabitants – the so-called “Illois” – were coerced to leave their homeland to clear the way for a military base. Most of the families, who had lived for generations on these islands, were moved to the main island of Mauritius, victims of the then prevailing cold war. Today, after more than 30 years, they still experience tremendous difficulties adapting to their present conditions. Many yearn to be resettled on these islands. As we are about to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of this century's seminal document on human rights, we consider that we owe it to these Illois to fully re-establish their rights, including the right of return.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius for the statements he has just made.

The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted from the rostrum.