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President: Mr. Gurirab (Namibia)

Mr. Purryag (Mauritius): It is a distinct pleasure to address the Assembly with a distinguished son of Africa and a veteran freedom fighter in the presidency. His election to preside over this last session of the closing millennium is a fitting tribute to his outstanding qualities. I congratulate him warmly and assure him of the total support and cooperation of my delegation.

We also thank His Excellency Mr. Opertti for the excellent manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-third session. The Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose strong commitment to the cause of the United Nations needs hardly be emphasized, has continued to lead the Organization with vision, vigour and great dedication.

Mauritius welcomes very warmly the admission of the Kingdom of Tonga, the Republic of Kiribati and the Republic of Nauru to the United Nations.

The curtain will soon fall on our eventful twentieth century, a century of tremendous achievements by mankind. The wide world has been reduced to a global village through progress in the field of science and technology during this century. The political map of the world has undergone tremendous transformation. It is hardly recognizable from what it used to be at this century's outset. Today, our world is made of independent nations, with peoples themselves in charge of their destinies. On the other hand, we did experience the horrors of wars in the first half of the century but decided never to let it happen again. We created the United Nations in the aftermath of the Second World War as a forum for all nations to carry forward together a common pledge for lasting world peace and promote development and progress for all humanity.

During this century man has paradoxically also created weapons of mass destruction that threaten his very existence. Disarmament, including nuclear disarmament, remains a major preoccupation for all of us as we step into the new millennium. The United Nations, representing the collective conscience of nations, has endeavoured to serve humanity and the cause of peace and development. The United Nations is the sole mechanism through which universal peace can be secured. We unanimously agree also that reforms to the Charter of the United Nations are necessary – indeed, overdue – as in its present form it does not reflect the tremendous changes the world has undergone since the Organization was founded half a century ago.

It is now almost six years since the General Assembly established the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council. Progress has been slow and has taken place on a limited set of issues only.

What is lacking for the process to move forward is political will on the part of some members. The fact is that the Security Council in its present form is neither adequately representative nor sufficiently transparent in its work for its decisions to be universally accepted.

Mauritius supports the proposals of the Non-Aligned Movement and of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the reform of the Security Council. We appeal to all Members of the United Nations to work together constructively and advance the much needed reform process expeditiously.

While the international community has largely

been successful in averting global wars, armed conflicts have continued to endanger national, regional and international peace. In particular, the African continent has continued to be afflicted with conflicts, the worst being the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the continued civil war in Angola.

However, the international community should take comfort in the fact that the leaders on the African continent have spared no efforts to find solutions and restore peace in the countries and areas in question. Through tireless and extensive efforts of African leaders, the OAU and the United Nations, and all the parties concerned in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, have signed the Lusaka Agreement in order to restore peace and stability in the country. One of the fundamental aspects of the Agreement is the deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping force, with the task of ensuring that all parties respect the terms of the Lusaka Agreement. We deplore the fact that the United Nations peacekeeping force has still not assumed its crucial responsibility in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We call upon the Security Council to give due priority to this matter so that a peacekeeping force is dispatched expeditiously, as delay to do so may imperil the implementation of the Agreement.

The rebellion in Angola continues because of arms supplies from outside to the forces of destabilization. The Security Council is fully apprised of this and confident that those guilty of breaking the embargo on arms supply to UNITA will be identified and held responsible. The people of Angola have indeed suffered too long. We therefore appeal to all nations to take necessary steps to ensure that unscrupulous elements do not channel weapons to the forces of rebellion in Angola out of their greed of monetary windfalls. The international community needs to intensify its efforts to end the rebellion in Angola.

The armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea ended with the signing recently of an agreement with the help of the OAU and several African leaders and friendly countries. We hope that the spirit in which the two countries have agreed to end their differences will continue and that lasting peace will return to the region. We are also heartened by the fact that an agreement has been signed between the parties concerned to end the internal strife in Sierra Leone. We are confident that peace and stability will now return

to Sierra Leone.

In the Comoros, forces of destabilization have continued to thwart the return to normalcy. Through tireless efforts by the OAU and countries of the region, a conference of all the Comoros parties concerned was held earlier this year in Madagascar with a view to reaching an agreement under which peace and stability would return to the Comoros and territorial integrity and sovereignty would be maintained. Unfortunately, the military coup derailed the whole process. We therefore call for the establishment of democratic rule in the Comoros so that the agreement reached at the Antananarivo conference can be fully implemented.

The Kosovo conflict has distressed us all. We have witnessed the horrors of ethnic cleansing, massive disruption of the life of a people and terrible destruction inflicted on a country. We must all remember many messages from the events in Kosovo. Humanity will not sit idly by when people are flagrantly subjected to genocide for reason of ethnic bigotry or political expediency. Quick-fix military action to resolve deep-rooted problems is not necessarily the best option. The United Nations remains the most appropriate mechanism for addressing issues that relate to maintenance of international peace and security.

Mauritius is deeply distressed by the violence in East Timor, the loss of so many innocent lives and the terrible sufferings inflicted on the Timorese people in the aftermath of the recent referendum. We welcome the action undertaken by the United Nations to send a peacekeeping force to restore peace and security on the island. The verdict of the referendum must be respected by the Indonesian Government and all parties concerned.

In the Middle East, the determination shown by the new Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Ehud Barak, to move the peace process forward, together with President Arafat, is most encouraging not only to the parties concerned in the region but also to the international community as a whole. This moment of great optimism must be seized in order to work out a comprehensive and just settlement that will bring lasting peace and stability to the region.

In 1996 our delegation, led by the Prime

Minister of Mauritius, The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, drew special attention to the situation in Fiji. We are pleased that the new constitutional process under which general elections were recently held has removed the iniquities which were written into that nation's Constitution before. We welcome this change and congratulate the people of Fiji on their courage and determination to bring the change in a democratic and peaceful manner.

(spoke in French)

Conflicts and wars, even after they have ended, invariably leave serious humanitarian situations behind them. The humanitarian crises in Africa seem of little interest to the cameras of international television networks. There are more than 12 million people who need urgent humanitarian assistance in Africa. The humanitarian agencies have received only \$352 million although their needs for Africa in 1999 are in the order of \$796 million.

Peacemaking efforts must be supported by effective humanitarian aid, especially for refugees. The host countries, already faced with their own difficulties, cannot take on this heavy burden. To give lasting peace a real chance, it is also necessary to support the return of refugees so as to make the stabilization of society possible. A special financing effort on the part of the international community is necessary to that end.

(spoke in English)

Respect for human rights is of primordial importance for the prevention of conflicts and for the maintenance of durable peace. We believe that all countries should make strict adherence to the human rights instruments of the United Nations a matter of national priority. We in Mauritius always place human rights high on our national and international agenda. Mauritius was honoured to host the First OAU ministerial conference on human rights, held earlier this year in the context of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The conference reviewed the human rights situation in Africa and adopted a declaration and plan of action which aim at strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights.

We have witnessed gross violations of human

rights, particularly under military regimes. In this regard, the decision at the recent OAU summit in Algiers to exclude from that organization those leaders who assume power in the continent through military coups is an important step that will help the cause of democracy and human rights.

Mr. Essy (Cote d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Mauritius has welcomed the International Criminal Court and was amongst the first to ratify the Statute establishing it. We look forward to an early conclusion of the work of our experts who are currently engaged in finalizing the rules to enable the International Criminal Court to commence its work.

The easy availability of light and small-calibre weapons has given rise to numerous conflicts, particularly in Africa. These small arms, besides exacerbating conflicts, give rise to social disruption, insecurity, instability, violence and crime. In view of the magnitude of the problem, the OAU summit in Algiers last July decided to convene a regional conference to address the issue fully. We urge the international community to take measures to control the flow of small arms.

Disarmament is essential for international peace. It is regrettable that the threat of nuclear holocaust will accompany humanity into the new millennium because of the international community's failure to work out a regime for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty we have taken important steps on the issue of nuclear disarmament, but these alone cannot eliminate the threat of nuclear weapons. Mauritius continues to be firmly of the belief that the best way for the international community to address the nuclear disarmament issue effectively is to establish a clear timetable for nuclear-weapon Powers to commit themselves to dismantle all nuclear weapons and for all nations to commit themselves to not develop such weapons in the future. So far we have adopted half-way measures only; it is time for a bold step to be taken that would eliminate nuclear weapons once and for all.

Chemical weapons, as weapons of mass destruction, can inflict untold miseries on their

victims. The Convention on Chemical Weapons – a very significant achievement – must be adhered to by all nations, particularly countries that have chemical weapons in their possession.

The lives of many people around the world, in Africa in particular, continue to be affected by landmines. We believe it is the responsibility of all nations to address this problem collectively. We appeal to those countries that have not yet acceded to the Ottawa Convention on anti-personnel mines to do so and also to contribute financially to the efforts to remove all landmines.

Peace, security and development are indivisible and mutually reinforcing. As we stand at the threshold of the twenty-first century we have a historic opportunity to create a long-term visionary strategy for the sustainable development of all countries of the world, in particular African States, and thus promote international peace and security. This is extremely important if we really want to avoid the marginalization in the wake of the irreversible process of globalization and unbridled liberalization. It is increasingly being realized that market forces alone cannot resolve the problems of poverty, deprivation and marginalization, particularly in Africa, which comprises the largest number of least-developed countries. The United Nations system, in our view, has an important role to play in this respect as there is a crying need for coherence in the formulation and implementation of policies in the trade, finance and social sectors.

It is true that globalization brings both challenges and opportunities, but to many developing countries the challenges are proving overwhelming. But there does not seem to be any alternative, in a world characterized by the *"pensée unique"*, to making the necessary adjustments to join a fast globalizing world economy. Higher levels of investment; technology transfer; and institutional, human resource and infrastructure capacity-building, will be required especially for African countries, if they are to make the necessary transition.

The developed world and the major financial and trading organizations must be not only cognizant of the situation but also responsive to the constraints on and needs of the developing world in general and the least-developed countries and vulnerable small island

developing States in particular.

The heavy debt burden, the declining level of official development assistance – which currently stands at 0.22 per cent of gross domestic product compared to the target of 0.7 per cent – and insignificant private investment flows into Africa do not allow many African countries to implement successfully the necessary adjustment programmes to compete effectively in the world market. Only decisive action to resolve the debt problem can provide the necessary impetus.

Although we recognize that the Cologne Summit initiative represents an improvement over the original Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative, we believe that the unsustainable debt of Africa – which contains 33 of the 41 HIPC countries – should be written off, for only then can those countries embark on the path of sustainable growth and development.

In that connection, we welcome the recently announced plan to cancel \$27 billion of debt owed by the poorest countries to allow them to use those resources to finance education and health, which are important in dealing with the problem of poverty.

We also commend the World Bank for establishing the \$400 million Infrastructure Investment Fund, whose advisory board will be headed by Mr. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa.

Capacity-building in all sectors of the economy is important if developing countries are to benefit from the opportunities arising from globalization and trade liberalization. But in view of the lack of a level playing field and the inherent obstacles facing African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, it is imperative for them to continue to benefit from trade preferences in the European Union under the successor to the fourth ACP-CEE Convention of Lomé for a sufficiently long transitional period before they implement any alternative trade arrangement.

The euphoria created following the signing of the Marrakesh agreement in 1994 after the conclusion of the Uruguay Round has been short-lived; many developing countries today recognize that they are overburdened with World Trade Organization

(WTO) commitments and obligations. There is indeed a growing recognition that implementation of these commitments is simply beyond their capacity, or rather that there is a limit to trade liberalization and deregulation.

It is, therefore, important to allow developing countries flexibility within the world trading system to implement policies in harmony with their sustainable development needs. The provisions on special and differential treatment in all areas covered by WTO agreements should be fully and effectively implemented. In this regard, it is also crucial that the multilateral trading system should facilitate the process of regional integration, because for many countries regional integration is an important step towards their integration into the global economy.

We welcome and support the recent OAU decision to accelerate implementation of the 1991 Abuja Treaty for the establishment of an African Economic Community. This process could be facilitated by effective implementation of the United States of America-Africa Blueprint adopted in March 1999 and more importantly, of the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. We urge the United States to ensure early passage of this long-standing Bill with its original provisions on textiles and clothing.

Two days ago, I had the opportunity in my address to the recent Assembly special session to highlight both the inherent constraints on small island developing countries and their development needs. The special session gave us an opportunity to review the implementation of the Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action for the sustainable development of small island developing States (SIDS): we must take the process further to embrace other issues, such as concessional loans and trade preferences for SIDS.

I reiterate my appeal to the international community to give special attention to the plight of SIDS, in terms both of providing financial resources, and of encouraging foreign direct investment, and also in the context of the negotiations for the third WTO Ministerial Conference, in Seattle. We must ensure that the Conference, which is to be held later this year, addresses the marginalization of small economies and the problems of developing countries that are net importers of food by adopting specific and practical measures. We must also see to it that the Seattle Round

of multilateral trade negotiations is a "development round" that puts the issue of development firmly on the international agenda. The WTO negotiations in Seattle should be broad-based and should provide a balanced outcome from which all countries will benefit.

In this connection, it should be emphasized that agricultural trade is of vital importance to a number of developing countries, in particular to small economies including small and vulnerable island developing States. In the agricultural trade negotiations we should give just as much importance to non-trade issues such as food security, environmental protection and the viability of rural populations.

These are vital issues for Mauritius, and for many other SIDS and small economies and small economies. And that is why we are emphasizing the multifunctionality of agriculture. Planting sugar cane, which is the only crop suitable to our difficult terrains, and which is resistant to adverse climatic conditions like cyclones and droughts, also contributes to environmental protection by providing a renewable source of energy. Sugar exports earnings assure food security. Many small island developing countries are in the same situation as Mauritius. We would therefore urge that this important dimension be fully taken into account in the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

Economic growth by itself does not bring about sustainable socio-economic development. Social development should continue to be given due consideration by our Organization. We therefore welcome the follow-up conferences on social development and on women, which will be organized next year.

For the majority of small States, the United Nations continues to be the main bulwark against infringements on their sovereignty and territorial integrity. We have consistently drawn the attention of the Assembly to the issue of the Chagos Archipelago, which was detached from Mauritius by the former colonial Power prior to our independence in 1968, and also to the plight of over 2000 people who were forced to leave the land of their birth, where they had lived for generations, for resettlement in Mauritius. This was done in total

disregard of the United Nations declaration embodied in resolution 1514 (XV), of 14 December 1960, and resolution 2066 (XX), of 16 December 1965, which prohibit the dismemberment of colonial Territories prior to independence.

Mauritius has repeatedly asked for the return of the Chagos Archipelago, including Diego Garcia, on which a United States military base has been built, and thereby the restoration of its territorial integrity. The over 2,000 displaced Ilois people have been facing tremendous difficulties in adapting in mainland Mauritius, in spite of all the efforts that Mauritius has made to assist them in this process.

So far the issue has been discussed within the framework of our friendly relations with the United Kingdom, with a view to arriving at an acceptable solution. Unfortunately, there has not been significant progress. The United Kingdom has been maintaining that the Chagos Archipelago will be returned to Mauritius only when it is no longer required for defence purposes by the West. While we continue the dialogue for an early resolution of the issue on a bilateral basis, we urge the United Kingdom in the meantime to allow the displaced inhabitants to return to the Chagos Archipelago. At the dawn of the new millennium, when we so strongly uphold universal recognition of and respect for fundamental human rights, the inhabitants of Chagos should not continue to be denied the right to return to the Chagos Archipelago.

The restoration of the territorial integrity of the State of Mauritius will not be complete without the return of Tromelin. We therefore call upon France to resume constructive discussions with us on the question of Tromelin.

This is the last session of the General Assembly for this century. When we meet next year it will be a new millennium. The question that comes to our minds is whether we want to come back next year and discuss the same issues and the same problems. Should we not, rather, make a pledge here and now that by the time we meet next year we will have taken the necessary measures that will put an end to regional and ethnic problems and to the abuse of human rights, and will instead create the necessary environment to enable the human race to enjoy basic freedom and basic rights in peace and prosperity? Mauritius is ready to make such a pledge.