

Agenda item 9 General Debate
General Assembly Fifty-Fifth Session,
Friday 22 September 2000

The Acting President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable Anil Kumarsingh Gayan, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation of Mauritius.

Mr. Gayan (Mauritius): It gives me great pleasure to address the Assembly under the leadership of Mr. Harri Holkeri. I offer him our heartiest congratulations on his election to preside over this first session of the new millennium and assure him of the total support and cooperation of my delegation.

We would like also to thank Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, for the excellent manner in which he presided over the work of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. This year again, we wish to compliment the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his remarkable leadership in the conduct of the work of the United Nations. We pay special tribute also to the President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly and to the Secretary-General for their imaginative and tireless efforts in achieving the resounding success of the Millennium Summit, held here just a few weeks ago. We also wish to welcome Tuvalu as the newest Member of the United Nations family.

During that historic Summit — the largest gathering of heads of State or Government the world has ever seen — the relevance and importance of the United Nations in a global society was emphasized. World leaders pledged most prominently their commitment to ensuring that the United Nations adapts to the new era and strengthens its capacity to deal with the challenges of maintaining peace and security, eliminating poverty and promoting development and progress for the benefit of all humanity.

Since its inception, the United Nations has been a beacon of hope to mankind for a more secure and prosperous world. The recently adopted Millennium Declaration provides fresh impetus to the United Nations to rededicate itself to the fulfilment of the lofty ideals of our Organization, namely to uphold world

peace and security and promote cooperation and development in all areas of human endeavour.

The maintenance of world peace and security remains the biggest challenge for our Organization. The continued existence of nuclear arsenals and the threat of a nuclear disaster represent a major impediment to the maintenance of peace and security. Following the end of the cold war, the feeling of insecurity created by nuclear militarization has diminished, but the international community's aspiration to global disarmament and the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction within a defined time-frame has eluded us.

We welcome all the efforts the international community is making towards achieving universal acceptance of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Yet more than 30,000 nuclear weapons are deployed around the world, including weapons that are still maintained in a high state of readiness. The risk that nuclear weapons may explode, whether by design or by accident, is ever growing. My delegation is convinced that the early convening of an international conference on nuclear disarmament to address issues of global denuclearization, including the total elimination of all existing nuclear weapons within a specific time-frame, is of critical importance. Such a conference would allow all States, most importantly those possessing nuclear capabilities and which do not fall under the purview of the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), to voice their concerns and contribute substantially towards achieving a world free of nuclear weapons. This is a debt we owe to generations yet unborn.

The role of the Security Council in the crucial area of international peace and security is evident. However, this central organ of our Organization will be rendered even more effective if it is further strengthened to make it respond positively to the emerging new realities which the new millennium is bound to confront.

Members of the United Nations attach great importance to the need for reform of this supreme body. It is to be noted that under the existing provisions of the Charter, which date back from a time when two thirds of the Members of the United Nations were still under colonial rule, a handful of States on the Security Council have the power to make decisions that bind the whole membership. Such a mode of operation is completely out of tune with today's realities, and, for this institution to retain its credibility, it should undergo a comprehensive reform, taking into consideration proper and equitable geographical representation.

In this regard, Mauritius supports the position of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the expansion and representativity of the Security Council, and we look forward to an early conclusion of the work of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council.

We support an increase in the membership of the Security Council, and we are in favour of making the Council an effective representative body that can act in the interests of humankind at large at all times.

The meeting of the Security Council at the level of heads of State during the Millennium Summit was an unparalleled opportunity for the 15 Members to discuss, at the highest level, how to make peacekeeping operations more responsive. We are all aware that deployment of United Nations troops in conflict situations is seen as the last chance for the restoration of peace and, in this venture, we simply cannot afford to fail. Therefore, the discussions that took place at the summit level of the Security Council need to be seriously pursued so that the future orientation of peacekeeping operations may be effected on a sounder basis.

In this respect, we welcome the proposals for improving the United Nations peacekeeping performance, as contained in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations — the Brahimi Report — and we look forward to their speedy implementation.

It is indeed a sad reflection that at the dawn of a new century, several African nations, such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Somalia and the Comoros remain trapped in

civil conflicts with disastrous consequences for millions of people on the continent and in the subregion. At the regional level, the OAU, as well as leaders of the subregions concerned, have spared no efforts to address each of these conflicts, but we need to realize that no great success has been achieved so far. The intransigence of the main protagonists involved continues to remain the stumbling block towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa.

The involvement of the United Nations in these conflicts has unfortunately also met with little success. We need to be imaginative, and we need to explore, with the civil society in each country in conflict, ways and means to convincingly establish that the fruits of peace are achievable. We need to look at the permanence of our interests, and these are based in peace and stability.

We also note with great concern that, despite all the efforts and steps taken by the OAU for a speedy return to constitutional order in the Comoros, the Anjouanese separatists and the military leadership in Moroni have signed the Fomboni Declaration in defiance of the OAU and the international community. We urge the international community to refrain from lending any support to the Fomboni Joint Declaration which, we believe, will undermine the unity and territorial integrity of the Comoros. Indeed, it is unacceptable that the future of the archipelago of the Comoros be compromised by two individuals who are non-elected and do not represent the aspirations of the population. We reiterate our support to the OAU in its ongoing efforts aimed at resolving the crisis, in accordance with the provisions of the Antananarivo accord, which remains the most viable framework for a lasting, consensual and durable solution to the crisis. We call on the military regime and the separatists in Anjouan to cooperate with the OAU so as to achieve an early resolution of the crisis.

We welcome the signing of the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea this year. This is a positive step, and we urge the OAU, the United Nations and other States to continue support for these two countries to take the next steps to conclude a settlement for lasting peace. Our region deserves no less.

While, inevitably, the international community, through the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations, must continue to do all it

can to end the existing conflicts and prevent new ones, there is an important aspect of civil conflict that cannot be overlooked any longer. It has been established beyond doubt that civil conflicts such as those in Angola and Sierra Leone have resulted from personal ambition or greed for private enrichment on the part of powerful individuals, rather than in pursuit of a legitimate cause and struggle for the common good. In pursuit of their sinister designs, these individuals wage long wars on and against their own people and, acting with impunity, inflict untold suffering on the masses, including women, the elderly and children, cause refugee problems within and outside their national frontiers, and retard development and progress of their countries. We believe that such dangerous persons should not only be condemned and stopped as early as possible from pursuing their unpatriotic designs, but also should be made to answer to their people and to the international community for the crimes they commit.

The proposed International Criminal Court should serve as the tribunal of the international community to try and punish such individuals and, the sooner it starts functioning, the better it will be for humanity at large. The International Criminal Court will not only be a deterrent for people who engage in heinous crimes but will also be an important instrument for the maintenance of international peace and security. Unless such a step is taken, the world will continue to face similar tragedies, and the perpetrators of such tragedies will go unpunished.

At long last, we have seen a glimmer of hope for the suffering people of Somalia. We congratulate the leaders of the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) for their initiative in putting together a peace and reconciliation process that will allow for the establishment of a representative government to take charge of the affairs of the country. We appeal to all factions in Somalia to come together and to take part in this new initiative, with a view to stopping the misery that the Somali people have endured for too long.

Important steps have been made this year towards peace in the Middle East. We congratulate President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak for the courage they demonstrated recently during the difficult negotiations in Camp David under the guidance of President Clinton. We believe that, having reached such a crucial stage of the negotiations, President Arafat and Prime

Minister Barak must meet the daunting challenge of taking further steps forward to reach a final agreement. We are confident that both leaders have the capacity to bridge the gaps and reach a mutually acceptable and satisfactory agreement. We appreciate that the issues outstanding in the path of such an agreement are delicate, but we are confident that the leaders of the region will respond to the ardent wish of peoples around the world for a peaceful Middle East.

It may sound like an anachronism, but it has happened just a few months ago in the Pacific region — namely in Fiji and in the Solomon Islands — that small bands of thugs have overturned democratically elected Governments. In the case of Fiji, Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry together with his whole Cabinet of Ministers, was held hostage for as long as 56 days, in a struggle for political power. The Prime Minister was set free only after he finally conceded that his Government would resign.

The international community watched helplessly as the tragic situation unfolded in Fiji. The fact that this is not the first time that a democratically elected Government is overthrown by unorthodox and violent means makes the situation all the more serious and calls for the immediate attention of the international community. Mauritius condemns unreservedly all attempts by any group, anywhere, to thwart the will of the people by force. I am reminded here of the statement of the United Nations Secretary-General at the opening of the OAU Summit in Lomé this year when, applauding the OAU decision to exclude Governments that have come to power by unconstitutional means from participating in OAU meetings, he expressed the wish that some day the United Nations also would take a similar decision. The time has come for us to seriously consider such avenues in order to send a clear signal to people who are bent upon perpetrating constitutional violations in total disregard of the will of the people.

Mauritius remains fully committed to the respect and promotion of human rights, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. These principles are enshrined in our Constitution. With regard to human rights, our commitment goes far beyond our national borders, as reflected in our membership in various United Nations committees, where we play an active role. Multi-party, free and fair elections constitute core traditions jealously cherished by the people of Mauritius. In the exercise of our valued democratic

rights, on 11 September last, just 10 days ago. the people of Mauritius, for the seventh time since our independence in 1968, elected a new Government. This Government remains committed to supporting strongly, at the national, regional and international levels, the principles I have mentioned earlier.

Since we met in September last, we have witnessed several acts of terrorism in various parts of the world endangering the lives of numerous innocent people. The hijacking of an Indian Airlines jet, the kidnapping of unsuspecting tourists from a Malaysian holiday resort and bomb attacks in some capitals are grim reminders of the dangers we face at the hands of unscrupulous and heartless fanatics. We condemn all acts of terrorism and call on the international community to take concerted action to deal with this problem. For our part, Mauritius stands prepared to play a significant role in the United Nations and its various organs to combat all such acts which pose a threat to international peace and security.

I had some remarks on people-centred development, debt and globalization. I refer delegates to the text that will be circulated. I will now talk about regional cooperation.

Mauritius attaches great priority to global partnership in addressing the key issues of poverty alleviation, achieving sustainable growth and development, and peace and security. We believe that regional cooperation continues to be the inevitable route towards strengthening international partnership and cooperation. Regional cooperation not only is desirable, but constitutes a necessary dimension in the process of the regional integration of many economies into the global economy.

Small island developing States, which constitute one fifth of the membership of the United Nations, are in a particularly difficult situation due to their vulnerability to a wide range of ecological, climatic and economic factors. The specificities of these States have been articulated in the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Constraints to their sustainable development include a narrow resource base that does not allow them to benefit from economies of scale, and the fact that they have small domestic markets. They also rely heavily on external markets, which are usually geographically distant, and costs for transportation, energy and infrastructure are

high. In addition, small island States have little resilience to natural disasters. A vulnerability index of socio-economic and other parameters has been prescribed for these States in the Barbados Programme of Action. We urge the United Nations and other international organizations to coordinate their efforts in developing and refining such an index, which should be used, together with other factors, by the World Trade Organization and the Bretton Woods institutions to accord special and preferential treatment to this category of State.

I wish to say a few words now about the Chagos archipelago and the island of Tromelin. Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity is, under the United Nations system, an acquired and inalienable right of every State, however big or small. We are conscious that the United Nations favours the completion of the process of decolonization.

For a number of years now, we have continuously brought before the General Assembly the question of the Chagos archipelago, which has always formed part of the State of Mauritius. This Assembly will recall that the Chagos archipelago, including the island of Diego Garcia, was detached by the colonial Power just before our independence, in violation of General Assembly resolutions 1514 (XV) of December 1960 — the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples — and 2066 (XX) of 16 December 1965, which prohibits the dismemberment of colonial territories prior to the accession to independence. We have all along sought to resolve this issue bilaterally with the United Kingdom through dialogue, but there has been no tangible progress so far. This issue has now reached a critical stage and we are extremely anxious to have meaningful negotiations with the United Kingdom with a view to resolving this matter within the shortest possible time. We also reiterate our demand that, pending a resolution of this issue, the former residents of the Chagos archipelago and their families, who were forcibly evicted and sent to Mauritius by the colonial Power, be allowed to return to their homeland.

We launch a fresh appeal to the former colonial Power, the United Kingdom, to come forward and engage in serious and purposeful discussions with us towards the early settlement of the Chagos archipelago question. We wish to stress that Mauritius will never abandon its intention to reunite its territory and to assert its sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago.

We also urge France, with which we have been discussing the issue of the return to us of the island of Tromelin, another outer island territory of Mauritius, to work with us constructively for an early resolution of this important issue. There is an agreement in principle for the co-determination of the island and its surrounding maritime space and we need to work out further modalities so as to arrive at a final solution on this issue.

(spoke in French)

I was gratified by the meeting, on 6 September 2000, of heads of State and Government of French-speaking States Members of the United Nations. That meeting allowed us to consider and arrive at the truth that the United Nations is the keystone that will allow mankind to free itself from the chains and other prejudices that hinder the evolution of international affairs and globalization, the two main engines of a better future for all. This meeting offered French-speaking States Members of the United Nations the opportunity firmly to assert their determination to achieve that objective.

I wish to stress that the future to which we aspire and in which we place our hopes must develop in conditions of respect for and promotion of the plurality of our peoples, their cultural and ethnic diversity and their multilingualism. We are duty-bound to respect, maintain and preserve the nature of our world, that rainbow of many cultures which, through globalization and the United Nations, will be a source of enormous wealth for States and individuals.

The Republic of Mauritius daily lives out this vision of the future. Our experience prompts us to subscribe to that vision for the common good. Hopes and dreams are built on concrete action. With the assistance of all its Member States, the United Nations must enjoy better and greater means. Only thus will peace become a tangible reality. Without peace and security, any effort at development is doomed to failure and the happiness to which the peoples of the world aspire will remain dead letter.

(spoke in English)

It goes without saying that, to achieve the objectives of a more peaceful, just and prosperous world, nations need to rededicate themselves to new commitments in the twenty-first century. Our delegation is ready to assume this responsibility and

looks forward to a fruitful outcome for the session that lies ahead under Mr. Holkeri's leadership.

I wish to end on a note of optimism with regard to the capacity of the United Nations to address global issues and to spearhead development and progress. My delegation is confident that our Organization and its specialized agencies are poised to play an even greater role in global reconstruction. We live in a highly demanding world. It wants results, seeks accountability and is not ready to condone failures. We all have a responsibility to make the world a safer place and to ensure a better future for our people. We can do it. Let us do it.

Before I conclude, however, I wish to take this opportunity to confirm the candidature of Mauritius for election to one of the non-permanent seats in the Security Council in the elections that are scheduled to take place next month. As far back as January 2000, Mauritius announced to all countries of the East African region that we would seek election to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council. At that time, Mauritius was the only declared candidate. The Government of Mauritius considers itself fully qualified to serve on the Security Council, which is the supreme organ of the United Nations, in the larger interests of peace and security and to contribute in a substantial measure to the important work of our Organization.

As a multi-party democracy in a multi-ethnic society, Mauritius has a track record in international relations and we consider that the standing of the Security Council depends upon that of its constituent members. The Security Council will be called upon to take important decisions in the interests of peace and security and it is important that the Security Council act as a homogeneous body. It is the wish of my country that our candidature be considered on its merits. We will very much appreciate the General Assembly's support in this regard.