

Tarrytown, New York, 16 - 17 June, 2011
Statement on the Revitalization of the General Assembly
H.E. Dr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the 62nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Almost two decades have passed since the beginning of a United Nations process defined as: Revitalization of the United Nations General Assembly. It is time now to draw **conclusions** on what are meagre results achieved so far, in spite of the undeniable efforts made throughout the years by many Presidents of the General Assembly, including myself, to promote and upgrade the role of the General Assembly in the United Nations system.

Based on experience, I stress that it is a mistake to believe one can discuss, evaluate and change the role of the General Assembly in the United Nations out of the context of the need for an overall reform of the system.

In order to make this reform effective, two basic preconditions are required:

- **First** - To reach an agreement among the 192 Member States on the notion and scope of the process defined as "reform" of the United Nations.
- **Second** - To organize a review conference on the Charter of the United Nations in accordance with its Article 109.

The **first** precondition is necessary due to the evident lack of interest of the membership to deal with this issue. Allow me to share with you this example: During the General Debate of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, 76 percent of the speakers addressed climate change, 75 percent armed conflicts, 68 percent the Millennium Development Goals, 49 percent Security Council reform, and only 18 percent General Assembly revitalization! It may sound paradoxical, but it is true.

The **second** precondition must be related with the first one. Organizing a "Review Conference" must become a high priority on the United Nations agenda.

People, as well as the institutions they create, are subject to ageing. There is no point in ignoring such an inevitable process.

But aging may also be about evolving, adapting – staying relevant by sharing the wisdom based on insights accumulated over the years.

Allow me in this context to paraphrase Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who pleads in a recent article called "New Directions for the United Nations" for a **constant recreation** of the organization. The Secretary-General says: "We must evolve and keep pace with a rapidly changing world".

Yet, we are aware that institutions often take a piecemeal approach to adaptation and adjustment to new realities. This is why, as the Secretary-

General states in the same article, "There is near-universal loss of trust in institutions and leaders."

After such an introduction, let us now consider a reform process of the United Nations system that is more than due. After all, sixty-six years have passed and the organization has proved to be a tool of humanity which is required and necessary to promote **multilateralism** as the driving force of relations among nations, regions and globally. However, its present form and structure must undergo much more than a lifting and refurbishing process in order to make the United Nations fit for dealing with global affairs in a completely reshaped world, relative to the historic context and background when the United Nations was originally established!

The founding fathers of the organization were obviously visionaries. We have inherited this **vision** of the United Nations not to balsam it, but rather to develop and improve it. In order to do so, a profound discussion and well thought out projection of the role of its principal organs, the balance among them, and their composition is necessary.

According to the **United Nations Charter**, the three main pillars of the organization are: the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. They are the key components of the core of the United Nations system.

The General Assembly, however, is the only organ that encompasses the whole membership – thus remaining the sole governing body that epitomizes the legitimacy of the organization carried by the entire membership.

Without a doubt, the Security Council holds the power. However, its power derives from the legitimacy of the United Nations, which is undeniably embodied in the General Assembly.

This is why a debate on whether or not there is encroachment in the relations between the General Assembly and Security Council is superfluous! Therefore, I think it is appropriate to have a more substantive **interaction** and **cooperation** between the GA and the SC on major issues of interest of the two principal bodies of the UN.

This could be provided, inter alia, through regular discussions of the President of the Security Council with the GA on issues which have been agreed in prior consultations of the President of GA and the respective President of the SC.

We should understand that neither reform of the Security Council nor a so-called revitalization of General Assembly makes sense unless they are **simultaneous** and **interrelated**.

To reform the Security Council and leave the General Assembly as it is like having a train with two types of wagons: ones that correspond with standards of high-speed trains and others that are part of regular trains!

My **first point** when it comes to the General Assembly, given that Security Council reform is not on our agenda today, is the following: There is no point in discussing a "revitalization" of the General Assembly. We should instead define and stipulate the role of the General Assembly in strengthening the United Nations. In other words, the General Assembly must be reformed as well, and not merely revitalized. If I may, it even sounds cynical to use a term that can mean to bring to life something inanimate!

My **second point** is that the General Assembly must become more relevant, effective and transparent in **practicing and communicating** its functions and powers, as stipulated in Articles 10 to 17 in the Charter of the United Nations.

The **third point** is that the General Assembly should not have a main part, followed by a rest of its session (as it is now), but rather a non-stop one-year session (from September to September).

The **fourth point** is that the agenda of the General Assembly should have two tracks: one track dealing with global issues (terrorism, climate change, etc.) and another track dealing with issues related to and subject to the work of its subsidiary bodies.

The **fifth point** is that the Economic and Social Council and the Human Rights Council should be integrated into the General Assembly and become integral part of its activities. There is no need for other committees except the financial and legal committees. This will allow for the General Assembly to guide and supervise the work of the Councils.

The **sixth point** is the following: For this purpose, a General Assembly resolution that deals with the procedural organizational aspects of the reporting of the Secretary-General once a year in a General Assembly session and during quarterly briefings must exist.

The **seventh point** is that the role of the General Committee should be revised and enhanced. The General Committee must become more operational and more involved in the coordination of the activities of the GA, which is and should remain the prerogative of the PGA.

The **eighth point** is that the participation of other stakeholders such as business, science, NGOs and others in the work of the General Assembly should be formally integrated.

The **ninth point** is to improve the process of nominating and electing the President of the General Assembly based on the proposal of a given regional group, followed by consultations among all other groups. The General Assembly must have greater participation in the election of President of the General Assembly, as well as the Secretary-General.

Finally, the **tenth point** involves strengthening the Office of the President of the General Assembly in the various areas of protocol, media

and staffing. The funding of this Office must be entirely from the United Nations regular budget.

Most of the arguments, which are included in these ten points, are scattered in various documents considered and adopted by the General Assembly throughout this period of about twenty years, since the debate on the revitalization of the General Assembly was initiated.

This is why I would like to draw your attention on the **Chart** that was adopted during the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, containing all paragraphs of past resolutions on the revitalization of the General Assembly. It is, in my mind, a valuable and useful document that articulates the collective memory of the United Nations membership on this very issue.

I suppose, under the present circumstances, this Chart should be revised and completed with the documents adopted since then, including those in the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

As such it should be used not only as an inventory of the General Assembly resolutions on this subject, but rather as a **guideline** for a coherent and integral concept of strengthening the role of the General Assembly in the United Nations system.

At the outset of my speech, I mentioned the efforts made by the Presidents of the General Assembly in the past in order to affirm the need for a serious reform of the General Assembly. On this occasion, I would like to commend the current President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his bold and, above all, considerate attempt to upgrade the role of the General Assembly during the sixty-fifth session. On January 28th 2011, a resolution on “**The United Nations in global governance**” was adopted by the General Assembly. It was an important step in the right direction. I fully agree with President Deiss' approach to setting up the General Assembly as the centerpiece of global governance. This requires much more ambition, skill and endeavour than to merely revitalize the General Assembly.

Allow me to **conclude**: In order to prevent the General Assembly from becoming an amphitheatre of cacophony, we must constantly moderate its work, streamline its agenda, and finally make it what it was meant to be – ever since the foundation of the United Nations – **the principal organ of the United Nations.**