

16 November 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Close of the General Debate at the 56th Session of the
General Assembly**

The general debate at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly has come to an end. Before closing it, I would like to make some concluding remarks.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The general debate of this session has been held in a most extraordinary setting unprecedented in the history of the United Nations, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September. As I said in my opening remarks a week ago, in view of the seriousness of the circumstances, I think this general debate bears for all of us a special meaning and a heightened sense of responsibility. Thus, I am particularly pleased and heartened to see a very successful conclusion to the debate. We had the honor of hearing statements by a total of 188 speakers. Among them were 31 Heads of State, 11 Heads of Government, 9 Deputy Prime Ministers, and 96 Foreign Ministers. I would like to extend my deep appreciation to all of them for honoring this Assembly by their participation as well as active and constructive contribution to the debate. I am also grateful for their cooperation in efficiently conducting the meetings under such unusual arrangements as the extended meeting hours and the limited time for statements.

The issues we have addressed during the last week were of great importance and urgency, particularly in light of the current international situation. Secretary-General Kofi Annan began by giving us an excellent outline of his priorities for the coming years along with a review of the fundamental guiding principles of the United Nations. During the general debate, speakers, almost without exception, highlighted the need for concerted common action to combat terrorism. A majority of them welcomed the swift response of the United Nations to the 11 September terrorist attacks and expressed support for General Assembly resolution 56/1 as well as Security Council resolutions 1368 and 1373. A number of delegations also underscored their support for the current military campaign in Afghanistan. Many expressed the view, in this regard, that a broad-based post-Taliban government should be established, representing all the Afghan people.

Amid widespread emphasis on the need for effective multilateral cooperation to address the immediate threats posed by terrorism, the importance of directly linking the wider goals of the UN with the fight against terrorism was also recognized. In this regard, it has often been stressed that terrorism can only be eliminated if the conditions creating a fertile breeding ground for terrorism, such as poverty and social and economic marginalization, are removed. Some speakers also pointed out that a lack of democracy and persistent violations of human rights could lead to

the emergence of terrorist movements, while others saw a link between acts of terrorism and the lack of progress in resolving long-standing disputes, particularly with regard to the Middle East conflict. As for the role of the United Nations in counter-terrorist activities, several specific ideas have been presented including one to establish a center for coordination of assistance to States in resolving crises caused by terrorist acts.

The question of the definition of terrorism was also a major theme. There was general agreement that acts of terrorism could never be justified regardless of the cause, motive or perpetrator. However, some delegations made the point that any definition must distinguish between acts of terrorism and acts in exercise of the legitimate right to self-determination and defense against foreign occupation. In this regard, I would like to remind Member States that at the end of the plenary debate on measures to eliminate international terrorism in early October, I requested the Sixth Committee to expedite its work with a view to conclusion of the pending conventions on international terrorism. I would like to appeal once again to all those concerned to exercise flexibility and strengthen cooperation so that we would not lose the momentum created thus far.

The broad consensus on addressing terrorism went hand-in-hand with a recognition of the need to deal in parallel with the many concerns that had been on the United Nations' agenda before the events of 11 September, and which are often at the root of conflict and social disintegration. These include the fight against poverty, underdevelopment, inequality, disease, and other economic and social problems.

It was widely agreed that the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the Heads of State and Government one year ago, provides a valuable blueprint for tackling global issues and that the international community needs to proceed expeditiously with its implementation. A number of delegations welcomed the Secretary-General's Road Map, in particular, as providing useful guidance in implementing the Declaration.

Many speakers drew attention to the role of the United Nations as a focal point of multilateralism, especially in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September, and as a cooperation forum for pursuing the objectives of the Millennium Declaration. Emphasis was placed on the central position of the General Assembly and the need for continuing reform of the Organization in order to enable it to deal successfully with both old and new challenges.

On the economic and social side, concern was expressed that the current global economic downturn made the achievement of the poverty reduction goal more difficult. In addition to a resumption of economic growth, meeting this objective would require the mobilization of new resources for economic and social development. The need to deal more effectively with globalization was highlighted along with the importance of humanizing this trend, encompassing, *inter alia*, the UN's role in international cooperation in response to globalization.

As the impact of the economic slowdown is felt most acutely by developing countries, especially the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), it is therefore even more urgent to address issues relevant to this problem. These include the continuing lack of full access to the markets of developed

countries for products from the developing countries, especially in agriculture and textiles and other barriers to trade, insufficient and declining ODA volumes, unsatisfactory levels of foreign direct investment, and unsustainable debt levels.

Many speakers saw in the just concluded Ministerial Meeting in Doha an opportunity to tackle imbalances in the international trade system. It is particularly noteworthy that the WTO member states agreed to name the new round of multilateral trade negotiations as the Doha Development Round. I believe that the new trade round will be able to provide powerful impetus to global economic growth.

Likewise, high expectations were expressed with regard to two conferences scheduled for 2002, namely the International Conference on Financing for Development, and the World Summit for Sustainable Development. Both are expected to provide strong support for implementing the goals of the Millennium Declaration.

The threat of HIV/AIDS was also a focus of concern. A number of delegations welcomed the achievements of the UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS of June 2001 and commended the Secretary-General for his initiative to establish a Global Fund on HIV/AIDS and other diseases. All relevant actors were called upon to contribute to this fund so as to support developing countries in their fight against the pandemic.

Concerning the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in an era of globalization, it was widely acknowledged that these technologies offer new opportunities for many developing countries but that, at the same time, greater efforts are needed to deal with the digital divide. In this regard, the United Nations ICT Task Force should be a catalyst in harnessing the potential of ICT for development.

Several speakers welcomed the adoption, by the 37th summit of the OAU, of the New Partnership for African Development as an expression of leadership for Africa's development and a number pledged their support for its implementation.

The general debate has also witnessed renewed commitment to gender equality and the implementation of Beijing and Beijing+5 as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Several delegations highlighted national action to ensure equality of opportunity for women and men, while others called for programs and measures for the empowerment of women, including in the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Finally, let me remind you that my intention in these remarks was to offer a brief, personal observation of the general debate, recognizing that a more thorough presentation would not be in keeping with my duties. I regret that it is not possible for me to reflect in these short remarks the rich ideas, profound insights and far-reaching visions that have been presented by some of the best minds of our world. I would just like to emphasize, therefore, that we share a responsibility to maintain and nurture the spirit of commitment and cooperation at the high political level that has been demonstrated in the general debate. We should direct our future work in the plenary and

the main Committees in such a way as to best reflect the concerns, hopes and aspirations expressed by all delegations over the past week. I trust that our collective commitment will ensure that this task is successfully completed.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to express my gratitude to the distinguished representatives of all Member States who have expressed support for my presidency along with their kind words addressed to me and my country. Last but not least, I wish to thank once again, on behalf of the General Assembly, the United States government and our host city New York for their hospitality and security arrangements during the general debate. My heartfelt thanks also go to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Under-Secretary-General Chen Jian and his able team, and all UN security personnel as well as the entire staff of the Secretariat for their untiring devotion and outstanding professionalism.

Thank you.