

31 October 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Closing of the Debate**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Sixty-one delegations have spoken in the debate under item 55: "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly", Item 57: United Nations reform: measures and proposals, Item 58: Restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields and Item 59, Strengthening of the United Nations system: reports of the Secretary General. I believe it important to note, at the outset, that delegations speaking under this cluster of items centred their statements on items 55 and 58. Little or no reference was made to items 57 and 58. This, I believe, is an indication of where some of our problems lie in respect of reform and revitalisation of the General Assembly and of the United Nations as a whole. We should, in our deliberation, ponder why we have two items before us for discussion, on which few delegations cared to comment.

The discussion on Items 55 and 58 have been both interesting and thought provoking. Delegations have been particularly reflective and conscientious in their approach to Item 55 on revitalisation of the General Assembly. It is on this item that I will focus my assessment today.

I am both pleased and encouraged by the overall mood of the debate, and particularly by the many concrete proposals and suggestions that delegations have made. I sense a gathering momentum in favour of taking decisive steps towards revitalisation of the Assembly. I also sense an emerging consensus that we should take action expeditiously. I see no reason for further delay.

The Informal Note that I circulated to delegations on 15 October 2003 has been well received. I appreciate your support for this document as a worthwhile initiative, and the generally held view that it forms a good basis on which to begin our work. I especially pleased that the two clusters of issues that are identified in the Informal Note have been generally welcomed as a useful conceptual framework.

Among the specific issues addressed in the debate, it is noteworthy that a number appear to give rise to particular concerns, and bear centrally on decisions that must be taken in the context of the revitalisation exercise. The first and all encompassing is the political position and status of the General Assembly. In this regard, attention was repeatedly drawn to the passage in the Millennium Declaration in which Heads of State and Government resolved, "to reaffirm the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policy-making and

representative organ of the United Nations, and to enable it to play its role more effectively." This objective, I believe, should form the backdrop of our negotiations in the weeks ahead.

The view has also been taken that the relationship between the General Assembly and the Security Council needs to be addressed. In this context, consideration by the Council of issues that seem to fall more naturally within the purview of the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council is a development to which further attention must be paid in our discussions.

The view has been strongly advanced in the course of the debate that for the General Assembly's resolutions and decisions to be better respected, they will have to become better known. Attention was drawn to the advocacy role the Department of Public Information should more actively play, in bringing this about.

In the consideration of possible means of strengthening the General Assembly, many references were made to the need to strengthen the Office of the President, both as a means of better managing each session and of ensuring needed continuity and institutional memory from session to session. Such strengthening would require augmenting the resources available to the Office.

There is also an emerging view that the role of the Presidency itself needs to be reviewed. Comments were made, in this regard, on the possibilities of extending the term of the President, re-electing the President to a second term, or instituting a troika system. Each of these issues might be further considered.

The idea of making more effective use of the General Committee as an organizational and coordinating mechanism has been generally welcomed. The initial informal steps I have taken in this respect might now be fleshed out and formalised.

The implementation of resolutions of the Assembly was a crucial concern raised in the debate. Comments were made concerning the many resolutions that went unimplemented or were poorly followed up. This is, indeed, a significant deficit in our activities to which greater attention must be paid. Suggestions have been made for better monitoring of the process of implementation, which should be examined in detail.

A vital part of ensuring more effective implementation must lie in drafting better resolution texts that would make resolutions more "user friendly" and thus more "implementable". There appears to be general agreement that resolutions should be shorter, and to the point, and to the extent possible, should refrain from the excessive repetition of previous resolutions. I trust that the comprehensive resolution that I anticipate will be the result of the negotiations that will now commence on the revitalisation item will itself be a model of what resolutions of the future might look like.

Views have begun to converge on some points regarding the nature and function of the Plenary itself. The rationale for compressing the Plenary's work into a three-month period, whatever it may have once been, no longer appears to be persuasive. An alternative should be sought to this

practice that has the Assembly considering, over a period of approximately thirteen weeks, some two hundred resolutions. As the Assembly's session is for one year, scheduling the work of the Assembly over this longer period seems desirable.

Notable interest was shown in positioning the Plenary to approach its work more thematically. This is an issue that should now receive further consideration, both in relation to the organisation of the General Debate and the organisation of the Agenda of the General Assembly.

A consensus has begun to develop around the importance of reducing the length of the Assembly's Agenda. Delegations have acknowledged that the substantive Agenda, as currently presented, creates a workload that is difficult to contend with. At the same time, the increasing awareness that the Agenda should reflect contemporary realities was evident from the debate, and is a matter that would require attention in our revitalisation discussions.

Progress has been made in biennialization, triennialization and clustering of items for discussion on the Assembly's Agenda, and this has been widely recognised. The general view appears to be that the time has come to make further progress on these fronts, as we proceed with the revitalisation exercise.

The issue of documentation overload is one that is inextricably linked to matters concerning the Agenda, resolutions and the biennialization, triennialization and clustering of items. It would be essential to take up this matter in this broader context.

Comments have been made concerning aspects of the revitalisation exercise that concern the main committees. Some of the Committees are themselves reviewing their work methods and procedures, to improve effectiveness. These initiatives will need to be integrated into the overall revitalisation exercise.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates:

I hope that my assessment of the revitalisation debate will assist you as we move ahead in our work. With regard to the next steps, I wish to advise you that I have invited six Permanent Representatives to serve as Facilitators for this item. I appreciate, and am pleased that they have agreed to do so. The Facilitators are:

- 1) H.E. Mr. Abdallah Baali, Permanent Representative of ALGERIA
- 2) H.E. Mr. Stafford O. Neil, Permanent Representative of JAMAICA
- 3) H.E. Mr. Dirk Jan van den Berg, Permanent Representative of the NETHERLANDS
- 4) H.E. Mr. Kishore Mahbubani, Permanent Representative of SINGAPORE

5) H.E. Mr. Roman Kirn, Permanent Representative of SLOVENIA

6) H.E. Mr. Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo, Permanent Representative of SOUTH AFRICA

I shall be meeting the facilitators as a group shortly, so that we can determine a framework and time frame for their work. It is my intention to present a resolution of the President for consideration by the Assembly before it concludes the substantive part of its session in December of this year. I know that I can count on you to give the Facilitators the necessary support and cooperation, so that we can meet this goal.

I look forward to working with you and benefiting from your continued support as we pursue together these critical questions that have been identified by our Heads of State and Governments and other high-level representatives as matters of priority for the General Assembly.