

10 June 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of
the General Assembly**

Delivered by Ambassador Dejan Šahović, Senior Special Advisor to the President

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives,

It is my distinct honor to address the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly in its fourth thematic meeting.

At the outset, I would like to thank personally, and on behalf of the President of the General Assembly H.E. Mr. Mootaz Ahmadein Khalil, Permanent Representative of Egypt, for his commitment and the leadership he has provided in his capacity as Chair of the Group.

As you are aware Mr. Chairman, President Jeremić attaches great importance to your work and the process of revitalization of the General Assembly. He has addressed this crucial issue twice in recent months in this Working Group and in the plenary. He spoke about all four clusters of issues that the Group is mandated to discuss. Today, I will focus on the “functions of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, including strengthening its institutional memory, as well as its relationship with the Secretariat.”

Since the adoption of Resolution 46/77 of 12 December 1991, which was the first resolution on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, the responsibilities and tasks of this principal organ of the United Nations have expanded continuously. The number of issues under consideration by the Ad Hoc Working Group demonstrates not only that significant increase, but also the need to further enhance the Assembly’s role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency.

Allow me just a brief remark to illustrate the volume of General Assembly tasks that the Office of the President is required to manage.

Since the beginning of this Presidency, a total of 19 chairs have been appointed to facilitate on-going processes mandated by General Assembly resolutions. This large number speaks for itself. I would like, once again, to thank all chairs and facilitators for accepting these responsibilities and for their commitment to advancing the agenda of the Assembly.

The Office of the President is also working hard on the preparations for four High-Level meetings to be organized at the 68th Session of the General Assembly. Three of them, on Disability and Development, Millennium Development Goals and Nuclear Disarmament will take place immediately prior or parallel to the General Debate; the High-Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development will be held somewhat later, on 3 and 4 October. In addition, the High-Level Political Forum, a new body mandated by the Rio +20 conference, will also be convened at the very beginning of the 68th GA session. I don't need to emphasize the organizational challenges involved in the preparation of these meetings.

The President has also been requested through GA resolutions to organize throughout this session a number of thematic meetings and events; altogether there are 12. If we count thematic meetings scheduled by the President himself, the total rises to 18. Practically all these events take place within a relatively short period of 5 to 6 months during the second part of the session.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly has done its utmost to carry out these tasks in close cooperation with Member States.

These activities demonstrate the increased involvement of the General Assembly in a variety of important global issues, which is no doubt a positive development. However, it is necessary, we in the OPGA believe, to ensure ever closer interaction between the main committees from where the mandates basically originate, and between the committees and the PGA. In this way we will be able to manage this part of the work load, including the preparations of the high-level meetings, in an efficient manner.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to ensure that the activities of the Office of the President are sustained and the effectiveness and efficiency of the Assembly is enhanced, a number of requirements have to be fulfilled. In that sense, ensuring continuity is extremely important. All work streams, that I mentioned, require follow-up and continued effort if successful outcomes are to be achieved. That depends largely on strengthening the institutional memory.

In that regard, this Office intends to ensure that the next Presidency of the General Assembly is fully informed of what took place during the 67th Session. In addition to the information posted on the website of the President, we will provide all relevant documentation, including the records of meetings, to the incoming President. We will fully brief his team over the next three months about all aspects of the ongoing work. In this context, I think that the preparations for the high-level events that I have just mentioned, which will take place under the 68th Session Presidency are especially important. We will do our best to ensure a smooth transition and takeover of responsibilities.

Another pressing issue is the adequate staffing of the Office. Currently an able and efficient team of diplomats and support staff, who come from all regional groups, work for the OPGA, but it is smaller than the team of the preceding Presidency. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member States who have seconded staff to the Office and supported our work in other significant ways. We are

also thankful to the Secretariat, particularly the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management for its support and continued efforts throughout the session.

To maintain continuity and preserve institutional knowledge, which are essential to ensuring the proper functioning of the President's Office, we believe that the number of staff members allocated to the OPGA should be increased. Currently, four professional positions are assigned, however they rotate each year with the change of President. At least two more senior members of professional staff should be assigned permanently as Advisors. Extension of arrangements with seconded staff is also a useful option. Our office benefited significantly from one such extension.

Speaking of continuity, we have to bear in mind that most of the issues on the agenda of the General Assembly go beyond the duration of a single session. A one-year mandate for the post of President of the General Assembly is, in that context, too brief. Short of considering an extension of the President's mandate, this again raises the issue of how to ensure better continuity by more effectively connecting successive Presidencies.

Last year, at a meeting similar to the one we are holding today, a representative of the Office of the President spoke about the possibility of adopting a "troika" of Presidents. Perhaps, this and some other ideas that Member States may develop can be explored in more detail.

Mr. Chairman,

A matter of crucial importance in terms of maintaining the activities of the President of the General Assembly is the budget. As we all know, without the appropriate financial support, it is very difficult to sustain the Office's activities at an adequate level. In this regard, I must, unfortunately, reiterate the same message that you heard last year and for years before that. The budget allocated to the Office for each year was set at 250,000 US Dollars in 1998. Since then, it has not been increased, except to adjust for inflation.

Part of the expenses of the Presidency is covered by the voluntary contributions of Member States to the Trust Fund. I would like to restate the President's gratitude for the generosity of Member States which contributed to the Fund established in support of the Office. But, ultimately, the bulk of the cost is generally taken on by the President's home country.

Such circumstances place the Office in an unpredictable and vulnerable financial situation. That also leads to inequality as some Member States are constrained by their financial capacity when they consider nominating a person for this important position.

We hope that the current budget can be reviewed in accordance with the existing procedures as mandated by Resolution 65/294 and increased to a level which is commensurate with the increased visibility, role and activities of the President of the General Assembly and his Office. Creating a meaningful budget for the Office would also guarantee a real independence for future Presidents.

I would like to reiterate the appeal President Jeremic made to this Group on its first thematic meeting on the 2nd of April, in which he called on the Members “to make a strong recommendation to level the fiscal playing field, by calling for a larger allocation of funds from the regular UN budget to be granted to the Office of the President.”

Distinguished representatives,

The support of the Secretariat is essential for the proper functioning of the OPGA. Throughout the session the President has maintained the frequent exchange of information and views with the Secretary-General. Our office’s interaction with various Secretariat departments has been very intensive, not only with DGACM, which as I already mentioned, is fully and ably supporting the President, but with other departments as well. For example, the backing from DESA was crucial in preparation of a number of thematic events and the forthcoming high-level meetings, such as on Migration and Development to mention just one, or in our relations with the NGO community.

We are grateful for this support. The resources of the Secretariat should be fully utilized to ensure continuity and strengthen institutional capacity of the Presidency of the General Assembly. In that context, perhaps, the practice should be established that the Secretariat briefs the incoming Presidencies in the transition period on the main ongoing GA processes.

Mr. Chairman,

It is clear that in the coming years, the tasks of the General Assembly and its workload will continue to multiply, as evidenced for example by the processes that are evolving with regard to the post-2015 development agenda. The President of the General Assembly and his Office should have at their disposal the human, financial and other resources to be able to cope with their share of these growing responsibilities.

I thank you for your attention.