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Statement by
Mr. M. Koteswara Rao
Counsellor & Legal Adviser

On
Agenda Item: 85
**“Scope and Application of the Principle of Universal
Jurisdiction”**

At the
Sixth Committee of the 71st Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

New York

October 11, 2016

Mr. Chairman

We thank the Secretary-General for his report A/71/111 on "The scope and application of the principle of universal jurisdiction" dated 28 June 2016. It provides information about the laws and practice of certain States concerning the exercise of universal jurisdiction in their domestic legal systems and their understanding of the concept of universal jurisdiction.

India has its principled position and a firm view that those who commit crimes must be brought to justice and punished. A criminal should not go scot free because of procedural technicalities, including lack of jurisdiction.

However, the fact cannot be over sighted that the exercise of jurisdiction is a unique legal subject in itself.

Mr. Chairman,

The widely recognized bases for the exercise of criminal jurisdiction include: 'territoriality', which is based on the place of the commission of offence; 'nationality', which is based on the nationality of the accused. Some States also recognise nationality of victim, as basis for exercising jurisdiction and protective principle, which is based on the national interests affected.

The common feature of these jurisdictional theories is the connection between the State asserting jurisdiction and the crime committed.

However, under the theory of universal jurisdiction, a State claims jurisdiction over an offence irrespective of the place of its commission or nationality of the offender or victim, and thus without any link whatsoever between that State and the offence/ offender. The rationale for such jurisdiction is the nature of certain offences that affect the interests of all States even when they are unrelated to the State assuming jurisdiction.

Mr. Chairman,

Under general international law, piracy on the high seas is the only one such crime, over which claims of universal jurisdiction is undisputed. The principle of universal jurisdiction in relation to piracy has been codified in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982.

In respect of certain serious crimes like genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and torture, etc., international treaties have provided basis for the exercise of universal jurisdiction, which is applicable between the States parties to those treaties. They include, among others, the Four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Apartheid Convention.

The question that arises is whether the jurisdiction provided for specific serious international crimes under certain treaties could be converted into a commonly exercisable jurisdiction, irrespective of the fact whether or not the other State or States are a party to those treaties.

Several issues remain unanswered, including those related to the basis of extending such jurisdiction, the relationship with the laws relating to immunity, pardoning and amnesty, and harmonization with the domestic laws.

Several treaties oblige the States parties either to try a criminal or handover for trial to a party willing to do so. This is the obligation of *aut dedere, aut judicare* ('either extradite or prosecute'). This widely recognised principle, including by the International Court of Justice in its decision of 20 July 2012 in the *Belgium Vs Senegal* case, should not be confused with or short circuited by the universal jurisdiction.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

We reiterate that the universal jurisdiction is applicable only to limited crimes, like piracy on high seas and other specific serious crimes under the relevant treaties/ conventions that have been adopted and agreed to by the States.

Therefore, we stress the need for avoidance of any misuse of the principle of universal jurisdiction in both the criminal and civil matters, the concept and definition of which is not yet clear and agreed to.

Thank you
