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General Assembly

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Sixty-sixth General Assembly
Plenary
130th & 131st Meetings (AM & PM)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY STOOD STRONG, ACTIVE, RESPONSIVE TO CHALLENGES,

SAYS OUTGOING PRESIDENT AS SIXTY-SIXTH SESSION CONCLUDES

Delegates Adopt 6 Draft Resolutions, 1 Oral Decision, Deferring Other Action

Faced with conflicts in the Arab world and other global challenges, the General Assembly had “stood strong, active and responsive” over the past year, making key advances in dispute settlement, United Nations reform, disaster prevention and sustainable development, Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser (Qatar), its outgoing President, said today, as the sixty-sixth session drew to a close.

“There have been serious conflicts, but also renewed hope, as countries emerged from conflict to peace,” said the President. “This had been a year when the impact of the global financial and economic crisis put the international community to a challenging test.” Against that backdrop, populations across the world had continued to call for freedom, dignity, peace and justice, he added.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the attention of Member States now extended beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict to developments concerning the “Arab awakening”, he noted. On Palestine, he said it had been an honour for him to process its first request to join the United Nations. “Although it has not yet been possible to welcome Palestine as a new Member to the Organization during my mandate, I am still hopeful that this will happen in the near future,” he said, urging the Assembly to continue its work in that regard.

On Libya, the deliberative body had made a historic decision to restore the rights of the new Libyan authorities, both in the Assembly and in the Human Rights Council. As for the Syrian crisis, the Assembly had carried out its institutional responsibility in the face of a Security Council deadlock. It had adopted a resolution in February that had led to the appointment of the Joint Special Envoy of the League of Arab States and the United Nations. In August, it had adopted another resolution aimed at ending the crisis.

Recalling that the sixty-sixth session had identified four key areas of focus, the President said it had been a significant year for the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes. Many conferences and seminars had been held throughout the year on that key topic, including the first-ever high-level forum on the culture of peace, he said, adding that he had proposed that the forum become an annual event to be held every 13 September, the date on which the Assembly had unanimously adopted the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace in 1999. Secondly, there was a pressing need for United Nations reform and revitalization, balancing implementation of Assembly resolutions and other administrative initiatives aimed at enhancing the organ's efficiency, he said.

The Assembly had also focused on disaster prevention and response, holding an informal thematic debate in April, among other measures, he said, stressing the importance of multifaceted engagement by all stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society. The integration of humanitarian and development approaches to strengthen local resilience and mitigate the risk of disasters was an essential

part of an overall disaster reduction framework. It was clear that the international community needed to be better equipped in order to respond to disasters, both natural and man-made. Fourth, on sustainable development and global prosperity, the Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development would go down in history as the moment when the international community had renewed its political will and commitment to tackling interconnected economic, social and environmental challenges.

Underlining the importance of putting effective means of implementation in place, in addition to the transfer of technology, and the whole range of partners, civil society and the private sector in that process, he said a defining element of Rio+20 had been its launch of an intergovernmental process to define the Sustainable Development Goals after 2015. He said he had sought to empower the Assembly in economic matters by holding a high-level thematic debate on the state of the world economy. "Forging legitimate political consensus is what the General Assembly does best, and that is precisely what is needed in global governance," he emphasized. "I am very confident that the United Nations will continue to offer mankind the best platform for a world of peace, security and prosperity to all."

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recalled that, when the session had begun a year ago, the transformation in the Arab world had still been in its early stages, creating hope and apprehension side by side. Later on, "when the Security Council was too divided to act on the violence and repression in Syria, the Assembly stepped in proactively, and has maintained its vigilance", he said. "This Assembly has been the venue for important discussions on a range of issues, including eradicating poverty, nuclear safety and security, as well as non-communicable diseases."

He commended the Assembly President's pursuit of a culture of peace and focus on mediation, among other endeavours. "The sixty-sixth session leaves a legacy of achievement, showing again the invaluable role and voice of the General Assembly as the Organization's leading deliberative body," he said. "Mr. al-Nasser guided the Assembly with skill and sensitivity, and reached out to partners in civil society, academia, the business community and the philanthropic world."

The Secretary-General continued: "Mr. President, during your tenure, the Assembly instituted a new observance on the United Nations calendar, the International Day of Happiness. Let us hope through our work, including in the new session that begins tomorrow, we can turn that aspiration into reality."

Both the Secretary-General and the President said they had enjoyed a strong and productive working relationship.

Following a minute of silence at the end of the meeting, the President invited his successor to the podium, handing the presidential gavel to Vuk Jeremić (Serbia), President of the sixty-seventh session.

Assembly Action

Earlier, the Assembly also took action on a number of outstanding matters ahead of the opening of the sixty-seventh session. It adopted, by consensus, a draft resolution contained in the Report of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly (document [A/66/891](#)). By that text, it decided to establish another Ad Hoc Working Group during the sixty-seventh session, to be charged with, among other things, identifying ways to enhance the Assembly's role, authority, effectiveness and efficiency. It also urged the Secretariat to continue its efforts to raise the Assembly's visibility, and made several recommendations relating to its working methods.

The Assembly also moved to establish a monitoring mechanism to review commitments made towards Africa's development, adopting a resolution (document [A/66/L.63](#)), deciding that the instrument would be built upon existing monitoring mechanisms, in line with the political declaration adopted in its resolution 63/1 of 22 September 2008. It further decided to conduct a related biennial review in the context of its agenda item on the development of Africa.

Stressing the importance of grounding the mechanism on reliable, available and timely data, including at the country level, the Assembly requested the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa to serve as the secretariat for the review, and requested the Secretary-General to identify and allocate resources to enable that Office to fulfil its mandate effectively. The Secretary-General was further requested to

submit the first biennial review to the Assembly's sixty-ninth session in 2014.

The Assembly also decided to proclaim 1 June as the Global Day of Parents, adopting a resolution (document [A/66/L.59/Rev.1](#)), as orally revised, by which it recognized that the family had primary responsibility for nurturing and protecting children. It invited all Member States to celebrate the Day in full partnership with civil society, particularly involving young people and children. It requested the Secretary-General to bring the resolution to the attention of all Member States, United Nations system entities and civil society organizations for appropriate observance.

Speaking on that item following the adoption, several representatives — including those of Switzerland, Chile and Costa Rica — expressed regret that no open, informal consultations had been conducted on the development of that text. Moreover, some said, there was no evidence that the proclamation of international days or years had any impact on policy. The United Nations already celebrated the International Day of Family on 15 May, and no substantial reasons had been given as to why another day was needed. In addition, the choice of 1 June was regrettable, as that date conflicted with the already-established commemoration of the International Day of the Child.

The Assembly went on to adopt, again by consensus, a draft on the “Extension of the intergovernmental process of the General Assembly on strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system” (document [A/66/L.62](#)), as orally corrected. By its terms, the Assembly decided to extend that intergovernmental process to the sixty-seventh session. It further requested the Assembly President to extend the mandate of the two facilitators of the intergovernmental process.

Speaking in explanation of position after that adoption was the representative of the Russian Federation, who said, on behalf of the “Cross-Regional Group” of States, that the text would help States parties fulfil their obligations to the treaty body system. Among proposals that the Group had made in that regard were the elaboration of a code of conduct for members of treaty bodies; establishing a relevant accountability mechanism for experts; and guaranteeing observance of the principle of equitable geographic representation in electing members of the treaty bodies.

Also making a statement on that matter were the representative of Iceland, who spoke on behalf of the co-facilitators of the international process to elaborate the text, and the representative of the United States. The latter emphasized that her country did not support the establishment of a code of conduct, and that non-governmental organizations must continue to be included throughout the discussion.

Among other action today, the Assembly adopted a draft, as orally corrected, on a high-level plenary of its sixty-ninth session, to be known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (document [A/66/L.61](#)). By its terms, the Assembly decided that the event would be held on 22-23 September 2014 in New York. The Assembly encouraged the full and effective participation of indigenous women, young people, older people and people with disabilities. It also requested the President to organize, no later than June 2014, an informal interactive hearing to provide inputs for the preparatory process.

Before that action, a Secretariat official read out a statement on the resolution's financial implications, saying that, as a result of the meeting, an additional appropriation of \$95,600 would be required from the 2014-2015 biennium budget.

A number of speakers welcomed the establishment of the World Conference and stressed the important role of the Assembly in protecting and promoting the rights of indigenous peoples.

The representative of Cyprus, speaking on behalf of the European Union, said the text allowed Member States and indigenous peoples to work together closely throughout the preparatory process. However, he expressed regret that the text did not contain the principle of full inclusion of civil society groups. The representative of the United States agreed, noting also that the text did not define a specific process by which indigenous groups would be accredited. That issue would require further consideration, she added.

The representative of the Russian Federation stressed nonetheless that nothing in the resolution

should be construed as annulling or modifying the rules of the General Assembly itself.

Meanwhile, the representative of Sweden announced that his Government had decided to contribute \$100,000 to the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund for Indigenous Populations, and encouraged other Governments to consider doing the same.

Among its other actions, the Assembly adopted, by consensus, a draft resolution contained in a Report of the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) titled "Comprehensive Review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects" (document [A/66/428/Add.1](#)). By that text, the Assembly endorsed the proposals, recommendations and conclusions of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, also contained in the report.

Speaking after that action, the representative of Argentina spoke on behalf of Brazil and Uruguay, stressing that it was important that the Special Committee's report had been endorsed despite the different positions of States. Peacekeeping was an area of fundamental importance for troop- and police-contributing countries, and with the increasing complexity of such operations, the Special Committee would be dealing increasingly with financial matters such as reimbursement. States must, therefore, work together to ensure that the Special Committee was not "waylaid" by taboo topics.

The Assembly also addressed the distribution of seats in the open-ended working group on sustainable development, established pursuant to resolution 66/288 of 27 July, which was slated to discuss the formulation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, the President recalled that, in a letter dated 13 September, he had circulated language for an oral decision on the open-ended working group for consideration by Member States.

Speaking on that matter, the representative of Brazil said that an even distribution of seats among regional groups was not a formula acceptable to all groups. Instead, a proportional approach should be applied, taking into account the different sizes of each regional group. However, as it had become clear in consultations that neither approach would be able to garner consensus, he said, Brazil had proposed a compromise arrangement that would start from an even distribution and then provide for adjustments that would take into account the different size of each group. The largest groups would then be assigned an additional seat while the smallest would have five seats each.

Despite the presentation of that compromise solution, he said, some Member States had urged further consultations on how the working group would be constituted. Brazil, therefore, proposed that the Assembly defer a decision on the working group's constitution until a later date.

Following that statement, the Assembly took an oral decision by which agreement would be reached on the distribution of seats on the open-ended working group established pursuant to resolution 66/288 of 27 July among United Nations regional groups, and on the specific representatives who Member States would designate to occupy them at the beginning of the sixty-seventh session.

In other business, the Assembly decided to defer consideration of various agenda items until the sixty-seventh session. They included the situation in the occupied territories of Azerbaijan; follow-up to the recommendations on administrative and internal oversight of the Independent Inquiry into the United Nations "oil-for-food" programme; financing of the United Nations Mission in East Timor; and financing of the United Nations Mission in Sudan. Among other items remaining on the agenda of the sixty-seventh session were the question of the Comorian Island of Mayotte; the situation in Central America: progress in fashioning a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development; the situation of democracy and human rights in Haiti; and armed aggression against the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 3 p.m. on 18 September to open its sixty-seventh session.

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