



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR JULIAN R. HUNTE

AT THE

OPEN-ENDED INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS
OF THE PLENARY ON AGENDA ITEM 56
(QUESTION OF EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION
ON AND INCREASE IN THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE
SECURITY COUNCIL AND RELATED MATTERS)

30 JANUARY 2004

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Let me first take this opportunity to wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Let me also express my deep appreciation to all of you for the support and cooperation you gave to me and to members of my Cabinet during the initial part of the Fifty-eighth Session last year. I believe that together, we carried out the work of the General Assembly in a business-like manner, which bodes well for our future work.

I think that it is generally acknowledged that the General Assembly took a major step forward in reforming itself when we adopted resolution 58/126 on the Revitalisation of the Work of the General Assembly. This is, above all, a comprehensive resolution which sets out courses of action that address many of the obstacles to progress on our path to reform.

I recall that when we began the revitalisation exercise last year, it was generally held that action needed to be taken to advance the process of revitalisation of the General Assembly. However, there was some doubt about what we could actually achieve. It is a tribute to you all that you were able to put differences aside and, in a relatively short space of time, come to the agreements that we did.

Today we begin the process of considering the question of Security Council reform. I am pleased that there is such good attendance today. I am particularly pleased that so many Permanent Representatives have found it possible to attend. Let me say to you, and to all participating in this informal meeting, that I find myself in a somewhat similar position to that of last September. It is generally agreed that after ten years, something must be done, but some have sounded a note of caution that it would be unrealistic to expect that much, if any progress, can be made on this question.

We are all well aware that the question of reform of the Security Council – enlargement of the Council and related matters - has been discussed for a decade in the Open-ended Working Group. While some valuable ideas have emerged from the discussion on Cluster II matters, it has proved extremely difficult to proceed beyond the stage of analysis of issues and collation of positions where Cluster I issues are concerned. Since Cluster I issues are the most important issues, it seems to me that before beginning another series of Working Group meetings, we should pause to reflect, and to take stock.

The first question that we should ask ourselves is a rhetorical one: “Has the Working Group succeeded in fulfilling the tasks assigned to it?” It seems to me that it is not an unreasonable assessment that the outcome of the Working Group’s deliberations to date has been somewhat of a disappointment, when reviewed in the context of its mandate. While the Working Group has identified the main problems that need to be resolved, it has had only limited success in doing so.

The second question we must ask is this: “Is reform of the Security Council a matter to be settled by the Working Group, or is the main impetus to come from elsewhere - specifically, the capitals of member states, and particularly influential Member States?” The provisions of the Charter give a very small number of Member States an important role to play in Security Council matters, and they will have a particular say in the outcome of this exercise.

This is, however, a democratic age and at a time when membership of the United Nations has expanded from 51 to a remarkable 191. The generality of the membership of this Organisation would, no doubt, want to continue their involvement in the question of Security Council reform, and would want to see it resolved to the satisfaction of all. I am confident that even the most influential Member States would wish to listen, and in fact, pay heed to the views of others.

A third question we must ask is, “What is the role of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Eminent Persons and the impact, if

any, that the setting up of the Panel should have on our deliberations?” Again, a note of caution has been sounded, and it has been suggested that the General Assembly should essentially suspend its deliberations on Security Council reform until the Panel delivers its report to the Secretary-General.

The Panel was not set up by the General Assembly nor did the Assembly determine its terms of reference. I can say that I have not been asked by the Secretary General – or for that matter by the distinguished Chairman of the Panel who was kind enough to call on me in late December last year – to delay the General Assembly’s consideration of Security Council reform until the Panel has reported.

I am sure that we are all aware that the terms of reference of the Panel, as announced, makes no specific reference to the issue of Security Council reform. Currently, it is unclear when the Panel’s discussion and conclusions will be received by the General Assembly. It seemed, at one time, that the Panel’s work would be before the Assembly in summer of this year. More recently, it began to appear that the Panel might need more time to finalise its report. I am sure that I speak for all Member States in commending the Secretary-General for his important initiative in establishing the Panel. I certainly look forward, with keen interest, to examining its conclusions and recommendations when they are made available.

In determining the extent to which the fact of the existence of the Panel should affect the manner and timing of the General Assembly’s consideration of Security Council reform, Member States will need to bear the foregoing issues in mind: that we have not been asked by the Secretary-General to suspend our work while the Panel deliberates; that it is unclear if and how the Panel will specifically deal with issues of Security Council reform; and that it is uncertain when the Assembly will receive information on the deliberations and conclusions of the Panel.

A decade has passed since the General Assembly decided that enlargement of the Security Council to make it more representative was a desirable objective and set up an

institutional mechanism to consider this and other matters related to the Security Council. In the ensuing period, a view has emerged that given the prevailing political circumstances, it is doubtful whether Security Council reform can be effected. Another view that has emerged is that any reform is likely to have counterproductive aspects, thus calling the efficacy of the exercise into question. Nonetheless, the majority of member States seem to still view Security Council reform as a goal worth striving for and continue to maintain that efforts towards that end should be pursued.

As your President, I am in your hands. I need to receive indications from you as to how you would wish me to proceed. In order to facilitate the shaping of the guidance that I require from you, I have had prepared and have circulated to you an Informal Note on the matter. The Note traces, in brief, the history of the deliberations of the activities of the Working Group and the results registered to date. It concludes by outlining courses of action for us to consider with respect to next steps.

I look forward to your reactions to the Informal Note. Based on those reactions, I believe we will be in a better position to collectively decide on the way forward.

Thank you for your attention.