

1 July 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
on Further Measures for the Revitalization of the Work of the
General Assembly**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Now that we have adopted the resolution contained in document A/58/L.66, "Further measures for the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly" by consensus, allow me to reflect briefly on the progressive steps we took leading to our important decision today.

When we adopted resolution 58/126 on "Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly" on 19 December 2003, we generally acknowledged that we had significantly advanced the process of reforming and revitalizing the Assembly. Our initiative, it was generally agreed, was a major stride towards ensuring that the Assembly maintained its position and continued to receive recognition as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations.

We sought to achieve two basic objectives in resolution 58/126. We initiated a number of specific, self-enabling actions, for example, improving the way the General Assembly does business, strengthening the Office of the President; and enhancing the relationship between three of the Charter's principal organs - the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. I am pleased to advise this Assembly that these provisions are already being implemented, to good effect.

We also established a framework of principles to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Assembly in resolution 58/126. Towards this end, we commissioned a number of reports to lay the groundwork for additional, concrete actions for the further revitalization of the Assembly. Now, after eleven meetings of the General Committee held in open-ended informal session and numerous consultations and discussions at all levels, we have successfully concluded this phase of our revitalization work.

But our work is not done by the adoption of the resolution in document A/58/L.66 - it is just beginning. If this Assembly does not faithfully implement the resolution, then much of our work would have been in vain. All the matters addressed in the resolution bear centrally on our revitalization efforts. There are a number of important aspects of the resolution, however, to which I would wish to especially refer.

Beginning at the Fifty-ninth session, the agenda of the General Assembly will be organized under a number of headings. The resolution states the purpose for taking this action - to give a sense of

structure to the work of the Assembly; to achieve a better presentation of the issues and challenges with which the Assembly deals; and to make the work of the Assembly more accessible. In short, the headings will serve as a defining principle that will allow Member States and the general public, for the first time, to appreciate at a glance the issues before the General Assembly.

Let me also refer to the resolution's provisions concerning the content of the agenda of the plenary. The customary agenda of the Plenary currently has 126 items. Of these, 47 are items dealing with organizational issues, elections, appointments and the consideration of reports of Charter organs. Therefore, we cannot adjust these items.

The Assembly determines how the remaining 79 items are considered. Of these 79 items, we have agreed that some 23, representing about 25%, should be adjusted, either through transfer to Main Committees, biennialization, triennialization, suspension from automatic consideration and in a few cases, elimination. The Assembly has gone far in making these decisions that touch on so many agenda items - further, I am told - than it has ever gone before. The purpose of this far-reaching decision is to contribute to the important work of rationalizing the Assembly's agenda, in which all must remain engaged.

Indeed, the resolution recognizes that the task of rationalizing the General Assembly's customary agenda is far from over. Therefore, the Assembly commits itself to "monitor the effects of the adjustments and to continue to make efforts to further streamline the agenda of the plenary." The Main Committees are also enjoined to contribute to this effort and to "give specific attention to the rationalization of their future agendas by biennialization, triennialization, clustering and the elimination of items and make recommendations to the plenary of the Assembly for its decisions by 1 April 2005."

Should the provisions of the resolution's section on Practices and Working Methods of the Main Committees be implemented faithfully, the door would be opened to transforming the way they conduct business, to the benefit of the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. Let me draw attention, especially, to three of the provisions concerning the work of the Main Committees that are likely to have particular impact.

The first provision to which I would wish to refer is that calling on all Main Committees to adopt a provisional programme of work at the end of session for the next session, to help future sessions plan, prepare, organize and review documentation requirements related to the programme. This is more than a technical provision - now all Main Committee would be required to look ahead to the next session of the General Assembly, and in particular, at the reporting implications of their decisions.

Main Committees tend to take discrete decisions on the issues before them. Consequently, the Committees and indeed, the General Assembly, has no means by which to overview the collective implications of the outcomes of Committees and Plenary. The review now required by

Main Committees might reveal overlaps in the decisions and might show where requests for reports might be unduly onerous for the Secretariat to prepare and for delegations to absorb.

The second provision to which I would wish to refer calls for the introduction of "Question Time" formats in all Main Committees. The purpose of this decision is to enable a dynamic and candid exchange with heads of departments and offices, representatives of the Secretary-General and Special Rapporteurs. This provision would introduce greater transparency in the relationship between the Secretariat and Member States.

As you would know, much of my time in recent years has been dedicated to the work of the United Nations - as Permanent Representative of St Lucia, Minister of External Affairs of St Lucia, and since September 2003, as President of the United Nations General Assembly. I must say that over the years I have begun to notice disquiet on the part of Member States, stemming from a sense that they are not always being kept fully informed about developments, or that proposals on matters of critical concerns are put before them on which adequate consultations may not have taken place. I would not wish to comment on the merit of these concerns. It is my view, however that the device of " Question Time" should allow for candid questioning and equally candid responses that would help address any concerns, including on the matter of transparency.

The third provision to which I would wish to refer is that which mandates that interactive debates and panel discussions shall be utilized or expanded by all Main Committees, beginning with the Fifty-ninth Session. Some Main Committees already make good use of this method of work, to good effect. I believe that these mechanisms to be invaluable tools for ensuring important interchanges about policy developments, and as with question time, to engage in dynamic and candid discussions, unconstrained by diplomatic nuances. Interactive debates and panel discussions are an important means, I believe, of keeping the United Nations abreast of new issues and ideas.

The section of the resolution on the General Committee also represents an important institutional development. The provision of resolution 58/126 that the General Committee should, "play the leading role in advising the General Assembly on the efficient organization, coordination and management of its work" has been a guiding principle for my Presidency from the beginning. While taking cognizance that its composition was such that Member States were unwilling to grant it recognition as the "Bureau" of the Plenary, I have sought to make the General Committee a more effective body. My view, in this regard, is that inadequacies, real and perceived in the General Committee could be overcome, working within the existing Rules of Procedure of the Assembly.

I am sure we all agree that the General Committee has, over the last ten months, become a more dynamic institutional tool. It was through the General Committee, for example, that the practice of informal briefings for delegations on topical issues has been put in place. You will recall that during my presidency, briefings have been held on the Budget, Staff Security and NEPAD. The resolution we have adopted recognizes these briefings as "a positive experience", and encourages

the General Committee to continue to hold them. Importantly, it has been through the General Committee, meeting in open-ended informal session that the deliberations on the content of this resolution have taken place, and as result, we have a consensus text.

This new, more dynamic approach to the General Committee is to continue, in line with the provisions of the resolution. Six concrete responsibilities are given to the General Committee. The most novel is the provision which calls on the Secretary-General to present to the General Committee and through it, to the General Assembly, the proposed programme of work of the forthcoming Assembly with relevant, related information on the status of documentation. This is a potentially far-reaching provision, as it will provide delegations with a tool to better plan and programme the work of the Assembly on an annual basis.

Currently, Member States do not begin to consider a programme of work for the Assembly until the third week in September, and this does not include a programme of work for the plenary. Moreover, the work programme of each Main Committee is considered separately and independently - coordination is not an issue in this exercise. I would encourage the Secretariat to give careful consideration to the preparation of this newly-mandated report so that member states will have a thorough product before them. My understanding of this provision is that the first report of this nature will be presented to the General Committee in July 2004; I look forward to receiving that report.

Let me refer to one further issue I consider to be of critical importance, and which we have been discussing since last year. It is the proposal to reorder the work of the General Assembly by scheduling it over two substantive periods of the session. This proposal has the strong support of many delegations, particularly those from small states.

I continue to hold the view that this proposal has merit for all delegations, in that it will permit them to better appreciate, better focus and therefore better act on the extraordinary number of issues that the Assembly seeks to address in the September to December period every year. I think it important to point out that in this four month period last year, we considered 276 items and sub-items, had submitted to us 347 reports totalling 5,500 pages, and adopted 287 resolutions. It is not clear to me why we should continue to operate in this fashion.

At its Fifty-ninth session, when the General Assembly resumes consideration of the proposal for scheduling the work of the Assembly over two substantive periods, Member States would have more time to consider this important proposal.

I trust that at that time, delegations would give more measured and favourable consideration to this issue.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates:

We have come a long way in our efforts to revitalize the General Assembly during this Fifty-eighth Session of the General Assembly. Working together, we have achieved a result which we

can all be justifiably pleased about. Let me here recognize all those who worked tirelessly to show, beyond doubt, that we are serious about revitalization of our General Assembly.

I am most appreciative to my Facilitators - the Permanent Representatives of Algeria, H.E. Mr Abdallah Baali, Jamaica, H.E. Mr Stafford Neil, Netherlands, H.E. Mr Dirk van den Berg, Singapore, H.E. Mr. Kishore Mahbubani, Slovenia H.E. Mr Roman Kirn and South Africa, H.E. Mr Dumisani Kumalo; to the various groups and delegations that provided input into the process; and to the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management that has provided excellent background information and support for the process. I would be remiss if I did not also thank my Chef de Cabinet, Ambassador A. Missouri Sherman-Peter and Senior Adviser for United Nations Reform, Mr Miles Stoby. I thank you all.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I thank you for your attention.