

1 June 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the General
Assembly**

Remarks delivered by H.E. Ambassador Dr. Mutlaq M. Al-Qahtani, Chef de Cabinet of the President of the General Assembly

I have the pleasure to participate in this important discussion on strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

I would like, at the outset, to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Alexander Lomaia, Permanent Representative of Georgia, and Her Excellency Ms. Susan Waffa-Ogoo, Permanent Representative of the Gambia, for their close personal interest and commitment to the process of revitalization of the GA, in their capacity as co-chairs.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Member States should redeem and act upon what our leaders reaffirmed and called for in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (Paragraph 150) – and this is: the full and speedy implementation of measures adopted by the General Assembly with a view to strengthening its role and authority as well as the role and the leadership of the President of the General Assembly.

The Assembly's agenda has evolved and grown enormously since the adoption of the General Assembly's first resolution on its revitalization more than 20 years ago. The Assembly's work now extends beyond the main part of the session, and it remains actively engaged throughout the year.

Bearing in mind the Assembly's heavy and growing agenda, it is essential to fully understand the context within which the President of the General Assembly (PGA) currently undertakes his or her mandate. The PGA spearheads the efforts and the collective responsibility of Member States to:

drive forward the agenda of the Assembly;
lead and facilitate the follow-up processes on substantive mandates; and
help to move forward processes when needed.

Additionally, in order to ensure that the voice of the General Assembly is heard worldwide, the President has the responsibility to conduct outreach on many levels. The Assembly has encouraged such actions by requesting that its Presidents increase their public visibility.

The Presidents are therefore obliged to broaden the scope of their duties beyond the UN Headquarters in New York, and across duty stations such as, Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna, and elsewhere, in order to reaffirm the Assembly's central role in global norm-setting.

The President's outreach provides assurances, especially to marginalized and vulnerable communities of the world, that the United Nations stands in solidarity with them. The President's briefings to the general membership following such important meetings do not only enable Member States to remain up-to-date on the most recent developments, but also helps to bring key messages from far corners of the world to the international community.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I would now turn to the Office of the President itself.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly, like any other Office in this Organization, can discharge its functions effectively and efficiently only if it has adequate human and financial resources.

In light of the growing role of both the Assembly and the President, it is imperative that the PGA is supported by a capable team. The Current PGA has carefully selected a competent team which is diverse, gender-balanced and representative of all regions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Member States who have provided Staff to the Office and supported our work.

It is worth mentioning that the contributions of some Member States in the form of secondment of staff, and particularly the immense support of the Government of the State of Qatar in strengthening the Office of the President, have gone a long way in supporting us to carry out the mandated activities in an effective manner.

With regard to the institutional memory of the Office, I would first like to mention here, as one of the best practices from our experience, that adequate time should be made available for a transition between the presidencies. Following his election, President Al-Nasser with his core team, opted to commence their work over a reasonable period that overlapped with the tenure of his predecessor. This interaction provided opportunity to share some of the best practices and lessons learned. This practice can be systematically expanded to other members of the PGA's team, so that effective hand-over processes between the incumbents and their successors can be implemented effectively.

Secondly, the possibility of using the expertise of a "Troika" of presidents – that is, the past, present and in-coming GA Presidents - is an idea worth exploring. In this context, President Al-Nasser has remained in close contact with his predecessors, and this has contributed significantly in maintaining the institutional memory of the Office. The President stands ready to provide any assistance and support to the incoming Presidents towards that end.

Thirdly, the proper documentation and archiving of the records of the Office, will be essential in maintaining the institutional memory of the Office.

During the 66th session, we have undertaken a number of measures in this regard, and these include, improving access to information, plus revamping and enhancing the PGA's website, with extra details of the President's meetings and participation in international forums.

We have also maintained proper electronic archiving and record-keeping based on the work and contributions of various specialists and on the general activities of the Office.

In this connection, the services rendered by the speechwriter, a dedicated post provided during the 66th session, as well as the roles of the Spokesperson and the assistant in reporting the President's activities as well as maintaining the Office website have been instrumental in upholding the high standards of communication and transparency of the PGA. In view of these important functions, more can be achieved with the provision of dedicated additional staff, and we hope that the Assembly would consider approving resources in this regard under appropriate agenda.

Fourthly, since, some mandates of the General Assembly extend beyond one session, the retention of some of the core advisors would ensure continuity of functional expertise and thereby enhance the institutional memory of the Office.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

Our presidency believes that the road to success in the General Assembly must be founded on the principles of partnership and collective responsibility. In this regard, we have continued to strengthen the constructive cooperation that exists between the President Al-Nasser and the heads of other principal organs, as well as the specialized agencies. This is vital for the attainment of the common objectives. We are also trying our best to build on the Assembly's strong partnership with civil society organisations, NGOs and the private sector on issues of global concern – especially in the areas of inclusive and sustainable development, peace and security and human rights. In this regard, we have appointed from the start of our tenure a Special Coordinator for Civil Society to facilitate a constructive and meaningful engagement of civil society in accordance with the rules and procedures set by Member States for every occasion. The capacity of the Office of the President to undertake effective and highly beneficial partnership with civil society should be strengthened to ensure continuity and greater benefits.

Effective coordination with the Secretary-General, as the Chief Executive of the Organization, and with the departments of the Secretariat has been instrumental in the successful performance of our Office. We are greatly appreciative of the services provided, in particular, by the Office of Legal Affairs, the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, and the Department of Public Information, in support of our work.

The Secretary-General's close and constant cooperation with the President during this Session and the support he provided to the work of our Office have been commendable. The success of some joint ventures undertaken by the President and the Secretary-General during this session is reflective of the quality of coordination and team work between the two offices.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

With regard to the budget allocated to the Office, it is surprising that at a time when the UN's overall budget has grown in every other area, the level of resources allocated to the Office - at US\$250,000 - has remained unchanged since it was last approved by the General Assembly for budget 1998-1999. This is despite the exponential increase in the activities of the Office in recent years.

Since this budget allocation represents a small fraction of the costs needed to finance the activities of the Office from the regular/core budget, it has become necessary for the country of origin of the President to bear significant costs in order to cover the expenses required to finance the activities. This situation, as highlighted in the discussions during previous ad hoc working groups, exposes the financial vulnerabilities of the Office, and creates the risk of inequality among the Member States when considering candidatures for the post of the President.

Moreover, the Trust Fund established in support of the Office and used to cover the costs of PGA initiatives such as specific thematic debates, did not receive any contributions for the 66th session.

In view of the high-level functions discharged by the President of the General Assembly on behalf of the Organization, I would like to call upon Member States to consider contributing generously to the work of the Office of the President in the coming sessions, either through the Trust Fund, secondments, or voluntary contributions.

It is, however, reassuring to note that, recognizing the difficult financial situation that the Office of the President has to face each session, the General Assembly in its resolution 66/246 on the proposed budget for 2012-2013 has requested the Secretary-General to submit in the context of the next budget, proposals to review the resource allocation to the Office of the PGA.

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

We hope that, in order to ensure the independence and effective running of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the General Assembly will take adequate measures to improve the financial situation of the Office in the coming budget. This could be done, at least to match the evolution of the regular budget of the Organization, including by approving dedicated conference service resources and additional posts assigned to the Office.

The inadequacy of the resources currently available to the Office also undermines the President's outreach capacity, and therefore constrains effective participation in regional meetings and other international forums. The provision of additional resources to enhance the President's outreach capacity would augur well for current efforts to improve the visibility of the Office and the work of the Organization at large.

As I conclude, I would like to note that, throughout the Presidency of this session, we have been careful to build on the progress achieved during previous sessions on a variety of issues. We hope that incoming presidencies will also carry forward the progress we have managed to achieve during this

session – with the full support of Member States. We stand committed to continuing our efforts during the remainder of our term, in order to achieve further progress in the laudable objectives of promoting the General Assembly’s central role in setting the global development agenda while adhering to the principles of building consensus and unifying the Assembly.

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share with you some of our experiences in the Office of the President of the General Assembly. Thank you for allowing me to offer these recommendations for strengthening the Office.

I thank you all.