United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information
Press Section
United Nations, New York

19

GA/6240
16 September 1980

STATEMENT BY SALIM AHMED SALIM (UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA), TEMPORARY PRESIDENT OF ASSEMBLY'S THIRTY-FIFTH SESSION

Following is the text of the statement by Salim A. Salim (United Republic of Tanzania), President of the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly (1979), and Temporary President for the opening of the thirty-fifth session today:

As we meet for the opening of the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly, I wish, in keeping with established tradition, to reflect with you on the experiences we have accumulated and the lessons we have learned since the last regular session of the General Assembly, and their relevance to the future agenda of the United Nations.

The last 12 months have been a very busy and challenging period for the United Nations. I might even characterize the year as turbulent and difficult, both politically and economically. The General Assembly had to meet twice in emergency special session in addition to the scheduled special session on international economic co-operation.

When we met last year, we had a very long agenda before us. Most of the problems on that agenda are still with us and new ones have been added. The path to a just and equitable solution to major outstanding problems still eludes us. In some cases, the positions on issues have hardened, making it more difficult to search for negotiated solutions. Furthermore, in addition to the old crises, new ones have emerged.

There was, for example, the dramatic deterioration of the United States/Iranian relations and the holding of the American diplomatic personnel. It is indeed a source of deep disappointment and anxiety that there has been no improvement in these relations during the year, and that American diplomatic personnel have continued to be held as hostages for 10 months now.

The developments concerning Afghanistan have also led to further deterioration of the international situation. The sixth emergency special session of the General Assembly was specifically convened to deal with this question.

(more)

On the whole, the year has witnessed a dangerous escalation of international tension, engendering a climate of deep distrust and mutual suspicions, particularly among the great Powers and, in the process, undermining, if not seriously threatening, the spirit and letter of detente. There is no doubt that the present international situation is very disquieting and unless its further deterioration is arrested, it poses ominous consequences for world peace and security.

This is therefore not an occasion for joy or self-congratulation. The problems we face call for even greater effort, imagination and wisdom; they call for courage and resilience; they call for dedication and sacrifice. Above all, they call for restraint among the most powerful nations.

During the past year, there was a strong reaffirmation of the importance of the General Assembly as a vital forum where serious attempts can be made to resolve global problems. That sometimes we do not agree or come up immediately with solutions should not obscure the importance of the General Assembly and the significance of the efforts of the United Nations.

The strength of the United Nations is in the principles for which it stands. These principles underline our vision of the future as well as the foundations for harmonious interaction among nations. We all subscribe to the equality of independent sovereign States; we all subscribe to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; we all subscribe to the equality and dignity of all human beings irrespective of race, colour, creed or sex; we are opposed to racial discrimination under any form or pretext; we are committed to the advancement of the quality of life for all people; and by our very membership to the United Nations, we are committed to conciliation, negotiations and peaceful coexistence, and the preservation of international peace and security. These, and more, constitute the purpose and the need for the United Nations.

These are not goals to be achieved at once. These are goals and objectives which every generation has to strive for. They constitute the permanent agenda and challenge for humanity. We cannot be naive or simplistic and expect that we can achieve them in one year, or a decade, or a single generation. What is needed is a clear vision of where we are going, and the ability to create and to capitalize on every opportunity which will bring us closer to our goals. Our greatest challenge is visionary and resourceful leadership, capable and willing to promote the principles of our Charter.

This century has been blessed with that kind of leadership. Those who drafted the Charter of the United Nations had a vision which enabled them to see beyond narrow and limited interests. Likewise, 25 years ago, visionary leaders met at Bandung and saw the need and future role of countries which until then had found themselves hopeless pawns in the rivalry of other nations. There the ground was laid for the eventual formal birth of the Non-Aligned Movement, which today exercises tremendous influence in world affairs.

Our task is to translate their vision into reality through practical programmes. Each time we make observable strides in this direction should be

cause for joy, a source of hope and reinforcement to our commitment for even greater achievements.

Thus, it was a great moment for all of us to welcome among us the independent Republic of Zimbabwe. The independence of Zimbabwe has a special place in the evolution of the international community. Year after year the question of Southern Rhodesia remained on the agenda of the General Assembly and the Security Council. General Assembly resolutions were sometimes ridiculed as meaningless and hollow. This notwithstanding, the General Assembly consistently upheld the principles of the Charter and in the end was vindicated, thanks to the resilience, courage and dedication of the gallant people of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a prized birthday present for the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

The independence of Zimbabwe is also a lesson for all of us. It has demonstrated that with a resourceful and committed leadership, in this case the leaders of the people of Zimbabwe, no problem is insurmountable. The liberation of Zimbabwe had also another significance for us all. It showed us that with perseverance, determination and goodwill, the negotiating process can triumph even in the most complex of circumstances. In a way, the victory in Zimbabwe, like the recent important breakthrough in the negotiations at the third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, eloquently reaffirms the conviction that with vision and dedication and political will, the most monumental of problems are not beyond solution.

The General Assembly must continue to uphold its principles and give encouragement to those who try to give meaning to the Charter's vision.

Only yesterday, the General Assembly concluded its eleventh special session devoted to a review and appraisal of progress in international economic co-operation and development. This session was convened to deal with one of the most difficult and yet crucial issues of our times. For some time we have witnessed a deterioration of the world economic situation as some of the pillars of the old world order have collapsed and others face imminent collapse unless urgent corrective measures are taken.

Interdependence among nations is no longer wishful thinking and the reality and pervasiveness of interdependence can no longer be ignored. Indeed, it is this perception of interdependence which encouraged us in the seventies to define in broad terms the parameters of the new world economic order. The need for such an order -- which implies major changes in power relations -- is gradually gaining acceptance. And yet the translation of the principles of the new international economic order into practical programmes to realize the new order remains disturbingly distant.

The world is not lacking in analytical studies on the present economic situation. We have reports of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation, the Brandt Commission, the Conference on International Economic Co-operation (CIEC), several studies by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and many more. What is missing

is the political will and spirit of genuine co-operation among nations. Without it, declarations or development strategies mean no more than the paper on which they are printed; without it global negotiations -- indeed any negotiation -- cannot succeed. And where the will to negotiate is demonstrated, experience has shown that a way can be found to agree on otherwise intractable problems.

The experience of the just concluded eleventh special session of the General Assembly is in this case very relevant. Given the political will, it was possible to arrive at a consensus on the international development strategy which this Assembly will be formally launching. Yet, at the same time, the lack of the required political will made it impossible for the session to achieve the expected positive results on the launching of the global negotiations.

The need for political will and a spirit of genuine co-operation is perhaps most relevant as we search for solutions to the major political problems of the post-war era. In the Middle East, in Lebanon, in Cyprus, in Korea, in South-East Asia -- to mention some of the crises points -- peace will continue to elude us unless there is a genuine desire, as well as the necessary political will to achieve peace. And there cannot be peace unless we respect and abide by the principles of the Charter.

Where there is a deliberate, consistent and determined effort on the part of any Government to violate the fundamental tenets which bind us together, where such behaviour threatens the well-being of all of us, appropriate measures should be taken by the international community in the interest of humanity. To do otherwise, or nothing, is to ridicule the whole purpose of the Organization and undermine its usefulness.

The United Nations should never compromise its basic principles. There is no basis for compromise on the inhuman policies of apartheid in South Africa. Similarly, there can be no compromise to foreign occupation and domination. Nor can there be compromise to the flagrant violation of human rights. In the Middle East we cannot continue to ignore the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. In this respect, the seventh emergency special session represented the culmination of the joint efforts of the membership to respond positively to the long frustrated aspirations of the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to achieve sovereign nationhood.

In Namibia, South Africa should not be allowed to continue with its illegal occupation in total defiance of our Organization and international law. We must therefore vigorously pursue the objective of the implementation, without delay, of the United Nations Plan for Namibia.

In my opening statement at the eleventh special session, I remarked that the complex economic problems confronting the world today are further compounded by the intensified pace of militarization. The arms race continues

unabated. Military expenditure at present conservatively estimated at $500 billion per annum represents a staggering figure -- particularly set against the background of rampant poverty in the greater part of the world.

To compound this trend and the psychosis of suspicion and distrust which it produces, the danger from the ever-increasing proliferation of nuclear weapons has become even more acute.

It cannot be denied that our world is now at a critical crossroad and that we must choose between the road which will lead mankind to its own fatal destruction, or the road towards mutual understanding, peaceful coexistence, progress and prosperity.

These are some of the challenges which we pass on to the next session. They are not easy problems. And yet there is no room for discouragement or despair. We have to continue untiringly to search for solutions. We should not be discouraged even if in the process we unravel new challenges. Let us continue to build on the foundations which we have. Let us resurrect and expand on the spirit of detente; let us respect and abide by rules and norms of diplomatic intercourse to which we all subscribe; and let us dedicate and commit ourselves to work for peace, progress and prosperity for all people.

During the past year I had the singular honour and privilege of being invited, in my capacity as President of the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly, to visit countries in all corners of the world. Those visits afforded me with a unique opportunity to receive the wisdom and guidance of many a head of State or Government, and of other high government officials on matters affecting world affairs which are our common preoccupation. I derived from them enormous encouragement and inspiration which has been of great help to me in discharging the enormous task of presiding over this important organ of the world Organization.

I should like to place on record my deep appreciation of the opportunities thus afforded me and of the warm, cordial and generous reception accorded me by all those Governments, without exception. My only regret is that, owing to the constraints of time, it was not possible for me to accept all the invitations so kindly extended to me. To those Governments, I wish to express my warm thanks for their kind understanding and consideration.

I wish also to express my appreciation and gratitude for the help and support which I received from the staff of the Secretariat in the course of my duties. You, Mr. Secretary-General, were most generous of your time and advice, I wish to thank you most sincerely. To Under-Secretary-General Bill Buffum I owe a particular debt of gratitude for his unflinching co-operation, assistance and friendship. My sincere thanks also go to the dedicated men and women of the Division of General Assembly Affairs, the Speakers Table and the Department of Conference Services for the exemplary discharge of their responsibilities. Above all, whatever we accomplished was only possible with the support and co-operation of all delegations. I wish to thank you all for your co-operation and support.

(more)

I wish also to express my profound gratitude to you once again for the honour bestowed upon me, my country and my continent, by electing me to the presidency of the thirty-fourth session, as well as of the three special sessions of the General Assembly held during the year.

I am confident that the work of the thirty-fifth session of the General Assembly will contribute towards the realization of the noble objectives of the Charter. May we hope that it will also help to create a climate conducive to genuine efforts towards peace and prosperity.

* *** *

(more)