

ITEM 110:
REVITALIZATION OF THE WORK OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: REPORT OF THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL

STATEMENT

BY

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Madame President

Today is a fine moment to look back at yet another year of arduous work of the General Assembly and to take stock of our achievements and failures. We believe that, overall, this has been a better year for the General Assembly than some of the previous ones. The follow-up to the World Summit led to significant results, in particular the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission and of the Human Rights Council as well as the adoption of a Counterterrorism Strategy. The Assembly has thus illustrated its ability to be a policy-making body which is indeed at the heart of the organization. The adoption of the resolution establishing the Human Rights Council has furthermore illustrated that we might be well advised to rethink the concept of consensus which is almost religiously observed in our discussion and at times to the detriment of the quality of our decisions. Consensus is thus not necessarily identical with unanimity, but rather a numerically very strong support which reflects genuine political commitment. We have also been confirmed in what we have known all along: That strong leadership is essential for the General Assembly to achieve significant results.

Madame President

While we can be proud of some achievements of the General Assembly, we must at the same time address one particular trend which has been the background music to much of the work we have done over the past year – the deteriorating relationship between the Assembly and the Security Council. This relationship appears ever more troubled and had a negative impact on numerous discussions, including management reform. We are concerned that many view the relationship between the two bodies as antagonistic instead of complementary. We continue to believe that a strong Assembly and a strong Security Council can coexist and work to each other's benefit and that both bodies must have a genuine interest in a functional and effective counterpart. Much has been said about the blurred lines of competence between the two organs and about the migration of topics from the Assembly to the Council. We share those concerns, but do not believe that blaming the Council is the solution to this unwelcome trend. Much rather, we believe that the Assembly has to assert its authority in the areas where it has competence under the Charter, not only by insisting on its competence, but also by producing clear results which justify the competence attributed to it.

Madame President

As a member of the group known as the “S-5”, we naturally see the working methods of the Security Council as a case in point for the relationship between the two organs. It is quite clear that the Assembly has the competence, both legally and politically, to express itself on the way the Council conducts its business and to make recommendations thereon. Such recommendations were contained in the resolution which the S-5 tabled in March. More than anything else, this text was aimed at creating a dialogue between the two organs on a topic which is of obvious interest and relevance to the membership as a whole. In hindsight, we believe that we have partly succeeded in that the S-5 text had a clear impact on the discussions in the Council itself. At the same time, it was not quite the dialogue we had in mind in that most of it consisted of things that were left unspoken. We hope that it will be possible to further develop this incipient dialogue and make it mutually beneficial and constructive. Given that the Security Council implicitly acknowledged the importance of our cause and addressed it to some extent, we refrained from having our own text adopted by the General Assembly. We will follow the application of the measures decided on by the Council itself with great attention, suggest further measures for consideration and seek for formal and informal ways to engage the Council on this subject matter. Given the continued inaction on the issue of enlargement of the Security Council, steady progress and an ongoing process on the issue of working methods – which are of particular importance to small countries – is all the more important.

Madame President

We have mixed feelings concerning the process to revitalize the General Assembly. We strongly believe that an Assembly that is fully capable of fulfilling the tasks assigned to it by the Charter is essential for a sound institutional balance of the organization. At the same time, we do not get the impression that talking about revitalization brings us much closer to this goal. Indeed, the report in front of us makes for somewhat ironic reading. In para. 9 of the report, reference is made to the annual report of the Security Council and the decision of the Assembly that the report should be considered “through interactive and substantive debates”. We just finished the debate of the report yesterday evening – a substantive discussion of course was impossible, given the date of its submission, and there was nothing interactive about the debate either. We would

welcome such an interactive debate, even if scheduled later during the session. Para. 14 of the report addresses the selection of the Secretary-General. We wholeheartedly welcome H.E. Ban Ki-moon as the new Secretary-General and look forward to his swearing in tomorrow in this hall. Nevertheless, the process leading to his selection had little to do with the measures contained in that paragraph. In some sad ways, the discussions on revitalization confirm some of the prejudices a wider public holds against the United Nations. A good part of the report is dedicated to the problem of non-implementation – indeed an urgent problem – when it becomes clear that non-implementation starts with the very decisions on revitalization itself. Instead of engaging in these repetitive and at times absurdly circular discussions, we are better advised to seize the General Assembly with issues of real relevance and to ensure decisions which have a real impact on the problems they purport to address.

I thank you