

United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

12-13 July 2012

Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly, at the “Towards a stronger General Assembly” Retreat

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be with you today.

I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Finland, Ambassador Jarmo Viinanen, for his invitation to this retreat, and for providing us with this opportunity to reflect on the crucial issue of General Assembly revitalization.

I am pleased to offer a few thoughts based on my experience as President of this august body.

As you are aware, one of my four key pillars as President is “UN reform and revitalization”.

This pillar reflects a goal that is common to all of us here today:

To build a stronger United Nations.

A United Nations that is better able and better structured to deliver on its global mandate.

This pillar also reflects our shared understanding that as the world changes, we must change with it.

As we undertake reform, revitalizing the General Assembly is a high priority.

Because – as I am sure you will agree- with un-paralleled universality, the Assembly is critical to finding legitimate solutions to the challenges of today’s world.

But let me be frank: today’s world is not the world of 1945 when the UN Charter was born.

To remain relevant and legitimate, the UN must adapt itself to meet current global challenges.

For this reason, Member States have, for almost 19 years, worked hard and built consensus on the need to revitalize the General Assembly.

I would take this opportunity to recognize Ambassador Susan Waffa-Ogoo, Permanent Representative of The Gambia, and Ambassador Alexander Lomaia, Permanent Representative of Georgia, the Co-Chairs for the Ad Hoc working Group on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

My thanks go to both Ambassadors for their leadership and extensive efforts in this area.

I am pleased that, this session, the Ad Hoc working group has been discussing important topics.

Discussions among the group have highlighted broad consensus on the importance of GA revitalization, and have emphasized the urgent need for a viable Assembly.

At the same time, different views have emerged among Member States about how best to achieve these goals.

In our discussions, some Member States have focused on technical and administrative issues.

These issues include, among others: improving the Assembly's working methods, and rationalizing the agenda of the Assembly, in order to make it more efficient.

Other Member States have highlighted the urgent need to revitalize the Assembly's political role and its authority as defined by the UN Charter.

Concerns have also been expressed on the importance of each principal organ strictly undertaking its mandate according to the UN Charter, with prospects of enhanced coordination between the General Assembly and other United Nations organs.

My own view is that we need to achieve progress on both fronts.

Improving the Assembly's working methods will also enhance its capacity to assume its duties fully, and to deliver on its mandate.

Yet, if General Assembly resolutions lack implementation, the mission of our organization will be undermined.

We must adopt a very balanced approach, aiming to have a more politically able, efficient and viable General Assembly.

To focus on only one aspect of revitalization while over-looking the others would create a gap, when what we really need is a bridge.

A bridge that will strengthen our common vision and our determination for the way forward.

My most sincere and honest advice for the best way forward in revitalizing the UN General Assembly is to ensure that equal importance is attached to the different elements of General Assembly revitalization.

I am confident that each of you will provide the necessary political will to this process.

I would also note here that the General Assembly's role should never be perceived as a substitute for the mandate of the other principal organs of the UN.

Rather, the General Assembly offers a complimentary, viable alternative for the international community to act in moments of deadlock.

This function has been put into practice this session, on the issue of Syria.

The Assembly's engagement on the situation in Syria reflects the very mission of our organization:

To keep peace throughout the world, and to encourage respect for human rights and freedoms.

Given the urgency of the situation in Syria, the General Assembly has held 4 meetings this year to consider the latest developments in Syria.

In a plenary meeting, the Membership adopted resolution 66/253, which called for the appointment of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, thereby implementing the provisions of Chapter 8 of the Charter.

We also heard briefings on the crisis from the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and of the League of Arab States, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

In considering the issue of Syria, the General Assembly is playing a complementary role to the Security Council, which had already adopted resolutions 2042 and 2043, endorsing the six-point plan and establishing the United Nations Supervision Mission in Syria (UNSMIS).

These acts within my stewardship of the General Assembly, have afforded practical measures for revitalizing the Assembly's role and effectiveness.

Dear colleagues,

I would turn your attention briefly to the mandate of the President of the General Assembly, and will offer a few thoughts based on my time in this office.

As the Assembly's agenda has evolved and expanded over-time, so too has the role of the President.

Today, the Assembly and its President remain actively engaged through-out the entire session.

As I view it, the PGA bears the responsibility of driving forward the agenda of the General Assembly.

He or she is tasked with leading and facilitating the follow-up processes on substantive mandates, and helping to move processes forward when needed.

In many ways, the President is the chief mediator of the Assembly.

Sorry, I cannot help but see the role of mediation in every issue!

Additionally, the President conducts outreach, to make sure the voice of the United Nations General Assembly is heard worldwide.

Such outreach activity has been encouraged by the Assembly, which has asked that Presidents of the General Assembly increase their public visibility.

For this reason, Presidents must extend their zone of duty beyond the Headquarters in New York, making themselves available at other centers of UN action as well, including in Geneva, Nairobi, Vienna and elsewhere.

Presidents should brief the general membership following such important meetings, to ensure that Member States remain up-to-date on the most recent developments.

The relationship between the General Assembly and other principal organs is of particular importance for the success of the United Nations' work.

Thus I have maintained close cooperation with both the President of the Security Council and the President of the Economic and Social Council.

Such cooperation has helped to ensure smooth and harmonized efforts in driving forward the UN's agenda.

The President also has a responsibility to ensure smooth coordination with the Secretary-General.

I must commend the Secretary-General for his commitment to ensuring close and fruitful coordination between our two offices.

This has been clearly reflected in, among other things, our joint visits to Libya and to Somalia.

Another important factor, which directly affects the President's effectiveness, is the PGA's one year term.

During this twelve month period, it is not always the case that each President finds this limited period of time appropriate or sufficient for familiarizing him or herself with the Office, while at the same time driving forward from day one the rich and diverse agenda of the Assembly.

Additionally, and openly, I would like to refer to the gap between the Office of the President of the General Assembly's current available budgetary resources, and the actual needed budget that is required to run this office.

Currently, the President has to search for external budgetary support from his or her country of origin, which is an extra burden on the presidency and distracts from the important issues at hand.

If we could ensure that the Office of the President's functions are supported through the UN's biennium budget, then developing and least developed countries would be encouraged to nominate their talents for the Presidency, and to contribute their rich expertise at this level.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

I am sure you will agree that this has been a particularly testing year for the General Assembly.

From the historic shifts taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, through a struggling global economic recovery, to an historic opportunity to build a more sustainable world - the UN and its General Assembly have been called upon to act urgently.

I am convinced that, in the face of shifting sands, the Assembly has stood strong, active and responsive.

It has built bridges and brokered new partnerships.

It has put aside politics and produced unity, to offer urgent help and hope to those most in need.

In doing so, the General Assembly has reaffirmed its place as the most legitimate, representative, universal body in the world.

I have endeavored, as President of this sixty-sixth session, to chart a clear course between idealism and realism.

I have sought to galvanize the support of Member States in building a truly united global partnership on all the important issues we have to address.

In the 2 months remaining of my term, I look forward to continuing to work with each of you, to ensure a strong, responsive United Nations – the United Nations the world deserves.

Thank you.