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INDIA  
भारत

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General Debate  
of the 72<sup>nd</sup>  
United Nations General Assembly

Address  
by  
Minister of External Affairs of India  
Smt. Sushma Swaraj

23 September 2017

Mr President

Let me begin by offering my heartiest congratulations on your election as President of the 72nd United Nations General Assembly. For those of us fortunate to represent our nations as Foreign Minister this is a particularly happy event: one of us has this honour.

Mr President

2: India welcomes your efforts to place people at the heart of international diplomacy as you shape policy and lend direction to world affairs from your august chair. I thank you for the theme you have chosen: 'Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life on a sustainable planet'. People, peace, decency, sustenance and focus define a noble objective.

Mr President

3: The United Nations was established for the welfare, security, harmony, rights and economic progress of the people of our world. India fully supports your efforts in this great mission.

4: I had spoken before this Assembly last year as well. It is a year that has seen much change both in this Assembly and in the world it represents. We have a new Secretary General at the United Nations. He is determined to prepare and strengthen the United Nations to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We welcome his efforts, and see in him a leader who can give practical shape to a vision.

Mr President

5: Our contemporary world is trapped in a deluge of troubles of which, surely, the most dangerous is the relentless rise of violence. Terrorism, and the ideas that engineer this evil, are spreading at the pace of a conflagration. Climate change stares us in the face, and threatens us with its dimension. There is a growing question mark over maritime security. For a mix of reasons, provocative and inflammatory, people are leaving the psychological, cultural and economic comfort of their traditional home space to seek refuge on distant shores causing global anxiety. A large part of the globe's population is still tortured by hunger and poverty. The young are beginning to lose hope as they confront unemployment. Women, victims of historic discrimination, are demanding what they must get: gender empowerment.

Nuclear proliferation is back in the zone of dangerous headlines. Cyber security has become a source of deep insecurity.

6: In 2015, we set ourselves a target of 2030 to find solutions to many challenges on this Agenda. Two of these years have already passed. Surely it is already time to ask how much has happened. If complacency defines the next 13 years then we are in danger of losing control. We need a sense of urgency as well as unshakeable fortitude to take decisions that can avert catastrophe.

7: I am pleased that India has displayed the courage and leadership to take tough decisions which have launched the interlinked process of sustainable development. The complete eradication of poverty is the most important priority of the present government. Mr President, There are two ways of addressing the curse of poverty. The traditional method is through incremental levels of aid and hand-holding. But our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has chosen the more radical route, through economic empowerment. The poor are not helpless; we have merely denied them opportunity. We are eliminating poverty by investing in the poor. We are turning them from job-seekers into job-providers.

8: All our economic programmes have a principal purpose, the empowerment of the poor: Jan Dhan, Mudra, Ujjwala, Skill India, Digital India, Clean India, Start-Up India, Stand-Up India. To describe them all would take up more time than I have at my disposal, and I shall therefore dwell on only three core programmes.

9: The Jan Dhan plan must surely count as the world's largest financial inclusion scheme. At least 300 million Indians who had never crossed the doors of a bank today have bank accounts: this is equivalent to the population of the United States of America. This was, understandably, not easy to complete in three years, but our banks, achieved this visionary goal set by our Prime Minister. While some remain to be included, the target has been set – every Indian family will have a bank account.

10: Mudra yojana has enabled government to fund the unfunded. Those who had never dreamt that bank credit was within their options, today, through Mudra, are getting soft loans without collateral to begin micro businesses. I

am particularly delighted to inform you that over 70 per cent of these loans have gone to women. Unemployment spreads despair. Through Skill India, Start-Up India and Stand-Up India poor and middle class youth are being trained to match their honed talent with bank credit and become self-employed or small-scale entrepreneurs.

11: Ujjwala is a signature scheme of our government. Free gas cylinders are being provided to the poor so that women do not have to suffer the dangerous consequences of wood-fired kitchens. Uniquely, gender emancipation is at the creative core of this programme.

12: Demonetisation was a courageous decision to challenge one of the by-products of corruption, the "black money" that disappeared from circulation. Today, India has passed the Goods and Services Tax legislation, through which there is one-tax across the country, without the untidy and punishing system of multiple taxes under differing categories in different parts of the country. Our "Save the girl, Educate the girl" campaign is reducing gender inequality. Our Clean India programme is generating what can only be described as a revolutionary change in social attitudes and habits.

13: I would like to note, at this point, that nations with rising capabilities will be able to generate such change, but the developed world must become an active partner in helping those vulnerable countries which are still mired in stagnant poverty reach SDG horizon within 2030. That is why the principle of Global Partnership was included in SDGs. I am happy to report that India has started, this year, the India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

Mr President

14: We are completely engaged in fighting poverty; alas, our neighbour Pakistan seems only engaged in fighting us. On Thursday, from this dais, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahid Khakan Abbasi wasted rather too much of his speech in making accusations against us. He accused India of State-sponsored terrorism, and of violating human rights. Those listening had only one observation: "Look who's talking!" A country that has been the world's greatest exporter of havoc, death and inhumanity became a champion of hypocrisy by preaching about humanity from this podium.

15: Pakistan's Prime Minister claimed that his nation's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah had bequeathed a foreign policy based on peace and friendship. I would like to remind him that while it remains open to question whether Jinnah Sahab actually advocated such principles, what is beyond doubt is that India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has, from the moment he took his oath of office, offered the hand of peace and friendship. Pakistan's Prime Minister must answer why his nation spurned this offer.

16: Prime Minister Abbasi has recalled old resolutions that have been long overtaken by events. But his memory has conveniently failed him where it matters. He has forgotten that under the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration India and Pakistan resolved that they would settle all outstanding issues bilaterally. The reality is that Pakistan's politicians remember everything, manipulate memory into a convenience. They are masters at "forgetting" facts that destroy their version.

17: Pakistan's current Prime Minister spoke of a "Comprehensive Dialogue" between our two countries. I would like to remind him that on 9 December 2015, when I was in Islamabad for the Heart of Asia conference, a decision was made by his leader Mian Nawaz Sharif, then still Prime Minister, that dialogue between us should be renewed and named it a "Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue". The word "bilateral" was used consciously to remove any confusion or doubt about the fact that the proposed talks would be between our two nations and only between our two nations, without any third-party present. And he must answer why that proposal withered, because Pakistan is responsible for the aborting that peace process.

18: I would like today to tell Pakistan's politicians just this much, that perhaps the wisest thing they could do is to look within. India and Pakistan became free within hours of each other. Why is it that today India is a recognised IT superpower in the world, and Pakistan is recognised only as the pre-eminent export factory for terror?

19: India has risen despite being the principal destination of Pakistan's nefarious export of terrorism. There have been many governments under many parties during 70 years of Indian freedom, for we have been a sustained democracy. Every government has done its bit for India's development. We have marched ahead, consistently, without pause, in

Education, Health and across the range of human welfare. We established scientific and technical institutions which are the pride of the world. But what has Pakistan offered to the world and indeed to its own people apart from terrorism? We produced scholars, doctors, engineers. What have you produced? You have produced terrorists. Doctors save people from death; terrorists send them to death. If Pakistan had spent on its development what it has spent on developing terror, both Pakistan and the world would be safer and better-off today.

Mr. President

20: Terrorism is at the very top of problems for which the United Nations is searching for solutions. We have been the oldest victims of this terrible and even traumatic terrorism. When we began articulating about this menace, many of the world's big powers dismissed this as a law and order issue. Now they know better. The question is: what do we do about it?

21: We must all introspect and ask ourselves whether our talk is anywhere close to the action we take. We all condemn this evil, and piously resolve to fight it in all our declaratory statements. The truth is that these have become rituals. The fact is that when we are required to fight and destroy this enemy, the self-interest of some leads them towards duplicity.

22: This has been going on for years. Although India proposed a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) as early as in 1996, yet two decades later the United Nations has not been able to agree upon a definition of terrorism. If we cannot agree to define our enemy, how can we fight together? If we continue to differentiate between good terrorists and bad terrorists, how can we fight together? If even the United Nations Security Council cannot agree on the listing of terrorists, how can we fight together?

Mr President

23: Through you, with utmost sincerity, I would like to request this august assembly to stop seeing this evil with self-defeating and indeed meaningless nuance. Evil is evil. Let us accept that terrorism is an existentialist danger to humankind. There is absolutely no justification for this barbaric violence. Let us display our new commitment by reaching agreement on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism this year itself.

Mr President

24: I had identified climate change as one of the significant dangers to our existence. India has already said that it is deeply committed to the Paris Accord. This is not because we are afraid of any power, influenced by friend or foe, or tempted by some imagined greed. This is an outcome of a philosophy that is at least 5000 years old. Our Prime Minister has, on his personal initiative, launched the International Solar Alliance as witness to our abiding commitment to a cause.

25: When we talk of world peace, we mean peace not only among human beings but also peace with nature. We understand that human nature is sometimes inimical to nature, but we would like to amend human nature when it tends in the wrong directions. When we inflict our greed upon nature, nature sometimes explodes. We must learn to live with the imperatives, cycles and creative urges of nature; in that lies, our own salvation.

26: We have just witnessed hurricanes, earthquakes, rains that inundate, storms which terrify. This is not a mere coincidence. Nature sent its warning to the world even before the world's leadership gathered in New York at the United Nations through Harvey. Once our gathering began an earthquake struck Mexico and a hurricane landed in Dominica. We must understand this requires more serious action than talk. The developed world must listen more carefully than others, because it has more capacities than others. It must help the less fortunate through technology transfer and Green Climate Financing - that is the only way to save future generations.

Mr President

27: We are discussing turbulence and change across the world, but the one organisation created to address world affairs is beset by its own problems. It seems to believe that it can afford not to change from the precepts and perceptions that determined its birth. On 18 September, there was a meeting here on UN reform. I participated. I witnessed an evident desire for change, to do something. But I do want to remind you that at the 2005 World Summit there was a consensus that the early reform of the Security Council is an essential element of our overall effort to reform the United Nations.

28: Efforts at text-based negotiations on the reform and expansion of the Security Council were initiated in the last session and more than 160 nations had expressed support for this effort. If we are serious, then the least we can do is produce one text that can be the basis for negotiation. I hope that under your enlightened leadership, Mr President, this will become a priority. If that happens it will be a significant achievement.

29: We also have high expectations from the new Secretary General of the United Nations. If he wants to reform the peace and security architecture, he will also need to address reforms related to peacekeeping that have been urged for long. Without improvements in UN Peacekeeping this goal can't be achieved.

Mr President

30: There is no shortage of issues; there is even less shortage of problems which should be recognised from this podium. But time is not always on the side of those who would like to raise issues and problems in the interests of a better, more peaceful and progressive future. The issues you have chosen are relevant to the UN Charter as well as to the ancient traditions of my land.

Mr President

31: My country's culture and thought has been shaped by a history and philosophy that believes in peace as humankind's only rational and practical objective. We truly believe that the world is one family and we hope that every member of this family deserves that elixir of life, happiness. Let me end by reciting a verse that is a synthesis of thought:

May all be happy;  
May all be healthy;  
May all see what is good;  
May all be free from suffering.

Thank you, Mr. President.

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