

National Statement by External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar at the General Debate of the 78th UNGA

September 26, 2023

**Mr. President, Excellencies,
Distinguished Members of the General Assembly,
Namaste from Bharat!**

Let me begin by expressing our felicitations to the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Dennis Francis. And our fullest support to the 78th UNGA's theme of "Rebuilding Trust and Reigniting Global Solidarity".

This is an occasion to take stock of our achievements and challenges even while sharing our aspirations and goals. And indeed, in regard to both, there is much that India has to share.

Mr. President, the world is witnessing an exceptional period of turmoil. As it is, structural inequities and uneven development have imposed burdens on the Global South. But stresses have been aggravated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the repercussions of ongoing conflicts, tensions and disputes. As a result, socio-economic gains of recent years have been rolled back.

Resources for sustainable development are severely challenged. And many countries really struggle to make ends meet. Navigating the future appears even more daunting today.

At this juncture, it was with a sense of exceptional responsibility that India took up the Presidency of the G20. Our vision of 'One Earth, One Family, One Future' sought to focus on the key concerns of the many, not just the narrow interests of a few.

In the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it was to bridge divides, dismantle barriers and sow seeds of collaboration that nourish a world, where unity prevails over discord and where shared destiny eclipses isolation. The New Delhi G-20 Leaders' Declaration articulates our collective ability to do so.

Excellencies, Friends, at a time when East-West polarization is so sharp and North-South divide so deep, the New Delhi Summit also affirms that diplomacy and dialogue are the only effective solutions. The international order is diverse and we must cater for divergences, if not differences. The days when a few nations set the agenda and expected others to fall in line are over.

As the United Nations itself symbolizes, finding common ground is an imperative. To listen to others and to respect their viewpoints, this is not weakness; it is the basics of cooperation. Only then can collective efforts on global issues be successful.

Recognizing that growth and development must focus on the most vulnerable, we began the G20 Presidency by convening the 'Voice of the Global South' Summit. This enabled us to hear directly from 125 nations and place their concerns on the G20 agenda.

As a consequence, the issues which deserve global attention got a fair hearing. More than that, the deliberations produced outcomes that have great significance for the international community.

Mr. President, it was also noteworthy that at India's initiative, the African Union was admitted as a permanent member of the G20. By doing so, we gave voice to an entire continent which has long been its due.

This significant step in reform should inspire the United Nations, a much older organization, to also make the Security Council contemporary. Broad representation is after all, a pre-requisite for both effectiveness and credibility.

The outcomes of the New Delhi G20 Summit will surely resonate for years ahead. Among them is the Action Plan for Sustainable Development Goals, a crucial need of the day. Equally important are the High Principles of LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) and the Green Development Pact, as they shape our approach to our planet's future.

The transformative role of Digital Public Infrastructure has also finally been recognized. As has the salience of women-led development in building an inclusive and progressive society. The reform of international financial institutions (IFI) has been given due weight, as has the resolution of debt vulnerabilities.

Friends, the New Delhi G20 outcomes are expressed both as larger policies and as specific initiatives. They could be about building cities for tomorrow or fighting corruption. Eliminating hunger or delivering quality education. Ending plastic pollution or preserving the ocean-based economy. Or for that matter, enhancing food security or even mapping global skills.

Some address longstanding issues like the gender divide and climate action. Others focus on new concerns such as responsible harnessing of Artificial Intelligence. All in all, we have placed for the world's consideration a set of actionable propositions, constructive solutions and new directions.

Even as we encourage collective endeavours, India also seeks to promote cooperation with diverse partners. From the era of non-alignment, we have now evolved to that of Vishwa Mitra (a friend to the world). This is reflected in our ability and willingness to engage with a broad range of nations. And, where necessary, harmonize interests.

It is visible in the rapid growth of the Quad, a mechanism today so relevant to the Indo-Pacific. It is equally apparent in the expansion of the BRICS grouping of independent-minded nations. Or in fact, the emergence of the I2U2 combination.

Recently, we hosted the creation of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The forging of the Global Biofuels Alliance was another notable development. This willingness to work in an open-minded manner on specific domains is now a defining characteristic of the emerging multipolar order.

Mr. President, all nations pursue their national interests. We, in India, have never seen that as being in contradiction with global good. When we aspire to be a leading power, this is not for self-aggrandizement but to take on greater responsibility and make more contributions. The goals we have set for ourselves will make us different from all those whose rise preceded ours.

India demonstrated this during the Covid through the Vaccine Maitri initiative. Our endeavors like the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure have gathered wide support. Our espousing of the International Year of Millets is enhancing global food security today.

We have built development partnerships with 78 nations across geographies. We have also been First Responder in disaster emergency situations. The people of Türkiye saw that in February, as did those in Syria.

Our commitment is understandably even greater, closer home. When Sri Lanka experienced a severe economic crisis, it was India that first stepped forward. But even in distant regions, partners such as the Pacific Islands have appreciated our contributions to meet their needs in health, in technology and in climate action.

Mr. President, the most populous nation and the fifth largest economy in the world knows that its progress makes a real difference to the world. Especially when so many nations identify with us for reasons of history, geography and culture. They follow our experiences closely and evaluate our solutions for their larger relevance.

Last week the United Nations assessed progress towards achieving SDGs. The mood here reflected the struggle to overcome challenges, especially those of resource paucity. It is, therefore, vital at this mid-way, that we expand our capacities and regain our confidence. As the largest contributor to meeting SDG targets, India's achievements should give heart to others on this journey.

After all, the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index records that we have halved the global MPI value in the last 15 years, lifting 415 million people out of poverty. That progress has now moved on to a higher level, with ambitious socio-economic initiatives covering financial inclusion, food and nutrition, health and water supply, as well as energy and housing. We are seeking to demonstrate that social welfare need not be the sole prerogative of the developed world.

Excellencies, programs underway in India highlight the transformational role of digital delivery of public goods. It has facilitated scaling up, it has enhanced efficiency and it has combated corruption. The national objective of Leaving No One Behind is forging ahead in so many dimensions. Moreover, the democratization of technology has opened mindsets, instilled confidence and inspired innovations.

Excellencies, in our deliberations, we often advocate the promotion of a rules-based order. From time to time, respect for the UN Charter is also invoked. But for all the talk, it is still a few nations who shape the agenda and seek to define the norms. This cannot go on indefinitely. Nor will it go unchallenged.

A fair, equitable and democratic order will surely emerge, once we all put our minds to it. And for a start, that means ensuring that rule makers do not subjugate rule takers. After all, rules will work only when they apply equally to all.

Mr. President, we must never again allow an injustice like vaccine apartheid to recur. Climate action too cannot continue to witness an evasion of historical responsibilities. The power of markets should not be utilized to steer food and energy from the needy to the wealthy.

Nor must we countenance that political convenience determines responses to terrorism, extremism and violence. Similarly, respect for territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs cannot be exercises in cherry picking.

When reality departs from rhetoric, we must have the courage to call it out. Without genuine solidarity, there can never be real trust. This is very much the sentiment of the Global South.

Next year, the United Nations will be hosting the Summit of the Future. This should serve as a serious opportunity to drive change, champion fairness and reform multilateralism, including the expansion of the Security Council memberships. We must address global challenges imbued with the conviction that we are one earth and one family, with one future.

Excellencies, Friends, India has entered the Amrit Kaal, a quarter century where greater progress and transformation awaits us. We are confident that our talent and creativity, now so visibly unleashed, will power us forward. The world saw a glimpse of what is to come when our Chandrayaan-3 landed on the moon.

Today, our message to the world is in digitally enabled governance and delivery, in the widening ambit of amenities and services, in rapidly growing infrastructure, and in our energetic Startup culture. It is visible too in vibrant cultural expressions, such as in the arts, yoga, wellness, and lifestyle.

Our latest assertion is in a pathbreaking legislation to reserve one-third of the seats for women in our legislatures.

Mr. President, I speak for a society where ancient traditions of democracy have struck deep modern roots. As a result, our thinking, approaches and actions are now more grounded and authentic. As a civilizational polity that embraces modernity, we bring both tradition and technology equally confidently to the table. It is this fusion that today defines India, that is Bharat.

I thank you, Mr. President.

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