EXTEMPORE REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR HARDEEP SINGH PURI,
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Thank you very much Mr. President.

I want to encourage my distinguished colleague from New Zealand to attend a few more interactive sessions on Security Council reform. There are indeed some interesting sessions which have taken place-interactive almost to the point where one of the participants said that you cannot change the outcome of the Second World War through Security Council reform! And these were not prepared speeches. This was emotion running riot.

Security Council reform certainly lies somewhere at the heart of this panel discussion. But I will come back to that in a minute.

Based on the inspiration that I have drawn from the very interesting, very incisive interventions of Ambassador Amorim and Professor Thakur, let me place before you four propositions. May be ‘propositions’ is not the correct word, because these are self-evident, so I would say these are truisms.

One: that organizational lethargy begets structural blind spots.

Two: the lessons of history will remain lessons of history if not properly learnt and understood.

Three: reform or step aside.

Four: denial is not a governance response.

And let me now start, Mr. President, by taking up one or two simple points which were made.

Why is ECOSOC not addressing the economic crisis in Greece?

ECOSOC could not even address the world economic and financial crisis, when it broke out in the last few months of 2008. The G20 Finance Ministers meeting in Sao Paolo, decided to convert the G20 to a Heads of State/ Government, a Summit level meeting in order to address the crisis. Lo and behold, what would have happened if ECOSOC had actually
addressed the world economic and financial crisis? In some respects, I am very glad that it didn’t. Otherwise, the total irrelevance of ECOSOC to that crisis would have stood out.

What do we do with ECOSOC?

I am not going to go into detail. ECOSOC had a certain utility when it was the electoral college and you needed it to get elected to the Human Rights Council. Now, that it is no longer the case. My recommendation to all those who are dealing with ECOSOC is: take a serious look, do some serious introspection and decide where you want to go with ECOSOC.

Now let me just say that in today’s world, we have talked about the challenges of climate change, the scourge of terrorism, violent and vicious forces of intolerance, unresolved development gaps, so on and so forth.

In the coming days, the United Nations is going to be tested not only by the political upheavals in North Africa and West Asia, but by a number of other issues.

Therefore I admire you, Mr. President, for the choice of your theme, that is “How can the UN remain relevant in addressing tomorrow’s global challenges”. There is an optimistic streak here, a presumption there that the UN is relevant today. And that what we do here actually has a bearing on what happens in the world.

Let me take one example, the so-called political process in Libya.

Resolution 1973 is absolutely clear. It talks about cessation of hostilities. We cannot get a ceasefire in the Security Council.

Why?

Because those who sit in the Council and those who voted in favour of 1973 have decided, may be due to mission creep, that regime change is an essential requirement. So, their position is, first the current political dispensation must give way and then the political process can start. In other words, if the current dispensation is not removed physically or otherwise, the kind of devastation which is going on there on a large scale will continue.

And I was astounded in the Security Council yesterday to have to hear from a senior member of the Secretariat saying it seems that Gaddafi has killed more civilians than NATO. Which means that you are acknowledging that NATO’s contribution to the killing of civilians—its supposed to go in there for protection of civilians—is as significant.

These are very serious issues. If we cannot get action on a ceasefire in Libya in terms of our own resolution, Mr. President, we have a crisis on our hands and let us acknowledge that crisis.

We had the African Union High Level Panel in New York recently, they didn’t come to the Council, but to some other meeting. They said they have a road map. If the Council is serious about a ceasefire it should be encouraging the African Union as the regional
grouping there to take responsibility and we should be backing that up. But no, because there are differences in terms of the approach.

Let me come to the second truism.

The lessons of history will remain lessons of history. Everyone knows that the institutions of global governance do not reflect the shift that has taken place of global economic reality, the power, the economic activity from Europe and the Americas to Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Reform or step aside is my third truism.

The G20 arose as a response to a global reality. Because the current institutions did not have the wherewithal to address the challenges which the G20 was able to. But what did we do in this organization. And I am like Ambassador Amorim—I am neither for nor against the G20. To me the G20 was a response, a product of the times.

What did we do?

We didn’t say, let’s find out what we can do to deal with the macroeconomic issues that the G20 was addressing. And all the time we were carping on how the G20 does not have the legitimacy, the G20 must not do this; there must be a response. But nowhere did we say that the lessons learnt from the global economic and financial crisis must be utilized to reform the UN’s economic governance structures.

Denial is not a governance response.

I keep asking myself Mr. President, whether we need something terrible or awful to happen again before we can put in place another appropriate international architecture to replace the current one. The current one clearly reflects the outcome of the Second World War and the thinking ‘to the victor belong the spoils.’ Do we remain blind to the fact that 70% of the Security Council’s meeting have been on Africa in the last six months that I have been on it. And in terms of the amount of time spent, more than 90% of the Council’s attention was on African issues. What more do we need to remind us on that. And yet there is there is not a single African country as a permanent member on the Council.

Where are we headed? And this is not the situation with the Security Council alone.

Recently, we had a large meeting of the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul. And there are 48 of them. Out of a total of 192 nations in the UN, a total of 48 are Least Developed Countries, and if you take the other categories-the small island developing states, the landlocked etc, and you remove the overlaps, you have a total of 90. There was not a single high-level representative of the G7 or the G8 in Istanbul. There was no new commitment on ODA. Existing commitments are sought to be reiterated where they can. Other countries, donors spoke of, you know resources not being available and a conscious attempt to divert attention from North-South commitments to South-South cooperation. Those of us who are active participants in South-South cooperation are very happy. But you know, South-South
will take some time to bridge the gap between the flows from the North to the South. Some things are changing. There is more foreign direct investment from the South to the South than the ODA, which means that the market place is changing.

Let me conclude by saying that I find today's session to be extremely optimistic. But the question is how relevant the UN is today and whether it will remain relevant in 2025. I am not entirely sure about our relevance beyond those of us who are actually involved in the industry of the UN. I think the market place's perception of us is quite different.

Someone said that the Special Envoy of the SG is not being able to get an audience with a political leader here or there.

Why? There's a very clear explanation.

Because we are not viewed, you know, as wanting to go in there and actually resolve the issue in an impartial manner. Because the shots are being called from elsewhere.

So my submission is, in order to be relevant we have to make ourselves relevant. And unless we have the political will for that, I am afraid there is going to be a problem.

Thank you.