

Statement by Mr. Anand Sharma, Member of Parliament and Member of the Indian Delegation at the 59th Session of the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, October 7, 2004

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to congratulate you on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee at the 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I would like to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation in the discharge of your responsibilities.

2. India is firmly committed to multilateralism and the primacy of multilateral institutions, processes and instruments in the field of disarmament and nonproliferation.

3. We believe in the need to revitalize and strengthen the authority and role of the UN General Assembly, including its main Committees. UN General Assembly's Resolution 58/316 provides the parameters within which we could move in that direction. The effective implementation of the resolutions adopted by the First Committee would make it more productive in providing guidance and direction to the other multilateral efforts in the area of arms control and disarmament.

4. Member States have varying security concerns and priorities and the First Committee provides them a forum to outline those to the international community through their general statements, thematic interventions and resolutions. Any attempt to limit this opportunity will reduce the First Committee's relevance, especially to the Member States of the UN who are not represented in the Conference on Disarmament.

5. The current agenda of the First Committee is derived from the Final Document of the First Special Session of the UN General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-I), which enjoys consensus support and reflects a delicate balance in addressing the security concerns of all Member States. Any piecemeal approach to change the agenda of the First Committee or to alter its priorities will erode this consensus and may even paralyse the working of the First Committee.

6. Failure of the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to agree on a Programme of Work is only a reflection of the current lack of global consensus on the goals and priorities of the disarmament and arms control agenda. It is also a manifestation of the lack of political will on the part of major players to address the issues that concern other Member States, including the issue of nuclear disarmament. India has shown considerable flexibility to enable CD to agree on a programme of work that is balanced and comprehensive. The absence of agreement on an agenda of the UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) was an outcome of the same malaise that afflicts the Conference on Disarmament. The international community has a collective interest in preserving and strengthening all elements of the institutional triad of disarmament- the First Committee, CD and UNDC. India remains committed to contributing to that goal.

7. There is a growing concern over the threat of proliferation of nuclear weapons, related materials and technology, particularly their possible acquisition by non-State actors. India shares these concerns. We believe States have the responsibility for taking measures to prevent proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and related materials and technology to both non-State actors and

other States. Aware of its responsibilities arising from possession of nuclear weapons, India has put in place legislative and administrative measures, including export controls for this purpose. Our record in preventing proliferation is impeccable.

8. It has been evident that the current nuclear non-proliferation regime is facing major challenges. We need to create a more inclusive and non-discriminatory structure to effectively address current proliferation concerns.

9. The focus on pursuing the goals of non-proliferation, without progress towards global and complete nuclear disarmament, may be detrimental and counter-productive. Measures aimed at expanding or perpetuating the existing regimes of export controls and technology denials will hinder peaceful applications of nuclear technologies and reinforce the existing divide between nuclear and non-nuclear States by creating a new class of haves and have-nots.

10. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy, including for electricity generation, remains crucial to economic and social development of many developing and developed countries. It can provide environmentally sustainable energy security. The need for ensuring access to nuclear technologies and materials for peaceful purposes is, therefore, as important as preventing proliferation of sensitive technologies and materials.

11. As long as nuclear weapons exist, the threat of use of nuclear weapons, accidentally or inadvertently, will remain. Only global and complete nuclear disarmament, within a time-bound framework, can totally eliminate the danger of a nuclear war.

12. This was the cornerstone of India's Action Plan for the elimination of nuclear weapons unveiled by late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 at the Third Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament and continues to be India's abiding objective even today.

13. While pursuing the goal of nuclear disarmament, it is desirable to take immediate steps for reducing nuclear danger. These could include measures to de-alert and detarget nuclear weapons, legally binding commitments on no-first use of nuclear weapons and non-use of nuclear weapons against Non-nuclear Weapon States.

14. Simultaneously, we need to evolve a new global order based on cooperative security and multilateralism. Addressing legitimate security concerns of States may help in creating a conducive environment for achieving global disarmament and nonproliferation objectives.

15. The growing danger of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction, related materials and technologies has added a new and more menacing dimension to the traditional danger of a nuclear war. The international community has demonstrated the will to confront this danger, which is manifested in the adoption by the General Assembly during the last two Sessions by consensus of the resolution, sponsored by India, on "Measures to prevent terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction" and adoption of Resolution 1540 by the Security Council this year. India is presenting the resolution again to reaffirm the commitment of the international community to take measures to combat this danger.

16. The new challenges can be effectively dealt with only through truly universal

and non-discriminatory regimes such as Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) and Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and by building on them.

17. There is a need to strengthen the international norm against biological weapons. India is committed to the current process of annual meetings of experts and States parties of the BTWC to consider specific topics. The 2006 Review Conference will provide an opportunity to put in place mechanisms to further strengthen this instrument and to address in parallel the threat of use of biological weapons by non-State actors.

18. India's commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention is evident in India's exemplary performance in meeting its targets for destruction before the prescribed deadline. We have a collective stake in ensuring that the provisions of the Convention are implemented fully and effectively.

19. Illicit trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) not only poses a threat to the security of States but also endangers their socio-economic and political stability. The impact of illicit trade in small arms is aggravated by its links to organized crime, terrorism and trafficking in narcotics. We hope the UN Programme of Action is fully implemented. Commendable progress in negotiations on an instrument on marking and tracing of SALW has been made. The Second Biennial Meeting of States in 2005 will provide a useful opportunity to review the progress so far in implementation of the UN programme of Action.

20. Agreement on a new Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CWC) shows that multilateral negotiations can achieve significant results provided there is political will. India had the privilege to Chair the Meetings of the Group of Governmental Experts and States Parties to the CCW in 2002 and 2003. India continues to coordinate the Working Group on Explosive Remnants of War, which is deliberating preventive technical measures and implementation of international humanitarian law in the context of Explosive Remnants of War.

Mr. Chairman,

21. The success of the First Committee will be measured not by how short our statements have become, how the number or the length of the resolutions adopted have come down and how free and interactive our debates have been but in whether all these propel the multilateral disarmament fora towards reengagement and productive discussions and negotiations. It is our hope that deliberations during the current First Committee session and the resolutions that we shall adopt will together provide an impetus to evolving a global consensus for meeting contemporary challenges, including threats to international security, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the moribund status of multilateral disarmament negotiations.

I thank you for your attention.