



New Delhi, India, 28 April 2005 - Secretary-General's press encounter

SG: Good morning. Thank you very much, Ladies and Gentlemen, for coming in such large numbers.

I will make brief remarks, and then we will open it up for questions and answers. Let me start by saying how delighted I am to be back in India after an absence of several years. It is invigorating to feel the vibrancy of life in this country as it goes through rapid economic and social development. It is also heartwarming to be here at a time when peace is gradually breaking out in the region, with India and Pakistan making steady and truly remarkable progress in their bilateral dialogue, and India and China forging a strategic partnership that has the potential not only of uplifting the region but also to have a salutary effect on huge parts of the world.

I came from Jakarta, where as you know an important summit took place, focusing on building renewed partnership between Africa and Asia. I hope as a result of that meeting that exchanges between the two continents will increase. It is countries like India that have a major contribution to making any effort to bring the peoples of these two continents together in the quest for a brighter and better future. India is an important member of the United Nations, and plays a very active role across the range of the Organization's work. A notable example is its longstanding and distinguished record in UN peacekeeping operations.

During my stay here I had meetings with H.E. President Abdul Kalam, H.E. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, H.E. Natwar Singh, the Foreign Minister, External Affairs Minister as you say here, Excellency Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, Chairperson of the National Congress Party, and also with Mr. L.K. Advani, Leader of the Opposition.

Among other issues we discussed, all aspects of my proposal for making the United Nations an effective multilateral instrument fit for the times and for future generations; the evolving regional situation in India's neighbourhood, with particular emphasis on relations between India and Pakistan and India and China, as well as the situation in Nepal; the post-tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts, and possibilities for cooperation between India and the United Nations disaster preparedness and response; as well as peacekeeping, terrorism, human rights, the situation in the Middle East, including Iraq and the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, and of course, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. In addition, I chaired a roundtable discussion on HIV/AIDS yesterday, which gave me an opportunity to discuss critical issues like stigma and discrimination from the perspective of people infected with HIV/AIDS [who] are living with HIV.

I am delighted that India supports many of the proposals I have made to enhance the effectiveness and relevance of the United Nations, and I am sure you will ask me to comment on India's aspiration for permanent Security Council membership. I believe many people, many nations around the world, consider India's aspirations legitimate, but as Secretary-General let me give you my comments here and now.

The proposals for Security Council expansion that have been put to the membership consist of two options, known as Option A and Option B. Intense discussions are taking place among member states on these options. I cannot, as Secretary-General, have a preference for any of the options or express an opinion about which individual country or countries should be members of the Council. Almost every member state believes that the Council should be reformed and expanded so as to reflect the realities of today, and I hope that 2005 will be the year of decision.

Let me pause here and take your questions.

Q: My question relates to Nepal. I just want to get your views on the situation there, the recent arrests that have taken place in Kathmandu and in other places. What's your view on what can be done by the international community to pressure King Gyanendra to put democracy back on the rails in Nepal. And do you have a view on countries supplying or not supplying weapons to Nepal?

SG: If I may ask you to ask one question each, because there are so many of you, so that I can take as many questions as possible. On the question of Nepal, I have been in touch with the King, and I also met him recently in Jakarta where we discussed the situation in Nepal. The United Nations and myself would want to see a return to constitutional rule as soon as possible, and I made this clear to the King. I think it is important that the political parties are allowed to resume their activities. From my discussions with the King, I hope this will happen. On the question of weapons and arms to Nepal, obviously individual countries have their own policies, but as the United Nations, we often discourage transfer of arms, or shipment of arms, into any area of conflict, because that will only exacerbate what goes on, but of course sometimes legitimate authorities need equipment and weapons for their law and order forces. That will have to be a judgment that will have to be made by the governments that are in discussion with the country concerned for supply of such equipment.

Q: What role can the UN play at this grave hour of crisis [in Nepal]?

SG: Well, the UN is already very active on the ground. We are active, providing humanitarian assistance. We have just decided to send a human rights team to monitor what is going on on the ground, and I hope the team will be able to dissuade those who are inclined to abuse the human rights of others, that they will be held accountable, and as I have indicated I am also encouraging the King to return to constitutional rule as soon as possible. But if at any future date it becomes necessary for us to do more, and it is agreed with the government and others, obviously we will be prepared to do that, and we are also in touch with neighbours and other friends of Nepal, including the government of India.

Q: You discussed a development model that is called Pura, providing urban amenities in rural areas. And so after discussions, are you thinking, or going to include, the Pura project in the UN Millennium programme?

SG: It was an interesting programme. The President took time to brief us and give us a presentation of the Pura Programme, which is well-thought through. And the whole idea of connectivity on all levels, I think, is exciting and could help rural areas. I walked away impressed, and indicated that we would want to look at it in the context of our own Millennium Development Goals, and our attempts to help governments achieve those Goals. So this is a lesson that may be relevant to other countries. We're always looking for "best practices" to share with other countries, and we may be able to do this with Pura. Thank you.

Q: My question is, since 1971, there's been no Secretary-General from Asia after U Thant. Do you think it's time, after your second term ends, that Asia should have a Secretary-General? What is your general sense on this? Thank you, Sir.

SG: Yes, it is true that the Secretary-General of the UN is elected on a rotation basis. And I think there is a general sense amongst the membership that next time would be Asia's turn. Already, you have a declared candidate from Thailand seeking the position. And I think unless there are dramatic changes, I think most Member States see it as Asia's turn.

Q: What would you like to see countries and the UN do more to restore democracy to Burma?

SG: I met with [Senior] General Than Shwe in Jakarta. I also have an Envoy working on the questions of Myanmar and working with the Government and Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD [National League for Democracy]. I did encourage General Than Shwe to really open up and allow Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD and all the citizens of Myanmar to play a role – political and otherwise – freely without interference and help build the nation. We would want to continue the dialogue and offer whatever assistance we can. I would want to see my Envoy Ismael Razali be able to go in as frequently as possible to try and see what he can do to facilitate a dialogue amongst all groups. And we are prepared to offer the Government any advice or assistance we can in strengthening their institutions and moving towards democracy.

Q: My question is India and Pakistan are making the right moves, so what is the relevance of the United Nations Military Observer Group and has India taken up this issue?

SG: As you gathered, I'm extremely pleased that India and Pakistan are making progress. And in fact the UN presence was all part of this effort. Obviously, we will need to discuss with the parties concerned, as development evolves, how we handle our presence and the role of observers – what it should be.

Q: Sir, you have delayed in presenting the [report pursuant to Security Council] resolution on 1559, and you have been criticized in the Security Council. And when the Syrian had presented to you their issues on the full withdrawal, you also came with a doubtful mind that it might not be fully [Is] the Secretary-General's decision on these issues influenced by other members or [do] you have a sovereign decision. Because even your vision on the "In Larger Freedom" [report] is also not welcomed by many of the members of the [Security] Council.

SG: I don't know where you get your facts from, but let me, first of all, say that it is not right to say that the Council had criticized me for not releasing the report on date. The report was under preparation, and I wanted to give the Council as full a picture as possible. There were developments taking place in Lebanon regarding the organization of elections, and at one stage, it was even regarding the formation of a government. We have the formation of a government. A decision has been taken on the date of the elections and the Syrian withdrawal. And of course, now that all these developments have taken place, I have been able to give the Council a full report on developments in Lebanon and Syria, and of course the Council will discuss the issue in the next few days. And I think this is the way it should be.

And on your second question, I really do not know what you mean by “we have criticized Syria”. The resolution has various aspects. The resolution deals with the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon. And we have indicated that we noticed a considerable and visible progress. We need to disarm all militia – that has not happened. There was also Lebanese taking action to assure their own sovereignty and control over their territory. And the final thing is we are also sending in an independent mission to investigate the assassination of [Rafik] Hariri. And I think the Council has received the report well, and they're going to have very serious discussions on that. I think that's what's important, and I'm pleased to see some positive developments in the region.

Q: In an expanded Security Council, do countries like India who are bidding for a permanent seat, can they expect to get a permanent seat with a veto? And also the Human Rights Commission, just last week, said that the Dalits of India and in other parts of the world, must be recognized as a separate category by work and descent. Could you explain that? Is that racial discrimination?

SG: The simple answer to your first question is that no, the new permanent members are not designed to have a veto. The proposal is establishment of additional permanent members without a veto.

On your second question, I'm afraid I don't have the details of the decision taken by the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. So I prefer not to be drawn on that at this stage. But I think the Human Rights Commission has a responsibility of ensuring that human rights of all are protected and are respected. And I think it must be in that spirit that they took the decision that you refer to. I hope it will be helpful.

Q: Mr. Annan, you spoke of India that it should sign up on the NPT and CTBT in this morning's lecture. Very recently, India articulated its position that the NPT has actually failed to curb proliferation.

SG: No, I did not say NPT. I said Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Q: But in the reforms that have been proposed, it also talks about the Non-Proliferation Treaty. And India has taken the stance that the Treaty has actually failed to curb proliferation. And that's because of various scandalous transfers of technology where some of the nuclear weapon states have been involved. Do you think the Treaty itself needs to be reworked?

SG: It will work if the members want it to work, if everyone respects the rule. We are going to have an NPT Review this year, and that will give us an opportunity to review the situation

and assess where we are and where we want to go. But as a general rule, every treaty that is established and ratified by Member States can only work if the Member States live up to the spirit and intent of the treaty that they sign.

Q: A leader from Taiwan is visiting Beijing, today actually. So do you have any comment about this issue?

SG: I don't know what sort of comment I'm supposed to have. But I think China receives many visitors, and I myself will probably be going there later on this year. I think China is a country that is reaching out to countries in the region and beyond. And it is its legitimate right to decide whom to invite.

Q: Excellency, I just want to know what about the HIV programmes that you started in the Asian region. I want to know what types of programmes you are taking in Asia, because this is more terror than the terrorist.

SG: I think the programmes have to be undertaken by each individual government in the region, working with the community, working with people living with HIV/AIDS, working with women's organizations and with grassroots organizations. This is a disease that requires complete social mobilization and leadership from the top. And I think it will succeed if we all get involved. We are encouraging each government to come up with a comprehensive national programme for tackling the disease. We are also trying to assist, through the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, and we are trying to share "best practices" with the governments in the region, what has worked in other countries and in other regions. And I hope, through the UNAIDS programme and the Resident Coordinator who is here with us, and we have Resident Coordinators in other countries in the region, that they will be able to cooperate with the governments to ensure that an effective programme to counter the AIDS epidemic is in place.

But one thing we did yesterday when I met the NGOs, there were several areas that we stressed: the mother-to-child transmission, which are considered the cruelest of all transmissions -- for a newborn child to arrive in this world infected with HIV/AIDS. And therefore we also need to look after the pregnant women to ensure that they do not pass it on to their children. That's very easily done, with a pill that is available today. We also need to educate the young, because it usually strikes people between the ages of 18 and 49. We need to educate the young to look after themselves. We need to bring in young people and get the young to become partners in our efforts to stem the disease. And we should also engage very seriously the people living with the disease. They have very powerful voices. They are courageous to come out and say, "we have it," and share their experience with others. And instead of discriminating against them or stigmatizing and ostracizing them, we should really understand how courageous they've been and understand that their effort, their honesty, their frankness is also helping society at large. And we should assist them.

Q: Mr. Secretary-General, has the UN been successful in curbing the deployment of child soldiers?

SG: I wish I [could] say we've been 100 percent successful in curbing the deployment of child soldiers. Obviously, we are against it. The Security Council is seized of it, and we are telling governments not to use children in armed conflict, not to give them guns and train them. It's not just young boys, there are also young girls who are drafted into these types of

conflicts. And we do not condone it. We condemn it utterly. And I think as we move forward, for example, we have a situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the International Criminal Court is involved. Those who exploit children and use them for armed conflict are breaking laws. And I hope, as the Court reviews the situation, some of those responsible will be held accountable.

Q: My question is, you are talking about consensus among Member States on reform. You also said that in a lack of consensus, the reform should not be held captive. Will you please elaborate that and how you are going to ensure about it?

SG: At the UN we've tended to interpret consensus as almost unanimity, the way we apply it. And we're dealing with a very difficult issue. And if you aim to get each of the 191 members of the Organization to agree, it might be difficult to attain that objective or get a decision. And so I'm encouraging the members to consider where there is broad agreement, broad agreement for a change for either of the options, they should be able to take a decision and not defer it because not everyone is on board. And so I'm encouraging them to take a decision without waiting for everyone to be on board. And that broad consensus, broad agreement, should be considered as enough.

Q: My question is about the reforms of the UN. You said that the new permanent members of the Security Council would not get the veto. But you said in Jakarta that the reform should make the UN reflect the situation in 2005, not 1945. But by denying the veto power to the new permanent members, do you think you're perpetuating, in fact, the situation that existed 60 years ago?

SG: In a narrow sense, one can look at it that way, that the Permanent Five, if they retain their veto, one is perpetuating the situation. But it is also a fact and a reality, that it is not going to be possible to remove the veto from the Five. It is utopian to think we can do it. Many Member States would want to do that, but it is not possible. And they are not willing to create additional vetos. What is important is to have effective representation on the Council, to make the Council more democratic, to ensure that voices of other regions are heard. And I think that sort of change would not only make the decisions of the Council much more acceptable generally, but the Council itself will gain in greater legitimacy. And I think that is enough of an achievement for us to be able to move forward and not insist that if we cannot withdraw the veto from the other Five, we keep the status quo. That is the option.

Q: My question relates to the proposal that has been put before you for the expansion of the UN Security Council. Do you see any possibility of incorporating amendments in the proposals to incorporate the demands, say by countries like India, that they should be given not only membership, but with veto power. Any possibility of changes?

SG: I have given the Member States a proposal. The report, "In Larger Freedom" is a basic document I have given them to facilitate their work and for them discuss. It is not excluded that the Member States may want to modify some of the recommendations before them. It is up to them to discuss, to negotiate and decide what decisions to take. And so, modification of the proposals are not ruled out. It's up to the members of the United Nations.

Q: I just wanted to understand if Iran's nuclear programme, was it discussed with India, and its international monitoring. And what is the United Nations assessment today, at this

junction? Is there a possibility of what happened in Iraq recurring itself in Iran today at this point?

SG: You mean a strike against the Iranian nuclear thing? I don't think that's on the cards. But obviously, there are very serious discussions taking place between Iran and the three European Union member states – Germany, the United Kingdom and France. And I think those talks have been going on for some time and I'm confident that they will produce results. And Iran has been cooperating with them fairly well. And I do not think that, if they resolve it that way and everybody agrees on a programme and an agenda, that there'll be any need to take any physical action against Iran. And it would be unwise, anyway. It would be unwise.

Thank you.