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Official Records

President: Mr. Bozkir (Turkey)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Arriola Ramírez (Paraguay), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 115 (continued)

Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/75/1)

Mr. Bhandari (Nepal): At the outset, I would like to thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his comprehensive report (A/75/1) on the work of the Organization, as well as for sharing his priorities for 2021 in his briefing yesterday (see A/75/PV.51). We welcome his report, which reminds us of the need to strengthen international cooperation under multilateralism in order to ensure a coherent response to the pressing global challenges. We commend the Secretary-General and the entire United Nations staff across the world for their tireless efforts in carrying out the work of the Organization during these unprecedented times.

The fallout of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has been colossal, with severe impacts on livelihoods, societies and economies. That calls for our collective efforts to protect people's lives, address socioeconomic impacts and build back better towards more equal and resilient societies at the same time.

In that regard, we appreciate the three-pillar response of the United Nations. We reiterate the need for further support for countries such as the least developed countries (LDCs), land-locked developing

countries and small island developing States, which are already on the precipice of rising poverty, increasing debt burdens and humanitarian crises.

The introduction of various COVID-19 vaccines is an encouraging sign. We appreciate the United Nations efforts as well as the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access initiative for the roll-out of this global public good. However, for countries like ours, news about the vaccines has generated both excitement and anxiety. That is because the availability of vaccines is not the same as their accessibility and affordability. Therefore, making vaccines accessible to all will be a true acid test of global cooperation and collaboration.

With the launching of the decade of action and delivery, accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is now more critical than ever. That is the case when the global community, in general, and the most vulnerable countries, in particular, are off-track in terms of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into its national plans and programmes, Nepal has made some significant achievements in key areas, including poverty reduction, food security, education, gender equality, basic sanitation and energy access, among others.

However, challenges and gaps remain. As we look to recover and rebuild better, we expect an enhanced level of international support in our development endeavours. With the preparations for the fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries under

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way already, this year will be of crucial importance to LDCs. The most important task ahead will be to negotiate the programme of action for least developed countries for the next decade, which needs to focus on bolstering productive capacity and accelerating the structural transformation of the LDCs.

The new programme of action will need to ensure that adequate measures are put in place to fend off the risks of relapse and that the graduation progress is smooth, sustainable and irreversible. As a country aspiring to graduate from the LDC category, Nepal underlines the need for adequate and predictable financing, with developed countries fulfilling their commitments for official development assistance and concessional financing.

Furthermore, as the Secretary-General highlighted in his statement, the year 2021 should be the year of making peace with nature. We also need to strengthen cooperation to combat climate change and preserve biodiversity. This year's twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity will provide us with excellent opportunities to do so.

As a mountainous and disaster-prone country, Nepal is a hotspot with regard to climate change. We have seen our mountains melting, glaciers receding and livelihoods disrupted, owing to no fault of our own. We call for the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, robust climate action and easy access to climate financing.

Nepal was one of the countries that endorsed the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. We appreciate his efforts aimed at bridging the rifts and differences in conflict-affected countries. We firmly believe that the promotion and protection of human rights is essential for peace and sustainable development. In that respect, we duly acknowledge the Secretary-General's call to action on human rights launched during the forty-third session of Human Rights Council. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Nepal continues to do its part to promote human rights at the national and international levels.

We reiterate our call for the general and complete disarmament of all weapons of mass destruction. We also underline the need for the early resumption of disarmament processes, including Review Conference

of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

As with defeating the current pandemic, combating terrorism, organized crime and human and drug trafficking requires our collective and collaborative action. The newly developed United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Platform could be an appropriate mechanism to facilitate information-sharing and collaboration among Member States.

As a major troop-contributing country to peacekeeping operations, Nepal accords a high level of importance to the safety and security of peacekeepers. We support the ongoing efforts under the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and the Declaration of Shared Commitments on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Congruity between mandate and resources is a must for the success of peacekeeping operations.

Reform is crucial for making the United Nations fit for purpose. Renewed multilateralism demands a more agile, innovative, transparent and inclusive United Nations. We welcome the efforts made with regard to the reform of the United Nations development system and recognize the importance of the reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system to our development needs, including through the implementation of the remaining mandates. The efforts aimed at ensuring gender parity at all levels of the United Nations system are truly encouraging.

In conclusion, as the Secretary-General stated yesterday, the year 2021 should be the year to change gear. We must do so for our shared aspirations of durable peace, prosperity and justice. The historic seventy-fifth anniversary year should not only inspire us to build on what has been achieved, but also encourage us to strive for a safe, sustainable and resilient future.

Mr. Pieris (Sri Lanka): On this cold but bright morning, permit me to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting to enable Member States to reflect on the report of the Secretary-General (A/75/1) on the work of the Organization. I thank the Secretary-General for the briefing (see A/75/PV.51) on his priorities for the year 2021 and take note of the Organization's accomplishments under his able leadership, particularly last year under the shadow of the extraordinary challenges posed by the coronavirus disease pandemic, which are well known and best forgotten, perhaps, as a bad dream.

However, dreams bring with them strong messages. The message has been loud and clear. It has probably given us a wake-up call. The Secretary-General's report puts into perspective our shared progress and common future in the delicate and intricate global landscape, which is in a continuous flux. It highlights the unfinished agenda of development and reform. Undoubtedly, the year 2021 — although saddled with challenges — will be an important one for every one of us.

The pandemic is severe in nature. Its severity was aptly described by the Secretary-General, who in paragraph 4 of his report states, “we were brought to our knees by a microscopic virus.” It has been said that the pandemic presents to us a valuable opportunity for the global community to reboot itself on the path towards development that is sustainable and harmonious with the environment.

That is unquestionably a very optimistic view from a section of the human family, which has successfully brought about this chaos. Ironically, the human race has also the ability to undo the chaos, although it may be at a great cost. We, however, cannot be jubilant about it or take credit for the recovery process. What is just as important as the development of the vaccine is the establishment of a global order that would ensure for the human family the non-recurrence of calamities of this nature. We cannot afford the luxury of another catastrophe of a similar nature affecting the human community.

In that context, we join the Secretary-General in underscoring the importance of multilateralism and firmly believe that, when we work together with mutual respect and understanding, we can accomplish many things. I once again cite the Secretary-General, “[o]nly an Organization that is inclusive and equitable will sustain us for the future” (*A/75/1, para. 18*).

The Secretary-General has repeatedly expressed his concern that the world is not on track to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The observation comes as no surprise, as we took on the SDGs in 2015 when we had already our hands full with the unfinished Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which we had carried forward at the turn of the century, as was observed yesterday.

Small States like Sri Lanka have ungrudgingly accepted the burden of the MDGs and SDGs and are currently committed to achieving them by 2030. The

acceleration of the implementation of sustainable solutions to overcome common development obstacles, including poverty and rising inequality, are crucial. A people-centric policy and a programme of action to achieve those targets have been prepared by the Government of Sri Lanka to that end. Poverty alleviation and an agri-based production economy is a major goal for the country.

We are all aware that acts of terrorism, xenophobia, racism, intolerance, hate speech and disinformation are threats to international peace and security. They transcend boundaries, and their prevention must be viewed as a collective responsibility by all of us. Having faced terrorism for nearly 30 years, Sri Lanka remains concerned about the unabated progression of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, without an end in sight.

It is only appropriate that we make the observation that the non-State actors that engage in unlawful activity should not be encouraged in any way or be given an opportunity to justify their activities in this forum through any one of their sympathizers, with a view to propagate their ideologies through the procedures established by the United Nations and its allied organs.

Regrettably, as the representative of our worthy neighbour and friend India observed yesterday (see *A/75/PV.51 (Res.1)*), this body has yet to agree on a common definition of terrorism, and a lack of progress on achieving a comprehensive convention against international terrorism remains. However, we remain optimistic and look forward to working with all Member States in addressing the challenges emanating from the many faces adorned by extremism and terrorism.

We note the reforms introduced both at Headquarters and throughout the United Nations system and reiterate the need for a more geographically diverse United Nations workforce sensitive to the different cultures that enriches the global community.

It is essential to ensure that all actions taken by the system are transparent and in conjunction with adherence to, and the implementation of, the Charter of the United Nations. While addressing the challenges of our times, the United Nations must represent and reflect the interests of all Member States. Meaningful results on the ground at the national level can be ensured only by seeking common ground, which is the only sustainable path for addressing challenges

in moving towards a more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

I would like to conclude by reiterating Sri Lanka's support for the President's work, as well as that of the Secretary-General, as we work collectively to deliver the mandates, guided by the Charter, which the Member States have set out for the United Nations. In that context, Sri Lanka is fully committed to working together with all Member States to achieve the shared objective of building a more just world, based on equality and opportunities for all. Be assured that Sri Lanka will be there together with the United Nations making it happen.

Mr. Altarsha (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation has taken note of the report of the Secretary-General (A/75/1) on the work of the Organization. Let me make the following remarks in my national capacity.

His Excellency the Secretary-General gave a valuable and transparent presentation yesterday (see A/75/PV.51) and addressed most of the issues that are of concern to the Governments and the peoples of the world, especially in the light of the coronavirus disease pandemic and its disastrous consequences for all. As is the case with any catastrophe facing humankind, we must learn from certain lessons and experiences that, if rightly applied, can constitute a fundamental pillar to address future challenges and threats to all of us.

The pandemic has exposed weaknesses in our domestic and foreign policies. It has demonstrated that no one is immune to what we like to refer to as transnational challenges. Humankind has suffered great losses owing to the pandemic, and those who believe that a return to the same policies pursued by certain Governments of countries before the pandemic will result in political and economic benefits are wrong.

The year 2020 was a pandemic year par excellence, but catastrophes never come singly. It could be said that 2020 was the year of imposing political pressure, gross interference in the internal affairs of Member States, violating sovereignty and aggression. Some might disagree on naming that year, but everybody agrees that 2020 was the year of economic sanctions and unilateral coercive measures. It was the year of starving peoples, killing children, bombarding civilians and other despicable policies — a path and approach that some boast about and are proud of.

When a Government official makes a statement or holds a press conference or even places a tweet on Twitter about economic sanctions, which, he explains, do not target people but are used to exert pressure only on Governments, and when that statement is met with applause and welcomed, then the only possible explanation is that public opinion and the international community have been drugged and do not exist anymore. Many civilians and innocent people will die of hunger, poverty and the pandemic while the world stands idly by.

A number of countries are languishing under the yoke of stifling unilateral economic blockade targeting their sovereignty and the safety of their people. That applies to the Islamic Republic of Iran, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and many other countries. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is not different from those of the countries I just mentioned. The question is: For what crime are the Syrian people being punished, and how long will countries and Governments be punished only because their foreign policy, or even opinions, are different from those of certain dominant Powers?

The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic acknowledges the valuable humanitarian efforts made by the United Nations and the humanitarian aid delivered by its specialized agencies since the beginning of the war in my country. However, what the Syrian people need is totally different than that; we do not need a food basket. What we need is the right to grow our own produce on our land and not to have it stolen or burned by occupation forces. Syrian citizens do not need the revenue from oil and hydrocarbons; they require the return of the oil fields occupied by the military forces of certain Member States in the north and north-eastern areas of my country.

We do not need appeals, written statements and disingenuous sympathy. We are in dire need of exercising our natural rights to defend our people and rebuild our national economy, which will never happen as long as the unjust economic blockade remains imposed upon the Syrian people.

The report of the Secretary-General focuses on overall United Nations efforts to combat terrorism. As a Government and founding Member of the United Nations, Syria had hoped that the report would have addressed terrorism specifically targeting Syria. Unfortunately, my country has become the destination

of the human waste — in the form of foreign terrorist fighters and their families — sent by numerous Governments of countries hoping to bring so-called democracy to my country at the hands of Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist groups.

My country requests the Secretary-General to compel countries to shoulder their responsibilities with regard to foreign terrorist fighters, thousands of whom live in camps on Syrian land, like the Al-Hol camp, in the north-eastern part of my country. We also request that countries repatriate the families of those terrorists and fulfil their obligations with a view to rehabilitating and reintegrating them so that they do not become the seeds of future terrorism.

We must remind everyone of the continued Israeli aggression against my country and the ongoing violations against Syrian sovereignty, the latest of which was an attack perpetrated by Israel that led to the martyrdom of a family's father, mother and two children and the injuring of four other citizens members of the same family, in addition to the destruction of a number of houses of innocent civilians. Does this attack not constitute a flagrant violation of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law?

Such attacks undermine the Syrian Government's ability to combat terrorism on its territory — the same terrorism that the United Nations has committed to counter by establishing hundreds of platforms and committees and convening hundreds of meetings. That terrorism also prevents us from achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Lastly, to this day we have not seen any real indication that the Governments of some countries are genuinely and seriously willing to combat terrorism and violent extremism in my country. However, that will not dissuade us from intensifying our efforts to eliminate terrorism and restore security and stability in Syria.

Mr. Koba (Indonesia): Indonesia aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Brunei Darussalam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (see A/75/PV.51 (Res.1)).

Indonesia commends the efforts of all Member States and the United Nations, including the Secretariat, in ensuring the continued operation the United Nations despite the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Meetings have continued to be held, documents

negotiated and resolutions adopted. In short, we continue to get things done. In the interest of time, I will read out a short version of our statement, and we will provide the full statement to the Secretariat. My delegation wishes to highlight several points.

First, with regard to peace and security, Indonesia continues to support the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda, with nuclear disarmament as one of his priorities. In the context of this year, we can highlight two important developments — the historic milestone of the entry into force of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons just last week and the convening of the tenth Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in August.

Concerning United Nations peacekeeping operations, we commend the tireless work of peacekeepers in implementing their mandates despite the challenging situation owing to COVID-19. As one of the largest troop- and police-contributing countries (TCCs/PCCs), Indonesia remains committed to continuing its active role in United Nations peacekeeping operations. The recent attacks on our peacekeepers pose serious challenges to the safety and security of peacekeepers. Last year, Indonesia lost a member of its personnel from one such an attack. One life lost is one too many.

We call on the Secretariat to continue working closely with Member States, TCCs and PCCs on this important issue. We would also like to once again underline the importance of the full and timely payment of emoluments for TCCs and PCCs, as it enhances operational capability and sustains the long-term contribution of peacekeeping operations.

Second, with regard to the issue of staffing and selection of United Nations executive heads, Indonesia stresses that there needs to be representation of well-qualified and merit-based candidates, together with gender balanced human resources, particularly from countries whose nationals are underrepresented. We need to continue upholding fair geographical representation within the United Nations human resources composition and reject practices resulting in the exclusive consideration of nationals from certain countries for specific positions within the Secretariat.

Third, with regard to the creative economy, as 2021 marks the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development in accordance with resolution

74/198, there could be no better time to further explore the major role of the creative economy. Indonesia believes that, as we strive to recover from the impact of the pandemic, the creative economy can be a viable option to boost the global recovery.

Fourth, Indonesia will assume membership in the Economic and Social Council this year. We stand ready to continue to champion economic and social development issues.

Fifth, with regard to the need to protect our people in the fight against COVID-19, the pandemic has also amplified existing threats, including those posed by non-State actors. With society's increasing reliance on information and communications technology, criminal groups continue to misuse the latter at a significant cost to the global economy. Counterfeiting medical goods, trafficking in persons and other malign activities continue to affect the most vulnerable and overwhelm Governments in their effort to combat COVID-19. International cooperation is a priority in addressing those borderless crimes.

Sixth, we need global solidarity more than ever to ensure that there is no place for any form of discrimination, racism or xenophobia in responding to the pandemic. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Indonesia is committed to dealing with human rights issues in a constructive and comprehensive manner, based on the principle of impartiality, objectivity and non-politicization.

Seventh, with regard the need to provide support for essential workers, we continue to encourage Member States and the relevant stakeholders to ensure their support for essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this vein, the adoption by consensus of resolution 75/17, on strengthening international cooperation to support seafarers and global supply chains, in 2020 serves as an example of the synergy resulting from the Secretary-General's efforts and Member States' commitment to the issue. We need to further translate the commitment into concrete efforts in order to effectively combat the pandemic.

Indonesia stands ready to support the effective implementation of the programme priorities set out by the Secretary-General for 2021. Let us work together to bring concrete progress and recovery to the world.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): We thank the Secretary-General for presenting his report on the work

of the Organization in 2020 (A/75/1) and outlining the current priorities (see A/75/PV.51).

Indeed, the past year has been the most challenging period for the United Nations and the world since the end of the Second World War. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has evolved from a global health crisis into a global calamity, claiming millions of lives, shaking the very foundation of our societies, increasing structural inequalities and disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations in situations of conflict and humanitarian emergency. On the long and winding road to recovery, a genuine commitment by all Member States to effective and responsible multilateralism remains a key precondition for building back better.

Having embarked on the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals, we must consolidate all efforts to make sure that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains an overarching framework for achieving a better future that leaves no one behind. In the spirit of that collective pledge, equitable access to all essential health technologies and products to combat the virus will be a critical global priority. No one, including people residing in conflict areas, should be denied or limited in access to remedies to mitigate the impact of the pandemic.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has been detrimental to international efforts for peace, development and human rights, exacerbating divisions, tensions, conflicts and other vulnerabilities. Armenia was among the first Member States to extend their full and unequivocal support for the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world, which was launched at the outbreak of the pandemic. Yet despite the calls for international solidarity and appeals to observe a global ceasefire, the past year has seen an unprecedented level of violence, war and human suffering. Our region is one such example, where senseless, brutal violence and destruction have disrupted decades-long efforts for peace, development and human security, while the pandemic and its associated challenges continued to ravage the world.

The pre-planned aggression against the people of Nagorno Karabakh, or Artsakh, in the midst of a global health crisis took a heavy toll on the civilian population, leading to loss of life, numerous violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, the destruction and desecration of religious and cultural heritage, mass displacement,

humanitarian crises and an influx of foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries who were specifically recruited and transferred to the conflict zone from the Middle East.

We appreciate the strong support voiced by the Secretary-General throughout the period of hostilities for the immediate cessation of fighting and the urgent resumption of dialogue under the auspices of the co-Chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The global challenges caused by the pandemic are a test for multilateralism. Amid the growth of authoritarian tendencies, hate speech, the weaponization of the pandemic to unleash wars, the oppression of dissenting voices and violations of human rights, the United Nations should serve as the guardian and custodian of international law, the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the values of humankind. The ability of the Organization to prevent and respond to those challenges is crucial for its credibility in ensuring that the pledge to leave no one behind goes beyond a mere declaration.

While we have welcomed the readiness of the United Nations to respond to humanitarian needs in all areas affected by conflict and the Secretary-General's call on all relevant actors to cooperate fully with United Nations entities to ensure their unfettered access, the United Nations system must not become hostage to the manipulations and narratives of authoritarian regimes.

In pursuit of the reform of the United Nations system, we encourage the Secretary-General and the Secretariat to look into the gaps that persist in order to eliminate any opportunity for manipulation by strengthening the independent capacities of relevant agencies and departments, particularly in terms of accurate reporting and delivering urgent humanitarian action. Attempts to instrumentalize programmatic cooperation with the United Nations to promote one-sided, discriminatory narratives and justify identity-based violence must be effectively identified, addressed and eradicated at all levels.

Armenia remains committed to continuing to pursue its ambitious reform agenda in cooperation with the United Nations and other international partners in order to build back and recover better by investing in strong and accountable democratic institutions, promoting human rights and gender equality, combating corruption and strengthening the rule of law.

We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's efforts in strengthening the Organization and its resilience in the face of the emerging global challenges in order to help fulfil aspirations for a better future for all.

Mr. Badubi (Botswana): We associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Djibouti on behalf of the Group of African States (see A/75/PV.51(Res.1)).

We thank the Secretary-General for presenting his report on the work of the Organization (A/75/1). We welcome the reorientation of the report and its marked improvement, as it offers content that enables the reader to better appreciate the full scope of the important work of the United Nations.

The statistics in terms of those of our countries and the global citizens benefiting from the services of the United Nations system, as well as the sheer number of personnel deployed around the globe and across all the pillars of the programme of work of the Organization, attest to the depth and width of the commendable work that the United Nations is doing.

It is particularly commendable that during 2020, while responding to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic at a time when the Organization was also facing a degradation of the multilateral spirit and a liquidity crisis, the United Nations was able to summon its collective comparative advantage to deliver ongoing support and emergency rescue packages to many of our countries, with the kind support of our fellow Member States and other partners.

But as the report indicates, the COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed the vulnerabilities and fragilities that vividly held back the Organization's full potential to do even more. As hard as it is to endure, the pandemic offers important lessons that we should learn from as part of the monumental recovery process that lies ahead.

Botswana agrees that, as we progress through the decade of action, our best bet lies in more aggressive efforts. As the Secretary-General himself said, we require a very radical approach to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Beyond the call for a ceasefire, which rallied a lot of support, and the useful policy briefs issued at the height of the pandemic, the call for action on human rights in 2020 ensured that that core mandate of the Organization

was not undermined by the pandemic. As also indicated by the representative of Djibouti speaking on behalf of the African Group, Botswana emphasizes that, as the United Nations recommits to human rights for all, the Organization must also offer the same dignified treatment to all its diverse workforce associated with the delivery of the organizational mandates.

There is no debate that the United Nations intergovernmental machinery is established by, and constitutes a forum primarily intended for, its Member States. But as Member States we cannot claim a monopoly on knowing what the global challenges are, or how to resolve them. Inclusive participation, by way of seeking the input of key external stakeholders, is equally important to enrich our intergovernmental debates. We therefore hope that the opinions of the global citizens who contributed to the outcomes of the Declaration on the Commemoration of the Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the United Nations (resolution 75/1) will not be ignored during 2021 and beyond.

If pursued in conjunction with a balanced transfer of technology and fair digital cooperation among countries, we believe that the road map for digital cooperation offers hope for a truly inclusive and sustainable digital future for all, which is conducive to realizing the fourth industrial revolution. Nevertheless, capacity-building measures in that area, especially in developing countries, should pay equal attention to addressing the associated vulnerabilities and risks that come with increased reliance on information and communication technologies.

On the strengthening of the Organization, it is acceptable that, from time to time, the United Nations must continuously re-adapt its operations to the realities of modern times across the development, peace and security and management pillars. While we look forward to better assessing the outcomes of the recent reform proposals, we expect that the usual mantra of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability will materialize through tangible and demonstrable results.

On staffing, we commend the achievements on mainstreaming a disability perspective, as well as gender parity, including in senior management positions. However, we are keen to see similar achievements on the overall geographical diversity of the United Nations workforce in all categories, and particularly at decision-making levels. We will engage more on the details of the recently launched geographical diversity

strategy and its implications, were it to be implemented, as compared to the existing system of desirable ranges.

Above all, we are of the view that the rigorous implementation of the United Nations accountability framework is key to successful human resources management strategies and policies of the Organization in the context of the shift to a new paradigm. That includes, but is not limited to, the proper administration of justice and oversight of the delegation of authority to senior managers that went into effect in January 2019.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs are indeed a formidable blueprint on which we can leverage recovery efforts with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic. But if we are not to move further off-track by 2030, all obstacles that frustrate implementation efforts, such as inadequate financing, need our urgent attention. The proper governance and stewardship of domestically available resources and their effective mobilization for the implementation of the SDGs is a matter that must concern all Member States. The root causes of inadequate financing need to be effectively addressed. That includes stemming the tide of illicit financial flows, which clearly undermine the genuine efforts of Member States.

We also agree that reliable and high-quality disaggregated data would ensure the accurate measurement of the global problems we are seeking to resolve. An evidence-based approach would facilitate the full implementation of the SDGs. We therefore emphasize that all entities deployed in our regions to support sustainable development efforts, including the regional commissions, should be well capacitated in this key area so that they can better support our countries.

Without downplaying the significance of the work performed by the many other United Nations entities involved in the fields of human rights, humanitarian issues, peace and security, international justice, disarmament and combating crime, drugs and terrorism, as well the role of the key Secretariat departments that ensure the effective functioning of some 461 United Nations duty stations, let me conclude by highlighting that the development of Africa is an established priority of the Organization, as recently reaffirmed in resolution 75/252, adopted on 31 December.

Like all other States members of the African Group, Botswana welcomes the continued focus in the United Nations programme of work to support the special needs of our continent. We believe that United Nations

activities implemented system-wide must be properly aligned with the key programmes and should derive from continental frameworks, in particular the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

We therefore support the work of the Secretariat entities that are involved in discharging the work in that area, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa and the Department of Global Communications. In the context of the evolved needs of the African region and the challenges exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we look forward to working within the African Group to ensure that the mandates and capacities of the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa render it fit for purpose to ensure that the Secretary-General receives quality advice on Africa's challenges at this difficult juncture.

Mr. Aliyev (Azerbaijan): Let me start by extending our congratulations to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Volkan Bozkir, on his successful leadership of the historic seventy-fifth session. We thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for the comprehensive briefing on his priorities for the year 2021 and his in-depth analysis of complex world affairs (see A/75/PV.51). We are grateful to both leaders, the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, for keeping the main deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations functioning properly and safely throughout the challenging circumstances of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The year of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations was pivotal for the Organization. The devastating COVID-19 pandemic unleashed unprecedented suffering and threatened to undo decades of progress and development. It greatly strained national health-care systems around the world and highlighted deficiencies in the global response. It became a test for multilateralism and the very commitment of Member States to a more integrated, effective and efficient United Nations.

Together we faced those challenges. We mobilized our collective resources. We strengthened our solidarity and cooperation. The thirty-first special session of the General Assembly, in response to the coronavirus disease pandemic, initiated by the President of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, manifested the true testament of our unwavering commitment to

multilateralism. The thirty-first special session of the General Assembly became the world's largest high-level forum to share national response strategies and offer support to those in need, and we are proud of the success of that historic initiative.

The importance of affordable and equitable access for all countries to medicines, medical equipment and, in particular, vaccines, which are global public health goods and must be universally available to all, cannot be overstated. Azerbaijan recently joined the Vaccines Global Access Facility with a committed amount of \$21 million. We hope that safe and effective vaccines will soon be ready for distribution. Coordination efforts by the United Nations system in the process are vital and will serve as an example as the world builds its resilience against future crises.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and aggravated vulnerabilities and inequalities in both developing and the developed countries, first and foremost being deepening poverty and exclusion. The poorest and the most vulnerable were hit the hardest, and it is of grave concern that the further impact of the crisis will reverse hard-won development gains and undermine progress towards achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Our top priorities must continue to include the implementation of national commitments and the fulfilment of pledges under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the achievement of our collective climate goals and the strengthening of international cooperation in support of those countries most affected by the adverse impacts of climate change.

Coherent global responses and common efforts with the United Nations at their core are the most effective ways to combat pandemics, fight climate change and international terrorism, manage forced displacement and migratory flows and achieve the goals of peace, including sustainable development and human rights for all. Support for that role of the United Nations and for safeguarding its collective security, political and humanitarian mechanisms is crucial for maintaining peace, stability and sustainable development.

In that connection, it would be highly relevant to emphasize the One Health approach, which is based on the idea of the increasing interconnection between human health and Mother Nature with the entirety of her ecosystem, especially during these trying times.

Azerbaijan is now embarking on the largest and most comprehensive reconstruction and rehabilitation project in its history, following the liberation of its internationally recognized territories from the foreign occupation that had lasted nearly 30 years. The trilateral statement signed by the President of Azerbaijan, the Prime Minister of Armenia and the President of the Russian Federation on 9 November 2020, contained in document S/2020/1104, opened a new era of prosperity for the region. The agreement was reinforced by the trilateral statement of the three leaders dated 11 January 2021, and its implementation will be further discussed during the upcoming meeting of the Deputy Prime Ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia tomorrow, 30 January, in particular in relation to the construction and development of a transregional transport and communication system.

Azerbaijan has launched a number of critical infrastructure projects in the liberated territories, which were subjected to total looting and destruction. A major highway to the city of Shusha is now under construction and is expected to be completed ahead of schedule. Two international airports will be constructed, in the Fizuli and Lachin regions of Azerbaijan, in order to expedite the integration process, boost local economies and encourage tourism. Furthermore, the Government of Azerbaijan is carrying out large-scale electrical power-generation projects, with an emphasis on renewable sources of energy.

The primary focus of those efforts is to create the proper conditions for the safe and dignified return of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons to their homes and properties. However, the mission is complicated by the necessity to undertake a massive mine-clearing campaign, which is currently under way and, according to experts, could take up to more than a decade.

Despite the enormous challenges, Azerbaijan remains on track in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and will continue to take both national and international action in that regard. The preservation of macroeconomic stability, reducing the economic footprint of oil and gas production, thereby promoting the diversification of the economy, accelerating resource mobilization and integrating sustainability practices are all part of our national strategy. My country is also preparing to deliver its third voluntary national review during the High-level Political Forum later this year.

We concur with the Secretary-General that preserving our common purposes and principles remains as important as ever. Strict compliance with those purposes and principles and joint concerted efforts will pave the way to make the year 2021 a year of possibilities, ultimately enabling us to overcome the fundamental challenges we are all facing today.

Mr. Prasad (Fiji): I thank the President for giving me this opportunity to take the floor. In the interest of time, I will keep my remarks brief.

Fiji aligns itself with the statement delivered yesterday by the Permanent Representative of the Maldives on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (see A/75/PV.51 Res. 1).

First of all, allow me to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/75/1), as well as an excellent briefing yesterday to share his priorities for 2021 (see A/75/PV.51). Fiji welcomes the report and endorses the priorities that the Secretary-General has outlined. They are indeed the right priorities, and we look forward to supporting collective efforts in that regard. The United Nations system, including the General Assembly, as one of the peak bodies of global governance, has its work cut out in support of those priorities. Rarely have expectations been higher, but we know that, with both the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, we are in good hands that will lead us through these challenging times.

The United Nations as a system needs to help the global community to respond to three pandemics in parallel: first, the health pandemic; secondly, the socioeconomic pandemic; and thirdly, a planetary pandemic. The underlying factors at work in those three pandemics are the same, causing pain and loss to all: the rich and the poor, men and women, countries large and small. It is equally true that, across all those pandemics, the people who are more vulnerable suffer most and often catastrophically. It is equally true that, across those three pandemics, the countries that are most vulnerable suffer the most. That is the position that small island States find themselves in.

As the Organization shapes its hopeful programme of work, building on considerable progress, the United Nations as a system has demonstrated over the past year that how much we achieve in being able to turn the tide depends on all of us Member States upholding their responsibilities and doing their part. Some of that responsibility lies in the General Assembly and some

of it lies beyond, in forums such as the Group of Seven, the Group of Twenty and the boards of international finance institutions.

Small island States find themselves uniquely and most intensely impacted by those three pandemics. My purpose is not to undervalue the suffering all countries are experiencing, but rather to state, in an effectual way that, across nearly all metrics, small States have the steepest bar to climb and their fall is often the fastest.

Many States, including Fiji, Samoa and Solomon Islands in the Pacific, entered into the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic with their health systems already degraded by their persistent fight against climate-induced health crises, from dengue fever and typhoid to the most recent measles outbreak. Several health systems in the Pacific, including those of Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga and Solomon Islands, had to deal with climate catastrophes and the COVID-19 outbreak at the same time. Moreover, too many small island developing States continue to be denied access to similar levels of resources from international financial institutions or from markets due to size, capacity challenges or because they are dealing with too many pandemics at the same time.

The planetary pandemic arising from biodiversity collapse, climate change and ecological changes has multiple impacts on the small island States as well. Relentless climate catastrophes have an impact on their agriculture and food security and amplify the vulnerabilities of women and young people. Such impacts are relentless and persistent. As I speak, Fiji's recovery from a category 5 cyclone that hit Fiji on 17 December, a few days before Christmas, has barely begun. As I speak, we are anticipating Cyclone Ana to hit Fiji in the next 24 to 48 hours. That illustrates the relentlessness of climate change on this category of countries.

We completely support multilateralism and, indeed, have followed the advice of the World Health Organization (WHO) every step of the way. Today we mark approximately more than 250 days of zero-community spread of the health pandemic. We have followed WHO recommendations to the letter. Yet we find ourselves at the back of the line for vaccines where we were warned we might find ourselves. At the same time, we are very proud to participate in the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility.

We call for a better appreciation of the difficulties of rationing vaccine distribution in small island States. Fiji is a country of more than 300 islands. Distributing 10 vaccines to a small island at a distance from the capital will involve hiring a ship and two or three days of sailing, and the cost of distributing the 10 to 20 vaccines to protect health workers could cost approximately \$100,000, with hiring the needed ships. It may make sense for the populations of small island States to be vaccinated in much larger numbers so that the vaccination process itself does not become an additional burden at a time when they are so severely stretched.

Each of the three pandemics are closely interrelated, and, if we do not deal with them with the urgency and the speed needed, it is feared that the three will morph into a huge super-pandemic with catastrophic consequences. I have deliberately chosen the way in which the Secretary-General's has framed his vision in order to say that small island States have a particularly dramatic set of vulnerabilities, thereby requiring special attention in how we respond to them.

Nevertheless, the Secretary-General's vision in the report reflects great optimism and hope, and we are working with that optimism and hope. This is a year of great possibilities. We have all reaffirmed our faith in multilateralism. We know that the United Nations matters. And it has mattered more than ever.

We welcome the presidency of the United Kingdom in partnership with Italy of the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) with great hope. We hope that, at COP26, the world will confirm its commitment to the sustained, long-term \$100 billion financing. We also hope that it will listen to the wise advice that the Secretary-General gave at the Climate Adaptation Summit this week, namely, that 50 per cent of financing be set aside for adaptation.

We are pleased to work with the ocean community to ensure that the Ocean Pathway is firmly locked onto the process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We cannot win the climate battle without winning the war to save the oceans.

It has been a delight to welcome the United States back to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change as a core partner in climate and oceans battle. At the Climate Adaptation Summit this week, the United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, Secretary Kerry, said

that oceans are an integral part of the effort to resolve the problem of climate and that climate is integral to resolving the problem of oceans.

This is a big year to make substantial improvements in protecting and sustainably harnessing the oceans for the potential they offer us. We need to satisfactorily end harmful fisheries subsidies, conclude negotiations on an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction and ensure the firm implementation of the Convention on Biodiversity. In addition, we look forward to the Food Systems Summit to pay far greater attention to the role of healthy oceans, innovations and funding for food sourced from our oceans for the future of humankind.

We will not make progress on any of these things if we do not tackle head-on the issue of financing for development. We welcome the initiative of Canada and Jamaica to shape ideas and perspectives on financing for development. This is far more pressing for Fiji and Pacific small island States. We need to make progress that is substantive, and we need to make progress that is fast.

We fully support Secretary-General's call for substantive debt relief, the expansion of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative of the Group of Twenty and the reallocation of Special Drawing Rights, but, beyond that, we are seeking a substantial increase in concessionary financing to help small States like ours respond to the three pandemics and the challenges arising from them.

We also know that the United Nations is in the right space. We support and welcome the Secretary-General's reform efforts through the United Nations development system. We are witnessing real and substantive improvements in United Nations capabilities and an increase in its cohesive operations in Fiji and across the Pacific. United Nations capacities are rightfully becoming more catalytic. I know that, at times, we are frustrated that they are not fully supported. We hope that support for United Nations capacities and institutions in Fiji and the Pacific will see meaningful improvement in future.

Once again, we fully support the vision outlined in the report of the Secretary-General.

Ms. Fatima (Bangladesh): I thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on his priorities (see A/75/PV.51), which we fully endorse. We share his concerns about the pandemic's impact on the Organization's work and priorities, especially in the areas of peace and security, climate action, the economic disruption, the response to humanitarian crises and upholding international law.

We thank the Secretary-General for his leadership in ensuring that the United Nations remains operational despite the enormous challenge that the pandemic has imposed on its work. We fully share his view that the international community must come together to address the consequences of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in an efficient, effective and coordinated manner. The pandemic has shown us the imperative and importance of building partnerships and solidarity as we endeavour to build back from the crisis.

In that regard, I commend the United Nations system and the staff globally, including of the funds and programmes, which have done a remarkable job on the front line of the pandemic to ensure that essential services and programmes continue unhindered with regard to those most in need. The United Nations has been able to show its relevance on the ground where it matters most. Allow me to highlight briefly some of our priorities.

First, we add our voice to the growing call that, for effective COVID-19 response and recovery, vaccines must be made available to all as a matter of priority. In order to overcome the impending vaccine divide within and among nations, the United Nations needs to take the lead in ensuring equitable, safe and affordable global access to the vaccines. We must ensure that the urgency and resources that have marked the development and roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines are matched by the same urgency in distributing them fairly to the most vulnerable people and nations.

Secondly, we commend the Secretary-General on his call on leaders of the world to declare a state of climate emergency until carbon neutrality is reached. In that spirit, the Bangladesh Parliament declared a planetary emergency and called on the world to work on a war-footing to stop climate change. As a climate-vulnerable country and the current Chair of the 48-member Climate Vulnerable Forum, we wish to see that all climate discourses give special attention to vulnerable groups, such as the least developed countries

(LDCs) and the small island developing States (SIDS), which are on the front line of climate vulnerabilities.

We have a lot of expectations for the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and we are encouraged to see the Secretary-General's efforts to rally support for ambitious climate targets in the lead up to Glasgow, as well as his urgent call to meet climate financing commitments, which remain woefully lacking.

Thirdly, the pandemic has seriously put at risk the goal of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It has also compounded the existing vulnerabilities of LDCs and SIDS, imperilling their hard-earned development gains. A record number of LDCs are poised to graduate this year. However, graduating countries have growing concerns that graduation may doubly jeopardize their development journey, owing to both the consequences of COVID-19 and the loss of LDC-specific support measures. In order to overcome that situation, we need bold and innovative solutions. It is imperative to support an incentives-based graduation pathway for LDCs — for graduating and graduated countries. The success of a country should bring rewards, not penalties.

Fourthly, the pandemic has revealed the stark digital divides both within and across societies. Millions of children, especially in developing countries, missed school owing to the lack of Internet connectivity. It is vital to build effective partnerships for harnessing digital technology, science, technology and innovation, especially in the developing world. We commend the Secretary-General for launching the road map for digital cooperation amid the crisis and placing it as a high priority on the United Nations agenda.

Fifthly, we take note of the reforms made in the United Nations peace and security architecture, especially in the areas of peacekeeping, as well as a stronger focus on the women and peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas. Last year, we saw the review of the United Nations peacebuilding architecture, which is expected to strengthen the Organization's role in preventing conflict, while building and sustaining peace. As the leading troop- and police-contributing country, Bangladesh actively engaged in that review process.

However, the pandemic has added new challenges to the United Nations efforts towards peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Despite the Secretary-General's very timely call for a ceasefire, conflicts continue, with devastating impacts on civilians. Our peacekeepers and other front-line workers continue to suffer from the consequences of protracted conflicts. The call for a ceasefire must remain an enduring process. Furthermore, in order to ensure the safety and security of peacekeepers during future pandemics and other such emergency situations, we must ensure that the necessary preparedness is embedded in the peacekeeping mandates.

Sixthly, we need to see an increase in decisive actions to find durable and sustainable solutions to protracted situations emanating from conflicts, especially those that lead to population displacement. Such situations can potentially lead to further destabilization, with serious political, security and humanitarian consequences. My country has been hosting more than 1 million Rohingyas from Myanmar for more than three years, with no progress in sight. We call on the Secretary-General to devote greater attention to this and other complex situations, with the urgency that is required.

Finally, we welcome the reform measures taken by the Secretary-General to make the Organization more accountable and fit for purpose. There has been strong support for the repositioning of the United Nations development system through the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

In that regard, we commend the Secretary-General's commitment to gender equality and efforts to bring about gender parity within United Nations staffing. We believe, however, that full equality cannot be achieved unless there is diversity. We would like to see, in tandem with gender parity, greater diversity and inclusiveness reflecting the balanced regional representation of United Nations staff at all levels.

I would like to conclude by reassuring the Secretary-General that he can count on Bangladesh's continued support for delivering on our shared priorities and commitments.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 115.

May I take it that the General Assembly takes note of the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/75/1)?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): May I also take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 115?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.