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PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE TWO THOUSAND
EIGHT HUNDRED AND TWENTIETH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 18 July 1988, at 3.30 p.m.

President: Mr. NOGUEIRA-BATISTA

(Brazil)

Algeria

Mr. DJOUDI

Argentina

Mr. DELPECH

China

Mr. LI Luye

France

Mr. BROCHAND

Germany, Federal Republic of

Mr. VERGAU

Italy

Mr. BUCCI

Japan

Mr. KAGAMI

Nepal

Mr. JOSSE

Senegal

Mr. SARRE

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Mr. LOZINSKIY

United Kingdom of Great Britain and

Northern Ireland

Sir Crispin TICKELL

United States of America

Mr. WALTERS

Yugoslavia

Mr. PEJIC

Zambia

Mr. ZUZE

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The meeting was called to order at 4.15 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted.

LETTER DATED 5 JULY 1988 FROM THE ACTING PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL (S/19981)

The PRESIDENT: In accordance with decisions taken at the previous meetings on this item, I invite the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to take a place at the Council table; I invite the representatives of Cuba, Gabon, India, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Pakistan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates to take the places reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

Mr. Mahallati (Islamic Republic of Iran) took a place at the Council table; Mr. San José (Cuba), Mr. Biffot (Gabon), Mr. Rath (India), Mr. Muntasser (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Mr. Umer (Pakistan), Mr. Al-Masri (Syrian Arab Republic) and Mr. Al-Shaali (United Arab Emirates) took the places reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Nicaragua and Romania in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Serrano Caldera (Nicaragua) and Mr. Tanasie (Romania) took the places reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The PRESIDENT: The Security Council will now resume its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I should like to draw the attention of members of the Council to document S/20020, which contains the text of a letter dated 17 July 1988 from the Acting Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The first speaker is the representative of Zambia, on whom I now call.

Mr. ZUZE (Zambia): Sir, let me, at the outset, offer Zambia's congratulations to you on your assumption of the high office of President of the Security Council for the month of July. Your personal skills as a seasoned diplomat and the deep-rooted faith of your country, Brazil, in freedom and justice, assure us of a just outcome of our present deliberations.

May I also pay a special tribute to your predecessor, Ambassador Marcelo Delpech of Argentina, for the very able manner in which he conducted the work of the Council during the month of June.

The shooting down of a civilian aircraft, Iran Air flight 655, by the United States naval forces over the Strait of Hormuz on 3 July 1988 has cast a long, dark shadow over the present meeting of the Security Council. That the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, His Excellency Mr. Ali Akhbar Velayati, was in our midst is testimony to the gravity of this regrettable incident in which 290 people, including 66 children, lost their lives. I wish to take this opportunity to welcome the Minister of Iran and to convey through him to the Government and people of Iran, in particular the bereaved families, the sincere and deeply felt condolences of the Zambian delegation over the loss of their loved ones. I also wish to extend my delegation's condolences to all the Governments whose nationals lost their lives in this incident and to the bereaved families.

My delegation has acknowledged the presence of the Vice-President of the United States, Mr. George Bush, at the beginning of the consideration of this matter by this Council. The Vice-President's presence indicates the seriousness which the United States Government attaches to this matter.

The Iran Air flight 655 tragedy is but the latest grim reminder to the international community of the gravity of the consequences of the continuing war between Iran and Iraq. The question which I believe is exercising the minds of many delegations around this table is whether or not this incident can be considered

(Mr. Zuze, Zambia)

by the Security Council outside the context of the ongoing wider conflict in the Gulf. It is the sincere view of my delegation that this Council, which under the Charter has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, cannot afford to ignore the grave dangers this war poses.

It is our view that, regardless of the context in which this tragedy is viewed, there is an imperative and urgent need to end this unwarranted war, which has already taken a heavy toll in human life for both Iran and Iraq, not to mention the massive irreplaceable resources used to sustain it, as well as the incalculable damage to property. We believe that this recent tragic incident is derivative of the ongoing war in the area. It emphasizes the need for the parties to the conflict to abide by the resolutions of the Security Council on this matter, in particular resolution 598 (1987), adopted unanimously on 20 July 1987. To this extent, we welcome the announcement today, by the Islamic Republic of Iran, officially and categorically accepting Security Council resolution 598 (1987). It is our expectation that with this formal acceptance of mandatory resolution 598 (1987), a way has now been paved for its implementation without conditions and as outlined in the plan of the Secretary-General.

As Member States, we have assumed certain obligations under the Charter, including the strict adherence to the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations. This is the essence of multilateralism.

With regard to the immediate issue at hand, two views have so far emerged: one is that the shooting down of Iran Air flight 655 was a premeditated act by the United States naval forces. The other is, of course, that the captain of the United States battleship acted in self-defence.

The conclusion that the captain of the battleship acted deliberately is based on the assumption that, since the United States warship Vincennes possesses the means to distinguish a fighter aircraft from a slow-moving commercial airline, the

(Mr. Zuze, Zambia)

possibility of an accidental act on the part of the captain is eliminated. This view however, underestimates the effects that a battle environment, such as that which might have prevailed at the time in the area of the tragic incident, creates, and excludes the likely probability of electronic malfunction and human error, both of which, unfortunately, are foreseeable in air defence.

There is a great deal that can be said about both views, given the unclear circumstances surrounding the incident. But we see no military or political advantage which the United States could have hoped to gain by shooting down a civilian aircraft. Similarly, we find it strange that the civil air traffic controllers appear to have ignored the existence of a battle zone and the inherent risks to civil traffic in the part of the Gulf where flight 655 was shot down. There are, in our opinion, numerous grey areas in the stories so far narrated about the circumstances of flight 655 prior to its sudden termination.

It is, therefore, gratifying to learn that both the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran have requested the International Civil Aviation Organization to undertake separate investigations of the events leading to this unfortunate tragedy. We also welcome the prompt decision by the Government of the United States to conduct an investigation in the matter, as well as the announcement to compensate the families of the victims of the tragic incident.

We live in a world of perplexing complexities. This calls for accommodation and compromise, not confrontation. The war in the Gulf has raged on for far too long. Its threat to freedom of navigation has not only continued but it has also grown, thereby jeopardizing commercial and economic security of our interdependent world.

The tragic incident of 3 July 1988 calls for serious reflection and introspection and for the generation of momentum towards the attainment of peace in the Gulf. The blueprint for achieving that goal is Security Council

(Mr. Zuze, Zambia)

resolution 598 (1987). It would be most unfortunate if the outrage we all have expressed about the tragedy of Iran Air flight 655 did not translate into immediate, concrete and concerted action to stop the Iran-Iraq war through the implementation of resolution 598 (1987). There is nothing we can do for the 290 victims of the Iran Air flight 655. The best monument we can erect in their memory is to ensure that such a tragedy does not happen again by removing the conditions which make it possible to happen.

We in the Zambian delegation salute the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts in the search for practical means of implementing Security Council resolution 598 (1987). We again call for the co-operation of the belligerent parties with the Secretary-General in his difficult task. To this end, we urge the Security Council to guard against diversionary manoeuvres designed to undermine the implementation of resolution 598 (1987), which was adopted unanimously. Efforts for peace cannot be and should never be compromised.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Zambia for his kind words addressed to me.

The next speaker is a representative of Pakistan. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. UMER (Pakistan): My delegation, Sir, warmly welcomes your presidency of the Security Council, which you have assumed in circumstances that are sad and serious. The Council has been convened to consider a question which is profoundly tragic in its human dimension and ominous in its potential for aggravating an already tense and difficult situation. There is an overriding need for restraint and sagacity. We are all familiar with your qualities of leadership. We are confident that the deliberations of the Council will continue to benefit from your outstanding diplomatic skill and experience.

I should also like to pay a tribute to the Permanent Representative of Argentina, Mr. Marcelo Delpech, for the exemplary manner in which he presided over the deliberations of the Security Council last month.

The facts of this grave incident are well known. The details were communicated by the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran in his letter of 3 July addressed to the Secretary-General. He stated that on Sunday, 3 July, an Iran Air passenger aircraft was the target of missile attacks by United States naval forces. According to the letter, the Airbus, a civilian aircraft of the Islamic Republic of Iran with 290 passengers on board, was flying on a scheduled flight from Bandar Abbas to Dubai in the routine corridor used by civilian airliners. As a result of the missile attack the aircraft disintegrated, causing the death of all passengers, including 66 children, and crew members.

The Pakistan delegation and, we believe, the members of the Security Council greatly benefited from the eloquent and comprehensive statement made on 14 July by His Excellency Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati. His presence here was an affirmation of the trust the Islamic Republic of Iran places in the capacity of the Security Council to take prompt and effective action in the discharge of its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and for the prevention of the recurrence of such unfortunate and grievous incidents.

(Mr. Umer, Pakistan)

The participation earlier in the Council's deliberations of His Excellency Mr. George Bush, Vice-President of the United States, testified to the great importance the United States attaches to the subject under consideration. We in Pakistan have already noted that the President of the United States has expressed deep regret at the loss of innocent lives resulting from a tragic accident. He has ordered an official inquiry and announced a decision to offer compensation to the families of the victims of the disaster.

The news of the destruction of the civilian aircraft and the death of all its passengers has caused immense grief to the Government and the people of Pakistan. We are indeed deeply saddened by the loss of innocent lives, including those of six Pakistani nationals, which has caused incalculable suffering to their families.

The President of Pakistan, in a message to the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran expressing his condolences, said:

"I was appalled and grieved beyond measure by the heart-rending news of the shooting down of an Iranian civil airliner, that resulted in a colossal loss of life. The poignancy of the enormous tragedy is apparent in the fact that those who perished in it were innocent children, women and men. This tragic event has, naturally, cast a pall of gloom over all Pakistan."

The shooting down of a civilian aircraft raises many disturbing questions. We believe that this human tragedy was avoidable. A detailed and thorough investigation must be urgently and immediately undertaken so that measures can be devised to ensure that such incidents do not recur, ever. To that end, Pakistan also participated in the recent deliberations of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization on this subject.

(Mr. Umer, Pakistan)

Pakistan deplores the loss of innocent lives in this most distressing incident, and urges the Security Council to take cognizance of it so as to devise appropriate measures in the interest of the safety of civil aviation.

It is said that the finest things are spoken on the saddest occasions. While we mourn the loss of innocent lives in the tragic incident of 3 July, there has been an extremely important and positive development. I am referring here to the letter dated 17 July from His Excellency Sayed Ali Khamenei, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, addressed to the Secretary-General, in which the President stated

"we have decided to officially declare that the Islamic Republic of Iran - because of the importance it attaches to saving the lives of human beings and the establishment of justice and regional and international peace and security - accepts Security Council resolution 598 [(1987)]". (S/20020, annex)

The entire international community, particularly the members of the Security Council, as well as the Secretary-General, who have worked arduously and steadfastly to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq conflict, have every reason to welcome this important decision. For the people and the Government of Pakistan, who have experienced profound grief and anguish at the colossal loss of life during the past eight years of this conflict, the vision of peace which has now appeared on the horizon is a source of boundless relief and satisfaction. My Government will be prepared to assist in any manner in ensuring that this vision is translated soon into reality.

By bringing its case to the Security Council with regard to the tragic incident of 3 July, and by its acceptance of resolution 598 (1987), Iran has given a clear demonstration of its trust and confidence in the Security Council and in its ability to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to it under the Charter.

(Mr. Umer, Pakistan)

We are confident that the decisions of the Security Council will not only reflect the international community's expectations of this body in its primary role of promoting peace and security but will also in equal measure reflect the trust and confidence Iran has placed in the Council.

The United Nations, and particularly the Security Council, is on the threshold of a historic opportunity. We are convinced of the Council's determination to grasp that opportunity so that peace and tranquility may return to a region tormented for so long by war and devastation.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Pakistan for the kind words he addressed to me.

The next speaker is the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. MUNTASSER (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (interpretation from Arabic): The delegation of the Jamahiriya is pleased to see you, Sir, the representative of friendly Brazil, a country with which we have good relations, presiding over the Council's deliberations for this month. My delegation is convinced that the Council's work will be crowned with success owing to your diplomatic skills and objectivity.

I should also like in this context to express my delegation's thanks to your predecessor, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, for the excellent manner in which he steered the Council's deliberations last month.

During the past few days we followed media reports, including press, radio and television coverage, of the barbaric act of aggression committed by one of the naval vessels of the United States fleet in the Arabian Gulf: an act of aggression perpetrated without cause against Iranian civil airliner 655 on Sunday, 3 July 1988; an attack which resulted in the loss of life of its 290 passengers, including more than 60 children whose ages ranged between six and 12 years.

Last Thursday we listened to the detailed statement of Mr. Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in which he clarified the circumstances of the tragedy - a statement which has provided incontrovertible proof of responsibility for the tragedy. We have listened to other speakers during the past two meetings.

My country condemned that senseless act of aggression only hours after it had taken place. A statement issued by the People's Office for Foreign Relations said:

"By committing this aggression the United States adds a new page to a record replete with official State terrorism and represented in repeated acts of aggression against aviation and navigation jeopardizing the lives of civilians and committing aggression against innocent peoples."

(Mr. Muntasser, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

On repeated occasions the Jamahiriya has called the international community's attention to the dangers engendered by the presence of foreign naval fleets in the Arabian Gulf and the Mediterranean. That presence represents a direct threat to the security, independence and sovereignty of the countries of the region; it also jeopardizes civil aviation and navigation, as well as the lives of passengers. The Jamahiriya considers the military presence of foreign forces the main reason for the escalation of tension and the destabilization of peace in the area.

My country was the victim of a previous premeditated, senseless aggression against the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986 which claimed the lives of a large number of innocent civilians, including women, elderly and children. Libyan Arab aircraft and vessels are still subjected to provocations by the United States military fleet in the Mediterranean. We have repeatedly informed the Secretary-General and the Security Council of those provocations, the most recent of which appeared in official document A/43/85-S/19423 of 12 January 1988.

My delegation expresses condolences to the families of the victims. We also affirm our stand of solidarity with the fraternal Iranian people in its confrontation of the American aggression. We also condemn in the strongest terms the senseless, barbaric aggression against the fraternal Muslim Iranian people.

Once again we renew our demand for the withdrawal of all foreign fleets from Arabian Gulf and the Mediterranean. We call upon the Council to assume its full responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security in the area. The Council should not stand idle before provocative acts that will lead to the escalation of tension and expansion of war in the area. The Council should take all measures that would lead to the immediate withdrawal of foreign fleets from the area.

(Mr. Muntasser, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

In conclusion, the delegation of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya expresses its happiness over the letter from the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Secretary-General in which he has expressed his country's acceptance of Security Council resolution 598 (1987). We hope that the Secretary-General's efforts will be crowned with success and will lead to prevailing peace and security among the fraternal countries of the region.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for the kind words he addressed to my country to me.

The next speaker is the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. AL-MASRI (Syrian Arab Republic) (interpretation from Arabic): At the outset I should like to express to you, Sir, my delegation's satisfaction at seeing you accede to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of July, especially since my country, Syria, is linked to your country, Brazil, by close ties of friendship and co-operation.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express to Mr. Marcelo Delpech, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, our gratitude for the wise and effective way in which he guided the Council's work last month.

Syria learned, with consternation and horror, the news of the shooting down of the Iranian civilian airliner flight 655 by an American warship, the Vincennes, resulting in the loss of life of all its 290 passengers, including women and children. My country has condemned that act and drawn the attention of world public opinion to the serious dangers resulting from the continued presence of foreign military fleets in the Gulf and to the suffering and danger that presence could cause to the peoples of the region.

(Mr. Al-Masri, Syrian
Arab Republic)

This tragic accident has shocked the conscience of mankind and is a violation of the human right to life, liberty and freedom of movement. We have heard the important statement of Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran; the information he provided has shed light on the circumstances surrounding the downing of the airliner.

That accident was the culmination of the human tragedy that has resulted in the military presence now in the Gulf. It has raised several questions regarding future developments in the situation in one of the most sensitive, vital and heavily travelled regions of the world. The continued presence of foreign military fleets in the waters and airspace of that region and the continued interference with and intervention in maritime navigation and air traffic are serious and continuing threats to the safety and freedom of such air and naval traffic and to passenger safety.

The shooting down of the civilian Iranian aircraft has brought to light the seriousness of the presence of such foreign military fleets in the Gulf. The accident requires that the international community make all possible efforts to ensure the rapid and effective withdrawal of those fleets and it demands that the States to which such fleets belong comply in order to reassure the inhabitants of the region, who are living in fear and terror of the recurrence of such a catastrophe. Their fear and terror of a new disaster will remain justified and legitimate so long as those fleets remain in the region and so long as they continue to interfere with freedom of maritime navigation and civilian air transportation. There is at present nothing to prevent the recurrence of such a tragedy in the future.

The arguments advanced to justify and explain that horrendous act, which resulted in one of the greatest tragedies the international community has known in

(Mr. Al-Masri, Syrian
Arab Republic)

the modern era, convince no one and cannot distract world attention from the fundamental problem, namely, that of the presence of military fleets in the Gulf, a presence that has become of fundamental concern to all.

The destruction of the Iranian civil airliner, which resulted in the deaths of 290 innocent persons, including women and children, and which has created a climate of fear and terror in the region, must be condemned categorically and energetically. In the face of this human ordeal, all peace-loving peoples are looking to the Security Council to adopt the measures necessary to guarantee strict respect by all States for the norms, rules and international conventions governing naval and air traffic, safety and freedom. There must be a rapid withdrawal of all military forces and fleets from the Gulf region to ensure the security of civilian air and maritime lanes, to respect civilian lives and to promote peace and security in that important and sensitive region of the world.

In conclusion, I should like to take this opportunity to express to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to the representatives of those States whose nationals died on Flight 655, as well as to the Governments and the bereaved families of the victims, my country's sincere condolences at the tragic loss of life.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic for his kind words addressed to my country and to me.

The next speaker is the representative of India. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. RATH (India): It is the privilege of my delegation to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month. We are confident that your long diplomatic experience and not-inconsiderable skills in that field will provide both guidance and leadership to the Council.

May I also take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Marcelo Delpech, the Permanent Representative of Argentina, for the admirable manner in which he conducted the Council's deliberations last month.

On 3 July 1988 a civilian aircraft belonging to Iran Air was shot down by a naval ship of the United States armed forces in the Gulf. The 290 passengers and crew aboard the aircraft lost their lives. Amongst them were citizens of my country. We have listened with great attention to the statements made to the Council by the Vice-President of the United States, the Honourable George Bush, and His Excellency the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Said Ali Akbar Velayati. We deeply deplore the shooting down of a civilian aircraft and the tragic loss of innocent lives.

In a message to the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran my Prime Minister has expressed his deep distress and the heartfelt sympathies of the people and Government of India to the families of the bereaved. My delegation wishes once again to convey its most sincere condolences to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the relatives of the victims. My delegation also expresses its deepest sympathy to the families of the victims from all the other countries involved.

We have supported the request for an investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) into the circumstances of this tragic incident. We have noted the positive stand of the parties involved in offering their fullest

(Mr. Rath, India)

co-operation to ICAO. We have also noted the United States Administration's order of a full enquiry and its offer of compension on an ex gratia basis to the families of the victims.

India's views on the situation in the Gulf are well known. Following the shooting down of the Iran Air aircraft, the official spokesman of the Government of India made the following statement:

"The Government has consistently maintained that great-Power naval presences in the Gulf are aggravating tension in the region and has accordingly urged utmost restraint by all concerned. The act of violence perpetrated yesterday has demonstrated only too clearly that peace in the region must be restored speedily by a process of negotiation which takes into account the legitimate interests of all parties, not through futile resort to force."

We had sincerely hoped that out of this tragedy would emerge a greater sense of urgency to bring an end to all hostilities in the region. Already, there are rapidly moving developments. We welcome the official declaration by the Islamic Republic of Iran of its acceptance of Security Council resolution 598 (1987). We are confident that that will be significant to the attainment of peace and security in the region. India has supported the efforts of the Secretary-General towards the implementation of resolution 598 (1987) to bring an end to the Iran-Iraq conflict and the consequences arising therefrom.

Today, we reaffirm that support to the Secretary-General, and we hope that we can now move quickly ahead to bring about durable peace in the region.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of India for his kind words addressed to me.

(spoke in Spanish)

The next speaker is the representative of the Cuba. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. VELAZCO SAN JOSE (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): May I first, Sir, congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of July. We know your diplomatic skills and experience, which give us confidence that the Council's work will be successful.

I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Delpech, Permanent Representative of Argentina, who gave proof of his skill and ability in the conduct of the Council's work during the month of June.

This lofty body is meeting to consider the tragic situation caused by the downing of a commercial airliner of the Islamic Republic of Iran by a United States warship, with the death of 290 persons, including 66 children, citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. On behalf of the Government and people of Cuba, I wish to express our deepest sympathy to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the relatives of the Iranian victims and those of other nationalities.

The mass media have provided a great deal of information on the incident, and we have all been able to see on our television screens the Dantesque scenes of the recovery of bodies from the waters of the Gulf.

Various civil and military authorities of the United States Government have made statements describing the incident as just an accident, the result of a mistake in identifying the aircraft, which was allegedly confused with a military plane.

(Mr. Velazco San Jose, Cuba)

We have also heard various possible reasons why the captain of the Vincennes ordered the downing of the plane, and there have also been many contradictions between the initial statements made by Admiral Crowe, who went so far as to say that the plane was outside the air corridor used on the Bandar Abbas-Dubai route, and later statements by Pentagon spokesmen.

What is certain is that Iran Air 655 was on a scheduled flight, was using an established international air route, was gaining altitude and not descending, as had initially been asserted, and during its short flight transmitted the appropriate civil aviation signals.

Moreover, the USS Vincennes is one of the most sophisticated warships in the United States fleet. At a cost of billions of dollars it has the Aegis system, a battery of radars, sensors, computers and automatic guided weapons which taken together supposedly work very well in combat - except that, as we are now told, it confused an aeroplane 62 feet long, an F-14, with an aeroplane 177 feet long, an Airbus.

It is not easy to imagine that it was simply an accident caused by a mistake in the computers, acquired through murky Pentagon contracts, or by the nervousness and irresponsibility of a ship's captain desperate to prove the effectiveness of the death-dealing machinery put in his hands. But even if we accepted the idea that it was just an accident, those 290 innocent victims would not have given their lives but for the unjustified military presence and the aggressive and bellicose policy of the United States in that part of the world. The concentration in the waters of the Gulf of a powerful naval force of the United States and other Powers from outside the region, far from achieving the goals for which it was supposedly sent, has in practice contributed to increasing tension in a region already torn by a tragic armed conflict.

(Mr. Velazco San Jose, Cuba)

Yesterday it was an aircraft of Iran Air that was downed; tomorrow it could be any one of the hundreds of commercial airliners that use those air routes daily.

The naval forces to which I have referred are a danger to the region; they jeopardize the security of air navigation and constitute a threat to international peace and stability.

Our country condemns the warmongering policy that led to the tragedy, and appeals to international public opinion to rally to achieve the withdrawal of foreign military forces from the Gulf and the taking of measures to avoid a recurrence of such actions, and at the same time to call for a search for a negotiated solution to put an end to the situation that for more than seven years has convulsed the region.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): I thank the representative of Cuba for the kind words he addressed to me.

(spoke in English)

The next speaker is the representative of Romania. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. TANASIE (Romania): Allow me first, Sir, to extend to you our sincere and warm congratulations on your assuming the presidency and to wish you every success in your term of office. Your country has always been distinguished by its dedication to the strengthening of international peace and security and thus to the strengthening of the role of the United Nations in international relations. Brazil and my own country have relations of mutual respect and many-sided co-operation. Your talent as a skilful diplomat and your wisdom assure the Council of success in its work this month.

(Mr. Tanasie, Romania)

At the same time, Sir, I wish to express my appreciation to your predecessor, Mr. Marcelo Delpech, for the excellent manner in which he led the Council's work throughout the month of June.

It was with deep concern and regret that the people of the Socialist Republic of Romania learned the news of the shooting down, by the naval forces of the United States operating in the Gulf, of the Iranian civilian airliner with 290 persons on board, all of whom lost their lives.

I wish to take this opportunity to convey the profound sympathy and condolences of the Romanian people to the people of Iran and the bereaved families of the victims.

The Romanian people is most worried about the situation, which has heightened tension in the region and created new threats to international peace and security.

The shooting down of the civilian aircraft was without any doubt a consequence of the great military tension prevailing in the zone. This tragic incident, which has particular gravity, has once again drawn attention to the difficult and dangerous situation in the Gulf region, which could escape control, endangering the security of every country and jeopardizing peace and stability in the region. It gives clear evidence of the need to eliminate the conditions which have provoked the escalation of the conflict existing in the Gulf.

We believe that the situation which engendered the incident must end without further delay. For this purpose, we reaffirm the longstanding position of Romania that it is imperative that all foreign warships be withdrawn from the Gulf, and that an immediate end be put to all similar acts, all forms of armed intervention and any resort to the policy of force.

(Mr. Tanasie, Romania)

Consistently favouring political ways of settling disputes and appealing for lasting peace in the region, Romania has always been of the view that life has clearly shown that any conflict adds more complications to a given situation and leads to the aggravation of relations between States. It is essential to act responsibly for the cessation of disputes and to proceed towards their settlement exclusively through negotiations. Romania has always stressed the need for the immediate cessation of the war between Iran and Iraq and solution of the conflict through peaceful negotiations, thus allowing the two countries to concentrate their efforts on economic and social development and to make their contributions to the settlement of the complex matters confronting mankind. Implementation of Security Council resolution 598 (1987) can be the basis for the restoration of peace and normalcy in the Gulf. It is the Council's duty to renew its peace efforts. Full support should be given to the Secretary-General in his endeavours to achieve peace.

Deploing the shooting-down of the Iranian passenger airliner, Romania expresses its opinion that more general conclusions should be drawn from the tragedy of the Iranian aircraft and that all measures should be taken to prevent activities that could generate other grave events in the region. A full investigation should be carried out by the relevant international bodies to clarify the circumstances that led to the incident and to contribute to the prevention of such tragedies in the future.

Romania would also like to emphasize the need for all States to exercise the greatest restraint and moderation in these difficult moments for peace and security in the region and to act so that wisdom and the supreme interests of peace, co-operation and understanding among all peoples prevail.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Romania for his kind words addressed to my country and to me.

(spoke in Spanish)

The next speaker is the representative of Nicaragua. I invite him to take a place at the Council table and to make his statement.

Mr. SERRANO CALDERA (Nicaragua) (interpretation from Spanish): At the outset I should like to tell you, Sir, how pleased my delegation is, and how pleased I am, to see you presiding over the work of the Council. You represent a sister Latin American republic with which we have many bonds and with which we share the same principles and ideals of respect for law, love of justice and peace, and solidarity among nations. We are certain that the Council will find in you the intelligent and effective leadership it needs to bring the present deliberations to a successful conclusion.

We wish to express our appreciation to Ambassador Delpech of Argentina for the exemplary way in which he directed the work of this body last month.

On Thursday of last week we listened most attentively to the statement of His Excellency Mr. Ali Akbar Velayati, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who related to us the grave events that impelled his country to request an urgent meeting of this lofty body. We also had the opportunity to hear the explanations and opinions of the Government of the United States of America from its Vice-President, Mr. George Bush.

Reacting to the serious occurrences denounced by Iran, on 4 July my Government issued a communiqué in which it forcefully condemned the brutal attack perpetrated by the armed forces of the United States against an Iran Air passenger plane over international waters in the Strait of Hormuz, causing the death of 290 innocent civilians.

(Mr. Serrano Caldera, Nicaragua)

The Nicaraguan people's sorrow at this tragedy was expressed by President Daniel Ortega Saavadra in a letter of the same date addressed to His Excellency Seyed Ali Khamenei, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We wish to take this opportunity to reiterate to the Government of Iran and the relatives of the victims, through their Minister for Foreign Affairs, our sorrow and pain at this tragedy. We express the same sentiments to the Governments and families of the persons of other nationalities who also were victims of this horrendous act.

Without prejudice to the results of the investigations begun by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) on the degree of responsibility of the United States Government in the commission of this barbarous act, the unfortunate circumstances that led to these meetings of the Council should cause us to reflect on substantive aspects that can hardly be dissociated from the context of the fratricidal war between Iran and Iraq and threaten their neighbours throughout the Gulf region.

First, the Security Council must ensure compliance with the international norms of civil air traffic adopted in the Chicago Convention of 1944, in particular the provisions of article 44 and annex II, which are universally recognized and valid norms any breach of which must be subject to liability and compensation to be determined by the results of the inquiry undertaken by the specialized agency. Although we believe that this important aspect of the problem cannot be resolved by ex gratia compensation but through recognition of the rights of the offended country and the victims' relatives, the basic consideration is not so much identification of the right mechanism for compensation as the establishment of measures to prevent the recurrence of such events.

(Mr. Serrano Caldera, Nicaragua)

Secondly, apart from the question of international liability, there is the problem of the context which prompts and causes the incident. The presence of foreign naval forces, mainly those of the United States, in the Gulf, far from ensuring free maritime transit in that region, which is vital to the international economy, has become an element of tension that has degenerated into repeated grave incidents. This kind of foreign presence unfortunately reflects the dangerous trend to resolve international problems unilaterally, setting aside the juridical and institutional framework of the United Nations Charter, in particular the powers it grants the Security Council in respect of threats to or breaches of international peace and security. The safety of civil air and maritime traffic in the Gulf region should therefore be a primary responsibility of the Security Council and of all the States of the region.

(Mr. Serrano Caldera, Nicaragua)

The withdrawal of those foreign naval forces is therefore imperative if there really is a desire to help to deactivate a devastating and fratricidal conflict that has already gone on too long, and if there really is a desire to create an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful, just and honourable solution.

The death of those 290 innocent persons is nothing but the tragic result of a mistaken and arbitrary policy, led by the United States of America, which balks at acting within the law and claims to have rights and interests everywhere in the world.

A year ago the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 598 (1987). That resolution constitutes the framework for the solution of the conflict, which all of us - especially the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries - wish to see ended. Any decision that the Council takes to guarantee the safety of maritime and air traffic in the Gulf region should be in keeping with the general lines and principles contained in that resolution and should not lose sight of those objectives. It is therefore essential that, as the necessary measures are taken to prevent a recurrence of barbaric acts such as the one which led to the convening of the Security Council on this occasion and to ensure compliance with the international norms that protect innocent civilians in cases of conflict, renewed support should be given to the Secretary-General in his efforts to achieve the implementation of resolution 598 (1987).

In that context, we express our appreciation to the Islamic Republic of Iran for having officially accepted Security Council resolution 598 (1987) - an acceptance expressed in a letter of 17 July 1988 addressed to the Secretary-General, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, by President Seyed Ali Khamenei. That expression of intent should be followed by the immediate implementation by the two parties of the plan drawn up by the Secretary-General for the application of resolution 598 (1987).

(Mr. Serrano Caldera, Nicaragua)

We cannot conclude our statement without making a strong appeal to all the parties to refrain from any action that could aggravate the present situation. We appeal particularly to the big Powers to co-operate and facilitate the implementation of resolution 598 (1987). To that end, it is essential, indeed crucial, to have the political will of the parties to the conflict between Iran and Iraq, fraternal countries with which Nicaragua has relations of friendship and solidarity and from which we request sincere co-operation with the Secretary-General in order to achieve the just and honourable solution to which we all aspire.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): I thank the representative of Nicaragua for the kind words he addressed to my country and to me.

(spoke in English)

The representative of the United States wishes to speak, and I now call on him.

Mr. WALTERS (United States of America): I shall not answer the accusations of premeditation levelled against my country in regard to this very tragic incident. They are unworthy of a reply. They are false, and even those who uttered them know that.

The PRESIDENT: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of Brazil.

In a statement issued on 4 July 1988 the Brazilian Government expressed its deep regret at the downing of the Iranian civilian aircraft, with the resulting loss of hundreds of innocent lives. It reiterated that international civil aviation cannot be left at the mercy of acts of this nature and noted that this tragic incident underlined once again the need for the utmost restraint on the part of all in the Gulf region, as called for in Security Council resolution 598 (1987).

On the same occasion the Brazilian Government extended its sincere condolences to the families of all the victims of this deplorable event.

(The President)

It is clear that a full and independent investigation of the facts is imperative. The results of such an investigation will serve the purposes of clarifying the circumstances under which the event took place and ascertaining responsibilities. The conclusions drawn on a technical level should, in addition, contribute to the improvement of the safety of civil air traffic.

As a member of the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Brazil concurred in its decision taken on 14 July, in response to an Iranian request, to investigate the occurrence. We welcome the decision by the United States to co-operate fully with this investigation.

We have taken note of the initiative of the United States Government to offer, as a humanitarian gesture, on an ex gratia basis, compensation to the victims.

It is our firm conviction that international civil aviation is a factor of peace and of bringing peoples together. Its safety, therefore, must not be jeopardized. To that end, certain norms governing international behaviour, such as the rules, standards and recommended practices enshrined in the 1944 Chicago Convention and its annexes, must be observed, particularly those related to the non-use of weapons against civil aircraft.

During the course of our debate, arguments have been advanced in support of the principles of freedom of navigation and of safety of civil aviation. It is in the best interests of the international community that upholding one must not imply infringing the other.

This tragic episode, beyond its immediate circumstances and implications, calls for both restraint and reflection on the part of all. It dramatically illustrates the disquieting degree of tension prevailing in the Gulf today. It also underlines the urgent need to put an end to the Iran-Iraq war, which has been raging for almost eight years. To that end, resolution 598 (1987), unanimously

(The President)

adopted by the Security Council one year ago, constitutes in our view the proper framework for a just and honourable settlement of the conflict and for the restoration of peace and security in the region on a lasting basis. Brazil commends the efforts by the Secretary-General in this regard and is fully prepared to work with him in the development of his implementation plan.

The presence in the Security Council of the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency Mr. Ali-Akbar Velayati, and the Vice-President of the United States, the Honourable George Bush, bears witness to the gravity of the incident, to the importance that both countries attach to this forum, and to their willingness to hear each other's contentions. We hope that this occasion will be seen as an opportunity for reducing tensions and creating a better political atmosphere, conducive to a comprehensive and lasting solution to the problems affecting the region.

(The President)

Given the responsibilities of the Security Council under the Charter as the main body entrusted with the preservation of peace and security, it is to be expected that, in the consideration of the item on our agenda, this body will take appropriate action in the manner that will give satisfaction to all.

I shall now resume in my capacity as President of the Security Council.

There are no further speakers for this meeting. The next meeting of the Security Council to continue the consideration of the item on the agenda will take place tomorrow, Tuesday, 19 July, at 11 a.m.

I should like to make a further announcement. I am inviting the members of the Council for consultations at 10 o'clock this evening. I apologize for the lateness of the hour fixed for these consultations, but additional time is indeed needed to prepare them.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.