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Indian Council of World Affairs
Sapru House, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi

Report

on
Speech

by

H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft

President-elect of the 70th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

at

Sapru House, New Delhi
31 August, 2015

'We must share much more equally' if we want to fulfil the basic promise that no human being is left behind, said H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President-elect of the 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), while delivering his Speech, 'UN at 70' at the Sapru House on 31 August 2015.

The UN is celebrating its 70th anniversary and Mr. Mogens Lykketoft has been elected as the President of the General Assembly, scheduled to be held in September this year. The President-elect said that the coming year will be 'one of the most important years' in the history of the UN, and suggested that the 70th Session would adopt 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals as part of the 2030 Agenda. Terming it as a 'historic achievement', he added that the theme of his presidency would be 'The UN at 70 – a new commitment to action'. Outlining the priorities of his presidency, Mr. Mogens briefed that his focus will be on implementation, strengthening of the UN's role in peace and security, and gender and human rights.

The 2030-Agenda of the UN talks about fairer distribution of resources between countries and inside the country. A global bottom-up approach has been evolved to set the agenda, which, apart from the member-states, involves NGOs, business community and stakeholders. The current distribution of resources is unsustainable. Only 92 persons have more wealth than what 3.5 billion other people have together. It is time to share more equally to give all people access to food, water, education, health and energy. The 2030-Agenda has a holistic approach and views poverty, inequality and environment problems as interconnected, requiring concerted efforts. The current pattern of production and consumption needs to be changed. Mr. Mogens was of the view that millions are aspiring for better life standards, for example, as in Europe, but it is not sustainable. He suggested that to address the climate challenges and sustainable development, there is a need for innovative ideas, green technologies and large investments.

Mr. Mogens suggested that investments can be sourced from three sources: the rich countries must deliver on the commitment of 0.7 per cent of their GDP as development assistance; the national governments must mobilise resources through taxes; and more and more investments should come from private businesses and pension funds. Referring to the

Millennium Development Goals, he suggested that poverty has been reduced to half at the global level. He said that the UN is still relevant and able to break new grounds; and it will be more coherent in supporting peace-building and reconciliation, especially in conflicts that are yet to be resolved. The UN would also support new initiatives to better address the challenges of terrorism, radicalization and asymmetric warfare. The world is still witnessing violence, wars and refugee problems.

The President-elect of the UNGA appreciated India's role in the UN and said that it is 'a significant contributor' to all areas of UN works. He also urged India to support the 'ambitious outcome' of the COP 21 in Paris in December. Talking about the UN reform, which has been a demand of many countries, including India, Mr. Mogens underlined that for the first time, member-states and civil societies are to be involved in the selection of the UN Secretary-General, and it will change the process. About the UN Security Council reforms, he underscored that the Jamaican Ambassador is writing a paper on the positions of different states and it can begin the text-based negotiations for reforms.

The speech by Mr. Mogens Lykketoft was followed by an interesting Q&A session with the audience. Questions were asked about the role of the UN, especially in the Balkans and Iraq, and how the rise of China can affect the China-UN interactions.

Mr. Mogens, in his response, suggested that though there have been failures in the past and violation of Charter by the members, the UN has been successful in bringing all major powers on the table to negotiate together. A large part of humanity lives in peace. However, in Syria and Ukraine, the major powers are not working together, therefore, the UN is unable to deliver; nevertheless, the Iran-P5+1 nuclear agreement is a promising step to address the bloodshed. He said that there is more hope than before to resolve the problem. He added that the advance of the ISIS has been 'shocking' and it should provide a reason to find a common ground. Further, he opined that there can be a consensus in the UN about the convention on terrorism.

On China, he said that with the increase in Chinese political, economy and military potential, the country will engage more internationally.

On being asked about the expansion in the number of permanent and non-permanent members in the UNSC, Mr. Mogens said it is up to member countries to decide and it will be clear in future. About the bigger role of developed countries in international financing, the President-elect opined that the new initiative of creating regional banks has been envisaged, but he also cautioned that they are not to compete with the World Bank, rather, supplement it.

A question about the tenure of the UNGA presidency was also asked implying that one year is a short period. Mr. Mogens responded that there are many members and even one-year tenure of presidency comes back for a member after more than 150 years. However, he expressed that the process of early election of the president eases the transition at the General Assembly.

The programme was presided over by Ambassador Nalin Surie, Director General, Indian Council of World Affairs, and was well-attended by the diplomatic corps in Delhi, UN representatives, academia, university students and media representatives.

Report by Dr. Athar Zafar, Research Fellow, Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.
