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April 12, 2010

Ad Hoc Committee on Assembly

Resolution 51/210

44th Meeting (AM & PM)

AD HOC COMMITTEE NEGOTIATING COMPREHENSIVE ANTI-TERRORISM CONVENTION

OPENS ONE-WEEK HEADQUARTERS SESSION

Members of the General Assembly committee negotiating a comprehensive anti-terrorism convention expressed hope this morning that remaining obstacles to completing the long-stalled draft text could be overcome during the Committee’s fourteenth session, which opened today.

“Continuing acts of terror in different parts of the world, which have taken a heavy toll on innocent human lives, demand that we demonstrate the necessary political will and sense of urgency in discharging the important mandate that has been bestowed upon this Committee,” said Rohan Perera of Sri Lanka, Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee established in 1996 by General Assembly resolution 51/210.

Mr. Perera requested that during the session, which runs until Friday, 16 April, members focus on the issue at hand -- creating a legal instrument to be used as a tool for law enforcement to complement existing sectoral regimes, to ensure criminal prosecution or extradition of terrorists. They should also focus on resolving the main area of contention -- the scope of applicability of that instrument, which required an agreed definition of terrorism.

He said that last fall, the Assembly, in its resolution 64/118, noted recent progress and mandated the Committee this year to elaborate a draft text “on an expedited basis” and to continue to discuss the convening of a high-level conference on the issue under the auspices of the United Nations.

In opening statements this morning, representatives speaking on behalf of groups and individual States agreed on the urgent need for the comprehensive convention to facilitate international action against terrorism, saying that the scourge was a threat to all countries, did not respect borders and could only be fought through strong international cooperation.

Some speakers affirmed that it was also crucial to address root causes of terrorism, which they described as injustice, extreme poverty, hopelessness and foreign aggression. Most also stressed the need to respect international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of the fight against terrorism.

While all speakers called for a clear text that would assist the fight against all forms of terrorism, some said that the treaty should not override the right of peoples to fight for self-determination and that the definition of terrorism should encompass activities carried out by States.

In that vein, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Mohammad Khazaee of Iran condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as well as the involvement of States in terrorist activities. He said that terrorism did not encompass the struggle of peoples under foreign occupation, which he said was itself the “gravest form of terrorism” and should be condemned.

He said that terrorism, in addition, should not be associated with any religion or ethnic group and the human rights of all groups should be protected. He also, along with the representatives of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and others, cautioned against certain countries’ use of the fight against terrorism to advance their own political agendas.

Speaking on behalf of the European Union, Juan Antonio Yáñez-Barnuevo of Spain, on the other hand, categorically condemned all terrorist acts as “criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation”, and said efforts to reach agreement on the comprehensive convention should be intensified with genuine negotiations on outstanding issues, to bring positions closer, if not to resolve them.

Israel’s representative, also advocating a categorical definition of terrorism without “exception or mitigating circumstances”, said that consensus on a text should not come, however, if it lent room for condoning terrorist acts under the “veil […] of liberation”. The convention should not extend to State military action, she added, saying that such action was governed by other international legal regimes.

On behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Bashar Ja’afari of Syria reaffirmed his group’s determination to resolve differences on the definition of terrorism to allow a draft text to be completed, with due consideration of the difficult issue of resistance to foreign occupation.

It was indeed time to show the necessary flexibility to overcome the remaining differences, Chilean representative Heraldo Muñoz said on behalf of the Rio Group. The draft convention based on the 2007 proposal of the Coordinator constituted the best basis for a consensual text, he stated.

Along with most representatives of other developed countries that spoke on the matter, Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo of Spain also noted the European Union’s position that the convening of a high-level conference on counter-terrorism should await agreement on a draft text for the comprehensive treaty.

Most representatives of developing countries who voiced a preference on the issue called for the earlier convening of such a meeting. In addition to presenting that position, Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima of Cape Verde, on behalf of the African Group, called for more assistance to be provided to developing countries in order to help them fulfil their obligations under all international conventions to fight the terrorism scourge.

The representatives of Colombia, Senegal, Lebanon, Guatemala, Qatar, Egypt, Cuba, Norway, Kenya, Turkey, Japan, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Iran (taking the floor a second time in his national capacity), Pakistan, Morocco, China, Algeria, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Ecuador, Ghana and India reaffirmed their strong support for the completion of the Committee’s tasks and for an effective, united fight against global terrorism.

Following those interventions, exercising his right of reply to what he called “outrageous statements” by Iran and others, the representative of the United

States said that his country did not engage in terrorist acts and accusations to the contrary illustrated why the United Nations had such a difficult time dealing with terrorism.

Earlier this morning, the Committee approved the agenda for its session and decided to maintain its Bureau from the previous session, including Maria Telalian ( Greece), Ana Cristina Rodríguez-Pineda ( Guatemala) and Namira Nabil Negm ( Egypt) as Vice-Chairpersons. Andi Xhoi ( Albania) would continue as Rapporteur, the Committee decided.

At the start of the meeting, the Committee observed a minute of silence in honour of the President of Poland and others who perished in plane crash on Saturday.

The Committee will meet again at a time and place to be announced.