

Statement by the Egyptian Delegation at the opening session (Bandung, 18 April 1955)

Caption: On 18 April 1955, at the opening session of the Bandung Conference, the Egyptian Delegation looks at the issues involved in the process of decolonisation and self-rule in Asian and African countries.

Source: Asia-Africa speak from Bandung. Djakarta: THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, Republic of Indonesia, 1955. pp. 67-70.

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Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen.

In this Conference, we are meeting as representatives of the Asiatic and African countries. There is a striking similarity between the conditions prevailing in our countries; a similarity that operates as a unifying force; we have emerged from a long period of foreign influence, political as well as economic. At present we are faced with such problems as economic development, social and political reconstruction. It is not surprising therefore that we should feel close together; a fact that finds its expression in our concepts of world peace and international justice.

Mr. Chairman.

The preoccupation of Egypt with its pressing and most-needed social and economic reforms has not diverted her from carrying out her international responsibilities in such a critical epoch. Egypt which has long been a victim of foreign domination stands in defence of the cause of freedom and welfare whenever it arises and the principle of self-determination for all nations.

This constitutes one of the cardinal features of our foreign policy. Egypt has always been identified with all efforts and initiatives designed to secure for dependent peoples the full enjoyment of the rights and benefits to which they are entitled under the Charter of the United Nations.

On the other hand, this Charter contains definite commitments on the part of the world organization and positive responsibilities on the part of its members regarding non-self-governing territories. The Charter lays certain obligations on the administering powers. Among these is the obligation to develop in those territories self-government, to take due account of the political aspirations of its peoples and to assist them in the progressive development of their political institutions. However, the colonial powers have always obstructed any effective supervision of their administration of the non-self-governing territories. We have struggled and we shall continue to struggle for the strict application of the obligations placed upon the colonial powers by the Charter.

The second feature of our foreign policy is our unshaken faith in the new international order which was inaugurated in the Charter of the United Nations and our sincere and continuous support of the world organization as an effective instrument in the maintenance of the international peace and security and the promotion of the world prosperity.

In the tension between the great powers which has unfortunately hindered the progress of the United Nations, Egypt always stood for the Charter and its principles.

Although the Arab countries were among those who were most disillusioned in the failure of this organization to act in accordance with human rights, especially with regard to the countries of northern Africa and Palestine, this did not cause us, however, to lose interest in it, nor did it deter us from co-operation in its activities or weaken our faith in its lofty principles and purposes.

The third feature of our foreign policy is to expand the scope of co-operation among the Asiatic-African group.

It is my deep conviction that the co-operation among the Asiatic-African nations can play a dominant role in the lessening of the present international tension and the promotion of the world peace and prosperity.

At this time when the United Nations passes through what I may call a crisis, the Conference bears a special responsibility, that is to restore to the people of the world by practical steps and concerted action their faith in the reality of international justice and the workability of international co-operation.

All over the world there is a growing sense of insecurity. The fear of war has been aggravated by the development of mass-destructive weapons capable of effecting total annihilation. The stakes are high in terms of the very survival of mankind.

To achieve this noble objective, it seems that five conditions are essential: the first is the success of the efforts which the United Nations have been making for the regulation, limitation and reduction of all armed forces and armaments; also for the elimination of mass-destructive weapons. It is with a painful awareness of the extremely heavy burden of armaments which is tending to break the back of the world economy and which is distressingly hampering social progress in the world, that Egypt, and I trust all countries represented here and even other countries not represented here, ardently hope that a stop be rapidly made to this race of armaments and that the world will soon awake from the horrifying nightmare which it causes.

Furthermore there is a close connection between raising the standard of living of the peoples and decreasing the armaments burden.

It is also evident that modern science and technology, if utilized for peaceful purposes, offer the possibility of greater well-being for the human race than has ever been known. Put to peaceful uses, atomic energy offers hitherto undreamed-of opportunities, especially for that vast majority of humanity that is still living in poverty in the economically under-developed areas of the world.

The second condition for world peace is the adherence by the United Nations to the Charter and its principles. All decisions and actions taken by the world organization must be based on the Charter. Had this been the case the flagrant injustice inflicted upon the people of Palestine and the unprecedented aggression committed against them would not have taken place. Permit me to make but a few remarks on a subject which involves my deep regret.

Under the eyes of the United Nations and with her help and sanction, the people of Palestine were uprooted and expelled from their fatherland, to be replaced by a completely imported populace.

Never before in history has there been such a brutal and immoral violation of human principles.

Is there any guarantee for the small nations that the big powers who took part in this tragedy would not allow themselves to repeat it again, against another innocent and helpless people?

It is almost impossible to believe that such injustice could exist in the twentieth century, the age of world order, and under the eyes of the United Nations, the guardian of international law and justice.

Mr. Chairman.

No less important as a condition for a world peace is the full respect by all states of their international obligations.

Under the Charter of the United Nations and the universal declaration of human rights the treatment by any

state of any national or ethnic group has ceased to be a matter of domestic jurisdiction as certain states still advocate. It has become a question of international jurisdiction and a matter of world concern. Discrimination in any of its forms does not only constitute violation of state obligations, it impairs friendly relations among nations. It is regrettable that racial discrimination is still practised in South Africa. This attitude was described by the United Nations Commission on the racial situation in the Union of South Africa in the following terms: "The doctrine of racial superiority on which the apartheid policy was based is scientifically false, extremely dangerous to international peace and security, and contrary to the dignity and worth of the human person".

Mr. Chairman.

There is another condition to which I would like to make reference and which is usually overlooked especially by some of the big powers. The game of power politics in which the small nations can be used as tools must be stopped if the existing international tension is to come to an end.

The imposition by the big powers of certain policies for the sake of their selfish interests has the damaging effect of isolating the small nations and weakening the ties of unity and community of interests existing between them, thus causing them to fall under the grip of foreign domination.

Small nations are entitled and bound to play independently their constructive role in improving international relations and easing international tension.

Mr. Chairman.

Last, but not least, is the liquidation of colonialism which has always been a source of friction and unrest. Since the days of colonial expansion, the problem of colonial rule by alien powers has lain at the roots of many wars.

We have been witnessing for some years the rising tide of nationalism not only in our part of the world but also in various parts of Asia and Africa.

Our own experience shows us that nationalism when thwarted creates difficult problems; but if it is dealt with wisely and realistically, it responds with friendship and generosity.

We greatly hope that this will be borne in mind in dealing with those remaining areas of the world where the natural urge of nationalism has not yet been satisfied. I hardly need to emphasize the fact that we live now in a different age and that the peoples have awakened and nothing can stem the tide of nationalism and progress.

On what grounds can any one condone the fact that the countries of North Africa which, for centuries, were independent nations and the seats of great civilizations, are now being degraded to the status of non-self-governing territories? Are such policies conducive to peace and co-operation among the nations? Most of the calamities of wars and conflagrations which have brought untold sorrow to mankind were always due to the fact that the right decisions were not taken at the right time.

Mr. Chairman.

Besides aiming at lessening existing tension whether in the world at large or in our respective areas, the co-operation between the Asiatic and African Nations can lead these countries representing the biggest two continents of the world and more than half mankind towards progress and better standards of living.

For world peace is not merely the absence of war. It requires concerted endeavours to create conditions of political stability, economic development and social justice; all being essentials for the development of a healthy world society.

Mr. Chairman.

The co-operation we have come eagerly here to promote can never attain its full and effective ends unless we all believe in the fulfilment of the following fundamental principles:

First: Every country has the duty to respect the political independence and territorial integrity of every other country and also to refrain from intervention in the affairs of other countries.

Second: Every country has the right to choose freely its political as well as economic systems.

Guided by these purposes and principles our Conference can no doubt reach agreement on such concrete proposals and practical steps as may make it possible to have a standing machinery for putting into effect the co-operation among our countries in the cultural, economic and social fields.

I am confident that I interpret the desires of all our peoples when I express the fervent wish that the deliberations of this Conference may mark a decisive turning point towards the improvement of the international situation. This is a new landmark in the long quest for peace and justice.

Thank you!