



*The
Bahamas*

**STATEMENT
BY**

**THE HONOURABLE T BRENT SYMMONETTE, MP
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**DURING THE
SIXTY-SECOND SESSION
OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
GENERAL DEBATE**

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Mr. President,

I am proud to address this august body as the representative of the Government of The Bahamas. We are committed to advancing a sense of security, wellbeing, pride and prosperity of the people of The Bahamas. We look forward to working with fellow member states toward securing the same opportunities and freedoms for all people.

On behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I congratulate you on your election as President of this 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly. I also want to pay tribute to your predecessor for her leadership and dedication and for so ably guiding the work of the 61st session.

I would like to extend congratulations to Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his appointment as the eighth Secretary-General of this Organization. My Government is confident that, given Secretary-General Ban's experience and diplomatic skills, he will ably guide the organization in facing its challenges.

Mr President

Let me take this opportunity to commend the General Assembly's adoption of the historic resolution 61/19 on the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and the commemoration of the International Day held on 26 March, 2007.

The Bahamas, where the majority of our people are proud descendents of freed slaves, is participating at both the national and regional levels in a number of commemorative activities. We fully support the project aimed at erecting a Permanent Memorial at the United Nations in commemoration of this shameful period in the history of our world.

At a time when the international community is engaged in serious reflections regarding the history and consequences of slavery and the slave trade, The Bahamas wishes to recognise Haiti, as the only country to liberate itself from slavery and for the inspiration this provided to the international campaign against slavery. Since modern forms of slavery still exist and many people continue to be held in servitude, we must not relent in our resolve until everyone is able to enjoy and exercise the freedoms which this organisation has worked so diligently to recognise, uphold and defend.

Mr President,

Despite Haiti's proud history, challenges have beset our neighbour for generations. Haiti's return to democratic order last year was especially welcomed and we celebrate the strides Haiti is making along the difficult and arduous road to peace, security and development. We heartily commend President Preval and his administration for their stewardship of this demanding process.

At the same time we also commend the Organization of American States for its unstinting support for the people of Haiti.

The United Nation's Mission in Haiti continues to play a vital role in this process and The Bahamas supports the call for that mission to be maintained so as to consolidate the gains made to date and thus place our CARICOM sister country on a firm and lasting path to sustainable development, peace, security and democracy.

We urge the international community to support the people of Haiti in this quest.

As Haiti lies a mere ninety miles from the southern shores of The Bahamas, its economic and political situation can and does have very tangible repercussions for us. Each year, The Bahamas is challenged by the arrival of thousands of illegal migrants from Haiti who, by perilous means, journey to our shores in search of a better way of life. Ensuring that justice and democracy prevail in Haiti, therefore, redounds positively not only for the people of Haiti but also for The Bahamas and indeed for the entire region.

Mr. President,

The UN's role in matters of sustainable development is crucial, particularly with regard to challenges demanding a truly global response, challenges such as climate change. We commend the Secretary-General for bringing greater focus to the issue, with the convening of the High-level event on climate change last week, and are hopeful that the event will provide the necessary impetus for action when member states meet in Bali later this year. The Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is indeed the appropriate forum for negotiations on a post-Kyoto agreement, and the political will demonstrated during the Secretary-General's event should only bring us closer to an agreed agenda in this regard.

For a small island developing state and archipelago, like The Bahamas, climate change is a matter of critical importance. For many of us it is not just a matter of economics, but a matter of survival, as 80% of our landmass is within 5 feet of mean sea level – even a one degree rise in atmospheric temperature can have devastating ecological effects. Climate change is especially challenging with respect to the potential effects on our tourism sector, the main industry in The Bahamas, which generates 60 percent of The Bahamas' GDP. We therefore cannot over emphasize the need for an ambitious mitigation agenda for the post Kyoto regime. Recent studies have shown that there are many mitigation options available, many of them win-win. We must, with unwavering commitment, explore these options in an open and inclusive environment.

For countries like The Bahamas, resources for adaptation are also essential. However, even access to existing funds can prove difficult given the country's high Gross National Income (GNI). It is vital therefore that the relevant financial instruments and mechanisms, be fully operationalised and/or improved, so that they become more accessible and better address the peculiar circumstances and special needs of different countries. Further there is need for greater international cooperation with respect to the development of new adaptation technologies, as well as the transfer of such technologies in support of the sustainable development of SIDS.

Mr. President,

We in the Caribbean region must prepare for the possibility of continued increases in the incidences of natural hazards, like hurricanes, floods and earthquakes. Whether it is through assistance with hazard mapping and vulnerability assessment standardization, or with the implementation of early warning systems, international cooperation has an important role to play in complementing national efforts to reduce vulnerability to natural disasters.

One step taken by the Caribbean region was the establishment of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility under the aegis of the World Bank. We want to thank those countries which have contributed to the fund.

The Bahamas continues to press for the execution of the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), as well as for complementary frameworks such as the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and the Hyogo Framework for Action. The time has come to reassess our collective response to these issues, and renew our efforts in support of sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Adequate financial resources are essential in the implementation of the wider internationally agreed development goals. Consideration of issues surrounding the follow-up to the international Conference on Financing for Development is particularly significant this year, as we prepare for the Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus to be held in Doha next year.

The Bahamas would wish for the deliberations of the upcoming High-level Dialogue, as well as that of the 2008 Meeting of the ECOSOC with the Bretton Woods Institutions, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to provide practical inputs into, and contribute to the success of this most important Review Conference.

The issue of strengthening the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision making and norm setting is especially important to The Bahamas. There is a definite need for concrete, realistic proposals to ensure the effective, permanent representation of developing countries, particularly small developing countries, in not only the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO, but other international economic and financial institutions like the Financial Stability Forum (FSF), the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Basle Committee.

The Bahamas welcomes the positive development in the area of international cooperation in tax matters, namely the establishment of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters within the ECOSOC. The establishment of this Committee, Mr President, ensures that the interests of small developing States of the UN with different tax regimes, will be factored into discussions and recommendations, aimed at adopting mutually agreed standards that do not unduly favour the wealthy nations at the expense of meaningful development in non-OECD member countries and jurisdictions.

Mr. President,

We have reached the halfway mark in the timeframe we set ourselves, in the Millennium Development Goals to undertake concrete steps by the year 2015 to address not only the economic and environmental challenges plaguing the international community and this organization, but the various social ills as well. In so doing, we gave those who are less fortunate hope for a better and more equitable world.

The July 2007 MDG Report demonstrates that progress has been achieved in the reduction of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, the reduction in child and maternal mortality rates and the increase in primary school enrollment levels.

However, nearly 20 million children worldwide continue to be severely malnourished and suffer from various preventable diseases that will undoubtedly affect their survival and rob them of their full potential. Overall progress in achieving equal rights and empowerment of women is still too slow.

My government regards effective and practical measures to address poverty and the enhancement of educational partnerships to facilitate the development of our human resources to impact accelerated change as critical issues.

HIV/AIDS remains a global threat to the development, progress and stability of our societies. If the goal of universal access to comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010 is to be achieved, commitments in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS must be implemented. The necessary financial and technical support to developing countries must be provided to help bridge the gap and foster a more comprehensive and sustained global response to this pandemic.

Equally as important is the fact that 63 percent of deaths worldwide are attributable to non-communicable diseases resulting from factors such as obesity, high cholesterol, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, Tobacco use, physical inactivity, unhealthy diet, and alcohol abuse. At a recent special summit of the CARICOM Heads of Government a number of action steps were identified. The governments have agreed to establish, by mid-2008, comprehensive plans for the screening and management of chronic diseases and risk factors so that by 2012, 80% of people in the Caribbean region with NCDs would receive quality care and have access to preventive education based on regional guidelines.

Mr. President,

In spite of the efforts of the various entities and the existence of United Nations Conventions to protect the rights of women and children, discrimination and violence against women and children persist throughout the world.

In an effort to better address this problem The Bahamas has drafted a new Child Protective Act and Domestic Violence Protection Order Act to enhance and provide greater protection to these vulnerable groups.

Mr President,

Last year the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted, marking an important step toward the elaboration of a Counter-Terrorism Convention. The Bahamas continues to condemn terrorism and recognises that while there may be instances when terrorism and criminal activities converge, the methodologies used to combat them are very different.

Based on its own risk assessment, therefore, each Government must determine the level of resources that can be applied to counter-terrorism measures, particularly given the emphasis the Strategy also places on addressing and preventing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.

In prescribing counterterrorism measures, care must be taken by the international community to preserve the tenet of due process. Care must also be taken to guard against the creation of disincentives that negatively impact countries with service based economies.

With respect to counterterrorism measures, The Bahamas has adopted new legislation, ratified additional anti-terrorism conventions, increased security of large facilities, airports, docks and harbours, developed a counter-terrorism intelligence network, as well as anti-terrorism training for the police and defence forces, as some of the measures to address this global issue. Needless to say, such initiatives present a challenge and divert resources from important social and economic development activities.

As with most small and vulnerable countries, the escalating scope, intensity and technological advancement of crime in today's world, is a serious challenge. The Bahamas is neither a producer nor a supplier of narcotic drugs or weapons of any kind. However, given its strategic location and the increasing demand for illicit drugs, along with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, The Bahamas finds itself faced with an unprecedented level of violent criminal activity involving primarily the younger members of our population. Nonetheless, The Bahamas has renewed its effort to combat this threat from both a national and regional perspective, and has allocated a significant percentage of its national budget to crime prevention and criminal justice; to equip local law enforcement agencies with the necessary tools and resources to protect its borders and the well-being of its citizens.

The Bahamas reaffirms its commitment to fulfil its obligations to major international drug and counter-terrorism conventions.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas continues to support the concept of an expansion of the membership of the Security Council. A Council that is truly representative should more equitably reflect the current membership of the UN, enabling developing countries, including small States, to play a greater role in its activities.

The Bahamas maintains, however, that, inasmuch as an expansion of the Security Council will not greatly increase the chances for participation on that body by the vast majority of UN Member States, particularly small ones such as The Bahamas, it is important that the Council be held to higher standards of transparency, inclusion and accountability, which can best be done through modification of its working methods. We believe that intergovernmental negotiations on all aspects of Security Council reform is the next important step in advancing this process, and my delegation looks forward to participating fully in that exercise.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas would like, once again, to underscore the importance of the need for adequate financial resources for the execution of all of the UN's responsibilities. From the financing of peacekeeping missions to the regular budget, and the proposed Capital Master Plan, the Organization continues to experience financial shortfalls in a number of critical areas.

While it is incumbent on Member States to fulfil the obligations that come with membership, the Organization must also put in place effective management tools and create a system that would eliminate

overspending and wastage, create more fiscal accountability and proper oversight. For The Bahamas whose assessment was increased in the last assessment review, future increases must be linked to progress on these issues.

The Bahamas is conscious that there are many areas of conflict around the world which threaten international peace and security and result in violations of human rights. We call upon the parties involved to respect the United Nations resolutions and to resolve their differences with due regard to the principles enshrined in the UN Charter.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas values the role of the United Nations, as the custodian of the interests of the world's peoples, in particular the poor and the vulnerable. The Bahamas continues to believe that the UN Charter constitutes a viable and firm foundation on which the organization can balance and achieve its objectives to maintain international peace and security and, equally important, to promote development, and economic and social progress.

Thank you