



*The
Bahamas*

Statement

by

**The Honourable T. Brent Symonette, M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs and
Attorney General**

at the

**Sixty-fourth Session
of the
United Nations General Assembly**

**25 September, 2009
New York**

Check against delivery

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I convey sincere congratulations on your election to the Presidency of this sixty-fourth session of the United Nations General Assembly. My delegation wishes to assure you of its full cooperation and support throughout the course of this session. I also take this opportunity to congratulate your predecessor, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann on his stewardship of the sixty-third session.

Mr. President,

The current global financial and economic crisis, the worst since the Great Depression, threatens to negate all that we have achieved thus far on our development agenda, both at the national and international levels. This threat was acknowledged at the High-level event on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) last September. The scenario is no better today.

Mr. President,

The fallout for The Bahamas has been considerable. Ours is a small, very open economy that is closely linked to the performance of more developed economies. Tourism matters in The Bahamas; it is our primary industry and it affects all aspects of economic life in our country. We are in the midst of arguably one of the most difficult tourism seasons on record. Visitor arrivals are down, hotel occupancies are down and revenues earned from tourism are down. Unemployment has increased sharply. The continued economic uncertainty means that unemployment will continue to pose a problem until the global economy is stabilized and returns to growth. In this regard, we are heartened by some early signs of global economic recovery.

Mr. President,

The Government of The Bahamas acted quickly to soften the impact of the international economic downturn on our population. We took appropriate steps to ensure the continued integrity of the domestic financial system; we accelerated planned capital works to generate employment and economic activity; and we increased targeted social relief to those most disadvantaged by the crisis. In implementing these programmes the Government exercised appropriate fiscal restraint so as to ensure sustainability in the medium term but also in the longer term, and to ensure that the economy would be well placed to respond swiftly to any upturn in the global economy.

The Bahamas believes that it is critically important to global financial health that actions taken at the national level are complemented by appropriate international responses.

Mr. President,

This year the General Assembly will consider the Scale of Assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations for the period 2010-2012, as well as the Scale of Assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of UN peacekeeping operations.

The Bahamas takes this opportunity to reiterate its longstanding position that per capita gross national income (GNI) should not be given undue weight in determining 'capacity to pay', as it often leads to distortions. Nowhere is this distortion more visible than in the case of the scale of assessments for peacekeeping operations. The current scale places The Bahamas, a small island developing state, in the same category as the most developed economies of the world, with the exception of the permanent members of the Security Council. This unjust formula creates an onerous burden and we call upon this body to address this inequity, which seriously undermines the development objectives of The Bahamas and other developing countries

Clearly the GNI criterion does not properly reflect either the vulnerability of our economy, or the extraordinary costs associated with the duplication of infrastructure required because of our archipelagic configuration.

Yet, despite our vulnerabilities, we have never wavered from our responsibilities as a fully-fledged member of the international community, and will continue to meet our obligations to the United Nations in the manner prescribed and agreed. While my Government is committed to paying its assessed contributions, in full and in a timely manner, we believe that the proposed Scale of Assessments is unfairly and unduly burdensome for countries such as The Bahamas and should therefore be reconsidered and adjusted, taking into account those considerations that reflect our vulnerabilities.

Mr. President,

Climate change presents acute challenges for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like The Bahamas. We are extremely vulnerable to its impact.

One of the major consequences of climate change for The Bahamas has been the increase in the number, frequency and ferocity of hurricanes impacting our country and region over the last two decades.

Mr. President,

Restoration and recovery efforts required as a result of these extreme events have tolled in the hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade alone, diverting scarce resources from other critically important national development programmes, and compromising our efforts towards sustainable development.

diverting scarce resources from other critically important national development programmes, and compromising our efforts towards sustainable development.

Hence, we have a special interest not only in actions being taken to mitigate the adverse impacts of Climate Change but in measures designed to slow and indeed reverse actions which negatively impact climate. As a founding member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), The Bahamas has joined with other like-minded states in our region and around the globe in calling for a global agreement in Copenhagen with legally binding targets that will permit us to achieve the ultimate objectives of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Bahamas is cognizant that the responsibility for climate change does not rest with developed countries alone. Within our limited capabilities, The Bahamas has undertaken a number of appropriate actions, which were highlighted during the High-level Event, in order to increase our level of resilience vis-à-vis the adverse impacts of climate change.

Mr. President,

It is also important that initiatives being undertaken in pursuit of environmental protection do not cause greater harm than good. For example, the introduction of an air passenger levy will cause damage to our already weakened tourism industry, an industry that is our economic life line. The proposed marine bunkering levies/taxes are likely to have a similar negative impact on the cost competitiveness of our Maritime Registry. Such supposed 'well-intentioned' environmental initiatives come at a time when the resources available for adaptation are not readily available to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like The Bahamas.

Mr. President,

As an archipelagic nation, The Bahamas faces particular challenges in the area of maritime safety and security. My Government has committed tremendous financial and technical resources to combat illicit trafficking of drugs and weapons, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and human smuggling, and underscores the need for effective cooperation and coordination among States and the development of innovative approaches to resolve these issues and complement national efforts.

The Bahamas welcomes the constructive engagement of the United Nations and the International Maritime Organization to address the issue of piracy. The Bahamas, as the world's third largest ship registry, will continue to engage with its partners in the international community toward ensuring the safety and security of international shipping.

Mr. President,

Haiti is a near neighbour and a member of our Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The Bahamas and the Caribbean Community States are committed to Haiti's stabilization, as well as to its political and economic development, in the short- and long-term. This cannot be achieved without sustained support from the international community.

The Bahamas is therefore heartened by the UN's active and sustained engagement in Haiti over the past four and a half years, through the work of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). We share the hope of the Secretary General that Haiti is moving away from a history of conflict to a future of peaceful and sustainable development. We call on the Security Council to further extend the mandate of MINUSTAH beyond 15th October, 2009, as recommended by the Secretary General. We are also hopeful that the recent appointment of former United States President Bill Clinton as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Haiti will help to keep the issues affecting Haiti at the forefront of the attention of the international community. The Security Council's meeting on Haiti earlier this month was most welcome in this regard.

Mr. President,

An increased level of criminal activity is creating new challenges for The Bahamas, a phenomenon shared with other countries in our region. We continue to implement national and regional anti-crime initiatives to combat this scourge, which undermines our economies and indeed to our social stability.

Illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and small arms and light weapons, are major contributing factors to this phenomenon. The Bahamas is not a producer of illicit drugs. Neither The Bahamas nor the other member States of CARICOM are manufacturers or suppliers of small arms and light weapons. Yet, illicit drugs and light weapons account overwhelmingly to violent crime in our societies.

A disproportionate amount of our scarce budgetary resources are dedicated to fighting illicit drug and light arms trafficking through our territory and in dealing with the terrible fallout in our communities.

The Bahamas is firmly committed to enhancing regional and international cooperation in the area of peace and security. We are pleased that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has agreed to re-engage with the Caribbean region and to support the fight against the crime and violence that today mars our societies.

Mr. President,

In closing, my delegation wishes to state that the current financial and economic crisis dramatically demonstrates the interdependence of the economies of the world. This in turn shows the critically important role which organizations like the United Nations can play in facilitating dialogue and crafting creative solutions to global problems. As we continue to face these unprecedented global challenges, The Bahamas reaffirms its commitment to engaging fully and constructively with its partners in the international community to find collective solutions to our challenges which confront us all.

Thank you.