



General Debate
66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

STATEMENT

by

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of the
Commonwealth of The Bahamas

26 September, 2011

New York

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Mr. President,

On behalf of the Government and People of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of this sixty-sixth session of the United Nations General Assembly. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I also extend sincere gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, for his stewardship of this Assembly during the sixty-fifth session. I would also like to extend congratulations to Mr. Ban Ki-moon on his re-appointment as Secretary-General.

I take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome the Republic of South Sudan as the 193rd Member State of the UN and convey the best wishes of my Government and people for its peace and prosperity.

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Government and People of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, I wish to express regrets on the loss of lives and the tremendous and wide-ranging destruction caused by hurricanes and tropical storms during this summer season. The Bahamas, as well as a number of Caribbean islands and the East Coast of the United States have been particularly hard hit by Hurricane Irene. The devastation caused by each of these storms reinforces the need for global attention to the adverse impacts of climate change and natural disasters. The storms' trail of destruction which took lives, flattened homes and businesses, toppled trees and spread debris across roadways and bridges, and which in some cases, caused almost certain irreversible damage to coastal areas and eco-systems compels, we believe, the international community to take immediate measures to address climatic phenomena which cause such huge losses and which threaten so many countries.

Mr. President,

For us, the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, including hurricanes, some due to the effects of climate change, are among the major challenges faced at the national level. Other environmental challenges, including waste and water resource management issues, together with economic and social challenges all constitute serious constraints for The Bahamas.

We are committed to mainstreaming sustainable development principles into our national development strategies. Progress is being made in key areas protecting our biodiversity and supporting the development of policies promoting renewable energy. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with international partners so as to achieve even greater success in the years ahead. In this vein, The Bahamas looks forward to next year's United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development or Rio+20. We fully expect that the Conference will take into account unmet needs in each of the three pillars of sustainable development, that is the economic, the social and the environmental.

Mr. President,

We face an increasingly complex set of global challenges. This has given rise to an equally complex network of formal and informal global institutions and mechanisms designed to enhance collective action to address these challenges. Consequentially the question of international governance as it relates to the global agenda has become a pressing issue in recent years.

The global economic crisis of the past three years has underscored the need for more effective global governance as has the long and sometimes controversial debate on reform of the UN Security Council. Arguably, at the heart of all these issues, particularly for small developing States like The Bahamas, is the need to ensure that our global systems are able to effectively respond to evolving global challenges, in an inclusive, participatory and transparent manner.

With respect to international economic governance, Mr. President, The Bahamas is acutely aware of the growing role of the G20 and the need to address how the Group would be better able to engage and consult a wider range of countries, as well as the United Nations as a whole, with a view to helping to translate G20 deliberations into effective actions on a global scale. Fortunately, the work of the Global Governance Group (3G) has been largely successful in this regard. Indeed, The Bahamas joined the 3G with the understanding that the United Nations has a central role in global economic governance, and that serious engagement with the G20 would allow for a clearer understanding of respective strengths and comparative advantages.

Mr. President,

Reform of the Security Council is no more a reality today than it was a year ago, or even ten years ago. This remains, however, an important goal as it stands as a harbinger of success for other equally pressing global governance activities that will inevitably affect each and every country regardless of its size, economic or political power. The aspirations of the marginalized for greater democratization, inclusiveness, representativeness, transparency and accountability are no less legitimate at the international level than they are at the national or local levels. If the Council is to fulfill its responsibility for international peace and security, it must reflect the geopolitical realities of our world in its composition, as well as in its modus operandi. The Bahamas therefore continues to support Security Council expansion in both categories and the reform of the body's working methods.

The Bahamas believes that the main strength of the United Nations is its inclusiveness, being perhaps the only global body with unquestioned legitimacy. Hence, we envision a greater role for the United Nations in a number of areas, not in order to duplicate work done elsewhere, but to ensure that there is a much-needed development dimension in areas of critical importance to small developing countries, including international cooperation in tax matters.

The Bahamas, along with the rest of CARICOM, continues to seek the conversion of the Committee of Experts on International Cooperation on Tax Matters into an Intergovernmental Subsidiary body of the ECOSOC, the central goal being to give small developing countries an effective voice when issues of cooperation on tax matters are being decided by the international community. Likewise, we recommend a greater role for the United Nations in the areas of international financial regulation and credit rating systems.

Mr. President,

As regards to the global economic and financial crisis, it is important to note that many small middle-income and ostensibly high-income developing States like The Bahamas continue to grapple with lingering effects, including serious credit and employment challenges – challenges that persist owing mainly to varying levels of indebtedness; non-concessionary status with respect to access to resources of the International

Financial Institutions (IFIs); and an increasing rate of erosion of preferential access to the markets of major development partners.

The Bahamas continues to develop national initiatives to address these and other related issues. We have seen some success in maintaining a sustainable Government Debt to GDP ratio; implementing measures to provide relief and assistance to Bahamians; as well as efforts to modernise and expand our public infrastructure, and increase investment to our least developed islands.

These national efforts must be met with appropriate and urgent actions at the international level in order to effectively respond to these challenges, as well as to help sustain progress in achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Such actions at the international level must include the provision of new and additional resources to assist developing countries, in particular the most vulnerable among us, as well as the development of necessary implementation mechanisms.

In this connection, The Bahamas wishes to underline the importance of implementing the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development. The Bahamas also wishes to highlight, in this regard, the critical role that a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system can play in stimulating economic growth and development in developing countries.

Mr. President,

Migration can and has been a positive force for development internationally. Indeed migrants have contributed to the development of The Bahamas in many respects, largely through contributions to education, health care, and to the development of the tourism and financial services sectors of our economy. Uncontrolled migration however, has also proved, and continues to be, a serious challenge to sustainable development.

In this context, The Bahamas welcomes increased dialogue on improving international cooperation with respect to international migration and development. We believe that proper cooperation can help to ensure that migration occurs through safe and regulated channels to the benefit of both the migrant and of receiving states like The Bahamas.

The Bahamas will continue to participate constructively in the process leading to the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development to be held by the General Assembly in 2013, with a view to addressing these and other related issues so crucial to our development.

Mr. President

The Bahamas congratulates the people of one of our regional partners, Haiti, on the election and installation of its democratically elected President/Government. We are greatly heartened by the peaceful and successful manner in which the second round of elections was concluded in Haiti in March of this year, clearly indicating that country's adherence to democratic principles and procedures. Subsequently, President Michel Martelly was warmly welcomed to the CARICOM Heads of Government meeting that took place at the beginning of July.

Political stability is fundamental to the Haiti's economic and social development and we hope that issues delaying the appointment of a new Prime Minister will be resolved in the shortest time possible so that the Haitian people can continue to recover from last year's devastating earthquake and reconstruct their country with a view to its sustained and sustainable development.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas recognizes the importance of the activities of the Haitian Recovery Commission to the recovery of the Haitian people and hence calls for the timely appointment of its Director. Similarly, The Bahamas calls on the international community to be generous in contributing to the Haitian Recovery Fund (HRF) and very specifically we call on donor states to honour the pledges, some of which remain dishearteningly outstanding.

Finally, Mr. President, while my delegation continues to commend the work of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), we feel strongly that members of that Mission must uphold the highest standards of conduct and any misconduct on their part must be rigorously investigated and appropriately addressed. Over the years, MINUSTAH has played a key role in helping to lay the foundation for long-term recovery and stability in Haiti, with its supporting activities for state institutions and the rehabilitation and training of the Haitian National Police and it would seem appropriate that, increasingly, MINUSTAH's role and functions should be a reflection of the country's development needs, as articulated by the Government there. The support and engagement of the international community in Haiti is as pressing and urgent as ever and the presence of MINUSTAH is an important factor in that regard, but it must be structured for greater relevance and efficacy in its undertakings.

Mr. President,

The issue of international peace and security remains a critical concern for this organization and the entire global community. The Bahamas unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and reiterates its commitment to the fight against terrorism. The terror attacks of September 11, the tenth anniversary of which was commemorated two weeks ago, like the heinous attacks in Mumbai, Norway and at the UN Headquarters in Nigeria demonstrate that our efforts thus far have proven insufficient; hence the urgency of our task. An important part of that task, we believe, must be a speedy conclusion to negotiations on a comprehensive International Convention for the Elimination of Terrorism.

The Bahamas, earlier this year, completed its one-year chairmanship of the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE). We are pleased that regional and hemispheric cooperation in the fight against terrorism has assisted in strengthening and enhancing both our anti-terrorism technical training and capacity-building measures.

Mr. President,

As an archipelago spanning more than 100,000 square miles, the porous borders of The Bahamas have, for many years, posed a challenge to national security and the rule of law. We are presently confronted by high levels of crime, too many of which involve the use of small arms and light weapons. We are not manufacturers of such weapons. We are keenly aware of the global threats posed by the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, which is linked to other aspects of transnational organized crime, including illicit trafficking in drugs.

The Bahamas, both nationally and internationally is acting so as to reduce the threats posed to our society by the criminal element. Nationally we are continuing a programme of reform of our criminal laws, modernizing and expanding our court system and strengthening targeted programmes to address social ills. Regionally, with sister member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) we are undertaking a number of measures to combat the challenges posed by crime and violence through the region's crime and security framework.

Internationally, The Bahamas is committed to the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and to engaging fully in its ongoing processes. We look forward to the 2012 Review Conference on the Programme of Action and to a comprehensive discussion of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects.

Mr. President,

The need to regulate the import, export and transfer of conventional arms is critical if we are to achieve some measure of peace and stability and reduce conflicts. The Bahamas is supportive of a strong, effective and non-discriminatory Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and welcomes the inclusion of the category of small arms and light weapons and ammunition within the scope of a future ATT and we express the hope that the instrument would also provide for an effective implementation regime.

What is clearly evident is the need for an integrated, global response to supplement actions at the national, regional and sub-regional levels if we are to effectively prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and reduce the escalating violence and crime in our societies.

Mr. President,

My Government reaffirms its commitment to the 2001 and 2006 Declarations on HIV/AIDS. The Bahamas HIV/AIDS programme is now 25 years old and has had many successes. Last year, no child was born in The Bahamas infected with HIV and the AIDS mortality rate continues to decline since the introduction of universal access to antiretroviral therapies in 2001. I take this opportunity to thank our regional, hemispheric and international partners for their support. While we laud our achievements, we are also cognizant of the need to give greater priority to additional prevention endeavours.

My Government is now faced with challenges in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases. The increasing threats posed by non-communicable diseases to small and vulnerable economies, like those of The Bahamas and the CARICOM sub-region, have severe socio-economic implications and have begun to derail our successes in achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). As the Right Honourable Prime Minister of The Bahamas articulated in his national statement during last week's High-level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, the health and socio-economic costs for the Government to treat NCDs are enormous.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas and its CARICOM sister countries welcome last week's high-level meeting and applaud the international community's attention to non-communicable diseases and their risk factors. My Government

is appreciative of the leading and stellar role played by CARICOM throughout the process and thanks the United Nations system, its specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization, as well as the Pan American Health Organization, and also civil society for their support.

Mr. President

The Bahamas also welcomes the adoption of the Political Declaration. However, the Political Declaration is not as action-oriented in scope as we envisioned when we undertook to carry out the mandate given to us by our Heads of Government four years ago. The Bahamas would have preferred the text to reflect stronger commitments and specific, time-bound targets to address non-communicable diseases and their risk factors. We have also taken note of the absence of concrete commitment for the establishment of a strong and effective follow-up framework, such as an NCDs Partnership, with the support of the United Nations system, the donor community, the private sector and civil society organizations. It is my Government's fervent hope that the declaration will shape the international health and development agenda, produce concrete and meaningful results, and halt millions of premature deaths worldwide. We look forward to a comprehensive review of this issue in 2014

Mr. President,

With the world community witnessing an unprecedented wave in the call for social change and democracy across several countries in the Arab world and in North Africa, we must ensure, in our desire to promote good and effective governance, that the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the promotion of civil and political rights, and the right to development form the basis of any long-term solution.

My Government's commitment to the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedom is unwavering.

Mr. President,

This year we celebrate some significant achievements in the advancement of the international human rights agenda - the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development and more recently this past week, the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. My Government reaffirms its support and commitment to their effective implementation.

This year, we also observe the International Year for People of African Descent. Within this context and the Durban commemoration, I make a special appeal for all Member States and the donor community to support the Permanent Memorial that will be erected here at the United Nations to honour and commemorate the victims of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. I reaffirm my Government's support for this important project.

Mr. President,

In spite of the objectives of these laudable initiatives in the advancement of the international human rights agenda and recent undertakings, such as the reform of the Human Rights Council, we are still confronted with persistent poverty and stark inequalities, both within and across countries, racism, racial discrimination and related intolerance, some 63 years after the landmark adoption of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. These challenges serve as a constant reminder that we have much more to do to improve the lives

of millions of disadvantaged and marginalized populations throughout the world. While it is advantageous to adopt declarations and renew commitments, it is more important, however, to ensure their effective implementation at the national, regional and international levels.

The United Nations must continue to reflect the ideals of its founding principles and unite us all through a common vision of peace, mutual respect and human rights for all.

I thank you, Mr. President.