



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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Statement

By

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Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

At the

**General Debate
of the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the second time in my tenure as Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, I have the pleasure and honour to welcome a distinguished son of our Caribbean Civilisation to the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly. Even as we thank your immediate predecessor for his service as the President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly, we look forward to your tenure, President Ashe, with boundless pride and unbridled optimism.

For this year's General Debate, you have chosen the theme "The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage." This is also the year that you will lay the groundwork for the UN Conference on Small Island Developing States, which will take place in Samoa next September. Your dual focus on the international development agenda and the peculiarities of small island states make this 68th Session one of the most important in my country's 33 years of membership in the United Nations.

Mr. President,

William Shakespeare cautions us that “what is past, is prologue.” Similarly, your invitation to consider the future of the international development agenda requires us to first consider the ways in which our recent and long-ago steps and missteps shape our future developmental challenges and opportunities.

I begin with an unfortunate, inconvenient truth: Our collective failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is largely rooted not in the shortcomings of earnest and hardworking developing countries, but in developed countries’ abject abandonment of Goal 8, titled “Develop a Global Partnership for Development.” The UN’s own MDG Gap Task Force noted that the quest for such a global partnership experienced “significant backsliding” in 2013 and that “the political momentum for advancing international development cooperation seems to have waned.” Sixteen of 25 developed countries decreased their aid budgets last year, and Official Development Assistance (ODA) contracted for the second consecutive year, the first such contraction since the creation of the MDGs. In a time of crisis, when assistance is most needed, ODA is itself in a deep and prolonged recession. The twists and turns by so many developed countries on this issue have been most disappointing. Without predictable flows of meaningful, non-discretionary assistance, the post-2015 development programme will remain, substantially, a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but rarely if ever attained.

At the same time, I applaud the efforts of those developed nations which take their commitments on ODA seriously. I hail, too, a raft of other countries which are in a genuine developmental and functional partnership with us. These include Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Venezuela, and Taiwan. Indeed, Taiwan, a country not washed by our Caribbean sea, has been remarkable in its principled and practical conduct of intergovernmental relations. Surely, the time has now come for this exemplar of the magnificent Chinese civilisation to be permitted to participate fully in the work of the various agencies of this world body.

Mr. President,

Our debate on the future developmental agenda of the international community occurs against the backdrop of the ongoing global economic and financial crisis. The global economy remains precariously poised, and for every nation that seems to have turned the corner, another one plunges back into recession. The impact of the crisis on development has been palpable, and has rendered the MDGs unattainable in many countries. As such, if we are to discuss the post-2015 development agenda, we must also discuss the reform agenda of our outmoded

international financial architecture, whose failings contributed to the current crisis, and whose continued stasis is a reckless invitation to future economic turmoil.

Mr. President,

Despite the challenges of the ongoing exogenous shocks and the encumbrances imposed by an insufficiently flexible international financial architecture, my country continues to make significant strides in our people-centered approach to development and poverty alleviation. This past June, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was one of 18 countries recognised by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for achieving Millennium Development Goal #1 – halving the proportion of hungry people by 2015 – to below 5 percent, and the more stringent World Food Summit goal of halving the absolute number of hungry people by 2015. For a small, vulnerable country to achieve this task ahead of schedule and in the midst of this debilitating global economic and financial crisis is truly outstanding. And we have done so while maintaining and advancing good governance, individual liberties, and democracy in accord with global best practices.

But the ambitions of my Government are far greater than Goal 1 of the MDGs. Having more than halved hunger, and pushed it below 5 percent of the population, we have now set our sights on the elimination of hunger altogether – to achieve zero hunger! We hope that the UN and the international community can partner with us effectively in fulfilling this historic ambition. Our policy goal of ensuring that no man, woman or child goes to bed hungry will have its own positive knock-on effects on poverty reduction, health, and arresting the spread of non-communicable diseases – which itself should also be of central importance in our post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. President,

As you are well aware, the roots of underdevelopment and exploitation extend much deeper than the recent abandonment of Goal 8 of the MDGs, by the bulk of developed countries. I arrive at this year's General Debate from the Caribbean's first-ever Regional Conference on Reparations for Native Genocide and Slavery, which was held in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The stirring and uplifting regional conference is the first step in the Caribbean's quest to address and redress a psychic, historical, socio-economic, and developmental wound that is, for CARICOM, 14 nations wide and 400 years deep.

The genocidal oppression and suffering of my country's indigenous Callinago, the Garifuna, and enchained Africans have been rightly adjudged to have been a horrendous crime against humanity. Accordingly, the collective voice of our Caribbean civilisation ought justly to ring out for reparations for native genocide and African slavery from the successor states of the European countries which committed organised state-sponsored native genocide and African enslavement. The awful legacy of these crimes against humanity – a legacy which exists today in our Caribbean, ought to be repaired for the developmental benefit of our Caribbean societies and all our peoples. The historic wrongs of native genocide and African slavery, and their continuing contemporary consequences, must be righted, must be repaired, in the interest of our people's humanisation. The European nations must partner in a focused, especial way with us to execute this repairing. Thus, the demand for reparations is the responsibility not only of the descendants, in today's Caribbean, of the Callinago, the Garifuna, the Amerindian, and the African. It is undoubtedly an agenda for all of us to advance, to promote, to concretise, and to execute. And the European nations which engaged in conquest, settlement, genocide, and slavery in our Caribbean must provide the reparatory resources required to repair the contemporary legacy of their historic wrongs. This is undoubtedly a special pillar in the post-2015 Development Agenda.

This repairing of the mind, of collective memory, of our economies, of our societies is part and parcel of the rebirth, the redemption, the further ennoblement of our Caribbean, our indigenous populations, our African descendants, and indeed of Africa.

I say to this august Assembly that the struggle for reparations represents, immediately, a defining issue for our Caribbean in this 21st century. It promises to make both Europe and the Caribbean more free, more human, more good-neighbourly. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) recently decided, quite rightly, to place the quest for reparations at the centre of its developmental agenda.

Mr. President,

I am also compelled to speak today on a contemporary injustice that is entirely within the capacity of this Assembly to address. In 2010, negligent, or even reckless, UN peacekeepers contaminated a Haitian drinking water supply, which led to an outbreak of cholera that killed 8,000 innocent Haitians and infected 600,000 others. There is no longer any scientific dispute that the UN is responsible for this outbreak, as has been conclusively established in the relevant reports. Prior

to the UN's negligence, Haiti had not seen a single case of cholera in 150 years.

Today, there are more cholera-infected persons in Haiti than there are in the rest of the world.

I continue to be deeply disturbed by the UN's callous disregard of the suffering it has wrought in a fellow CARICOM country, and by the shameful, legalistic, avoidance of what is a clear moral responsibility on the part of the UN.

Accordingly, I call on Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to acknowledge unambiguously, and apologise for, this organisation's role in the tragedy, and to take immediate steps to compensate the victims and their families. Anything less will further undermine the moral authority and credibility of this institution.

Mr. President,

Sixty-eight years ago, our predecessors conceived of a grand experiment, a commitment to bind the world together in a collective quest for peace, justice and development. Over time, we have created a body of rules, laws and expectations that add flesh to the principles that undergird the UN Charter.

Now, we are engaged – explicitly and indirectly, willingly and reluctantly – in a reassessment of that grand commitment. Today, the actions of a small subset of powerful nations shake the very foundations upon which this Assembly was built, and threaten to bring the temple down upon the heads of those of us who still subscribe to the original tenets of our gathering.

International law, properly conceived and universally adhered-to, is the bulwark against impunity, unilateralism, and “great power” triumphalism. Today, there are those in this Assembly who hold a curious view of international law, as something that must be imposed against others, but which has limited applicability to them. To some in this Assembly, it seems appropriate to disregard international law in the very enforcement of their distorted view of international law. Clearly, such conduct is unacceptable, for the simple reason that it threatens the continued legitimacy of our entire multilateral system.

Small, vulnerable states, by definition and necessity, are those most reliant on an enforceable body of equitable international laws within an effective system of multilateral diplomacy. It is no surprise, therefore, that small states like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have emerged as some of the strongest defenders of multilateralism, sovereignty, diplomacy and the rule of law. We view it as our

responsibility to sound the alarm when this institution threatens to depart from the foundational Charter principles that bind us together.

It accords with elemental reason and historical experience that no nation is intrinsically superior to any other; no people are innately better than others. To be sure, there are cultural and social differences; but to be different does not imply a condition of being better or worse. One nation may be more powerful than another but that circumstance ought never to permit the powerful to ascribe arrogantly to itself, in laughable vanity, the doctrine of exceptionalism. Inevitably, this vain ascription swiftly degenerates into an embrace of the damning path of the rightness of unilateral force rather than an uplifting multi-lateral force of rightness.

Mr. President,

Egregious examples of the continuing disregard of international law abounds. Surely, it diminishes a great nation like the USA to continue its myopic vendetta against Cuba by way of an illegal, out-moded, and hurtful economic blockade, and the absurd declaration that Cuba is a sponsor of terrorism. All right-thinking persons internationally justly demand that the USA end the economic blockade against Cuba and remove its name from the unilaterally – drawn up list of states

which allegedly sponsor terrorism. It makes no sense whatsoever for international law to become a prisoner of domestic politics and the vainglorious of a great power.

Similarly, the plight of the Palestinian people is being sacrificed on the altar of political expediency and in disregard of the opinion of almost all of humanity. To be sure, the issue contains enormous complexities but unless it is resolved satisfactorily, a sustainable peace in the Middle East is unattainable. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is hopeful that the current moves towards serious negotiations bear fruit consistent with the principles and mandates spelt out repeatedly in the resolutions of the United Nations.

At the same time, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is deeply impressed by the efforts of the President of the United States to embrace diplomacy rather than military intervention in pursuance of a political settlement in Syria. The Syrian Community in my country, rightly and anxiously, looks forward to peace in their troubled homeland. Only the extremists will benefit from a prolonged civil war. Still, peace cannot be reasonably sought when a pre-condition of regime change is held aloft. All sides in this conflict must make compromises in the interest of the Syrian people as a whole.

Mr. President

There is one emergent issue of consequence which is required to be addressed. It concerns the recent deeply disturbing reports of widespread and unrestrained spying that has been allegedly conducted by the United States of America against a number of countries, including its staunchest allies. Indeed, there are reports that the practice of such electronic espionage is rife, even within the halls and offices of the United Nations. We strenuously reject any such activity as illegal, a violation of diplomatic conventions, and an affront to the comity of nations. St. Vincent and the Grenadines considers that the agenda for appropriate corrective action in this regard, as outlined earlier this week by the distinguished President of Brazil, is fair, reasonable, and achievable by the international community.

Mr. President,

As we continue our collective journey in the quest of a greater and lasting global peace, we have been reminded that wars do not only erupt between countries, but within them. We know, too, that some of the highest numbers of violent deaths occur in countries ostensibly at peace. This year, the international community has recognised that genuine and lasting peace between and within nations, cities and

villages cannot occur in an environment that permits the unregulated trade in small arms and light weapons. The Arms Trade Treaty that we negotiated – and which Saint Vincent and the Grenadines signed on the very first day that it was available for signature – is far weaker than we would have liked. Nonetheless, we consider it an important first step in regulating the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons worldwide, and particularly into our Caribbean region, where the tide of guns is oftentimes accompanied by torrents of narcotics making their way to markets in other countries.

Mr. President,

I am deeply disappointed at the international community's endless, rudderless and seemingly vacuous negotiations on climate change. Our failure to achieve meaningful progress on this matter of existential urgency is inexcusable.

Vulnerable countries like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are on the front lines of climate change and are already bearing the brunt of the increasing fallout from global warming. Meanwhile, the major emitters and historical polluters pay callously insincere lip service to our plight. For them, combating climate change is a question of dollars and cents, not life and death. They are only too happy to see the multilateral process fail, so that they can retreat into ineffectual and painless

national commitments. But these stubborn obstacles to progress must not be allowed any longer to stand in the way of the survival and development of vast swaths of our planet.

I applaud the initiative of the Secretary-General to convene a high-level meeting on climate change, in the hope that such a meeting will give direction and impetus to our meandering negotiations. Our post-2015 development agenda will not survive an unchecked global warming. It is high time, too, for genuine, good-faith negotiations, and for meaningful resources to assist in mitigation and adaptation.

Mr. President,

The Charter of the United Nations begins with the phrase “We the peoples of the United Nations.” It is not we, the rich peoples; nor we, the militarily powerful peoples; nor we, the peoples of large countries; but we, the peoples of the entire world, the whole membership of this institution. The UN does not exist to confer benefits to select groups, but to secure peace and development for all. If we are to set the stage for the future of development, that stage must be inclusive, so that all nations and peoples have a significant part to play, and a stake in the outcomes. Let

us make ourselves worthy successors of the ennobling and humanising vision of
our venerated founding fathers and mothers!

Thank you!

