



Remarks

by

H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

New York

1 October 2013

Closing of the United Nations General Assembly

General Debate

Please check against delivery

Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come to the end of the General Debate of the 68th session, one in which member States gave voice to their distinct needs and diverse challenges, as well as individual and shared concerns. I thank each and every one of you for sharing your priorities, concerns, hopes and expectations for our 68th session.

Permit me to try and reflect on the major issues you have identified so as to provide a guide for our deliberations going forward.

Many of you will recall that I chose the following theme for this 68th session, namely, “The Post 2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage!” and also outlined a number of priority areas for elaboration by member States in either High-level events or thematic debates. Virtually every delegation that referred to this theme commended the choice and pledged full support and cooperation for its further elaboration. This heralds a sense of promise about what is to come over the next year and I trust that we will all be able to work collectively and creatively during this session.

Building on the achievements of Rio+ 20, many delegations stressed that we now need to begin work toward defining a universal development agenda, inclusive of sustainable development goals, based on common but differentiated principles. We heard appreciation for the launch of the High Level Political Forum as the guardian and catalyst of this agenda.

Throughout the week, a number of items were mentioned that countries wish to see in our new agenda including: culture, education, climate change, job creation, sustainable energy, social inclusion, equality for all, access to water, sustainable agriculture and use

of ocean resources, food security, health care including maternal care, non-communicable diseases, and the fight against HIV-AIDS, among others.

Some delegations reminded us that democracy, human rights, peace and security must also be a part of sustainable development; some emphasised the role and empowerment of women, youth, indigenous communities and persons with disabilities.

We heard emphasis on the role of partnerships in development which, coincidentally, will be the focus of one of our thematic debates. There were reminders that while South-South Cooperation has become an important part of development cooperation, it is a complement to North-South, not a replacement. Partnerships are also needed among state and non-state actors. The means of implementation, the need for adequate resources and funding, innovation and technology transfer were further recurring themes.

A number of delegations reminded us that the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the Small Island Developing States are an important consideration for the Post 2015 development agenda; they welcomed the 2014 Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States as a vehicle for providing contributions.

As we begin to focus on the new agenda, many delegations referenced the collective responsibility of the international community to accelerate progress toward the full realization of the MDGs ahead of the 2015 target date; in this context, partnerships and financing were also emphasized.

Reforming the global economic governance architecture to reflect the weight of emerging and developing countries was also a concern.

A number of delegations condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and called for the perpetrators to be held accountable. Many delegations expressed concerns about the dire humanitarian situation. They welcomed Syria's decision to adhere to the chemical weapons convention and called for an immediate application of its provisions. Many

welcomed the recent unanimous decision of the Security Council on Syria, but nevertheless called on that body to uphold the rules of the Charter in regards to further action. Many expressed a desire to find a negotiated solution at the Geneva II Conference.

On the issue of Palestine, a number of delegations repeated their call for a two-state solution and welcomed the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

Regarding the African region, we heard praise for progress in countries such as Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at the same time, concern was expressed for the situations in Guinea-Bissau, Central Africa Republic, Sudan and the Sahel. On Somalia, there were both words of encouragement and caution.

There were calls for the international community to take action against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. In this regard, strong condemnation was registered about recent terrorist attacks in Kenya, Pakistan and Iraq. Sadly, we can now add Nigeria to that list.

In addition, member States underscored the need to protect women and children in conflict; end sexual violence in conflict and the enrolment of child soldiers; support transition processes following the Arab Spring; and address issues of cyber-security, with suggestions for the UN to play a greater role in this area. Some nations expressed reservations about the ICC, which they feel has demonstrated bias against their geographical region.

The need for disarmament was emphasized, with concerns about the use of weapons of mass destruction and risks of proliferation; calls were made for the creation of nuclear weapons free zones. Similarly, the use of small arms was reviled for their negative impact on peace and security. Delegations welcomed the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and called for its prompt entry into force.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Delegations also highlighted the need to make progress on the important issue of reforming the primary organs of this institution. Many called for a more balanced, fair, representative and accountable Security Council; many mentioned how the use of the veto has had a paralyzing effect. Most also want revitalization of the General Assembly, and better coordination between the two bodies. Based on the strength of the sentiments expressed in this regard, it is now up to you, the member States, to move with purposefulness on the required reform and revitalization.

Excellencies,
Secretary General,

The General Debate provides a useful measure of stock taking on the issues at the forefront of our lives within the mandate of this Organization, and it is the only mechanism by which our 193 members can make their voices heard. Key issues raised by leaders in the General Debate are those that affect our countries and our people, and those that require concerted effort from the entire international community.

We are oftentimes accused of being an organization that is all talk and no action. Perhaps so. But I submit that our general debates, which occur at this time each year, serve an important purpose; they help us to mark where we are as a global community, and they provide guidelines for where we need to go; they serve as a useful point of peer review and general accountability. Moreover, our debates also show us that despite any such negative elements, faith in the value of our Organization as the world's forum of nations continues to be high.

Excellencies,

With the guidance we received this past week, it is now up to us to find the common ground among our priorities, as the basis for moving forward with decisive action. In the real world in which we live, such healthy compromise is the best outcome of our joint effort. We are the ones responsible for finding such common ground. And with the directions and the reference points laid before us this week, it is now up to us to identify our common agenda and move forward on it. We are responsible for the implementation of action by working to create a post-2015 development agenda.

During the months to come and throughout the session, I look forward to working with all of you, and to realizing meaningful changes and progress.

Let me conclude by expressing my deep appreciation and thanks to the Vice Presidents of the General Assembly, as well as the Department of General Assembly and Conference Management, for their unstinting support, long hours and their incredibly hard work during this period of our session.

Thank you.