



**Remarks**

**by**

**H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe**

**President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations**

**General Assembly**

**to the**

**Thirty Second Meeting of the**

**Third Committee**

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*Please check against delivery*

Ambassador Tafrov, Chairman of the Committee,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my understanding is that this Committee has gotten off to a positive start and is on schedule according to the Provisional Programme of Work, which bodes well for the important tasks you will undertake during the next month.

I have no doubt that you, Mr. Chairman, are deserving of the heartiest of congratulations for guiding this body's work to date and, more importantly, for stepping forward at a moment when such leadership was sorely needed. Our United Nations community can rest assured that this Committee is in good hands.

I also extend congratulations to the distinguished Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteur. And I commend the various UN Subsidiary Bodies, Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies, which have contributed - and I hope will continue to contribute - to the work of the Committee so as to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

Distinguished Delegates,

The mandate of this Committee derives from a statement of Charter principles that is simple yet forthright; to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours.

In practical every-day terms, this means a concern for some quite basic values – among them that human rights are universal; that poverty must not prevent anyone from enjoying his or her basic human rights; in fact, that poverty must be eradicated; that persons must feel themselves secure in their societies; they must be able to have decent jobs and not to go to bed hungry; and they must feel part of their society and feel secure and protected within it.

In other words, the orientation of this Committee is decidedly people-centred. This is the way it must be if we are to achieve our desired goals in the economic, social and environmental fields. It is clear to all that we live in an era characterized by, inter alia, expanding disparities between rich and poor, increased civil and sectarian strife, and growing economic hardship, all leading to massive movements of populations both within and across borders, and growing sensitivity to religious and cultural differences. The lesson of this situation is that a wider enjoyment of social and economic rights cannot be achieved by mere tinkering with the present international system or by superficial changes in current international arrangements. This is the logic of the new paradigm of development – post-2015 - which we are seeking to elaborate. That paradigm embraces a commitment to a more effective, coordinated and inclusive approach to development for all, including the poor and most vulnerable. And it also advocates a new relationship between human beings and the planet we inhabit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking back over the past decade, we undoubtedly see some singular achievements. To name a few, gender equality and the empowerment of women have improved in many parts of the world; the gender gap at the primary school level has narrowed; maternal mortality rates in many regions have fallen; women have better access to political participation and labour markets; fewer children are out of school; the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has fallen by half; and more people have gained access to improved water sources and sanitation facilities.

But the tasks ahead of us are still many and challenging. With fewer than 800 days remaining before the target date for achieving the MDGs, we need to intensify our efforts and remain focused on these tasks - putting young people to work; reducing barriers to social and economic advancement; feeding the one in eight persons who remains chronically undernourished; saving the lives of women and children who continue to die from preventable deaths; ending gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls and marginalized and vulnerable groups; renewing efforts to eliminate systemic racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in our societies; and addressing the many crises in countries afflicted by conflict and post-conflict situations.

Responding to these challenges begins first and foremost with the commitments we have already made. We all have the common and shared responsibility of implementing the outcomes of major UN Summits and Conferences, many of which address issues that overlap with what you discuss here in the Third Committee.

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me draw your attention to several important areas of consideration that have, or will have, a direct bearing on the Committee's work.

Negotiations aimed at strengthening the UN human rights treaty body system are set to resume shortly. This important process is necessary to ensure the system functions effectively and to uphold international human rights standards and norms. I am aware of the delicate nature of the negotiations and the number of outstanding issues to be resolved. However, it is important that you build upon the work from previous negotiation sessions and continue engaging constructively in order to achieve the best possible outcome at the earliest opportunity.

A number of other significant processes will require follow-up, as 2014 will be an active year for the Committee. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of the Family; the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples; and the launch of the Decade of Peoples of African Descent were all mandated by resolutions adopted by this Committee and the General Assembly. I count on your support as my Team begins preparations for these events.

As we will also commemorate a few upcoming milestones, I welcome your support and participation. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of December we will commemorate International Human Rights Day, as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of both the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action and the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. I warmly invite you to join in the commemoration and celebration of these landmark achievements in the field of human rights.

As you know, the theme of the 68<sup>th</sup> session is "The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage!" Issues that are closely related to the work of the Third Committee will play a very important role in advancing the post-2015 process and in helping to define sustainable

development goals. In this context, the resumed session will feature two significant events on: *Contributions of women, the young and civil society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda* and *Human Rights and the Rule of Law*. I am looking forward to your inputs into these events and encourage delegations to participate at the highest level possible. The exact dates and other modalities should be communicated to you shortly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is one final consideration that I would like to leave with you. It should have been clear from what I have said so far, that the Third Committee does not function in a vacuum. The issues on your agenda and those on the agendas of other Committees are all inter-related. But inter-relatedness does not give us licence to make progress in the Committee hostage to any one set of considerations. We are here as members of this Committee to work together, and I stress TOGETHER, for achieving mutually agreed solutions, please remember that the General Assembly is seen as the conscience of the international community. Decisions made within this body are noted, and can exert influence throughout the world, where attempts are being made to build bridges, decrease intolerance and to promote relations of stability and harmony. Please let us be ever mindful to not inadvertently give encouragement to influences that are contrary to our Charter principles.

As I conclude, I ask, as I have or will do in other Committees, for your continued support to ensure that the work of this current session proceeds efficiently, and that discussions take place in a constructive atmosphere. I urge you to seek maximum consensus in your deliberations while maintaining the determined spirit that has long been a hallmark of this Committee.

I wish you success in your efforts and please be assured of my steadfast support as you continue your important work. We count on you to help keep the poor, the vulnerable and the subjugated of this world in the forefront of our considerations.

Thank you.