



Remarks for the closing of the main part  
of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly

27 December 2013

President of the General Assembly

H.E John W. Ashe

Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the main part of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly comes to a close, I would like to begin my remarks by thanking all of you. Your insights, engagement and professionalism have kept this Assembly rich and active. I extend these thanks to those in the Secretariat, particularly DGACM, who have serviced the General Assembly and its Committees so ably. The Vice Presidents have supported me throughout the session and helped me fulfil my duties when I was unable to do so, and the various Chairs and the Rapporteurs have kept the session running smoothly.

Together, these collective efforts enable the nations of the world to voice their opinions and take action on the issues that concern them and affect their populations. This in itself is no small achievement, as our UN Charter calls for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of common ends.

Excellencies,

There are a number of impressive highlights from the 68<sup>th</sup> session. We opened the High Level Week on 23<sup>rd</sup> September recognizing that we must make space for persons with disabilities in our development efforts. We also saw the inauguration of the first High-Level Political Forum, which met under the auspices of the General Assembly and will meet under the auspices of ECOSOC in 2014; we adopted an outcome document that paves the way for a universal and shared Post 2015 development agenda; and we held the first ever High Level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament, which produced a resolution designating 26th September as International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. During the General Debate, more than 110 Heads of State and Government shared their platforms with us, underlining the vibrancy and centrality of this Assembly.

We then proceeded with our agenda, and during this session, you adopted 259 resolutions and took 66 decisions.. These resolutions covered a wide range of issues, from nuclear disarmament to the rule of law at national and international levels, and from financing for development to the peaceful use of outer space. We also saw new resolutions introduced on the right to privacy and the safety of journalists, as well as a resolution designed to strengthen the ECOSOC.

Today's conclusion of the work of the Fifth Committee again underscored the need to adapt – indeed revitalize – the methods of work of our General Assembly to fit these challenging times. As the work of our organization gets more challenging so does its financial and administrative needs. We therefore need to ensure that the ways in which we deal with these challenges have evolved and that the approaches of yesteryear also need to evolve if we are to have a fully functional organization.

We do know a priori that in a budget year adequate time will be need to consider all aspects of what is now a fairly detailed and intricate UN budget. Perhaps then the time has come for us look at either a dedicated session of the Committee for this important process or perhaps have the introduction of the budget at the outset of the work in the Committee rather than in late October as is the current practice. And maybe the time has come for us to more toward a more broad based introduction of electronic means for both the issuance and indeed the preliminary consideration of documents by that Committee, pending of course the later availability of the actual paper version of the relevant documents. I should hope that member States will consider these ideas during the sessions of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.

The 68th session also had some other noteworthy firsts. For the first time, Palestine was accorded the privileges of State at the General Debate and cast their first vote in the General Assembly.

Following an uncontested election to the Security Council, one Member State chose to decline their seat, which was unprecedented in UN history. I greatly appreciate that Member States were quickly able to come to an agreement to ensure that the seat will be filled as of January 1st. With that in mind, I would like to commend delegates for the resumption of intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform. While this issue is no doubt a challenging one, we are determined to put forth our best effort in the next months.

Finally, we saw a moving tribute to Nelson Mandela in a Special Meeting of the UN General Assembly last week, during which 53 Member States paid their tribute to one of the world's most revered peacemakers.

As the main part of the session closes and we prepare for the holidays, let us be mindful that such peacemakers are sorely needed in this world. Reports of recent turmoil in our world including in South Sudan and the Central African, Republic, as well as the ongoing conflict in Syria, no doubt distress us all. While responding to these upheavals does not primarily fall under the mandate of our Assembly, they are very much a concern to every one of us and may at some point be brought to our attention.

As a testimony to our collective commitment to advance global peace, I would also like to express my hopes that the Arms Trade Treaty, which was adopted during the 67th session, will enter into force during the 68th session of the General Assembly.

Excellencies,

As you all know, I proposed the theme for the General Debate of the 68<sup>th</sup> session as the "Post 2015 development agenda: Setting the Stage." To that end, I announced that there would be three High-level events and three thematic debates.

I am pleased that today I can share with you the proposed dates in 2014 for these events/thematic debates:

The first thematic debate on "Water, sanitation and sustainable energy in the post-2015 development agenda," will take place on 18-19 February.

The first High-level event on “Contributions of women, the young and civil society to the post-2015 development agenda,” will take place on 6-7 March, in advance of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

The second thematic debate on the “Role of partnerships and their contributions to the Post 2105 development agenda,” will take place on 8-9 April.

The third thematic debate, “Ensuring Peaceful and Stable Societies,” will take place on 24-25 April.

The second High-level event, “Contributions of South-South, North-South and triangular cooperation and information and communication technologies for development to the post-2015 development agenda,” will take place on 20-21 May.

And the third and final High-level event, “Human rights and the rule of law in the post-2015 development agenda,” will be held on 17-18 June.

Finally, to assess our progress and review outputs, a stocktaking event will be held in early September.

Specific information about the High-level events and thematic debates, including the concept notes, will be available in early January on the website of the President of the General Assembly.

I would like to thank all member States who have shared their ideas with me on these proposed events and thematic debates and I look forward to your continued inputs during the actual sessions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are a number of other such events that will take place during the remainder of the 68<sup>th</sup> session that merit our mention:

1. A thematic debate to consider the role of culture and sustainable development in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda;
2. The launch of the International year of Small Island Developing States and the Third International Conference on SIDS to be held in Samoa;
3. A High level thematic debate on investment in Africa;
4. An interactive dialogue on the commemoration of International Mother Earth Day on 22 April 2014 to advance discussions on Harmony with Nature and sustainable development;
5. A series of four one-day structured dialogues to consider possible arrangements for a facilitation mechanism to promote the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies;
6. A special meeting during the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;
7. The human rights treaty body review, which will conclude in 2014;
8. An informal interactive hearing in preparation for the World Conference on Indigenous Issues, and
9. The biennial review of the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.

Our General Assembly will have a critical role in ensuring the success of other major conferences and events in the social, economic and environmental fields, which fall beyond our timeframe. A few of these include, the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, the Third UN Conference on Financing for Development, the International Decade for People's of African Descent, a comprehensive review and assessment of the progress achieved in the prevention and control of

Non-Communicable Diseases, and the special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014, which will take place during the following year.

We will also work to ensure that commitment and momentum is maintained towards the Third World Conference on Disaster Reduction to take place in 2015 and the Third United Nations Conference on Sustainable Urban Development to take place in 2016.

As promised in my statement at the start of the session, we will also remain focused on UN reform next year. As mentioned, I look forward to the continuation of negotiations on Security Council reform in the early part of the year. Likewise, following a recent plenary debate on Revitalization of the General Assembly, the work of the Ad-Hoc Working Group will begin early in the new year in the form of the four clusters. I look forward to more in-depth deliberation of the various issues under the chairmanship of the Co-Chairs. On both issues, I expect your full cooperation and commitment as a vibrant and effective United Nations depends on all of us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My team and I have very much enjoyed working with you over the last few months and I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish during the next nine months. Let's continue to work hard so that we can look back on our time here with a sense of pride and accomplishment.

I wish you all the best for the remainder of 2013 and I look forward to working with you in 2014.

Thank you.