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STATEMENT BY
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PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF LABOUR
OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
TO THE
FIFTY-NINTH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

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Mr. President;

Esteemed Heads of Delegations;

Distinguished Delegates;

Distinguished Observers;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I stand before the General Assembly of the United Nations with equal measures of pride and humility.

Of the more than 190 nations that make up the United Nations, Antigua and Barbuda is among the smallest in population and land mass.

In the face of these strikingly modest statistics, my humility in standing at this renowned and universally respected podium would be readily understood.

That Antigua and Barbuda is accorded the privilege to address the United Nations today is obvious cause for pride.

On a personal note, I have just completed my first six months as Prime Minister, in the first term of the party that was elected to govern Antigua and Barbuda on March 23rd, this year.

It is therefore a particular pleasure and a special personal privilege for me to be afforded this opportunity to take the podium at this session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Secretary General for the kind sentiments he graciously extended on the formation of my Government.

Considering that a single party had ruled Antigua and Barbuda throughout the life of our 23 year old nation, and for some considerable time prior to that, my leadership and my government are still in a tender state of infancy.

I therefore trust that should I be guilty of any lapse in protocol during my remarks, you will blame it on my innocence.

The removal of a long entrenched government makes 2004 a year of dramatic change and intimidating challenge for Antigua and Barbuda.

The United Nations Human Development Index ranks Antigua and Barbuda in the high development scale.

By virtue of our per capita GDP income, Antigua and Barbuda is designated a middle income country.

Though it is self evident that all countries are not created equal, it is a fundamental purpose of the United Nations to ensure a level playing field in the arena in which small as well as large nations of the world engage one another.

I say this despite overwhelming empirical evidence that size and might often come into play without subtlety, without apology and sometimes without sufficiently vigorous challenge in the affairs of the United Nations.

The structure of the Security Council dramatises the reality that one nation, one vote still has its limitations.

In this context, we might be tempted to accept, as Nobel Laureate Sir Vidia Naipaul asserts in the opening line of *A Bend in the River*, that "The world is what it is".

I submit that the overarching mission of the United Nations is to defy the status quo and to unrelentingly work to transform the world from what it is, into what it can be.

The logical and particularly relevant concomitant to all of this is that a fundamental function of the United Nations is to assist small members states like Antigua and Barbuda to be all that we can be.

We recognise that the United Nations has been making every conceivable effort to meet this mandate.

This is most notably so under the stewardship of our indomitable Secretary General, His Excellency, Dr. Kofi Annan.

Not surprisingly, small societies like those of the English speaking Caribbean have become casualties, not beneficiaries, of globalisation and the new world economic order.

The United Nations acknowledged this in the Millennium Declaration.

The Declaration conceded that while globalization offers great opportunities, its benefits are very unevenly shared, while its costs are unevenly distributed.

The Declaration recognized that developing countries and countries with economies in transition face special difficulties in responding to the challenges of globalisation.

The Millennium Declaration defined the need for policies and measures, at the global level, which correspond to the needs of developing countries and economies in transition; and which are formulated and implemented with their effective participation.

The Millennium Declaration recognized a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level.

The Millennium Declaration affirmed a determination to deal comprehensively and effectively with the debt problems of low and middle-income developing countries through various national and international measures designed to make their debt sustainable in the long term.

Still, the reality confronts us that the views of all other member states of the United Nations are outweighed by those of the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Moreover, the world saw, not all that long ago, effective marginalisation of the United Nations in defiance of rational concerns, strongly expressed, of the general membership of the UN.

I have no desire to be trampled underfoot by the elephants engaged in the historic battle that raged in this forum before it moved to its still active theatre in the Middle East, earlier this year.

I am, however, compelled to wonder by what process the United Nations appears to have ruled out a negotiated resolution of the ongoing war in Iraq as an option.

Mr. President:

It is lamentable that in meeting the unique needs of vulnerable small states and micro economies, the United Nations is routinely sidelined in international trading relationships and development processes.

The United Nations is not recognised as a key catalyst in defining the world economic order and international trading arrangements in the 21st century.

That agenda is understood to be directed by organisations such as the World Trade Organisation; the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; the Financial Action Task Force; the International Monetary Fund; and the World Bank.

Two of those organisations are assemblies of a small number of wealthy nations that do not necessarily attach adequate priority to the vulnerabilities of small states and economies in transition.

We are not all convinced that those organisations, whose decisions can well determine the destiny of small states like Antigua and Barbuda - and the now desolate Grenada - are sufficiently responsive to the special needs of small Caribbean states.

Indeed, Mr. President, the instances in which small countries of the Caribbean have been the targets of the OECD and the mighty United States are vivid in our consciousness.

Super power intervention in traditional arrangements between Europe and the Caribbean for bananas and sugar has been no less devastating and they have certainly been farther reaching than Hurricane Ivan's savage demolition of Grenada.

The OECD offensive of what were termed "Harmful Tax Jurisdictions" manifestly discriminated against international financial centres in the Caribbean.

Our responses to this challenge were responsible and effective.

We would like to think that the English speaking Caribbean countries are model nations in the family of man.

We represent a zone of peace in a world shattered by internecine and international wars.

We maintain exemplary parliamentary democracies.

With a few sad exceptions, we in the Caribbean change our governments by the ballot, and by no other means.

Though we are small, we are overwhelming in human worth.

The Commonwealth Caribbean gave Bob Marley to the world.

We gave Nobel Laureates, Arthur Lewis, Derek Walcott and Vidia Naipaul to the world.

We have given our music to the world in the form of Reggae, Calypso, Soca and Steelband.

We have enriched the cuisines of the world.

We have given the fastest female track athletes to the world.

We have contributed to the standard of academia around the world through the export of many of our finest minds.

We have been blessed with the most desirable beaches in the world and we welcome the world to share our beaches and our incomparable natural environment.

Our islands represent green points of light on a globe convulsed by callous attitudes to the environment among certain developed countries; and among countries in transition, as well.

Small though our nations, we are mighty warriors in strong and effective alliances with the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and other nations in the war against the international narcotics syndicates.

Mr. President:

I deem it my country's civic responsibility to remind this august body of our duty to fulfil our role as outlined in the Preamble of the United Nations Charter, to be the central area for harmonizing the actions of nations in achieving international cooperation in solving issues of a humanitarian nature.

Today two nations within the Caribbean region; Grenada and Haiti, have been devastated by natural disasters. Some 90% of Grenada's housing stock has been destroyed. Civil society is in deep trauma. The economy has been wiped out and the government is completely immobilized. This means that there is an ineffective authority.

More than 1000 persons have just died in Haiti in the wake of Hurricane Jeanne, with the figure expected to be doubled in days. The dead are being buried in mass graves to prevent a health epidemic. Homes and crops have been destroyed with floodwater lines on buildings measuring up to 10 feet high.

Survivors in Haiti's third largest city Gonaives are hungry, thirsty and increasingly desperate. UN peacekeepers and aid agencies, are stretched to the limit.

**Mr. President;
Heads of Delegations;
Other Members of Delegations;
Observers;
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Grenada and Haiti are now in a condition comparable to a massive military bombardment. Against this backdrop, I urge the United Nations — every single nation large and small to intervene in those two Caribbean countries devastated by recent hurricanes. These two Caribbean countries are certifiably disaster areas.

An adequate response from all of us and more so developed countries to the plight of these two countries would be a quantum leap to recovery and reconstruction for Grenada and Haiti and the best option to ease the suffering of the battered and distressed people of those two countries. We must act quickly. We must act now!

Mr. President:

I make bold to say that my country, Antigua and Barbuda, is a veritable United Nations in microcosm.

Antigua and Barbuda has become home to a relatively larger proportion of immigrants from Caribbean countries than has any other Caribbean state.

On any day, on any street in St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda's Capital, you will hear virtually every Caribbean inflection, English and Hispanic.

You will also hear accents from China, Syria, Lebanon, Europe and Africa.

Indeed, Mr. President, we are celebrating Antigua and Barbuda's unique diversity with the construction of a Caribbean Festival Park that will be a permanent showcase and celebration of the essences of the entire Caribbean Region.

Mr. President:

I have chosen to use this opportunity to urge the United Nations General Assembly to petition powerful nations and agencies of the world for review of the policy of penalizing small states that achieve a measure of success in the process of guiding their economies to growth and their citizens to better lives.

Is it not ironical that only in the area of development funding achieving a "Graduation" is rewarded with punishment?

Development funding dries up, technical aid is more difficult to access when small states begin to show signs of prosperity.

The effect of this is really to pull the carpets from under small states the moment we stand up.

Mr. President:

Small developing states will never be insulated against external shocks.

The international security measures mandated by America's post 9/11 Patriot Act, have inflicted an inordinate financial burden on the small economies of CARICOM member states.

We have been compelled to finance security infrastructure for which we had no provisions.

With intensified security concerns in the United States, Caribbean countries are confronted with increasing waves of deported felons from the United States.

This brings the risk that among these deportees, there might well be prime recruits for organised crime and Narco-trafficking.

Caribbean societies are simply not equipped to respond effectively to these challenges.

Among member countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Antigua and Barbuda is considered to be relatively affluent.

The grim reality is that Antigua and Barbuda is confronted with an economy that has been experiencing sustained decline.

The country has been accumulating crippling debt.

We are uncovering disturbing levels of unemployment, particularly among our young people.

This can well place a significant proportion of our youth at serious risk.

Many of these concerns are common to small states of the Caribbean.

Policy and rules are made in organisations controlled by the powerful few.

This brings us to the contradiction that as small states strive to be all that we can be, we are penalized for our success.

Policy makers in the developed world, donor countries and multilateral donor agencies should not take our natural and physical attributes as barometers of our economic and social development.

Mr. President, in this age of globalization, where the emphasis is on bigness, being small is definitely a disadvantage of major magnitude.

Small economies cannot easily diversify production. Jobs are concentrated in a limited number of industries, namely agriculture, tourism and services.

Tragically, we are now encountering a situation where our unemployed young people, are easily induced into the drug trade.

Given that the Caribbean region is a recognised drug transshipment point between Latin America and the United States and Europe, the attraction of "easy money" and effective marketing to youth by drug dons, make this job opportunity very attractive to the youth of the Caribbean region.

My party, the United Progressive Party, campaigned on a platform of transparency, accountability, and integrity in every functional aspect of government, and throughout the society as a whole.

As a demonstration of my government's seriousness in combating corruption, I have tabled anti-corruption and integrity legislation in our Parliament.

We did this during our first six months in Government.

My Government and the majority of the Antiguan and Barbuda people are committed to every option that will support our dedication to good governance in Antigua and Barbuda.

Mr. President:

I challenge the United Nations to stand by the tenets of the Millennium Declaration, which call for equity among nations, large and small.

There is a compelling reason for this call.

CARICOM countries are currently engaged in three separate sets of negotiations that will seriously impact the economies of our countries and the welfare of our people.

To date, there have been no concessions to the special needs of small states in our negotiations with the European Union, on the Free Trade Area of the Americas and with the World Trade Organisation.

Not everyone engaged in these negotiations appear to be in sympathy with the fundamentals of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

If affirmative action is not to be proffered to Antigua and Barbuda and other small states of the Caribbean region and the world, let us at least be spared punitive suspension of whatever special facilities enabled us to move our countries forward.

Mr. President;
Heads of Delegations;
Other Members of Delegations;
Observers;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Antigua and Barbuda thanks you for the opportunity to propose that in keeping with the letter and the spirit of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, small states such as those of CARICOM should be afforded the promised opportunity to be beneficiaries of globalisation and the new world economic architecture instead of leaving us casualties, as we must now be accurately described.

I thank you for your time and for your gracious attention, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.