



**Statement**

**by**

**The Honourable Prime Minister of Antigua and  
Barbuda**

**His Excellency Mr. Winston Baldwin Spencer**

**At the**

**United Nations 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly Debate**

**September 28, 2007**

**Mr. President,**

Let me first congratulate you on your election as President of the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly. I also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon on this his first General Assembly as Secretary General.

**Introduction: Multilateralism and the role of small states**

**Mr. President, Your Excellencies,**

I am honoured to once again address this august assembly, and I stand before you humbled AND emboldened.

Humbled by the magnitude of the socio-economic challenges we face as a community of nations, AND emboldened by the trust that has been placed in me by the people of Antigua and Barbuda to articulate their interest in an increasingly competitive international system.

Humbled by the gravity of the environmental challenges facing our world today, AND emboldened in the knowledge that without courageous and timely action, countless lives will continue to be plagued by misery and countless more unnecessarily lost.

**Mr. President:**

As the Prime Minister of a small island state, I am also humbled and emboldened by the show of confidence we have received from the Group of 77, having been elected Chairman for 2008. It is not a responsibility we take lightly, and you can rest assured we intend to rise valiantly to the task of Chairmanship, executing the responsibilities of the Chair with the sort of professionalism and skill the Group rightly expects of us.

As Chairman of the Group of 77 for 2008, and like the Chairs before us, we pledge to uphold the principles and objectives of the group; to preserve, at all times, our collective interest as developing countries; safeguard our common positions, and by so doing achieve significant advancement in the development agenda.

**Mr. President, Your Excellencies,**

I am humbled AND emboldened enough to quote Albert Einstein who once said, "*The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing*". The time for "looking on and doing nothing" is no longer an option for all of us.

Let me at the outset unequivocally state that multilateralism should be the preferred means for effecting international peace, security and human development.

There are some who would prefer for multilateralism to recede and for the world to be run by a few dominant powers.

Those who are so inclined should be reminded of the intent and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations which, among other things, reaffirms the faith of humanity in, and I quote, "**fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.**" End of quote.

It is no small wonder then that the crafters of the UN Charter pledged their determination to, and I quote, "**...employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of ALL peoples.**" End of quote.

**Mr. President:**

The Charter of the United Nations is perhaps more relevant today than it was at the time of writing.

The challenges to peace, security and development which require collective action have multiplied immeasurably.

At the same time, humanity has so advanced that today it is possible to achieve the intentions of the Charter on a scale beyond what might have been achievable at the time of its crafting.

Regrettably, meeting the purposes of the charter of the United Nations seems to be hindered by a paucity of political will and determination, to an unprecedented degree.

An equitable international system responsive to the needs of all countries and people is not beyond our reach.

In this context, there is a role for all nations, large and small, that includes the firm resolve to strengthen the multilateral system, in order to correct systemic imbalances that hinder the achievement of the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals.

Systemic imbalances in international trade, finance and international governance keep millions locked in poverty; and millions in a perpetual state of insecurity because they remain under-represented.

Indeed there is a role for **ALL** states. It should therefore come as no surprise that Antigua and Barbuda is of the view that small states can, and should play a crucial role by being the voices of reason, the voices not shackled to dogmatic positions which power necessitates.

The absence of so-called "high power" allows small states to be pragmatic and practical in coming up with solutions to some of the most pressing international problems.

**Mr. President,**

We can no longer continue talking while humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate. The situation in Darfur calls for our immediate and swift action.

We cannot continue talking while women and children are forced to live in refugee camps. We cannot continue talking while tens of thousands of persons continue to die.

We must act now. There must be swift action to strengthen the joint United Nations-African Union force to Darfur which will support the African troops already there.

Every citizen has a right to life and a right to live in peace. We call on all parties to end arm sales to the fighting factions. We must ensure that this happens.

We must make this happen.

**Mr. President:**

While acknowledging the reality that the distribution of power is skewed among nations, we believe that talent, ability and good intentions remain in abundance in all countries, large and small.

Further, no country is too small to be able to contribute innovative solutions for some of the most pressing international problems.

We in Antigua and Barbuda may be among the small and the powerless in might and money; we are willing, able, and intent on playing our part to achieve international peace; and development through active multilateral diplomacy.

**Trade, economic growth and prosperity**

**Mr. President:**

Global poverty and economic inequality can only be solved through sustained economic growth.

Central to sustaining economic growth for poorer countries is the establishment of a pro-development trading regime with a fair playing field where large and small play by the rules; rules meant to create a fairer system and to allow for the maximum benefits from international trade to be widely distributed among countries.

In this regard, we re-emphasize the importance for individual member states of the United Nations to abide by fair trading practices, which eliminate targeted barriers designed to deny access to small, vulnerable countries seeking economic opportunities through such options as Internet trading.

Equally important is the need for member States, big and small, to play by the international trade rules. The economic survival of our people depends on this. Our Tourism and Financial Services Sector depend on this.

Wealthy nations will ultimately have to pay a high price for actions that further pauperise already poor societies.

**Mr. President:**

In a local context, the reduction of income inequality is a key priority for the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

My government has ensured that affirmative action to ease the economic squeeze on the poor is embedded in all revenue-generating mechanisms.

My government resolves to ensure that the benefits of economic growth is shared among the entire population, by focusing on employment generation and the provision of free and low-cost social services in the areas of health, education, among others.

**Underscoring the importance of sustainable development**

**Mr. President,**

Climate change is a global problem requiring a collective response, and if we do not respond quickly, the result will be disaster on a global scale.

This represents a monumental test of the political will and courage of humanity in general, but especially of the political leaders of the most powerful countries.

For small-island states, the challenge of adapting to climate change is not a new one, what is new is its urgency.

Increased risk of natural disasters adds an extra dimension to the vulnerability of the island-states of the Caribbean.

Because of our size and the nature of our primary economic activity, the infrastructure of an entire country can be destroyed by, for example, the passage of a single hurricane.

The livelihood of the entire population is at once threatened.

Antigua and Barbuda, like many of our other CARICOM brothers and sisters, have had to place greater priority on disaster preparedness, resulting in increased competition for the already meager resources of the government budget.

Our situation is not unique.

I take this opportunity to highlight the importance of international action to support our efforts at disaster risk reduction, through an ambitious climate change regime under the ambit of the UNFCCC.

This must, of necessity, include a commitment to increasing the level of international financing for adaptation in vulnerable countries.

**Mr. President:**

The proliferation of crime in our already vulnerable societies represents a threat to the peaceful and stable communities for which the Caribbean is known.

In all Caribbean societies, the bulk of violent crimes is drug related.

It so happens that the bulk of narco-trafficking activity in our region is linked to illegal drugs bound for North America and Europe.

This means that small Caribbean economies are required to pay a high price to protect societies to our north, and the Atlantic from drug shipments headed their way.

We urge the UN family of agencies, in recognition of the link between globalization and crime, to provide the Caribbean with increased assistance in this area.

We also need the support and cooperation of individual member states, particularly those who practice a policy of criminal deportation.

This practice parachutes graduates of metropolitan criminal systems onto societies in which they often have no families, no social network to assist in their re-entry into vulnerable Caribbean societies from which they had long been exiled.

This is a monstrous assault on several of our societies.

**Mr. President:**

Related to the problem of drug related crimes and the proliferation of hand guns, Antigua and Barbuda reiterates its call for strengthening and implementation of the various UN treaties on small arms and light weapons.

The scale and scope of the disruptions and destruction caused by the proliferation of small arms in the hands of unemployed youth in the Caribbean is tremendous.

Here, too, small developing states, which produce no weapons, are confronted by the tragedy wrought by guns manufactured in countries which fail to control, and which appear untroubled by the ease with which their weapons of death cross international borders.

Even a miniscule increase in violent crime has a negative impact on development in small island states.

These perspectives should inform the international debate on peace and security.

**Mr. President:**

All countries, large and small, have a national interest in eliminating the threat to development posed by international terrorism.

Antigua and Barbuda continues to play its part by adhering to the various anti-terrorism resolutions of the United Nations; including our obligations under UN Security Council Resolutions 1540, 1373, among others.

Additionally, we have taken the added initiative to enact our own national legislative requirement by way of our National Anti-Terrorism Act of Parliament in 2005.

**Mr. President:**

Combating international terrorism should not depend on the trampling of religious and cultural diversity and individual rights and freedoms.

Cultural and religious intolerance and prejudice; and the stifling of cultural diversity will only serve to perpetuate the causes of terrorism.

### **Promotion of International Justice**

**Mr. President:**

Earlier this year Antigua and Barbuda along with the rest of CARICOM held activities to commemorate the bicentenary anniversary of the abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.



CARICOM also led an initiative for the anniversary to be commemorated here at the United Nations. This is an issue that should remain on the agenda of the United Nations.

My government is proud to have been a part of the initiative led by CARICOM Member States at the United Nations to get the international community to recognize this anniversary.

Such international recognition is important because it provides the opportunity to carry forward the fight for justice.

With all the modern treaties and international statutes and recognition of the slave trade as a crime against humanity, this crime remains unpunished; the entities remain unaccountable for their participation and profiteering.

Maintaining international focus on this issue gives our nations and the world the opportunity to make progress in repairing the damage caused by 500 years of slavery and colonialism, so that those who profited from such a crime can be urged to take responsibility for rectifying the effects that remain today.

Progress may be slow in the fight for justice for the descendants of slaves, but we must not give up.

As a community of sovereign nations, Antigua and Barbuda and the other CARICOM member states consider it necessary for the international community to become accountable for this crime against humanity. The question of reparations must be placed on the United Nations agenda now.

### **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

**Mr. President,**

We urge the UN system and member states to continue to pay special attention to the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The dividends from investing in gender equality and women's empowerment are two-fold - democratic gains on one hand and development gains on the other.

My government has placed top priority on empowering women politically and economically.

The Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua and Barbuda is female. So, too, are the President of the Senate and the Clerk of Parliament.

My government has the honour of having the first female elected Member of Parliament, who currently holds the position of President of the Inter-American Commission on Women.

We haven't stopped there.

The Chairman of the Integrity Commission pursuant to the Integrity in Public Life Act, is a woman

The Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, appointed earlier this year on the advice of the Prime Minister, is female.

The Ombudsman, a creature of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda is also a woman. The Chairman of the Public Service Commission, also a creature of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda is a woman.

We continue to focus on increasing women's participation in the political decision making-process.

In this, we have been helped by the normative framework of the various UN Gender entities.

We will continue to work towards even greater gender parity in the political, economic and social spheres, and we encourage all member states to do the same.

**Mr. President:**

As we in the Caribbean grapple with the increase in HIV/AIDS cases, we are also confronted with another great threat to the survival of our people. Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases have become a major concern for the Caribbean.

Recently, an historic Summit of Heads of CARICOM on Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases held in Trinidad and Tobago, agreed to give full support for the initiatives and mechanisms aimed at strengthening regional health institutions, through the signing of a comprehensive Declaration highlighting a plan of action on this critical health issue.

We strongly believe that "the health of the Region is the wealth of Region", which underscored the importance of health to development.

It is therefore necessary for the United Nations, through its various organs and agencies, to lend support to our initiatives to develop strategies to prevent and control heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and cancer in the Region by addressing their causal risk factors of unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use and alcohol abuse in addition to strengthening our health services.

We must act together now to reduce the suffering and burdens caused by NCDs on the citizens of our Region which is the worst affected in the Americas.

We seek the cooperation of the United Nations and our international partners in the development of initiatives for the screening and management of chronic diseases and risk factors so that by 2012, 80% of people with NCDs would receive quality care and have access to preventive education based on regional and international guidelines.

**Mr. President:**

Allow me to conclude on the point at which I began, by referring once more to the Charter of the United Nations.

Sixty-two years ago, when the United Nations was formed, the international system was less complex and colonialism was still the dominant concern.

Humanity was reeling from the effects of a second world war.

It was not the best of times.

Today, in my opinion, it is still not the best of times for a majority of the people of planet earth.

The primary catalysts to positive change and improved lives for the global population are the United Nations and Leaders of its member states.

I am hopeful that sharing our collective wisdom, and drawing from this source, the 62<sup>nd</sup> United Nations General Assembly will translate into meaningful and enduring benefit for the peoples of the world.

I am equally confident that our deliberations on climate change will lead to solutions that will ensure the protection of our Planet and its peoples.

I thank you, Mr. President.