



Antigua and Barbuda

**Statement by
Prime Minister Gaston Browne
Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to
the United Nations**

The twenty-ninth special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development

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Fellow Heads of State and Government

Your Excellency Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon

Your Excellency the President of the General Assembly,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Twenty years ago, in 1994, when the ICPD met in Cairo member states agreed a Program of Action that, it was claimed, would quicken the pace of development and secure a better future for generations yet to come.

But, two decades later, the results have not been nearly as expected.

Underdevelopment and poverty continue to plague many developing states.

A global economic crisis in 2008 - not emanating from the poor, but generated by the rich - sent the economic system into a tailspin, and its effects permeated most developing countries, the Caribbean sub-region principally among them.

Its most devastating impact was to return many states and peoples to pre-1994 conditions.

The current state of wealth and income inequality between wealthy states and poor ones, and even between the wealthy and the poor **within** states, is justly described by the most recent Report as "unsustainable."

Too many of the earth's inhabitants have been left behind; and too many of the youth and the elderly have been left out.

In my own Caribbean region, the problem is not population growth; it is the refusal of international financial institutions to grant us concessional financing that we urgently require to build conditions that would create jobs for our small population.

The problem also lies in the rejection of debt forgiveness or at least meaningful debt re-scheduling that would give us a chance to recover the development ground that we have lost.

Unemployment is the most severe of the many challenges that all societies face.

Youth unemployment is the most frightening.

It wastes our human capital, our most precious human resource.

It condemns young people, capable of innovation and creativity, into lives on the margins of society or to lives of crime.

In many countries today, we are witnessing a lost generation as young people come out of colleges and universities with no prospect of employment in the fields in which they trained, if they have a prospect of any sort of job at all.

The nuclear family—the basis of all civilizations—is placed under great stress, as young couples are squeezed out of housing markets, mortgages, credit, and faith in the future.

Is it any wonder that across the global landscape there is youth discontent and frustration with governance systems within their own countries and globally?

And it should be said and noted - with all the seriousness that it is due - that when small states like mine venture into areas of productivity, such as financial services that challenge the dominance of some developed countries, the response is to bludgeon us with threats and blacklisting so that we either surrender or perish.

The principal victims are the very qualified young people who we have spent millions of dollars to train so that they could compete in a globalised world.

But, our economies as a whole also suffer – leaving us unable to provide adequately for the health care of our sick and elderly, and to guard our population against non-communicable diseases.

At the present time, chikungunya, is spreading across the Caribbean sub-region with severe consequences for our economies.

It takes only two or three workers absent from small and medium-sized businesses because they are disabled by chikungunya to cause such businesses – already working on small margins of profitability – to decline, if not to collapse.

We now live in trepidation of the spread of the Ebola virus, for the costs to our small countries would go far beyond the huge expense of medical treatment.

The effect on tourism, which now accounts on average for 60% of the GDP of many of our countries, would be devastating.

Yet, the international community has not responded to the disease in parts of West Africa with the urgency for which it cries out.

The world must be grateful for the helpful actions taken by China, Cuba and the United States, but what is needed is a global response.

People are dying; people are frightened; people have little or no hope.

If the world waits for a global pandemic before we all act together, the effect will set us back even further than the financial crisis of 2008 or the recessions that preceded it.

The human family of nations must respond with the care and compassion of which the United Nations is capable.

Small countries, such as mine, are anxious to overcome the unemployment of our youth; to guard against threats to our people's health; to establish the conditions for human happiness.

But, while we are making great efforts to succeed, success will best be achieved if the effort is a global one.

That, should be why we have all come here.

For what is required is a sustained global effort.

And that is what any review of the Plan of Action must reflect.

Nothing less will do.

Thank you, Mr. President.