

21 September 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Members of the Clergy, Excellencies, family and friends:

Fellowship with the spiritual leaders and congregation of the Cathedral of St John the Divine, and all others gathered here today in this beautiful church, is among the most welcomed privileges that I will have as President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I wish to thank The Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski, Dean of the Cathedral, for his kind invitation, and for the opportunity to share some of my reflections on the United Nations, particularly on its role in the maintenance of world peace, an area in which the church is also challenged to make a meaningful contribution.

We live in a world, and a time, when interdependence is a way of life, and international cooperation is an imperative.

I believe the Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, put it succinctly when he said, "no single country has the capacity to cope with the political, economic, environmental and technological challenges of an interconnected world." We are at a juncture when multilateralism offers the global community not just the best, but the only way forward.

The pivotal role that the United Nations has played over the past fifty-eight years, in ordering the affairs of peoples and nations, has placed it at the centre of multilateralism. It has therefore fallen to the organisation to address and resolve a wide range of global problems, in areas including socio-economic development, human rights, health, and peace and security.

The United Nations has demonstrated its impressive capacity to contend with the world's problems, by the significant successes it has accomplished. Decolonisation has been one of its most outstanding accomplishments, increasing its membership from 51 to 191 sovereign and equal states. United Nations successes have inspired confidence in the organisation's ability to formulate and implement further policies and programmes for the benefit of all human kind.

In recent times, however, the United Nations has been seriously challenged by the enormity of the problems confronting it, and the high expectations many have of the organisation. This has led some to assert that the United Nations has lost its prestige, and to question its relevance. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the organisation's efforts in the area of international peace and security, in the wake of developments pre and post military action in Iraq.

Such criticism could not be taken lightly by an organisation established following a devastating world war, whose member states enshrined among its Charter principles pledges, "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another, as good neighbours" and "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security". Peace, therefore, is one of the main organising principles of the United Nations.

Therefore, the United Nations is responding to the formidable challenges that intra-state and inter-state conflict present to peace and security - be they in Iraq, the Middle East, Africa or Asia. This requires member states to cooperate to thwart the unbridled and unprincipled use of force in international relations, and to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. We may not always get the results we want, but this is not to say that our efforts are not without merit or that we have failed.

It has been said that violence begets violence, and that peace will not necessarily follow war. It has also been said, that there is not one road, but many roads to keeping the peace. We need only reflect on issues such as poverty, the inequitable distribution of the world's resources, health pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, trade imbalances, violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, transborder crime, weapons of mass destruction and terrorism to agree that there are other, and significant threats to international peace and security.

Let me pause here to reflect on the recent terrorist attack on the United Nations Headquarters in Baghdad, and the senseless killing and injury of people working in the service of humanity. As human beings, I know that we all share the grief and loss which that incident inflicted on the families and friends of the victims, and on the international community as a whole. United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and his staff, are among those who felt the loss and grief caused by the Iraq bombing deeply and personally, losing some of their cherished friends and colleagues, and knowing of the injuries suffered by others. This is an opportune time to pay tribute to Secretary General Annan and his staff for the essential role they play in helping the United Nations to reach the goals and objectives we member states set out for it.

The United Nations is challenged, now, to address the root causes of conflict and war and to break the cycle of destruction and rebuilding, that these evils engender. In economic terms, this is a bargain - the price of war has consistently proved to be higher than the cost of peace.

Over the years, the United Nations has built a strong support system for its continuing efforts to address the underlying causes of many of the destructive tendencies we are witnessing in the world today. Specialised agencies including the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) help to implement the Charter responsibility - to promote economic and social advancement of all peoples. The world is a better place because these organisations help to create the conditions in which we can live as good neighbours.

Promoting a culture of peace is part of the process of building a better world. If we are to succeed in this endeavour, this culture must be a way of life for all people.

I believe that the church is an important stakeholder in developing a culture of peace, and in supporting the United Nations in its initiatives for peace.

It is to the church and our spiritual leaders that people look for guidance, growth and development. It is our spiritual leaders that help to build our value system that will guide us during our lifetime, values such as tolerance, social justice and respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We will, therefore, continue to look to the church and spiritual leaders to encourage all to make a contribution, each in their own way, by working to develop our common, and not our competing interests, and by using their moral authority to promote the ideals of the United Nations Charter, particularly those extolling the dignity and worth of each human person.

I am honoured by my association with the United Nations, and particularly by the distinction afforded me to serve as President of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. My country, St Lucia, has always believed in the United Nations, and has been the beneficiary of many of its policies and programmes, including the decolonisation process. My Prime Minister, Government and I believe in the high ideals of the organisation, which holds our best hope for a better world.

The United Nations is an honest broker in world affairs, and its good works, including in keeping the peace, have been recognised worldwide. Over the years, the organisation's accomplishments have earned it high accolades, including the Nobel Peace Prize.

Still, there is much work to be done. Being a product of its member states, however, the United Nations can only be as effective as we want it to be. In short, if we want a strong and viable United Nations, able to play its essential role, and to keep the peace, we all have to play our part. Are we, the people, ready to do so? I know that I am. I hope we all are.

May God continue to bless the United Nations and to bless you all!