

23 September 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the General Debate**

This general debate of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly takes place at a time of enormous challenge for the United Nations. The participation of a significant number of heads of State and government in the debate sends a strong message of support for the United Nations, and reaffirms to the people of the world that their leaders are at the forefront of international efforts to address the broad range of issues of importance to them. As President of the fifty-eighth session, the presence of world leaders here is encouraging for me.

Some 58 years on, recent unfolding, often tragic, developments worldwide pose a serious challenge for the United Nations, and particularly for the General Assembly. This is particularly so in the areas enshrined in the Charter as the Organization's primary objectives -- the promotion of economic and social advancement; tolerance and peace; and the maintenance of international peace and security, including collective security.

Lately, we have engaged in a process of self-searching and re-examination; looking, for example, at the goals we have set ourselves in the economic and social fields, and our efforts to keep peace in the world. Reform and revitalization of our Organization is key to the success of our initiatives and, hence, is among our priorities. The safety and security of United Nations personnel has high priority and has taken on renewed urgency following yet another attack on the United Nations in Baghdad. As we express our sympathy over yet more loss life and injury, I wish to assure the Secretary-General of our continuing support for his efforts to protect United Nations staff.

Our achievements over the past decade are unquestionable; but many of our initiatives are useful only if they lead to concrete action. We the Member States of this General Assembly are partners, and must work cooperatively to ensure that urgent and necessary action is taken to implement these initiatives, if we are to remain relevant. In doing so, I believe it to be in our best interest to be consistent in our respect for the Charter, and for international law; to demonstrate by our action that this Assembly has not only the capacity, but the political will, to constructively address and resolve the complex problems of our world; and to close the gap between our agreed objectives and the resources needed to implement them.

The General Assembly has oversight of the United Nations system as a whole, and, hence, has before it the full range of international issues. As advocate, supervisory and policy-making body, it must give the direction necessary to ensure coherence in the system, so that the Organization may respond in a holistic manner to the many challenges it faces.

Heads of State and governments must bring new dynamism to the General Assembly this session. The political direction they will provide will be key to enabling the Assembly to effectively address critical issues such as sustainable development, poverty alleviation, violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, terrorism and United Nations reform. This is the direction we need for the entire one year of the session, including from January to September 2004. For it is during this less intensive, second part of the session, so to speak, that we can look more reflectively at the decisions we have taken in the fall, and begin the critical task of implementation and other aspects of the Assembly's work.

We all know the problems. I will be looking to heads of government and other high-level participants in this general debate for their advice on how best we may arrive at the solutions.