

2 October 2003

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

Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We have come to the end of the general debate of the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. It is noteworthy that this session attracted the highest level of participation since the Millennium Summit. Among the 189 speakers, the Assembly heard 50 Heads of State, 27 Heads of Government and 94 Deputy-Prime-Ministers and Foreign Ministers.

I express my sincere appreciation to every Head of State and Government, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister for their active participation and for their constructive contribution to the debate, and support for my stated priorities.

When I opened this general debate, I indicated that I would be listening carefully to the priorities identified by high-level participants, which would provide the framework for this Assembly's work. What I have heard gives clear indication of where member states are on many of the critical issues that will be before the Assembly.

There was resounding support in the general debate for multilateralism and reaffirmation of the United Nations as the primary international organisation to address critical global problems. In fact, many expressed the view that in these unsettled times, the United Nations and multilateralism were needed now, more than ever.

The central role of the General Assembly as advocate, supervisory and policy-making body was a point consistently made. However, continuing revitalisation efforts were urged, to permit the Assembly to deal effectively with challenges, both old and new.

Development and the prosperity of countries and regions received much attention from high-level representatives. They supported the view that the fifty-eighth session should give appropriate focus to issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, equity in the global economic system and the preservation of the environment. The regrettable outcome of the Cancun round of negotiations gives new impetus to calls for full consideration of development issues by the General Assembly, including the Millennium Development Goals.

Some speakers reminded us that the outcomes of the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, set for 29-30 October 2003, would be critical to the work we will do in the area of

development. Therefore, we expect wide representation and high-level participation in the High level Dialogue.

Strong support was expressed for the ten year review of the Plan of Action for the Sustainable development of Small Island Developing States. This should auger well for the successful review in Mauritius in 2004, and implementation of its outcomes.

Considerable attention was given to Africa's development needs, as well as the requirement to keep these matters high on the Assembly's agenda. Many stressed the need for continued international support for the implementation of NEPAD, and for cooperation and support to bring peace and stability to the African continent.

The Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his report on the work of the organisation, gave us thought provoking insight into his priorities for the coming year. In this context, we have noted the Secretary General's proposals on United Nations reform, including the establishment of a high-level panel of eminent persons to review these matters for our consideration.

Security Council reform continued to command attention. The general view was that the Assembly should continue this work, notwithstanding that efforts in this area for more than a decade had not yielded tangible results.

I do not recall a statement in which the situation in post-war Iraq and the need to urgently address all aspects of it, was not emphasised as a priority for the United Nations. This was an area in which general support was expressed for initiatives to bring relief to the people of Iraq and to permit them to take responsibility for their own future.

Almost without exception, all condemned the brutal attack on the United Nations premises in Baghdad on 19 August 2003 and the loss of life and injury to, United Nations staff. It was agreed the attack was the latest, and a formidable, challenge to the United Nations and to the security of United Nations staff. There was support for the Secretary General's initiative to review the matter of safety and security for United Nations staff.

The situation in the Middle East was considered to be a matter of grave concern. It was thought that the General Assembly should send a strong message to both sides in the conflict - Israel and Palestine - urging them to put an end to bloodshed and violence. Implementation of the proposed Road Map was seen by many as a viable means of bringing long-lasting peace to the Middle East.

The one day High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS which took place on 22 September 2003, immediately preceding the general debate, was considered by all to have been both constructive and productive. The views expressed in both the Plenary and the interactive debate underscored the need for a cooperative approach in addressing this most devastating pandemic. The foregoing is my brief, personal observations, of salient issues raised in the general debate, which I thought I should share with you.

As I reviewed the many statements, I was struck by the common ground among speakers over a wide range of issues. This makes me hopeful that we will be able to do good work in this General Assembly during the fifty-eighth session.

Our leaders have given direction to the work we are to do, and political support for it. We must now carry forward the commitments they have made, if the hopes and aspirations expressed are to be realised.

Let me conclude by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Vice Presidents of the General Assembly for their assistance and cooperation in the conduct of the work of the general debate. I also wish to thank the dedicated secretariat staff and commend them for their support and cooperation.

Thank you.