

19 November 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
to the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States at
the Meeting of Experts on Democratic Governance**

Mr. Chair of the Permanent Council, Mr. Assistant Secretary-General, Permanent and Alternate Representatives of the Member States, Ladies and Gentlemen:

For me, it is a singular honour to be the first President of the United Nations General Assembly to address the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States (OAS). I wish to express my appreciation to the Chairman of the Permanent Council, H.E. Salvador E. Rodezno Fuentes, Permanent Representative of Honduras, who extended the invitation to me. I am also appreciative to the Assistant Secretary General H.E. Mr. Luigi Einaudi, and the Member States of the Council for graciously welcoming me here at the OAS.

That my country, St Lucia, a small island developing state of the Caribbean, joined the OAS upon attaining its independence in 1979, attests to the significance both our Government and People attach to this important hemispheric organization. We have, through our committed and active participation, demonstrated our confidence in the organization to address the thorniest problems affecting countries of the Americas.

My own experience with the OAS has been not only at the political, but also at the personal level. As representative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I had the opportunity to work together with the OAS in its cooperative initiative with CARICOM in the Republic of Haiti. Our joint efforts implemented a commitment of fundamental importance to the OAS, CARICOM, the hemisphere, and indeed the United Nations - promoting democracy and the democratic ideal.

The high regard that St Lucia has for the OAS, and its constructive relations with the organization adds to the significance of this occasion. But as President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, my address to this Council signifies the recognition by this distinguished body that in a world that increasingly confounds us with its complexity, and daunts us with its dangers, multilateralism is the key to our survival. Critical to building a multilateralism that is meaningful is the mutual understanding and strong links we develop between states and organizations, and between the United Nations and regional organizations, in this instance the OAS.

The countries of the Americas have an historic place in the establishment of the United Nations. Of the 51 countries and national entities that gathered at San Francisco in 1945 to sign the Charter of the United Nations, twenty-two were from the Americas. Accounting for more than a third of the countries at San Francisco, they joined in declaring their determination to save

succeeding generations from war; reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; and in pledging to establish conditions under which international law would be respected, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedoms. Other countries of the region shared this vision of the United Nations and as they became independent, joined the organisation.

It was not surprising that the countries of the Americas could make a significant contribution to the discourse at San Francisco. It was about a century and a half ago that the great Liberator, Simon Bolivar, summoned the Congress of Panama with the aim of establishing an association of states in the hemisphere. That goal may not have been realized then, but other initiatives proceeded in a straight line, ranging from the International Union of American Republics through the Pan American Union to the founding of the OAS in 1948.

The context in which the United Nations and the OAS work may be different, their perspectives and immediate objectives may vary, and the machinery for reaching their objectives may not be quite the same. As nation states, our quest for a peaceful world, human rights and fundamental freedoms and better standards of life in larger freedoms is a matter of coordinating the different paths we must take to reach the same shared goals. So it is with our organizations - the United Nations and the OAS are both working towards the same end, although they may be using different means to reach it, and may in fact reach it at quite different times. Even before the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights was concluded, for example, the American Declaration on the Rights and Duties of Man had been adopted. It was followed by the Inter American Court of Human Rights, a pioneering institution of which we are all proud.

The General Assembly, the United Nations only universal organ, is the leading forum for discussion of the full range of issues on the global agenda. The nature and scope of current, new and emerging issues on that agenda were compellingly reflected in the Assembly's General Debate, convened on 23 September - 2 October 2003. The numbers of Heads of State and Government and other high level officials participating in the debate was higher than at any meeting since the Millennium Summit. This underscores the critical juncture at which the global community finds itself.

Heads of State and Government and other high-level officials in the General Debate highlighted Issues of sustainable development, poverty alleviation, human rights and fundamental freedoms, of peace and security, terrorism and organizational revitalization and change, for priority attention by the General Assembly. I am pleased to say that these issues accord with the priorities of the St Lucian Presidency. But importantly, there is a striking degree of convergence between the key issues highlighted by high-level participants in the General Debate, and which are priorities for the United Nations, and the issues of which the OAS is seized.

There is strong support for multilateralism at the United Nations, as the essential means for dealing with critical global problems. The United Nations is reaffirmed as the primary organization through which such problems might be addressed - more vital, it is frequently said,

than ever before. Hand in hand with support for the United Nations went an active determination to vigorously pursue continuing revitalization of the organization, in particular, the General Assembly and the Security Council.

There is general agreement that the United Nations, after fifty-eight years, must change, if it is to remain dynamic in a world very different from the one its founders knew. As President, I have responded to the urging for revitalization of the Assembly, with a view to its working more efficiently over the broad range of issues within its mandate. Even as we speak, consultations are ongoing at the United Nations, to reach agreement on a resolution we hope would be presented to the General Assembly this December.

The reform of the Security Council is a different matter, because central issues such as permanent membership and the veto are exceptionally challenging. There is an English saying that how people will react, "depends on whose ox is being gored". Simply put, this means that nations, like people, will act, or refuse to act, when they think that their interests are being advanced or imperiled. I must, however, respond to Member States request for action in this area. Currently, we are taking stock of ten years of discussion, before we present proposals for consideration. There is significant momentum for revitalization and reform, which gives hope that Member States will take up the challenge where it might be indicated.

The United Nations Secretary-General has also taken an initiative that will lead to United Nations reform proposals. He has appointed a group of eminent persons to advise him on these matters, principally in the area of peace and security. These are issues on which the United Nations membership will pronounce and take decisions in the fullness of time.

Development and prosperity - or their opposite - of countries and regions continue to be identified among the broad problems confronting us early in the twenty-first century. Increasingly, states are recognizing, by bitter experience, the relationship between poverty worldwide and issues such as inequity in the global economic system, inter-state and intra state conflict, environmental degradation and the ravages of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS.

It had been expected that globalization and trade liberalization would have ushered in an era of prosperity, and not an era of vulnerability. The conventional wisdom was that the economy of all states would be greatly improved. Yet, the reality for many in the developing world, including in our hemisphere, is that their economic and social situation continues to deteriorate, and poverty continues to rise. At the United Nations, the urgency and difficulty of advancing toward the Millennium Development Goals, including the commitment to reduce poverty by half by 2015, has been affirmed.

Therefore, two important international events in the area of development, convened early in the Fifty-eighth Session - a High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development and High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS - were strongly supported. Stigma and discrimination, the impact of HIV/AIDS on development, and the need to adequately fund action in this area are among the issues on which the United Nations is now focused.

The High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development again brought together major stake holders - Government representatives, the Heads of the International Financial Institutions, members of the business community and civil society - to review implementation of the Monterrey Consensus adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development, held in Monterrey, Mexico in March 2002. Critical issues such as commodities and tax cooperation were addressed in this context. We are now seeking to chart a path for the future, with the objectives of better financing development and implementing the Millennium Development Goals, firmly in view.

It is in itself important, but not sufficient, to recognize the urgent needs of the African continent, facing as it does challenges ranging from conflict and retarded or slow growth and development to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This is a matter now centre stage on the United Nations agenda so that concrete action may be taken. Notably, strong support is being advocated for the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

I am happy to say that small island developing states have taken the lead in advocating their own cause, and have raised significant support for the issues affecting them. In August of next year, there will be a follow-up Conference in respect of the Plan of Action for the Sustainable development of Small Island Developing States, which, given the significant number of SIDS that are members of this OAS, would no doubt receive the strong support of the general membership. At the United Nations, the SIDS are encouraging the broadest possible participation in the Conference.

In the political and security area, it is no surprise that the situation in Iraq has engaged the attention of all at the United Nations. There is, generally, no dissent from the view that the international community has an obligation, through the United Nations, to provide support to post-war Iraq. It is also a shared objective that the Iraqi people be enabled, as soon as possible, to take charge of their own country and their future.

The deterioration of the situation in the Middle East is a grave international concern. At the United Nations, there is a ground swell of support for initiatives that would bring peace to the region, and that would lead to the creation of two states - Israel and Palestine - living side by side in peace.

The increasingly urgent threat of terrorism has brought home to us how very much our world has changed since the dramatic attack on the headquarters cities of the United Nations and the OAS on 11 September 2001. Now, the threat of terrorism is not someone else's problem, it is a global problem. It is clear, therefore, that fighting terrorism will require a multilateral effort - to track the flow of illicit capital, the financing of terrorist groups, the illegal flow of arms and the networks of transnational organized criminals, including those involved in illicit drug trafficking.

Resources diverted into the fight against terrorism require countries - some of them seriously hard-pressed economically - to divert scarce resources from their own social development,

without much realistic hope of these shortfalls being made up from outside. Nor would indirect support, like better terms of trade or greater access to technology, be easily forthcoming.

Now, we are faced with another new and disquieting development - increasingly, the United Nations itself, its Specialized Agencies and their staff members are being singled out as targets of terrorism. This is a disturbing trend, evidenced again just last weekend in Afghanistan. This trend has enormous consequences for our collective policies and programmes. These are issues receiving much attention at the United Nations.

There is now tremendous support for the United Nations to advance significantly in the areas I have outlined. Our primary task now is to ensure that the considerable areas of consensus on the issues find form in the resolutions of the General Assembly. Not resolutions that are vague to accommodate multiple points of views, but resolutions that can translate consensus into specific, implementable action. And we also need to take the necessary action to make the United Nations an efficient and effective organization, in the service of all the world's people.

I said at the outset that we in the United Nations and you in the OAS may deal with issues from different perspectives. The issues, however, are essentially the same, and there are important synergies between the work of the OAS in this hemisphere and the work of the United Nations.

In many ways, the OAS continues to take the lead in dealing with key issues on the global agenda. The increasing danger posed by nuclear proliferation is once again engaging the attention of the international community. The region has led the way in this area, by establishing through the Treaty of Tlatelolco, the world's first nuclear-free zone. The OAS Convention on Corruption preceded the United Nations Convention on Corruption, and the region is fully engaged regarding the United Nations Convention, expected to be opened for signature in Mexico next month.

It is significant, also, that the OAS has held three very important meetings in close succession on matters of critical importance on its agenda, and which also feature prominently on the international agenda - the OAS High Level Meeting on Poverty, Equity and Social Inclusion; the OAS Special Conference on Security; and the Meeting of Experts on Democratic Governance. Given the importance of underpinning democracy with economic and social progress, of putting in place strategies for poverty alleviation and for security and alleviating the debt burden in the hemisphere, the outcomes of these meetings should be part not only of the hemispheric strategy but of the strategy of the international community as a whole.

Importantly, they constitute part of the Summit of the Americas process, a significant aspect of which is the creation of a Free Trade Area of the Americas. I know that member states of the OAS are working diligently, to negotiate a trading system that would be fair and equitable, and from which all may benefit, given the links between trade at the regional and international levels.

The United Nations Charter recognizes the importance of regional organizations in collaborative efforts that would assist the organization to deliver on its global mandates. It has worked particularly well with the OAS in that regard - collaboration between the OAS and the United

Nations Economic Commission for Latin America concerning the FTAA and the joint human rights observation mission of the OAS and the United Nations in Haiti are but two examples of this fruitful collaboration.

I believe that we who are members of both the United Nations and the OAS have a decisive role to play in the development of mutual understanding and synergies between our two organizations. I would urge us today to continue to enhance our efforts for the realization of peace and security, economic progress and well being and social justice.

Thank you.