

25 February 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at Long Island University (LIU)**

Mr. Moderator, President David Steinberg and scholars of Long Island University: good afternoon.

It has been my privilege, in the months since my election as President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, to address a wide range of fora on the work of the Assembly and of the United Nations. I particularly welcome invitations from university communities - they provide the opportunity to dialogue with students probing the broad range of academic disciplines that will prepare them to become concerned citizens of the world. It is a dialogue that includes faculty members, those who provide the education and training so essential to that preparation.

May I therefore thank you, Mr President, and the faculty and students of Long Island University, and particularly Professor Dr Yusuf Juwayeyi, for this opportunity to speak with you today. I do so on a matter of critical concern in today's world - how to promote development of a kind that would bring maximum benefit to all people and that can be sustained. How, indeed - in the simplest definition of the term "sustainable development" -, we can meet our development needs in the present without compromising the needs of future generations to meet their own needs.

If we were to examine media reports on the work of the United Nations today, and perhaps any day, it is not likely that critical sustainable development issues would feature prominently in lead stories. Lead stories are generally reserved for conflict and war, crisis and confrontation - issues considered to be more immediate and more urgent. Particular focus is generally given, in this context, to the issues for which the United Nations Security Council has primary responsibility under the United Nations Charter - the maintenance of international peace and security.

Yet, socio-economic development is an essential cornerstone of the United Nations, one on which clear pronouncements are made in the Charter. In fact, it can be said that development underpins other ideals enshrined in the Charter - self-determination, peace and security, enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and justice and the rule of law - and offers real hope that we can accomplish the Charter's lofty ideals.

The United Nations General Assembly is the organisation's sole universal organ - all 191 Member States of the United Nations have a seat in the Assembly, and each has a vote. It is in the Assembly that the equality of nations large and small is a reality, a reality that ensured that St Lucia, one of the organisation's smallest states, could hold the Presidency of this important body.

It follows, therefore, that the framers of the Charter would have given the Assembly an important role in the organisation's policy-making and coordination processes, including in respect of development. This pivotal role of the General Assembly was recognised by Heads of State and Government in the Declaration of their Millennium Summit in 2000, when they resolved "To reaffirm the central position of the General Assembly as the chief deliberative, policy-making and representative organ of the United Nations ...".

The Charter did not leave promoting "better standards of life in larger freedom" to chance - institutional arrangements were put in place to position the United Nations to meet development objectives. The United Nations Economic and Social Council has lead responsibility for the coordination and promotion of coherence on development issues. It has developed a network of commissions, committees and other mechanism to advance initiatives in this complex, but critical area.

Specialised Agencies - bodies including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) - each play an important role in advancing development objectives of the United Nations system. It is to the General Assembly that responsibility has been given to receive, consider and provide policy guidance on reports from these various institutional arrangements.

I earlier referred to the development area as being a complex one. It is particularly so in today's world in which globalization and trade liberalization, underpinned by rapid advances in technology and communications have become the principal driving forces in the global economy. Earlier, the prevailing wisdom had been that once markets were opened, trade was freed up, new mechanisms such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) were put in place and new terms of trade replaced existing systems such as regional preferences, there would be development for all.

Experience, however, has challenged these assumptions, demonstrating beyond a doubt that these processes are not so straightforward. For the most part, those benefiting from globalization and the rules based system of the WTO have been the more economically advanced countries of the developed world. Increasingly, a direct correlation is being recognized between poverty and inequity in the global economic system, the degradation of the environment, the ravages of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and other serious global problems.

Indeed, disparities between rich and poor nations are marginalizing many countries, particularly in Africa, among Small Island Developing States and in other areas of the developing world. In the Caribbean, for example, we have seen investments move out of the region to areas of lower costs, as the prices of the region's commodities fall and its efforts to diversify into financial and other services are challenged. At the same time, official development assistance from richer to poorer countries continues to decline markedly, and seeds of instability and conflict seem to be strewn worldwide.

Lest I be accused of painting a picture of doom and gloom, let me say that countries, developed or developing, have a primary responsibility to promote their own development. Where there are fair rules of engagement, developing countries do. Many have risen to the socio-economic development challenges, and have made progress.

Let me also say, however, that in the current global environment, international cooperation and solidarity is needed, if indeed we are to improve the standards of living of all the world's people. This is a fact that has been recognised by the United Nations General Assembly, as we address issues such as poverty eradication, the provision of freshwater, climate change, renewable sources of energy and the development of marine resources and sustainable fisheries.

Commencing with the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the concept of "sustainable development" began to gain a foothold. While pointing to the urgent need to step up the United Nations development agenda, it was also accepted that development had to proceed in a manner that was sustainable.

Following UNCED, the General Assembly embarked upon a decade of international summits and conferences, aimed at fostering cooperation and consensus in addressing development concerns. It is important to emphasize here that these summits and conferences touched upon virtually all areas of human endeavour, including the protection and preservation of the environment, population, social development, women, children, and housing.

I am sure you will recall gatherings such as the Millennium Summit, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, the World Summit on Social Development, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, to name but a few. These summits and conferences serve as a catalyst for the current United Nations development agenda, which includes the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The significance of major gatherings, however, is not the convening itself - it is what happens after the debates have ended, the commitments have been made, and the reports have been delivered. It was clear to all, particularly the developing countries, that a strategy was needed to fund the development initiatives emanating from these various conferences and meeting. The international community took up this challenge at the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development, which took place in Monterrey, Mexico.

Monterrey stands as a watershed in respect of financing for development. There, all partners - governments, civil society, the business sector and the international financial and other institutions such as the World Trade Organisation - agreed on the means for delivering development financing. Now, we have in place modalities for realising the development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals, which themselves set realistic targets to be implemented within agreed time-frames.

We had an opportunity to review obstacles encountered and progress made in delivering on commitments made in Monterrey at the High Level Dialogue on Financing for Development,

which the General Assembly convened in October 2003. Our findings were mixed, but left us with no doubt that the clock is ticking, progress or new action has been limited, and more needs to be done.

This, therefore, is an important time for the United Nations and for the General Assembly, as we move towards 2005, the first agreed time frame for reviewing our successes or otherwise in meeting our development objectives. As I speak, the Assembly is holding consultations to determine the format and procedure of our review. Whatever decisions are taken, the developing world, in particular would be urging further commitments to implement the development agenda and to put in place strategies that would ensure that development remains at the centre of the United Nations endeavours.

I thank you.