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THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

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Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly, at the Closing of the 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

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

I took up the Presidency of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly one year ago, under no illusion about the enormity of the responsibility of this Office and the task that was before me. At that time, the mood of this Assembly was somber. The military action in Iraq and its aftermath, and the resultant crisis of confidence that threatened to engulf the United Nations, weighed heavily on the Assembly, and indeed, on the organization as a whole.

Moreover, the situation in Iraq, though critical, was not the only issue with which the General Assembly was preoccupied. The Assembly was poised to review progress in meeting commitments made on financing for development, and in combating the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic. Assessments in these areas, and on the progress made in advancing the United Nations development agenda generally, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), were less than encouraging. A clear message was being sent by Member States - the General Assembly had to do more to implement its Charter mandates, and targeted revitalization initiatives were essential to this process. There was general disquiet that a decade had gone by, and the initiative to reform the Security Council had yet to yield comprehensive results.

As President of the Assembly, I shared the determination of Member States that we ought not be deterred by these disturbing developments. My strong conviction was that the Fifty-eighth Session of the General Assembly should be an action-oriented one, and that Member States could work together with me for this purpose. I so stated in my opening address. I knew that realism, pragmatism and decisive action, together with optimism, was required, and looked beyond the challenges we faced to the significant opportunities they presented for the Assembly to assist the United Nations in living up to the ideals of the Charter. I declared the effective management of the Assembly as an unequivocal commitment, as an essential element of undertaking to help our United Nations meet its goals and objectives.

I think it fair to say that today the Assembly's outlook is decidedly more positive and rightly so. Member States can clearly identify, within the priorities set for my Presidency - development, revitalization and reform and peace and security - the issues they deemed to be of critical concern to the Assembly. I am honoured that Member States have given their full support to my Presidency and St Lucia's leadership, supported by the Governments of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in guiding the work of this General Assembly. Due in large measure

to the cooperation and activism of the membership, the Fifty-eighth Session has noteworthy accomplishments to its credit.

Multilateralism beyond doubt underpinned my Presidency, and was the basis on which decisions were made on the wide range of issues on the agenda of the Assembly. This was how it ought to be, since pressing global challenges, including poverty and hunger, debt, fair trade, sustainable development, deadly disease such as HIV/AIDS, nuclear proliferation, terrorism and organized crime are not North or South, developed or developing countries issues. They are global challenges, requiring multilateral cooperation for their solution. In the Fifty-eighth session, therefore, we gave the negotiating table a central role in our management of the Assembly's affairs.

We thought it important that Member States should have an overview of the discussions on pertinent issues to enable the Assembly to take guidance from Heads of State and Government and other high-level participants, and to identify points of convergence to inform the outcomes of critical aspects of its work. I therefore took the initiative to summarize the deliberations of the General Debate, setting out cogently the positions governments took on the broad spectrum of issues, from the MDGs to globalization and trade liberalization; from revitalization of the General Assembly to reform of the Security Council; from Iraq to the situation in the Middle East.

Mr. Secretary-General, I am appreciative of the support you gave to me and to this Assembly in carrying out the important work we do on behalf of the world's people. Your Report on the Work of the Organization helps set the foundation for the work of the session. I therefore presented a summary of this report, as well as the report of the Security Council to the Assembly. The Assembly had earlier decided that the Security Council's report should be summed up to determine if there were issues the Assembly wished to bring to the attention of the Council. I was pleased that mine was the Presidency which took the initiative to implement this decision of the Assembly. We did in fact make summing up debates, formal and informal, a practice during my Presidency, a practice Member States indicated that they highly valued.

The Charter of the United Nations gave the organization a key role in improving the standard of life of the world's people. In keeping with this ideal, Member States gave clear indication that development should be brought back to center stage on the Assembly's agenda. Taking into account the numerous challenges developing countries face, particularly in critical areas such as aid, trade and debt, sustainable development commanded significant focus this session.

I am pleased with the gains the Assembly made in its development initiatives. Some sixteen Heads of State and Government participated in the High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS, convened less than one week into the session. Their presence underscored, at the highest level, the determination of the membership to halt and reverse this most serious of threats to humanity, and to the development goals of states, particularly in the developing world.

The High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development, also convened early in the session, gave considerable impetus to sustainable development initiatives. Although the news from the

Dialogue was not good, nevertheless the Dialogue did play an invaluable role in efforts to put financing for development issues back on track. In the context of the High-level Dialogue, we placed issues such as commodities, international cooperation in tax matters and the role of the business and private sector in sustainable development under close scrutiny in interactive discussions. The findings are available to inform policy choices at the national, regional and international levels. They also help to determine the partnerships required to implement the commitments made at the 2002 International Conference on Financing for Development, and in other development efforts.

The Presidency continued to take this more inclusive and interactive approach to the Assembly's examination of sustainable development issues, using primarily consultations, briefings and panel discussions, including within the framework of the Assembly's General Committee. Many developing countries are facing some of the greatest challenges to their development, particularly in respect of globalization and trade liberalization. We were therefore judicious in consultations and briefing meetings convened under the auspices of the Presidency, to select topics of particular concern to these countries, and to carry forward key initiatives, such as the High-level Plenary to be convened in 2005, to follow-up implementation of the outcomes of a decade of summits and conferences in the economic and social fields.

We were honoured, in that regard, that Uganda's President Museveni accepted our invitation to address the commodities issue; Nobel Prize Laureate in Economics, Joseph Stiglitz, to address the issue of trade and development; and UNCTAD's Secretary-General, Rubens Ricupero to address issues pertaining to the convening of UNCTAD XI. In the General Committee, Under-Secretary-General Gambari brought us up-to-date on initiatives to advance the New Economic Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD). The general feedback on this, and all our interactive briefings, including on the topics for discussion, was very positive.

My Presidency was one that ensured that the General Assembly broke free of convention in challenging times that demand new ideas, vision and innovation. It was my considered view that an event as pivotal as the commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda should be one for innovation across principle organs of the United Nations - the General Assembly and the Security Council. I was pleased that the Permanent Representative of Germany (then serving as the Council's President) accepted my invitation, in his personal capacity, to co-chair the Commemoration with me. Perhaps in the future cooperation on another significant event will find favour with the Council.

Informal briefings on matters of peace and security are not usually convened by the General Assembly. My Presidency did not regard this as a bar to holding such a briefing on the situation in Haiti. We were encouraged by the positive response to the informal briefing, and are appreciative to Under-Secretary-General Prendergast for his lucid and cogent presentation on that occasion.

Also in the area of peace and Security, the General Assembly four times played the role envisaged for it in the "Uniting for Peace" resolution, reconvening in Emergency Special Session

on Palestine when a veto by a permanent member of the Security Council did not permit action to be taken by the Security Council.

My Presidency perceived, in the serious concern repeatedly expressed that the "oxygen had been sucked out of the General Assembly" in the wake of military action in Iraq and the focus of world attention on the Security Council, a genuine readiness in Member States to act in respect of revitalization of the General Assembly. This gave impetus to our initiative to take specific and tangible steps to advance the process of revitalization. This matter was far more complicated than it appeared on the face of it.

My Presidency has been commended widely for its accomplishments in revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. I accept this gracious commendation on behalf of all who worked tirelessly for the consensus adoption of two resolutions - 58/126 and 58/316- recognized as the most far-reaching actions the Assembly has taken in more than a decade. The guiding principle of these resolutions is straightforward - the General Assembly's authority and role should be enhanced, and its working methods should be improved.

Already the results of the initiative are evident, in the transition office provided to the President-elect of the Fifty-ninth Session of the General Assembly, and in the staff provided to his Office. Scope has been given to the President to propose issues on which pronouncements might be made in the General Debate, as well as to initiate more interactive debates, an important opportunity to provide leadership on topical issues on the Assembly's agenda.

The President of the Security Council now briefs the President of the General Assembly on the Council's work, although greater effort will have to be made to institutionalize this process. Two meetings have already taken place between the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council. The continued development of this mechanism, which has value as a means of increasing cooperation, coordination and complementarity in the work of the three bodies, will make a substantive contribution to efforts within the United Nations for greater coherence.

In advancing the revitalization initiative we have not shied away from the tough issues - the Assembly's more than three hundred and thirty-three item agenda; the extensive volume of its documentation; and the significant number of resolutions it adopts. Action has already been taken to make the agenda more accessible, and comprehensible, by organizing it around broad themes, based on the United Nations medium-term plan. Further rationalization of the agenda has also been initiated, particularly in respect of the agenda of the Plenary. The revitalization resolutions also point the way forward in respect of documentation as well as resolutions, which the Assembly has determined should be more concise and focused.

Our revitalization efforts have permitted the Assembly to put other United Nations mechanisms, including the General Committee, to good use. Reform of the General Committee is called for as part of the revitalization exercise. There can be no doubt that this process is well under way - the General Committee, meeting in informal sessions, was the forum for discussion of most of the

revitalization reports, and its conclusions were incorporated in revitalization resolutions. As Member States continue to consider the reform of the General Committee, I do hope that its scope for providing greater support to the work of the Assembly will be explored.

My Presidency has been diligent in designing an effective framework to sustain the drive to revitalize the General Assembly. The proposal to convene the General Assembly over two substantive periods of the session is one of the issues that has been set aside for discussion in this framework during the Fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. Throughout, we have kept our proposals and expectations pragmatic and realistic. It is clear, however, that if we are to continue on a meaningful revitalization path - and we must - greater confidence would be needed on all sides so that issues of importance to some countries would not be sidelined at the expense of issues of interest to more powerful and influential countries, all in the name of revitalization. Work must also continue to be done to ensure that the General Assembly can better react to immediate events, for example, the situations in Iraq and Haiti.

Notwithstanding skepticism, complexities and ambiguities surrounding Security Council reform, my Presidency reacted to the genuine, if cautious, willingness we perceived among most member states to proceed. Our firmly held view was that other means for generating meaningful discussion on Council reform were worth exploring, to bring this matter out of its ten-year paralysis. As a result, the Open-ended Working Group on Reform of the Security Council held frank and open discussions on our initiatives to address separately six important topics relating to Security Council reform, including the use of the veto.

But can our discussions, insightful as they have been, lead to policy decisions on reform of the Security Council? Can more be done to reform the Council, to ensure that when it sounds alarm bells, the organization immediately rises to the challenge to bring peace and security to a country or region troubled by conflict and war? There is considerable optimism that the Security Council reform efforts of the Open-ended Working Group will receive a boost from the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, when it reports in December 2004.

Given the collective expertise and experience of the Panel, its report will no doubt be a good one. What is realistic and feasible, however, is defined not by reports, but by what Member States do with reports. This Assembly must either act on the recommendations of the report, or take its own decisions on the matter of Security Council reform, or reform will continue to evade us. I stand firm in my opinion that the Security Council can be reformed, but that compromises are critical. I believe there was a glimmer of compromise in the Open-ended Working Group - can that glimmer become the bright light of Security Council reform? These matters are in the hands of Member States.

Let me now turn to cooperation with the United Nations Secretariat. Our efforts for revitalization of the General Assembly and reform of the Security Council have and continue to be focused primarily within and between the inter-governmental bodies. The experience of my Presidency is that it would be important, at this juncture, to examine the relationship between the Secretariat

and the General Assembly, including the Office of the President. I would encourage Member States themselves, both inside and outside of the United Nations, to examine the priority that should be accorded to supporting the Office of the President.

The limited attention the work of the General Assembly attracts from the media, and limited public awareness of the work of the Assembly generally is a continuing concern. My Presidency has taken up advocacy for the General Assembly, and indeed for the United Nations, as a special undertaking. We have ensured, through the revitalization initiative, that a strategy has been devised by the Department of Public Information to publicize the Assembly's work.

We have also taken every opportunity to ourselves publicize the work of the Assembly, and indeed the United Nations, the world's premier multilateral organization. We have done so on official visits to Member States and through our participation in important international meetings such as UNCTAD XI held in Brazil in June of this year, and the Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting for the January 2005 International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Nassau in January 2004. We have done so in meetings of other intergovernmental organizations such as the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth, academic and other institutions, parliamentary forums and in the helpful relationship we developed with civil society, including Non-Governmental Organizations and the business and private sector.

My Presidency made a determined effort to involve the largest number of Member States in the work of the Fifty-eighth Session. Let me here recognize the Permanent Representatives who graciously accepted my invitation to act as Facilitators over a broad range of issues. Our initiatives on revitalization of the General Assembly, reform of the Security Council, humanitarian affairs, the forthcoming 2005 High-Level Plenary, HIV/AIDS, Children and the conferring of United Nations Observer Status, were all facilitated. I thank the Facilitators, on your behalf and on my own behalf, for their cooperation with the Presidency and the Assembly, and for the exceptional service they rendered.

Let me also take this opportunity to thank Under-Secretary-General Chen and in particular the team in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management, led by Mrs Peggy Kelly, for the excellent cooperation we have received. This team has indeed been our partner in our endeavours to provide leadership and efficiently manage the General Assembly. I commend them for their exemplary efforts.

With the election of my successor, H.E. Mr. Jean Ping, Minister of State, Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and La Francophonie of the Gabonese Republic, the General Assembly has, for the third time, elected a President three months in advance of the session over which the President will preside. It has been a priority for my Presidency to ensure the smooth, seamless transition between Presidencies that the General Assembly envisaged. President-elect Ping and I have met for an exchange of views on the Presidency. My Cabinet has extensively briefed the incoming Cabinet. Together with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Management, we have prepared briefing documents that include the specific responsibilities that

would fall to the President of the Fifty-ninth session by virtue of mandates emanating from the General Assembly. Over the transition period, we have been available to assist.

As I prepare to bring this Fifty-eighth Session of the General Assembly to a close, I am mindful that the accomplishments of the Assembly are not measured by the successes of one session. Keeping in step with the ideals of the United Nations Charter requires continuous efforts. I am heartened that I leave a General Assembly with a more positive outlook - our accomplishments over the course of the Fifty-eighth Session prove what we can achieve when we work together, cooperatively, with a clear sense of purpose underpinned by political will.

I thank you, the Member States of this Assembly for the confidence you placed in me. I thank you for your cooperation and kindness. I commend you for your efforts and for the noteworthy gains this Assembly has made. Most of all, I thank you for your efforts on behalf of the world's people. And now, having brought the ship to safe harbour, I hand over to the new captain.

I thank you.