



The
Bahamas

**SIXTY-FIRST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

GENERAL DEBATE

**STATEMENT
BY**

**THE HONOURABLE FREDERICK A. MITCHELL, M.P.
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK**

26 SEPTEMBER 2006

Please check against delivery

Madam President,

I congratulate you on assuming the Presidency of this sixty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. I also commend your predecessor Jan Eliasson of Sweden for his outstanding performance as President of the preceding Session of the General Assembly.

I acknowledge and pay tribute to the Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his many years of dedication to the United Nations. The Government and people of The Bahamas are profoundly grateful to Secretary-General Annan for all that he has done for the United Nations. I look forward to welcoming him one day in The Bahamas so that I might thank him personally.

I also congratulate and welcome Montenegro as the 192nd Member State of the UN and convey the best wishes of my Government and people for its prosperity and welfare.

Madam President

The Bahamas stands for democracy, the rule of law and the right of self determination. In this very body, before the Committee of 24 on Decolonization, our national leaders made the case for the independence of our country. We were able to achieve that in 1973, and ever since then successive administrations have voiced The Bahamas' support of the same principles. I do so again today. In doing so, I remind this body that The Bahamas and the region of which it is a part are shining examples to all the world of all of those principles. Within the next year the Bahamian people will have again the opportunity to choose their government in a general election based on universal adult suffrage. There have been within the past year in our region similar general elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Guyana. The Bahamas does not support the use of the military in government or to overthrow legitimately elected governments. Wherever this occurs it must be deplored and there must be a return to constitutional democratic rule within the shortest possible time.

In our foreign policy, The Bahamas believes in peace with all nations. We seek to avoid ideological battles. Ours is a policy that avoids extremism while at the same time letting our voice be heard for the dispossessed. We have the right to be here, to speak for ourselves and for those who cannot speak. Our people have fought for their voice to be heard and they will be heard.

Madam President,

My delegation welcomes the attempt by the Security Council to increase the transparency of the selection process in that body for the post of Secretary General by apprising the President of the General Assembly of its proposed actions on this matter and on the results of the straw polls. We would take this opportunity to assure this body that whoever succeeds to the post will have our support and cooperation.

Madam President,

It was just over a year ago that we adopted the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document that has served as the roadmap for the reform efforts over the past twelve months. The Bahamas, like other Member States of this organization, is pleased that a number of reforms have been implemented. In this regard we note the Peace Building Commission and the Human Rights Council. With regard to the Human Rights Council, we hope that it will evolve as an entity dedicated to a process of constructive dialogue and cooperation in which all countries may participate on an equal footing.

Madam President,

The Bahamas renews its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and in particular our commitment to universal education, fighting HIV/Aids, equality for women and

cutting poverty in half by 2015. The country's international, award-winning Urban Renewal Initiative has been begun to address in particular the issue of poverty in The Bahamas. The further reform of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) should lead to its being empowered to **implement** the internationally agreed development goals and commitments toward the eradication of poverty, hunger and all other ills that continue to plague humanity.

Madam President,

I turn now to the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the issue of regional global security. We renew our commitments in this area. However, as we have done for the past four years we take the opportunity to further define our security interests as not being limited to the strategies defined by a narrow view of counter terrorism. We believe that counter terrorism strategies should be informed by a much broader definition, namely as ensuring the stability of our societies as we fight the vulnerabilities to drug traffickers, natural and environmental disasters, poverty, and our challenges with education and health care. In particular we call upon the developed economies in our region and further afield to remember their moral and legal obligations to stop the assault on our societies of small arms, to cooperate in stopping the flow of drugs through our region, and to work together with us in declaring the Caribbean Sea and its environs a nuclear free zone. There must be a strategic alliance between developed economies and those in our region to ensure that these security vulnerabilities are minimized if not eliminated.

Madam President,

The Bahamas is greatly heartened by the fact that Member States have agreed on the text of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which is to be adopted by this General Assembly in the months ahead. This landmark Convention recognizes the importance for persons with disabilities of their individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices, and it acknowledges that these persons should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, particularly those of direct concern to them. This is an important step in empowering not only persons with disabilities, but also the neighbourhoods, communities, societies and countries in which they live. For too long persons with disabilities have been marginalized in many settings depriving them of their rights as citizens and depriving society of the many contributions they could make in the exercise of their full and unimpeded participation. The Bahamas plans legislation to further empower the disabled during the current session of Parliament.

Madam President,

It has often been said that reform is a process and not an event. We continue to support reform of the Security Council so that it might more accurately reflect the interests and balance of power in the realities of the 21st century including allowing small island developing states (SIDS), to play a greater role in its activities. It is our hope that this 61st Session of the General Assembly will see significant movement in the reform of the Security Council.

Madam President,

Any reform would mean very little, however, if it does not ultimately translate into the well-being of the people of this planet. In this vein, The Bahamas will do its part towards the implementation of the global partnership for development and the translation of this partnership into not only effective international, multilateral economic, trading, financial and environmental governance systems and mechanisms, but into the proliferation of healthy, productive households and communities that contribute to increased global welfare and security. We take this opportunity to recall our concern about coercive measures by developed states that adversely affect the trade in services in the Bahamian economy and in our region. We iterate our call for leveling the playing

field and for a global forum to address how the issue of a level playing field can be translated into international public policy.

Madam President,

The Bahamas welcomed and participated in the recent High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. At that time, The Bahamas outlined the many positive impacts that international migration has made on its economy and cultural development. The Bahamas however also noted the many challenges the country has experienced over the past sixty years in managing migration, including with respect to the prevention of irregular or unauthorized migration in particular. For The Bahamas, irregular or unauthorized migration has given rise to considerable challenges in the social and educational sectors, as well as to serious national security issues. In this regard, The Bahamas pledged to work, with our partners, toward the establishment of a better way to match the supply with the demand for migration in a safe, legal, humane and orderly way, to maximize the societal and human development potential of global labour mobility, with the involvement of public and private sector stakeholders.

Madam President,

The Bahamas is committed to sustainable development. To a small-island developing State, there are few things more important than securing the necessary assistance in order to build resilience against the many hazards that afflict the country on a consistent basis, including the violent storms that pass through our region even more frequently as a result of global warming. In this connection, we look to our partners to take further action to reduce green house gases, and call on those countries that have not yet done so to sign the Kyoto Protocol. It is also imperative that we all commit ourselves to the development of alternative sources of energy, to make us less dependent on the current polluting technologies that supply our energy needs but threaten our sustainability.

Madam President,

The Bahamas would like to take this opportunity to, once again, congratulate the people of one of our regional partners, Haiti, on the election and installation of its democratically elected Government. It is imperative that the international community do all it possibly can to see Haiti through to the establishment of stability, security, and sustained and sustainable development within its national borders.

As I have stated on previous occasions, The Bahamas which sits some 90 miles over the seas to the north of Haiti has a special interest in its stability and prosperity. Instability in Haiti can cause instability in The Bahamas. A significant portion of the population in The Bahamas is either Haitian or of Haitian descent. A migration crisis resulting from the instability in Haiti will have an immediate effect on The Bahamas, one that would be difficult for our country to endure, and one that we believe with the will of the Haitian community and the support of the world community can and should be avoided.

The Bahamas has always made known its support for the people of Haiti and their aspirations for peace, security and development. We have and continue to take seriously our commitment to assist the people of Haiti in taking charge of their destiny and placing their country on the path to enduring democracy and development. The Bahamas believes that it is imperative therefore that the promised international financial assistance to Haiti is delivered in a timely and efficient manner.

Madam President,

I would also like to take this opportunity to signal the Government's support for the upcoming CARICOM initiative to encourage the United Nations to mark and commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in 2007. Slavery and the concomitant slave trade together stand as one of the most heinous violations of human rights in recorded history. As the global sentinel for human rights, it is incumbent upon the UN to highlight the 200th anniversary of the cessation of this crime against humanity with a special event in 2007. We hope that this initiative will receive the wide and enthusiastic support of this General Assembly and indeed of the wider UN community.

This commemoration will present an ideal opportunity to pay tribute to peoples of African descent, across the entire spectrum of the Diaspora, who share a common heritage and, having survived the middle passage, have gone on to form the bedrock on which the prosperity of many developed countries has been built. For its part, The Bahamas plans to undertake a number of commemorative events including a Festival of Arts which will run from March, 2007 to January, 2008. A different country or region of Africa will be showcased each month during the Festival as a means of exposing Bahamians to the rich culture of Africa through theatre, art, music and dance.

Madam President,

One of the other challenges that we will face during this session is reaching agreement on the scale of assessments for the apportionment of expenses of the United Nations for the next triennium. We look forward to engaging with other Member States to achieve a scale of assessments that is truly based on the principal of "*capacity to pay*", and that is transparent, equitable and stable.

Madam President,

The Bahamas continues to believe that the UN Charter constitutes a viable and firm foundation on which the Organization can balance and achieve its objectives to maintain international peace and security and to promote economic and social progress. I wish to reaffirm The Bahamas' commitment to the principles enshrined in that universal document, as well as to the ongoing process of reform, which seeks to more effectively translate these principles into real peace, security and sustainable development for all of the world's inhabitants. While dramatic progress may sometimes evade us, we must not be swayed from our course and we must remain confident that our activities and efforts will benefit future generations. Now more than ever we need the United Nations.

Thank you, Madam President.