



Antigua and Barbuda

PRIME MINISTER
THE HONOURABLE BALDWIN SPENCER

ADDRESS

2005 WORLD SUMMIT
High Level Plenary Meeting

60TH SESSION OF THE UN
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Co-Presidents of the High Level Plenary Meeting;
Heads of State;
Fellow Heads of Government;
Secretary-General;
Ministers;
Distinguished Delegates;
Special Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Exactly four years ago this past Sunday the 9/11 terrorist attack on America united the world in horror and in compassion.

Today this 60th Session of the United Nations General Assembly is taking place in a nation again traumatised.

This time, by a catastrophe of a character and magnitude that no one in this historic gathering could have contemplated; even with vivid recollections of the tumbling of the Twin Towers.

Our hearts go out to those unfortunate Americans and citizens of other countries who lost everything, including loved ones, in the devastation that hurricane Katrina has wrought.

Antigua and Barbuda shares their sorrow and extends heartfelt sympathy to them.

Fortunately for Katrina's surviving victims, a "Silver Lining" has broken through the dark clouds of the Gulf Coast disaster.

Sadly, the underprivileged in poor countries have no hope for any "silver lining" to brighten their permanently bleak existence.

Adversity is the dominant feature of their existence and their expectations.

There could be a "silver lining" for that global underclass.

This would happen if the riveting television images of the ongoing agony of Katrina's victims could ignite among all nations, and among all peoples, the recognition that we all share the duty to be our brothers' keepers.

It would be to the immeasurable good of humankind if members of this family of nations assembled for this World Summit could embrace this shared responsibility.

It should also underline the imperative for comprehensive United Nations reform that would make this organisation more responsive - and more timely in responding - to the vulnerabilities of, and pervasive threats to the poor in its smaller, developing member States.

Should we fail to respond in this fashion, we would condemn ourselves to history's verdict that when called upon, we would all be guilty of failing humanity.

That is a charge that we must not permit history to levy against us.

We, of the Caribbean Community, have long been renowned for our overwhelming humanity.

Antigua and Barbuda is a small, twin-island, nation of approximately 85,000 people.

An estimated thirty-five percent of our population is immigrant.

The vast majority of our non-native population is from sister Caribbean countries, to whom we opened our borders when they faced economic distress and natural disasters.

Though Antigua and Barbuda's resources are limited, as long as adversity causes our Caribbean brothers and sisters to seek survival and opportunity in our land, we are unlikely to change our open door policy.

In consequence of this, social and economic development is increasingly challenging for a developing nation shouldering a debt burden out of all proportion to our economic capacities.

We recognise, nonetheless, that we live in a global and interdependent world, in which no State can stand alone.

We contribute, beyond our capacity, to collective responses to transnational threats such as narco-trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering and terrorism.

We suffer from convulsions in global trade. The current crippling impact of continually rising energy costs on our fragile economies is a current case in point.

Venezuela's offer of stable fuel supplies on concessionary terms through the PetroCaribe initiative is therefore a timely - and welcome - intervention for member countries of the Caribbean Community.

These and other issues highlight the need for the expansion of the partnership between developed and developing countries.

Meeting the agreed Official Development Assistance target of 0.7% of GNP, including within the context of the Mauritius Strategy, must be addressed if small states are to devise strategic infra-structural strategies for sustainable development and competitiveness.

Antigua and Barbuda, like other members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, has limited options for trade in a globalised world.

We lack the factors required for a viable manufacturing base.

Our economies, and the welfare of our people, are largely dependent on services.

Our principal economic options are tourism and financial services, and in the case of Antigua and Barbuda, Internet Gaming.

It is thus not difficult to grasp Antigua and Barbuda's compelling need to seek WTO intervention in the dispute with the United States of America regarding Internet Gaming.

Internet Gaming is one of the limited available options through which Antigua and Barbuda, as a small developing State, can bridge the digital divide and use Information and Communications Technology as an instrument of economic development.

Rendering Antigua and Barbuda poorer by unlawfully denying market access to Internet gaming will not make the United States richer.

Forgiving the disproportionate debt that continues to cripple developing economies will not make creditor countries poor.

Deporting hardened convicted felons to vulnerable Caribbean societies will not make America, or any OECD country, safer.

Enabling developing nations to access vitally needed pharmaceuticals at rates reasonably close to the cost of production will not put transnational drug companies out of business.

Though we are without economic muscle, member countries of CARICOM merit consideration for our many contributions to the ideals of the United Nations.

We cannot be faulted for the level of our contribution to peace and collective security, and human rights and the rule of law, in the Americas.

Last October, just seven months after our election to our first term of office, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda enacted an unprecedented trilogy of integrity legislation, comprising Integrity in Public Life Act, a Prevention of Corruption Act, and a Freedom of Information Act.

My Government introduced this package of integrity legislation without any demand from any source other than my Administration's manifest commitment to transparency and accountability as components of good governance.

We are convinced that transparency, accountability and integrity in government are fundamental to economic and social development.

Without prompt solutions to the debt obligations of small and vulnerable economies, the targeted eradication of poverty will remain an elusive Millennium Development Goal.

Fundamental to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals is a determination among stronger nations of the world to strengthen the weaker.

A reformed UN system must therefore devise special mechanisms to reduce the debt burdens of low and middle-income countries.

An area of immediate potential for small States would be assistance from the international community in capacity building in information and communications technology.

Antigua and Barbuda has identified this sector as a key driver of human development.

As small-island developing countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, Antigua and Barbuda and our immediate neighbouring islands face the challenges of very limited land space, fragile eco-systems, and vulnerability to natural disasters and the effects of climate change.

Compounding these challenges is our heavy dependence on the natural environment to support our tourism industry - the lifeblood of the economies of our nations.

Threats to our natural environment are therefore threats to our very existence.

We contribute the least to the causes of climate change, yet we suffer the most from its effects.

The devastation wrought by the increased intensity of hurricanes can and has set back our development efforts by decades.

As we continue to invest in development of our human capital, HIV/AIDS continues to eat away at those investments.

Our small populations, the openness of our borders, and the high cost of drugs and health-care technologies compound the problem.

We need the cooperation of our international partners to gain access to health care resources.

A reformed UN system must be empowered with the necessary financial and technical resources to assist its member States in the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS, the distribution of anti-retroviral drugs and the necessary resources for prevention programmes.

In recognition of the major role of trade in promoting economic growth, employment and development for all, a reformed United Nations system must champion a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system.

It should not take catastrophes of epic proportions to shock the world into recognition that, as this Summit asserts, we live in a global and interdependent world, in which no State can stand wholly alone.

The United Nations plays a crucial role in international peace and security. Its reform is unavoidable in order to meet today's global challenges.

Antigua and Barbuda fully believes that in order to respond to global threats and challenges, United Nations reform must be multi-faceted. It must be achieved through a process of democratic deliberations designed to achieve a consensus.

Reforms must take into consideration the goals of developing countries which make up 2/3 of its membership.

It is my country's hope that the 60th Session of the General Assembly will achieve reform through unity and in the long-term interest of the membership of the United Nations.

I trust that these reflections will remind all nations in whose names this World Summit was convened that among these United Nations, the obligation falls to bigger brother-states to be their smaller brothers' keepers.

Thank you, Excellencies, Heads, and other Distinguished Delegates, for your gracious and generous attention.