



Honourable Laisenia Qarase

Prime Minister of the Republic of the Fiji Islands

STATEMENT

DURING THE

HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING

OF THE 60th SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

New York

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Distinguished Co-Presidents and Delegates,

My country offers its congratulations to the Presidency of the Special Plenary and extends its compliments both to them and the distinguished Secretary-General of the United Nations.

May I, on behalf of the Government and people of the Fiji Islands, extend to the President and people of the United States, our sincere sympathies for the widespread devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Our prayers and condolences are with those who lost their loved ones and their homes.

Mr. President,

I commend His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan for his incisive report, covering many aspects of UN and international affairs, including the Millennium Development Goals.

They contain much that will take us further along the difficult road to development, freedom and peace on earth.

Fiji congratulates the Secretary-General for the initiative he has taken to begin the implementation plans to reform and strengthen the United Nations in its various responsibilities.

What is now required, if we are to complete the journey, is an effort of our collective will. It requires sacrifices and compromises, and a renewed commitment of support both to the United Nations and to each other.

If this can be accomplished, we can achieve the UN's mission for humankind.

Let us ensure then, that from here the UN goes forward in a spirit of renewal and reform that generates real hope, purpose and prosperity for the family of the world.

We must all help to create a United Nations organisation that is more efficient and accountable. It must function always with integrity and urgent concern for the needs of the member States. Above all, we must help the UN to concentrate, as never before, on reducing the shameful gap between developed and developing countries.

Fiji reaffirms its commitment to what the UN stands for. As always, we are for peace; that is why we have sent so many of our soldiers and police officers to serve with the UN's peacekeeping and peacebuilding forces. Many precious lives have been lost, but we have accepted this ultimate sacrifice as our contribution to the global effort for peace and security.

Mr. President,

There should be no pause in UN endeavours to establish and maintain international peace, security and stability. This remains the UN's primary role and we support all measures to strengthen this.

Fiji acclaims the proposal for a Peacebuilding Commission. We will gladly share with such a Commission our own experience of reconstructing our country, since the civil unrest which almost tore the country apart in 2000.

With God's help, we quickly restored our economy and began the task of bringing our diverse communities together. The ongoing challenge for our country is to strengthen the foundation for unity and harmony.

While adopting many measures and initiatives to create a culture of peace, we have attached the utmost importance to reconciliation and forgiveness. Now, we seek to take this forward, by introducing, through legislation, the concept of restorative justice.

Mr. President,

Fiji is fully dedicated to a Security Council membership which reflects current geopolitical realities. We support the inclusion of India and Japan to join with the United States and China as permanent representatives from the Pacific and Asia region.

We look forward to the moment when peace finally reigns in the Middle East, and we commend all those countries who are helping with this global cause.

For our Pacific Ocean region, it is our fervent hope that the Korean people, as a whole, will find lasting harmony.

On the future of Taiwan, Fiji recognizes that this is a domestic issue, and encourages and supports resolution through dialogue and mutual agreement.

Mr President, this age of globalisation is marked by the adoption of universal principles governing such matters as democracy, human rights and trade and development.

Today, I reaffirm here that Fiji accepts these precepts; there is no question about that.

But we also say that countries like ours, undergoing profound transition, should not be held to unrealistic standards. We need time to evolve, to adapt and adhere. Do not judge us by what might be inappropriate at our stage of development. Measure us by the progress we are making towards the universal ideals and the level of our commitment to change.

Fiji fully respects the principle of equality of human rights. We endorse the proposal for a Human Rights Council, directly accountable to the General Assembly.

For our country, it is vitally important, as a factor for long-term stability, that we always maintain a careful balance between the rights of individuals and communities. The special interests of the indigenous people, including their right of ownership to their natural resources, must also be protected.

We, therefore, strongly endorse the intention to bring to this Assembly a final draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

This has particular relevance for a multi-cultural country like ours.

Mr. President, we are pursuing many policies to raise the quality of life of our citizens, in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals.

For Fiji and other small vulnerable States, there is one overriding issue that is so critically vital for our economic survival, and that is market access and remunerative prices for our exports.

What do the Millennium Goals mean if developing countries cannot get access to markets and a fair return on their exports?

There must be real recognition of the economic disparities and unequal conditions which make a mockery of the very idea of free trade.

The removal of certainty of access through the termination of quotas and the reduction in assured commodity prices, without accompanying financial assistance and trade support measures, pose a serious threat to our economic growth and sustainability.

Unrealistic and inequitable world trade policies simply make it much harder for our countries to eliminate poverty.

I, therefore, commend those developed States which are prepared to support developing nations to assist developing nations in cushioning the impact of WTO compliance.

I pay particular tribute to the European Union for its willingness to provide this type of assistance to its developing partners in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. We call on our EU partners to provide adequate long-term support as it begins to reduce preferential process for ACP sugar.

I also express appreciation to our close neighbours Australia and New Zealand for their support in helping us get better access to their markets and in their important areas of development.

Fellow delegates, the Millennium Development Goals can be met. But only if the UN commits itself to trade reforms which also reflect a realistic appreciation of the plight of all developing countries, including vulnerable island nations.

May we find the strength and conviction to do what is right.

Thank you.

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