



The Honourable Justin L. Simon QC
Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs
Antigua and Barbuda

**ADDRESS TO THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

On the occasion of the
General Debate
of the 61st Session
United Nations General Assembly

27 September, 2006
United Nations
New York

Please check against delivery.

Madam President

Distinguished Heads

Excellencies

Antigua and Barbuda joins the other members of the United Nations in congratulating Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Kalifa on being elected President of the 61st Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Madam President, we wish you success in all your efforts and assure you of our full co-operation.

I would also wish to thank and congratulate your predecessor Mr. Jan Eliasson for his profound leadership of the 60th regular session of the General Assembly.

I wish also to convey the appreciation of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda to Mr. Kofi Annan for his many years of service to the United Nations and for his overall dedication to the pursuit of world peace and development. Every year brings new and unique challenges which add to the burdens of the office of the Secretary General, and this past year has been no exception. In bidding Mr. Annan farewell, on behalf of the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda, I pay tribute to his indomitable courage over the past ten years, and say to him: success is never final and failure is never fatal; it is courage that counts, and you Sir, have risen to the challenge when it counted most.

Madam President,

Among the many accomplishments of the Twentieth Century was the establishment of the United Nations. And among the accomplishments of the United Nations in its 60 years of existence is its advocacy of decolonization by peaceful means; its advancement of the concept of sovereignty as a natural right of all nations and all peoples; and the awareness it has brought to the international community that in this era of globalization the majority of humanity are afflicted not by inter-state wars, but by the ravages of poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, and human rights violations.

We are aware of the awesome task of implementing the reform measures for this organization. We are however encouraged by the significant achievements made since the adoption of the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit. We are pleased that some progress has been made in areas such as the establishment of the Human Rights Council, the Central Emergency Fund, the launching of the Peace Building Commission, and agreement on a counter terrorism strategy.

Respectfully, Antigua and Barbuda joins this community of nations in underscoring the importance of social and economic development, basic human rights and their importance to the maintenance of international peace and security, mutual respect, and lasting goodwill among nations.

Madam President,

Slavery is today perhaps the most under-recognized crime against humanity in spite of its vicious displacement and brutal treatment of an entire race. Next year, 2007, marks the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic triangular slave trade. The fourteen (14) member countries of the Caribbean Community, whose people are principally of African slave descent, are committed to bringing this anniversary to the attention of the world, and we look forward to your unanimous support in the United Nations General Assembly of our forthcoming resolution, and your joining us in the appropriate recognition of this event which foreshadowed the abolition of slavery.

Madam President,

In a few weeks, on November 1st, Antigua and Barbuda will celebrate twenty five (25) years of political independence. As we take stock of our challenges and experiences in nation-building and our actions in attempting to achieve and maintain a decent standard of living for our people, our progress report is one mixed with successes and failures punctuated with hope and frustration. Madam President, the reality is that we are a politically independent, small-island nation with limited resources, existing in an economically interdependent yet fiercely competitive world.

Our challenges are many, but, emerging from a colonial dominated past, we are indeed proud of our history as an independent democratic state where people of whatever race creed or political affiliation are free to express and exercise all basic and fundamental human rights, which are inherent features of the United Nations legal framework. However, for a politically independent nation like ours to survive in this economically interdependent world, this requires effective multilateralism and the forging of real international partnerships. In other words, our future depends on our ability to work well with each other within a spirit of understanding and respect, given our diverse cultures and economies.

Madam President,

Antigua and Barbuda is acutely aware of the importance of partnerships and of the necessity of working within a multilateral framework to meet the challenges we face as a young developing nation. This brings me to the importance of the United Nations in its role as a melting pot of ideas for constructive and positive action. Madam President, the UN's development agenda is an ambitious, noble, worthy, and necessary one. Were we to accomplish the goals we have set within the specified timeframes, it would be a testament to the greatness of humanity. My government and people therefore support any process of reform of the United Nations that will enhance the level of representation in all its principal organs, increase its effectiveness, and improve its legitimacy. It should be more democratic in its representation, more reflective of modern-day geopolitical realities, and more timely and effective in delivering on the outcomes of its many international conferences, summits, and agreements, including, of course, the Millennium Declaration.

Madam President,

We are wholeheartedly in agreement with those who believe that multilateralism should not be subverted and that the UN's framework for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts should not be undermined or replaced by unilateralist tendencies.

Additionally, in our efforts to revamp and revitalize the various development organs of the United Nations we should pay particular attention to the vulnerability of states. Madam President, when the entire GDP of a country can be wiped out by a single common-place natural disaster, that country's economy is most definitely vulnerable. When the economic mainstay of a country can be cut off by activities and events that occur in another country many many miles away, that country is indeed vulnerable. When a country's economic activity can be effectively stymied by the failure or refusal of another country to abide by international rules, accepted norms, and arbitral determinations, that country's economic prospects are certainly vulnerable. For small island states like us, such vulnerability is our greatest insecurity.

Over the years Antigua and Barbuda has joined the rest of the world in mourning immeasurable losses from natural disasters – be it monsoon flooding, sub-Saharan drought, or Asian tsunamis. Our Caribbean sub-region is particularly susceptible to the annual ravages of a hurricane season from June (which the popular ditty says is “too soon”) to October (when it may be “all over”). My country's government feels that a review of existing international disaster relief funds and an increase in the amount of financial resources made available, are necessary for the elimination of this sad state of economic vulnerability of so many nations.

Madam President, with regards to international peace and security, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda does not believe that war benefits any country – not the warrior, not the vanquished, not the passive onlooker. As leaders of nations, international peace is the greatest gift we can give to our peoples and to our children. Hence, a world where friendly diplomatic relations and dispute-solving discussions between countries are promoted, is a world in which our children and grandchildren will inherit a legacy worth cherishing. Our present day values and our hope for a better tomorrow have been reason enough for my country's compliance with a significant number of UN-mandated anti-terrorism treaties. Terrorism breathes insecurity and places a severe financial burden even on countries and communities far removed from the actual terrorist act. We join others in encouraging the members of the United Nations to continue to deal comprehensively with the threat of terrorism by all means necessary, including the promotion of and respect for religious, cultural and ethnic tolerance. We must of necessity be more responsible when we speak as influential world leaders. With the growth and development of technology, all the world's a stage that William Shakespeare never foresaw. It therefore behooves us all to constantly and continuously mind our exits and our entrances and the many parts that we play on the global stage.

Madam President,

Today we join a list of countries who have, time and again in these hallowed halls, repeated the clarion call for greater action by the international community to realize the laudable objectives and full intentions of the United Nations Charter in the areas of meaningful development financing, and the concept of fair trade. Secretary-General Kofi Annan is politically correct when he said a few days ago from this very podium: "global partnership for development is still more a phase than a fact – especially in the all important area of trade". Too often we take corrective steps at home on the domestic level, to create, in the jargon of the UN, "an enabling environment". Yet we see little or no real and tangible results because developed countries do not deliver on their commitments but continue, in spite of their rhetoric, to support or continue systematic imbalances in the international trading system.

Madam President, Antigua and Barbuda in spite of its limited resources and its highly vulnerable economy has embarked upon a strategy of economic diversification guided by the rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization. Yet, even as we play by the rules, the unfair trading practices of some of our international partners threaten to diminish the modest economic gains that we have made in recent times. Madam President, we need to ask ourselves: Are we really serious about raising standards in the developing world? Are we serious about sustainable development?

Madam President, rest assure that in spite of the continuing rhetoric, we in Antigua and Barbuda will continue our efforts to achieve a high standard of living and improved economic and social wellbeing for our 80,000 people. We will continue to partner with our sister countries within the OECS and CARICOM sub-regional groupings. We will continue our advocacy for good environmental stewardship and the advancement of the fundamentals of sustainable development at home, in our region, and beyond. In addition, we will continue to insist on nationally-owned development strategies as we seek deeper North-South AND South-South co-operation for more meaningful, tangible, and lasting development.

I thank you, Madam President.