



STATEMENT BY

H.E DR. W. BALDWIN SPENCER

PRIME MINISTER & MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

IN THE

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SIXTY-SIXTH SESSION

OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,
Secretary-General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me at the outset commend you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election as President of the 66th session of General Assembly of our United Nations.

To you, my friend, I hereby pledge my delegation's full support for your efforts to successfully move forward the agenda of this session.

I also wish to commend your predecessor, Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the 65th session of the General Assembly for his stewardship.

And I would be somewhat remiss if I did not commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his leadership of our treasured organization. Mr. Secretary-General, I am pleased to lend my voice to those of other Heads of State and Government who have commended you on your reappointment for a second five-year term, beginning 1 January 2012, and to wish you every success in your bold quest to develop an organization that is both effective and efficient and can bring about meaningful change in the complex world in which we live.

Mr. President,

Your choice of the theme for this general debate, namely, "the role of mediation in the settlement of disputes by peaceful means" could not have been more timely or appropriate.

Mediation is one of the bedrocks on which this organization was founded. While it is true that mediation should not be the only tool available to the international community to mitigate conflicts, there is nevertheless a growing interest in and the provision of mediation, and its use as a promising and cost-effective tool in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution.

In addition we, as a community of nations, have repeatedly recognized the useful role that mediation can play in preventing disputes from escalating into conflicts and conflicts from escalating further, as well as in advancing the resolution of conflicts and thus preventing and/or reducing human suffering and creating conditions conducive to lasting peace and sustainable development, and in this regard, recognizing that peace and development are mutually reinforcing.

My fellow delegates,

In the General Debate of the 65th session, I, as well as others, called for lasting peace in the Middle East; I also issued a call for implementation of the “two-state solution” which would have Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security. Both these notions are not new. Sadly, none is anywhere close to realization. Given the current state of affairs, it should come as no surprise to anyone that the Palestinian people would seek a different option: full membership in our organization or, failing that, a vote by the General Assembly that would elevate the status of Palestine from a nonvoting “observer entity” to “observer state,” a status equal to that of the Holy See.

As we have said in previous debates, we remain fully supportive of the aspirations of the Palestinian people and for the idea of a two-state solution, which would allow the Palestinian people the right to govern themselves, and reach their potential, in a sovereign and contiguous state. It is against this backdrop that we decided to join with others who have already done so and grant recognition to the State of Palestine.

As we did then and we do now, we believe that recognition of the State of Palestine will contribute to the quest for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the creation of lasting peace and stability in the region, and ultimately result in a viable Palestine, and a secure Israel, based on the 1967 lines, with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders exist for both sides.

Excellencies,

Many of today’s conflicts are fueled by the illegal trade in small arms and light weapons. These small weapons of mass destruction have wrought devastating impact on the countries of our region over the last decade, and have been directly implicated in the associated rise in crime and violence, involving the use of firearms. Needless to say, these weapons have had a significant adverse impact on the socio-economic and human development and security of our countries.

In the 2007 UNODC and World Bank reports our region was identified as having higher murder rates than any other region in the world, and that small arms and light weapons are used in the commission of more than 70% of those murders.

This dubious designation we never sought and it is neither welcome nor desired.

This is why, Mr. President, at our most recent Summit in July 2011, my fellow CARICOM Heads adopted a Declaration on Small Arms and Light Weapons in which, *inter alia*, we agreed to “to accord the highest national and regional priority to matters related to combating and eradicating the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and their ammunition” and to “intensify and sustain engagement in the United Nations effort for the conclusion of a legally binding Arms Trade Treaty.”

I call on all member States of our organization to join our region in this worthy endeavour.

Distinguished delegates,

The very existence of many developing countries as viable States is at stake. The world financial and economic crisis continues to threaten debt sustainability in our countries through its impact on the real economy and the increase in borrowings we had to undertake in order to mitigate the negative impacts of the crisis.

The recent gyrations in the major stock markets of the world do not inspire hope for lasting global economic recovery anytime soon. Now more than ever, we need a new sovereign debt restructuring and debt resolution mechanism that takes into account the multiple dimensions of debt sustainability, if we are to overcome the current crisis.

This seemingly unending economic crisis has affected our countries, not only in economic terms, but also through the presence of barriers to trade as well as the finance embedded in some of the anti-crisis measures adopted by some developed countries, and, more importantly, on our social development, which in turn has led and continues to lead to major loss of jobs and difficulties in financing social programmes that address poverty or the provision of basic amenities, and which threaten our efforts to attain the internationally-agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mr. President,

While my country has made good progress with the United States on our online gaming dispute, we urge the United States to remain committed to reaching a mutually-agreed outcome that will bring value to our economy and is implementable by the United States.

With so much at stake, we will soldier on in our quest to seek market access openings in key sectors and other innovative incentives that could include, but not limited to, financial and technical support,

forensics, equipment, and training, for dealing with drug trafficking and for the creation of decent jobs for the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mine is not the only country in the Caribbean that has experienced trade-related difficulties with the United States. A far more pernicious economic, commercial and financial blockade which has been imposed by the United States of America against Cuba, and although the overwhelming majority of the membership of the United Nations has repeatedly called for the lifting of this blockade, it continues unabated.

Mr. President,

Since its inception, the blockade has inflicted untold economic damage to the Cuban people, caused shortages and needless suffering to the Cuban population, limited and restrained the development of the country and seriously damaged the Cuban economy. Through this all, the Cuban people have managed to preserve their sovereignty, independence and right to self-determination.

As a country committed to the norms of the multilateral trading system, to the freedom of trade and navigation, and one that rejects the extraterritorial application of another country's national law, we call on the United States to immediately and unconditionally lift its economic blockade against the people of Cuba.

Mr. President,

On September 20, almost eleven years to the day since the landmark World Health Assembly endorsed the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable diseases to reduce the toll of premature deaths due to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the General Assembly adopted a political declaration that, among other things, calls for the launch of a global NCD campaign.

While there is much to be lauded in the declaration, we are nevertheless disappointed that some of our original expectations, including a clear goal for the launching of the global NCD campaign, with a corresponding road-map, may not have been fully developed. We believe that, if rigorously implemented, however the declaration will contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

Let it be known that we will do our utmost to ensure that the momentum generated at the meeting is not lost.

My fellow delegates,

Two days ago, we held a one day high-level meeting to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the internationally-recognized blueprint for action to fight racism that was adopted by consensus at the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance ,held in Durban, South Africa. To this day, the Declaration remains an innovative and action-oriented agenda to combat all forms of racism and racial discrimination.

This 10th anniversary is a chance to strengthen political commitment in fighting racism and racial discrimination. It is also an opportune time to revisit the issue of reparations for slavery, which is central to any discussions about racism, colonialism, and poverty.

Antigua and Barbuda has long argued that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and racial violence against peoples of African descent have severely impaired our advancement as nations, communities and individuals across the economical, social and political spectra. In seeking redress for the injustices suffered by African slaves and their descendants, today's Caribbean and African peoples, would advance immeasurably, the process of genuine healing.

Those who choose to differ have argued that, unlike victims of the Holocaust or those who have been interred during wars and have subsequently received remunerations, neither the victims nor the perpetrators of slavery are alive today, and it is unfair to hold the descendants of slave-owners responsible for the actions of their ancestors.

On this we strongly disagree. However, none should disagree that racism and other legacies of slavery continue to shape the lives of people of African descent; thus reparations must be directed toward *repairing* the damage inflicted by slavery and racism.

This is why, Mr. President, we call on former slave States to begin the reconciliation process by issuing formal apologies for the crimes committed by the nations or their citizens over the 400 years of the African slave trade. And to help counter the lingering damage inflicted on generations of peoples of African descent by generations of slave-trading and colonialism, we call on those very States to back up

their apologies with new commitments to the economic development of the nations that have suffered from this human tragedy.

Mr. President,

The United Nations declared 2011 to be the “International Year for People of African Descent.” Throughout the year, nations and communities of the African Diaspora have undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at the realization of full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, participation and integration in all political, economic social and cultural aspects of society, the promotion of a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture, with pronounced emphasis on encouraging multilateralism and developmental approaches, as well as the creation of a global Afro-centric movement.

The time has come for peoples of the African Diaspora to begin helping themselves. A key part of this process is the first African Diaspora Summit, to be held in South Africa in mid 2012. The Summit and its preparatory process will provide a platform for the African Diaspora to put in place economic policies aimed at ensuring sustained economic cooperation among public and private stakeholders, so as to promote development, entrepreneurship and business opportunities in Diasporan regions.

My fellow delegates,

On 31 October 2011 our planet will reach a milestone of sorts: somewhere on the earth’s surface the planet’s seven billionth inhabitant will be born.

7 billion people!

If nothing else, this milestone will serve to reaffirm our determination as the international community to implement sound development policies and promote the inherent right and dignity of each person.

Coming amidst the preparation for the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, a world of 7 billion inhabitants reminds us of the critical need to pay attention to population dynamics, if we are to understand the needs of our people; proactively plan to avoid development pitfalls and develop forward looking policies that promote the health and dignity of every human being on earth, while at the same time safeguarding the planet we call our home.

Ladies and gentlemen,

By making the necessary investments to develop quality human capital with equally strong measures to promote gender equality with the active promotion of women and youth participation in all spheres of life, we will create the enabling conditions for transforming the economies of developing countries in order to eradicate poverty and achieve the internationally-agreed development goals. Policies responsive to the needs of our population not only contribute to dynamic, growing economies but are a prerequisite for addressing the huge challenges related to access to food, energy, water, sanitation, climate change, fast-paced urbanization and migration.

It is not enough to merely respond to anticipated challenges but to take innovative and proactive approaches to seize the opportunities presented by a world of 7 billion people.

Distinguished delegates,

As the countries of Latin American and Caribbean region reflect and respond to these global challenges, we have determined that our own destiny is interwoven and that as developing countries we must unite and coordinate our efforts in a systematic, structured and deliberative way.

We have done just that with the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CLAC).

Antigua and Barbuda fully endorses and supports the objectives and ideals of CLAC and wishes to acknowledge the efforts of countries such as Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Cuba and our sister CARICOM member States for bringing this organization into being.

Mr. President,

As we prepare for an important Summit in Caracas, Venezuela in December, we intend to lay the foundation for a dynamic, responsive and meaningful community of nations, who share a common history and who have a great deal in our coming together in this way to reshape the agenda, thereby creating a greater balance in the pursuit of happiness, prosperity, peace and democracy in our hemisphere.

Distinguished delegates,

Within my own sub-region, the eight small developing countries that make up the OECS have a common currency union, the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU). We have been adversely affected by the global financial and economic crisis and we are faced with a protracted recovery. The

impact of the global crisis was manifested in steep declines in our tourist arrivals and expenditures, direct foreign investment and remittances.

Our real GDP fell by 5.7 per cent in 2009, and is estimated to have declined by a further 2.2 per cent in 2010 influenced by declines in value added in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, wholesale and retail, transport and financial intermediation.

The crisis has also had a marked impact on our fiscal positions with an accompanying increase in public sector debt.

Despite these challenges, there is a positive side. Our countries have strong liberal democratic systems and the rule of law is upheld. We also have a stable currency which has been pegged to the US dollar at a rate of EC\$2.7 to US\$1 since 1976. This has been responsible for comparatively low inflation and confidence in the monetary system.

In response to the global and regional economic and financial crises, ECCU members have crafted a very strong response to these challenges. We have upgraded our current economic integration arrangements to an Economic Union status and a new treaty to that effect, the Treaty of Basseterre, establishing an OECS Economic Union, was ratified in January 2011.

We have put in place a number of institutional arrangements which have served us well in addressing the effects of the crisis over the past two years.

We have adopted an ECCU Eight Point Stabilisation and Growth Programme in 2009, aimed at stabilising and transforming the ECCU economies.

As part of the financial programming, we have set fiscal targets which have been approved by the Monetary Council and published. The targets are intended to move our countries on a path to achieving a debt to GDP ratio of 60% by 2020.

In addition, we are exploring various avenues. Given the limitation in funding that is accessible from regional and international financial institutions, the Monetary Council agreed to approach friendly countries for assistance on reasonable terms to address the situation. We urge our international partners to support the region in our endeavours to ensure growth and sustainability for our economies.

Mr. President,

My region remains deeply concerned that AIDS already had claimed 30 million lives and orphaned 16 million children since it was first discovered in 1981. Bold and decisive action to wipe out what

remained of an unprecedented global human tragedy despite significant progress in the past decade to combat the disease is needed.

We must redouble efforts to achieve by 2015 universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support, with a view to realizing the sixth Millennium Development Goal of halting the spread of HIV by the same year, including through programmes for HIV education, particularly among youth, expanded HIV testing and counselling, improved access to condoms and sterile injecting equipment, and stronger health-sector prevention intervention, particularly in remote areas.

My region remains committed to intensify national efforts to create enabling legal, social and policy frameworks to eliminate stigma, discrimination and violence related to HIV and to promote non-discriminatory access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

Mr. President,

As a small developing nation, we can easily identify with your call for enhancing South-South and triangular cooperation. This, after all, was perhaps your signature issue during your tenure as Chairman of the Committee on South-South Cooperation.

In addition to your main theme for this session, we also support your call to focus on UN reform and revitalization so as to ensure that our organization remains relevant, efficient and effective and is able to adapt to meeting the ever changing global challenges.

Your choice of improving disaster prevention and response also resonates with us. The increase in the frequency and intensity of natural and man-made disasters and the devastation wrought by them on vulnerable countries such as my own, leaves us with no choice but to develop ways to build our capacities so that we are better prepared to withstand these disasters.

Your fourth focal area of sustainable development and global prosperity is perhaps the one with the most scope for collective action. The Rio+20 conference in June 2012 will certainly provide a forum for the international community to, among other things, recommit to sustainable development, the eradication of poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals, by ensuring the balance between the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development, with the human being at the center of our efforts.

Mr. President,

We can no longer ask the question whether we can but we need to give an account of how exactly we will meet the enormous political, economic, humanitarian and environmental challenges our planet faces.

The global economic crisis continues to shake the pillars of our economic system: banks, businesses, governments, private sector and even our very own families.

Now more than ever we need a more efficient, effective and focused UN that is both transparent and accountable to help us address the extraordinary array of geopolitical and humanitarian challenges – famine in Somalia, the aftershocks of the Arab Spring, ongoing conflicts in some countries and difficult transitions in others - in addition to the deeper political, economic and environmental transformations that are re-shaping our world.”

Distinguished delegates,

In an increasingly uncertain world, the world’s people are looking to us here, in this great hall of the United Nations, for answers.

We are their best hope for building a safer, secure and just world.

We cannot afford to disappoint.

We know that rescuing the planet will require us to invest in people, particularly women and youth; it will require us to reemphasize prevention, both of conflicts and natural disasters; and it will require us to devote new efforts to assist nations in transition – from war to peace, autocracy to democracy, poverty to prosperity.

Let us show the people of the world that we are indeed up to these enormous tasks. Then, and only then, will we be able to say: “Yes, we did!”

I thank you.