



*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

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TO THE

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SIXTY-THIRD SESSION

OF THE

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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Mr. President,

It is with great pleasure that I associate the Barbados delegation with previous speakers who have congratulated you on your election to the Presidency of the Sixty-Third Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We are particularly proud to see a fellow member of the Latin American and Caribbean Group assume this high office, and I pledge to you, Mr. President, the full support of the Barbados delegation as you carry out your most important mandate. We wish also to commend your predecessor His Excellency Dr. Kerim for leading the Assembly over the past year through complex discussions on a range of global challenges.

I also extend the good wishes of the Barbados Government to our distinguished Secretary-General. We offer him our continued support as he leads the United Nations at this critical juncture in world affairs and seeks to identify for member states with differing interests and national priorities, meaningful pathways to progress.

Mr. President, on January 15th, 2008, the citizens of Barbados, in exercise of the democratic right which they hold sacred, voted in General Elections to bring into office the Government of the Democratic Labour Party which I have the honour to lead. It is a tribute to the good sense of the Barbadian people and the maturity of our democracy that in our country free and fair elections take place every five years, and that the transition to a new Administration is seamless, orderly and peaceful. That exemplary process affords me the opportunity to address you for the first time today as Prime Minister of Barbados. I am humbled by the confidence the Barbadian people have shown in me and conscious of the responsibility that now falls to my Government to respond to the overwhelming call for change that brought us to office.

Barbados is a stable, progressive small state whose high human development rating can be attributed to the emphasis successive generations have placed on the development of social capital. Our country is not endowed with abundant natural resources, and it is therefore our human resources which are our greatest asset. Within our well-developed social democratic system the new Barbados Government will place the greatest priority on policies which nurture the talents and enterprise of individuals, and which continue to assure our people universal access to quality education, health care, adequate housing and decent working conditions, all within an environment of respect for human rights and the rule of law. We are well aware that we are now called upon to do so in a time of unprecedented global economic and social volatility which is shaking the foundations of societies far larger and more powerful than our own. In these circumstances, my Government's immediate focus must be on policies that seek to address the high cost of living, which is driven largely by high energy and food prices, to reduce the levels of domestic and international debt, and to stabilize the national economy while keeping it competitive.

Barbadians are a resilient and resourceful people. We have weathered international storms before, and with strong and competent leadership we will do so again. In international affairs, Barbados cherishes the reputation it holds as a successful small state whose positions are based on principle, and whose actions reflect a profound respect for democratic values. In its engagement with the rest of the world, the Government which I have the honour to lead pledges to uphold and carry forward the proud traditions of the father of our independence and National Hero, the Right Excellent Errol Barrow. His address to this Assembly as we joined the ranks of sovereign states remains as relevant today as it was when it was first delivered some 42 years ago. His clear definition of the parameters of Barbados' foreign policy is the creed by which our Government and people continue to live. It is perhaps appropriate if I quote his words directly:

“...we will support genuine efforts at world peace, because our society is stable. We will strenuously assist in the uprooting of vestigial imperialism, because our institutions are free. We will press for the rapid economic growth of all under-developed countries, because we are busily engaged in building up our own...”

“... we have no quarrels to pursue and we particularly insist that we do not regard any Member State as our natural opponent. We shall not involve ourselves in sterile ideological wranglings because we are exponents not of the diplomacy of power, but of the diplomacy of peace and prosperity. We will not regard any great power as necessarily right in a given dispute unless we are convinced of this, yet at the same time we will not view the great powers with perennial suspicion merely on account of their size, their wealth or their nuclear potential. We will be friends of all, satellites of none.”

The position of the new Government of Barbados will be guided by this enduring philosophy. Because we are a small island, we will champion the issues of greatest concern to Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and argue for the need for special recognition of their inherent vulnerabilities, and for sensitive responses to the critical challenges, such as climate change and susceptibility to natural disasters, that constrain their sustainable development. Because a one-size-fits-all mentality threatens to further marginalize us in the new international trading arrangements, we will continue to show leadership, within the Small Vulnerable Economies Group, in the advocacy efforts to create a regime of special and differential treatment to cater to our unique circumstances.

Because we are a middle income developing country, deemed too successful to qualify for concessionary financing, but too high-risk for favourable terms on the capital markets we will join with like-minded colleagues to lobby for adequate support mechanisms to ensure that our development process is not derailed.

Because we are a Caribbean country we will partner with our fellow Caribbean states to protect our shared patrimony, the Caribbean Sea, from over-exploitation and environmental degradation, and to secure our borders from the threats of drug and arms trafficking, money laundering and terrorism. We are fervent advocates of the notion of the Caribbean as a zone of peace and we view with great concern any action, from whatever quarter, that seeks to reintroduce the anachronism of cold-war rivalry into our peaceful regional community of nations. And finally, because we are a responsible member of the international community, and we believe in the positive role that small states can play in advancing the cause of international peace and equitable economic and social development, we rededicate ourselves to the building of an international system that operates on the principle of multilateralism and that respects the sovereign equality of states and the tenets of genuine non-alignment.

Mr. President, whatever semantics are used, there is little doubt that we have entered an international economic crisis of grave proportions, which threatens to derail the progress of many states and to worsen the already desperate circumstances of the most vulnerable among us. The volatility of oil prices makes managing the economic affairs of our countries a daily challenge and the escalating cost of basic foods has had immense political and social consequences around the world. The signals could not be clearer. Investment in renewable sources of energy, such as wind, solar, geothermal and bio-fuels is imperative. National efforts will certainly not be sufficient and we will need to forge global partnerships with increased investment in research and development and meaningful incentives to reverse our excessive dependence on fossil fuels.

The issue of food security is now at the centre of our national and international policy agenda. The measures proposed by UN Agencies, and those agreed to at the Rome Conference must now find expression in specific programmes and projects. In addition to immediate humanitarian relief for the most affected countries, policies must be put in place urgently to boost production and productivity in agriculture and to correct distortions of the market that jeopardize the global supply of food. Crisis situations are often catalysts for creative national action. But the enormity of the current crisis means that for many developing countries national action will have limited impact unless accompanied by a supportive framework of international cooperation and the honouring by the donor community of past commitments for increased resources for development.

A successful outcome to the Doha Review Conference on Financing for Development must include a genuine global partnership to provide the required financial resources for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The availability of additional financial resources is not, however, the only requirement. Meaningful changes must also be made that will allow for greater voice, representation and effective participation of developing countries in international decision-making within the international financial institutions. The causes of the present global financial crisis are firmly rooted in the failure of the international community to reform an undemocratic and antiquated system of international economic governance that has not kept pace with the rapid growth of global interdependence.

Barbados believes that those responsible for the crisis, and who also created, controlled, and manipulated the global financial system for their own advantage, cannot now be trusted to heal it. Developing countries must demonstrate leadership in the search for a lasting solution to the global financial crisis and insist that any exercise to institute reforms must strictly adhere to the principles of openness, transparency and inclusiveness, with the United Nations taking the lead.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) must be empowered to play a more meaningful role in global economic decision-making consistent with the mandate entrusted to it by the UN Charter. Even with the recent strengthening of the Council, its current responsibilities fall short of the role envisaged for it by the founders of this Organization. As a member of the Council, Barbados is ready to work with other Member States to end the marginalization of the ECOSOC from the global economic policy-setting and decision-making processes.

The ECOSOC is by no means the only principal organ in the United Nations which is in urgent need of reform. The Security Council as it exists is not representative of the current realities and dynamics of international politics and must be reformed to reflect the situation today. We join those who have called for the start of inter-governmental negotiations on Security Council Reform during the 63rd Session.

Mr. President, as the Prime Minister of a small island developing state, in a region at the epicenter of the global climate crisis, it is my hope that the current international efforts within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to respond to the scientific evidence on climate change, prioritizes the concerns and needs of these vulnerable developing countries already being affected by the dangerous impacts of climate change. Failure to take urgent, ambitious and decisive action would be nothing short of reckless indifference.

In the wake of the destruction and devastation of the 2008 hurricane season, we in the Caribbean are acutely aware of the precarious nature of our very survival, as well as the urgency attached to action to mitigate the causes of climate change.

At Copenhagen in 2009 we must deliver an agreement that is comprehensive, ambitious and inclusive, which adopts a package of mitigation-related activities that will ensure that long-term temperature increases are stabilized well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and also provides SIDS and other vulnerable developing countries with new, additional, predictable and easily accessible sources of funding for adaptation. Time is not on our side.

During this 63rd session, the Assembly will consider a resolution entitled "Towards the sustainable development of the Caribbean Sea for present and future generations" which will again seek to gain international support for the Initiative of the Member States of the Association of Caribbean States to have the Caribbean Sea recognized as a Special Area within the context of sustainable development. Since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 61/197 some two years ago, the Member States of the Association of Caribbean States have made significant strides at developing the institutional and legal framework for Caribbean Sea governance, and collaborated with various civil society stakeholders on measures to ensure sustainable management and conservation of our most precious natural resource. We look forward to continued assistance from the international community in helping us to achieve the objectives of this Initiative.

Mr. President, the Barbados Government looks forward to maintaining the excellent relations that we have enjoyed over these many years with the United Nations. We pledge to continue to uphold the principles of its Charter and will do everything to assist in maintaining an international system and community in which all nations can make their own contribution to the betterment of mankind.

I thank you.