



Address by

His Excellency Mr. Donald R. Ramotar
President of the Republic of Guyana

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

My delegation and I warmly congratulate you on your election to the high office of President of the General Assembly. I salute you as a distinguished son of our Caribbean Community and I pledge Guyana's unwavering support towards the successful execution of your important duties.

Allow me to pay tribute to your predecessor, His Excellency Vuk Jeremic, for his valuable service to the Organisation.

I take this opportunity to renew our appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, for his leadership and dedication to the United Nations.

Mr. President, I also take this opportunity to express solidarity and deepest condolences to the Government and people of Kenya on the recent terrorist attacks which resulted in the loss of lives and great pain to the people of that nation.

Mr President, barely eight hundred days remain for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the launch of a post – 2015 development agenda. It is appropriate, therefore, that you have invited this Assembly to focus its attention on the theme, "*The post – 2015 Development Agenda: setting the stage.*"

A review of our experience to date will reveal that the world as a whole has witnessed substantial progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. However, prospects vary significantly within and across countries and regions and a large number of countries are likely to come short in achieving the goals.

Health and education challenges threaten the sustainability of hard earned socio economic gains. Today, still more than one billion people live in extreme poverty and one in eight persons on the planet suffer from chronic undernourishment, among them more than 200 million children. In addition, we still have fifty-seven million children who are out of school. This needs to be urgently corrected. We must also pay special attention to the quality of education in order to develop a generation of global citizens who are able to rise to the challenges of the future. To this end, Guyana supports the Secretary General's "Education First" initiative as an instrument for the development of meaningful solutions to the challenges regarding access and quality in education.

Mr. President, if we are to make this world a better place for everyone we must also address the issue of inequality. Income distribution continues to be skewed in favour of the rich nations and rich persons within countries. This gap has grown dangerously wider. Needless to say inequality leads to great discontentment and social unrest. At the heart of many of the conflicts we see today is the

widening gap between the haves and have nots. Sometimes this is not readily visible as the fight for social and economic justice is often clouded by inter-ethnic, inter-religious and other types of conflicts.

To defend the gains that have been made and to expand further, it is necessary for the United Nations to focus on narrowing the gap in income, access to social services, infrastructure, land distribution, and in other critical areas. If there is one lesson to be drawn from efforts to achieve the MDGs, it is that addressing inequality is crucial to the achievement of sustainable development objectives. The approach adumbrated in the UN Resolution for a New Global Human Order remains relevant in the struggle to eradicate poverty and inequality and indeed the post 2015 Agenda.

Mr. President, in setting the stage for a post-2015 development agenda, we must build on and expand the gains made. To do this end we must create an international environment that is conducive for the achievement of the goals that we will set for the future. Central to our efforts must be the focus on world peace. Peace and development are inseparable. Peace will only be realized if international law and the rights of nations and their sovereignty are always respected and upheld.

It is in this regard that I wish to view the situation in the Middle East. At the moment, Syria is at the centre of our collective concern. The war in that sister nation has taken thousands of innocent lives. It is an illusion to believe that military intervention will bring peace to that country. What is badly needed is a political dialogue between the Syrian parties. The international community also has an important role to play. We welcome the agreement between Russia and the United States which will facilitate the destruction of chemical weapons held in Syria. We call on all countries that possess such weapons to do the same. We hope too, that there would be a withdrawal of terrorist forces operating in Syria. After all, they cannot be terrorists when they were fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, but freedom fighters when fighting the Syrian Government. A terrorist is a terrorist.

In the same way, let me say that a blow was struck against democracy when a coup took place in Egypt. However, the major world powers, instead of condemning the use of such means to change governments, chose to remain silent. This gave tacit support to the coup which has led to the violation of human rights and may lead to more protests and possible violence.

Moreover, peace in the Middle East will not be realised until we have a just solution to the Palestinian tragedy. The Palestinian people have the right to their own country. We support them in their quest for the right to live in peace and in an independent, viable Palestinian state.

Mr. President, turning to our own region allow me to underscore that the blockade against our sister Caribbean country Cuba has caused serious damage to that country's economy and it continues to be a major obstacle to development. We join the call for a lifting of the blockade and the removal of the burden that it places on the Cuban people.

Mr. President, the adoption in April of this year of the landmark Arms Trade Treaty opens the door to effective regulation of the international trade in conventional arms. For us in the Caribbean, the Treaty bears relevance not only to the safety and security of our citizens and to the fight against transnational crime but in an important way to our overall pursuit of sustainable development. The funnelling of guns into our societies is a menace that must be curbed in order to preserve our youth and our future. As one of the first countries to ratify the Treaty, Guyana urges all states to work to assure its early entry into force.

While peace is vital for development, let me hasten to add that socio-economic progress, coupled with democracy, is crucial to the preservation of peace. Central to these principles is our people. They remain the most important factor for development. That is why my own country has been investing increasingly in our people's development.

An examination of our national budget would reveal that some 30 per cent of our expenditure goes to the social sector. As a result, we have managed to achieve several of the MDGs well before the time envisaged.

We have achieved universal primary education and are close to achieving universal secondary education. We have also slashed poverty by more than half. Moreover, according to the FAO we are one of the few countries in the world that has not only reduced poverty by more than half but also improved nutrition.

Excellencies, the eradication of poverty and the promotion of sustainable development must become a key principle and objective of global economic governance and a guide-post for the actions of international financial and trade institutions.

Mr. President, while I speak of these achievements, it will be remiss of me if I do not point out the grave challenges that confront us, even as we seek to build on the foundation already laid.

We, in the Caribbean, have experienced major setbacks due to the international economic and financial crises which started in North America and Europe. While it appears that the latter two regions are emerging from the crises, in the Caribbean, the effects are still devastating.

Even as we continue to grapple with the effect of the financial crises, we are now faced with the "graduation and differentiation" imposed by some of our international partners. We are told that as middle income countries - measured by GDP per capita - we are no longer entitled to concessionary financing. This is a recipe for reversing the gains made over years of hard work and sacrifice. We call for a rethink of this position and urge that greater consideration be given to the special vulnerabilities of our region, where a country can see one hurricane wiping out its entire GDP. Clearly, what we need is increased cooperation with the international community and our development partners and not less.

Mr. President, another serious challenge to sustainable development is the impact of climate change. This is even more so for the Small Island Developing States represented in this Assembly, some of whom face an imminent passage to oblivion. Climate change is not of our making but sadly as Small Island Developing States and low lying states we remain the victims of its most adverse impacts. Unfortunately, Mr. President, instead of a reduction, emission of greenhouse gases has risen by nearly 50 percent. This marked failure to take decisive action poses a threat to all humanity. It is tragic that while we all know the dangers that lurk due to global warming and climate change, we seem incapable of stopping ourselves. This is no doubt due to the unstoppable drive to accumulate for accumulation sake and sheer self-interest on the part of some countries.

We welcome the observance of 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States and call on the international community to use the occasion to take a serious approach to meaningfully assist SIDS, particularly in relation to building resilience and disaster risk management. To this end a special fund must be established and must be easily accessible.

Mr. President, in setting the agenda for the post-2015 Development Agenda, we believe that we should continue the pursuit of eradicating poverty. The United Nations must not allow this objective to be lost among the many other demands that exist.

The United Nations also has a role in ensuring that poorer, smaller, developing countries are not always put at a disadvantage at the level of international economic discourse and action.

It is critical that this body pursues and encourages multilateral approaches to international and global problems. Experience has shown that even though the multilateral approach is often slow, it is the only approach that can lead to lasting peace, democracy and justice in our world.

I thank you.