



# General Assembly

Sixty-second session

**10**<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting

Friday, 28 September 2007, 9 a.m.

New York

*Official Records*

*President:* Mr. Kerim . . . . . (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

*The meeting was called to order at 9.10 a.m.*

## Address by Mr. Emile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Lebanese Republic.

*Mr. Emile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Mr. Emile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Lahoud:** Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President on your election as President of General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I wish you every success. I would also like to offer my gratitude to your predecessor, Sheikha Haya Al-Khalifa for the outstanding job she has performed as the first Arab woman to ever preside over this austere body. Finally, I would like to thank His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for all his efforts on behalf of world peace and security.

A year ago, I spoke from this podium about Israel's brutalities against my country and its atrocious 33-day war. I had hoped then that those tragic events that we had bitterly lived and suffered through in Lebanon would pave the way for activating the Middle East process based on the Arab Peace Initiative that was endorsed at the Beirut Arab Summit in 2002.

Regrettably, nothing thrives in our region more than violence and grudges, and nothing deafens more than the sound of war, while all calls to stimulate the peace process find no response. It is against that gloomy background and with a mix of anticipation and reservation that we await the results of the Middle East peace conference that is to be held in the near future. In that respect, I would like to reaffirm certain realities that cannot be ignored in any settlement, because I believe that unless we learn from our past mistakes, we will not be able to take full advantage of present opportunities.

First, for any settlement to the Middle East crisis to succeed, it must be lasting, just and global. Secondly, a viable solution must call for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions that pertain to the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories. Thirdly, paramount to all Arab rights is the right of return of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with resolution 194 (III) and the rejection of all calls for their resettlement in their temporary host countries.

The resettlement of the Palestinians is contrary to the expressed will of world legitimacy as embodied in the General Assembly. Moreover, and more specifically in Lebanon, it would dangerously alter the delicate balance of Lebanon's existence as a nation based on diversity and the coexistence of a large number of its sects, which have lived side by side in harmony and enjoyed mutual respect.

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In this regard, Lebanon fully rejects efforts to empty the Beirut Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 of its contents, namely by excluding the right of return for Palestinians. The Initiative, we believe, contains a realistic and global solution to the Middle East conflict, and its implementation could bring about stability and security for all parties.

A year ago, the Security Council adopted resolution 1701 (2006), which put an end to Israel's aggression against Lebanon. We were quick to abide by that resolution. Our armed forces have closely cooperated with the units of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, as stipulated in their mission statements and as recounted in the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006).

Today, as I stand here again to reiterate Lebanon's commitment to implementing that resolution, I wonder why we are still in the phase of the cessation of hostilities and have not yet moved into the ceasefire phase, as called for in the resolution. That matter remains suspect to many Lebanese, especially since Israel continues, up to this very moment, to violate our land, sea and skies. So far, there have been over 500 breaches since the adoption of the resolution. I call upon the world community to remain vigilant regarding any malicious intentions harboured by Israel against Lebanon, as that could lead to another conflagration in the region.

Despite the fact that the Lebanese recall with pain, agony and distress last year's destructive and hostile war against their country, they are proud of their national resistance and their army, who were able to jointly claim a historic victory over one of the world's strongest military arsenals, which had violated all international and ethical norms and wanted to terminate Lebanon's role as a nation characterized by coexistence among all its religious sects.

With regard to securing the full implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), we in Lebanon believe that that will only happen when our nation regains its occupied Sheba'a farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills and some northern parts of the village of Ghajar; when we secure the release of Lebanese prisoners held in Israeli jails; when Lebanon's legitimate rights to its water resources are restored; and when Lebanon is given maps of the landmines and the sites of cluster bombs.

In this regard, we welcome efforts made by the United Nations in terms of studying documents and

maps related to the Sheba'a farms, and we express our relief over the progress made so far in verifying their Lebanese identity. We look forward to practical measures that would end Israeli occupation and hand over those territories and water rights to Lebanon.

The United Nations has always shown Lebanon special concern, and such concern is clearly manifested in all United Nations resolutions on Lebanon. The Lebanese, who reiterate their commitment to the implementation of those resolutions, wish to see those resolutions implemented in a fair manner and on a real and constant basis. As you know by now, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which was established to try the assassins of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, had been a controversial issue with regard to the circumstances of its establishment. We referred to that in detail in our letters to the Secretary-General and asked that copies be handed over to all Security Council Member States and other copies be kept as reference documents at the United Nations.

We did this in the belief that international justice should be reinforced. Since the very first moment of the heinous crime of the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri, we have attempted to seek the whole truth, and I was probably the first to ask the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, to set up an impartial international investigation commission.

I believe the best way now to enable all to overcome the controversy caused by the international tribunal would be to hold an impartial, transparent and just hearing that seeks to determine the whole truth. Only then would the Lebanese be assured that the tribunal is just.

Lebanon is about to hold democratic presidential elections in which the Lebanese will make their choice in a free and responsible manner. Unfortunately, there have been attempts by international parties to intervene in Lebanon's domestic affairs in a way that contradicts international norms. Such interference could instigate hatred and increase tensions on the Lebanese scene, which might have negative repercussions not only on upcoming presidential elections but also on the safety of the Lebanese.

Lebanon welcomes all foreign assistance and pays tribute to those countries that have stood by it in the wake of last July's destructive Israeli war. Lebanon hopes, however, that any foreign assistance to Lebanon is made to all the Lebanese people, without any

discrimination, in order to stop possible divisions among them. Foreign aid to Lebanon should be made as a gesture of support to the restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty and the unity of the Lebanese people.

That is why we urge the international community, through its commitment to the Charter of the United Nations, to stop foreign intervention in the domestic affairs of Member States. Consecutive events in Lebanon have shown that the Lebanese are capable of making their own decisions and their own choices and can live side by side and interact peacefully within institutional framework established by their civic bodies and protected by their security institutions, namely their national army.

Since we are referring to the national army, we should highlight the heroic confrontations of the army with an extremely dangerous terrorist organization in the past three months, an organization equipped with updated weapons and believing in destructive objectives that targeted Lebanon and many other States in the region. The costly price paid by our national army in terms of human losses and injuries aimed at reinstating Lebanon's national goals of confronting and fighting terrorism. Lebanon has and will always be a nation that supports peace and justice and promotes democratic values. However, to enable Lebanon to confront and curb terrorism, real assistance should be given to its national army in order to accomplish its national and security goals.

In a world that witnesses the daily bloodshed known as "the conflict of civilizations", and in a world that is sharply and deeply divided between East and West, I find myself addressing the international community as a man of experience. From here, I urge the world community not to allow Lebanon to fall, because the falling apart of Lebanon would mean a collapse of moderation and a victory for those who favour the use of force. Lebanon remains a unique message to the world, a country where religions and cultures interact peacefully, so that we can live together, as noted by His Holiness the late Pope John Paul II.

As a citizen of Lebanon, a small country that has survived against all odds, I urge you not to retreat in the face of adversity and to support what is right and just. A last glimpse of a burning Middle East, where the flames devour the meek and the mighty, should

allow you to reflect upon the choices ahead, lest it become too late.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Lebanese Republic for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Emile Lahoud, President of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

#### **Address by Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

*Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Note:** I bring warm greetings of "iakwe" from the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, on whose behalf I have the honour to address the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

I wish to convey our congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election in the presidency of the Assembly at this session. I am confident that, under your able leadership, consensus on crucial issues will be achieved, benefiting the entire membership, particularly the often-forgotten remote small island States of the Pacific. My commendation also goes to your predecessor for her successful stewardship of the work of the Assembly at its sixty-first session.

Allow me to also congratulate you, Mr. Secretary-General, for your election as the eighth Secretary-General of this Organization. Steering the United Nations in today's interwoven world of complex trials and tribulations remains ever more challenging, and I wish to express my country's confidence in your stewardship and to commend you for your current efforts in taking a range of measures to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations.

For the past 62 years, we have come to this Assembly to express various issues and concerns dear to our heart, as they affect the daily lives of our citizens. Education, health and the environment are among the issues at the top of my country's priorities, but these issues are nothing if we, the community of nations, fail to attempt to avert the forthcoming ecological disaster.

My people are concerned with — or rather terrified by — with the issue of our very survival. Will we even exist 50 years from today? If we are to exist at all, we must put a stop to the rising tide of destruction unleashed by global warming. Our future — or perhaps, our absence of future — depends on the decisive actions of this Assembly. I find no pride in having coined the term “ecological refugee”. It is my deepest hope that no one, and certainly no one in the Marshall Islands, will have to bear that name.

Since my election more than seven years ago, educating the world about the threat my people face as a result of sea-level rise and global warming has been one of my Government's priorities. In addressing the issue of climate change, actions and real progress are needed. In saying this, I am proud to announce the new alliance that my Government established earlier this year with the local government of Martin Luther King Jr. County, in Washington State in the United States, aimed at confronting the threat posed by global warming.

The unwavering faith I have in this Organization is the reason why I am standing at this podium today on behalf of my people. On our shoulders, as leaders, lies the responsibility entrusted to us, to keep not only the peace to live in harmony and with dignity, but to preserve our environment to ensure the very survival of our children for generations to come.

I commend the Secretary-General for convening a high-level meeting on climate change this week. I am also hopeful that we, as leaders, will come up with the necessary agreements on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in December. While we are committed to playing our part, strong leadership is required by the major industrialized countries. We once again renew our support for the Framework Convention and the Kyoto Protocol, and we call upon all States that have not yet done so — in particular the major emitters — to ratify the Protocol without further delay. We also call upon

the international community to assist small island developing States in developing and implementing comprehensive adaptation strategies.

I remain hopeful that the international community can reach a consensus on moving forward the necessary agreements to achieve lasting peace, security and diplomatic solutions to the seemingly endless web of issues. We are so integrated and interconnected today that we all face equal challenges, be it in terrorism or the proliferation of nuclear weapons. I commend this Assembly for adopting last September the historic United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which will prevent the global scourge of terrorism. The Marshall Islands remains committed in the fight against terrorism, and we continue to take action at the national level and to cooperate at the regional and international levels to ensure that we combat terrorist threats with comprehensive and united action.

In the area of disarmament and non-proliferation, our collective efforts need to be invigorated to overcome stalemate. Nuclear weapons and the testing conducted on our islands in the past is a nightmare that continues to haunt my people. The 67 atmospheric weapons detonated on my island of Bikini Atoll from 1946 to 1958 continue to inflict pain and suffering on my people to this day. The Marshallese people were under the care of the United Nations Trusteeship Council when the United States nuclear testing programme was in progress. Once again, I call on the United Nations and its agencies and Member States who share similar experiences and have the expertise to assist us with the restoration of our radiation-contaminated environment to provide the needed assistance for my people's health-care needs that are linked to radiation exposure, and to support the Marshall Islands' Changed Circumstances Petition, which was submitted to the United States Congress in 2000.

I commend the work of the Assembly at its sixty-first session in adopting resolution 61/109, which requests the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation to continue its work, including its activities to increase knowledge about the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation from all sources, and requests the United Nations Environment Programme to continue to provide support for the work of the Committee and for the dissemination of its findings and to review and strengthen the Committee's

present funding. I am confident that my people will benefit from the Committee's work, noting that previous policy and resettlement decisions based on misleading scientific opinions have caused so much suffering among my people.

My people's survival and well-being also depend on our ocean resources. We are encouraged by international and regional agreements and treaties that aim to protect these scarce resources. However, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing continues to threaten our major source of livelihood. In protecting our ocean resources from exploitation, we continue to seek assistance from Member States with the expertise and capacity in conducting and enforcing conservation and management measures, as well as in the development of our domestic fisheries. I reiterate once again my support for a moratorium on bottom-trawling until there are clear indications on its negative effects on the ocean biodiversity.

The Micronesia Challenge — a commitment led by the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of the Marshall Islands — aims at conserving that biodiversity and our vulnerable ecosystem by effectively conserving at least 30 per cent of the near-shore marine and 20 per cent of the forest resources across Micronesia by 2020. The Micronesia Challenge is part of a much larger and growing commitment by island nations throughout the world to take the international lead in preserving primary ecosystems. I call on the international community to support the efforts that have been put in place and to develop and provide the resources for realistic financial plans in support of conservation and sustainable use of our natural resources.

Within the Pacific region, we continue to cooperate closely to ensure that effective regional actions are taken in our endeavour to combat our vulnerabilities in the economic, social and environmental areas, which are priority areas highlighted under the Pacific Plan and Kalibobo Roadmap, endorsed by Pacific leaders almost two years ago.

My Government has had the pleasure of hosting and actively engaging in several regional meetings held to that effect. The Eighth Pacific Islands Conference of Leaders, which I was honoured to chair in Washington; the Seventh Annual Micronesian President's Summit, held in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia, earlier

this month; the seventh Food and Agriculture Organization meeting of the South West Pacific Ministers for Agriculture, held in May; and the Micronesians in Island Conservation conference, held last June in Majuro — all these provided the opportunity for our leaders, development partners and non-governmental partners to meet with other leaders from the region to address the wide range of issues and challenges that continue to plague the Pacific.

In my view, the successful implementation of regional commitments international obligations can be achieved only with the support and commitment of member countries, regional and international organizations, development partners and a range of stakeholders.

In that regard, I wish to emphasize that the assistance of the international community, which has played a crucial role in enabling us to meet current and emerging challenges, is still very much needed. There is only so much that we can do as small island developing States; thus, now more than ever, I continue to call on the international community for considerable investments and comprehensive assistance, including the much-needed policy reorientation to address the interlinked issues of economic, social and environmental security.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands was founded on the ideals of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. We continue to observe and stand for those democratic values and the defence and promotion of human rights. The United Nation's noble ideals of good governance, democracy, multilateralism and respect for human dignity also serve as my guiding light in my capacity of high steward of my people.

However, while the United Nations continues to work with States in resolving disputes peacefully and in helping to create democratic societies, it still turns a blind eye to the 23 million people of Taiwan and silences their voices. The absence of Taiwan in the United Nations creates a gap in the global network for cooperation, goes against the ideals and concept of justice upheld by the United Nations and contravenes the principle of universality.

We reiterate our support for the reform and expansion of the Security Council and for a criteria-based approach under which potential members, such as Japan, must be well qualified, based on factors such as economic size, population, commitment to

democracy and human rights, financial contributions to the United Nations and contributions to United Nations peacekeeping efforts.

During the general debate of the sixtieth session, we noted in this historic Hall that the United Nations and its offices and agencies did not have a permanent presence in many of the small island developing States of the Pacific. In June 2006, it was announced that a coalition of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) would open a total of eight new offices in the Pacific island countries. We welcomed that historic accomplishment, the progress it marked towards harmonization within the United Nations and the assistance and support the new offices would provide in developing national capacity and meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

We, Member States that pay our dues, deploy peacekeepers, and discharge our responsibilities in the international community, deserve offices that give relevance to the United Nations and the implementation of its doctrines. The Marshall Islands is appreciative of the work currently under way for the establishment of a joint presence in our country by UNFPA, which will be the leading agency on behalf of UNDP and UNICEF. We, however, ask the General Assembly and the Secretariat to ensure that offices befitting the ideals and reputation of the United Nations are established in the other identified Pacific island countries.

In closing, I wish to reassure you, Mr. President, that the Marshall Islands remains committed to the implementation of the commitments made over the last decade, and we expect our partners to fulfil their commitments as well. The sustainable development of small island developing States, such as the Marshall Islands, can only be achieved through a genuine partnership within the international community. Only then can we realize the commonly shared goal of universal peace and prosperity.

My delegation looks forward to a productive session under your able leadership, Sir. Komol tata, and God bless.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Kessai Note, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

**Address by Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo,  
President of the Republic of the Philippines**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of the Philippines.

*Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

**President Macapagal-Arroyo:** Mr. President, congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly. Congratulations also to our Secretary-General, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon, who was such a good friend of the Philippines when he was Foreign Minister of the Republic of Korea. We embrace his vow to focus on strengthening the three pillars of the United Nations: development, security and human rights.

The United Nations is a pillar of development. It plays a major large role for the Philippines. Poverty alleviation is the most important part of our agenda and our vision of transforming the Philippines into a modernized nation in 20 years. We want to be actively engaged in local, regional and global affairs, because that is the future.

We believe in the power of the global trading system to alleviate poverty and modernize nations through market forces. That does not mean we believe that countries like the Philippines are ready to compete head-to-head today in every sector, but it does mean that we cannot afford to be afraid of globalization.

By being increasingly connected to the world, the Philippine economy has reached a new level of maturity and stability, with some of the strongest macroeconomic fundamentals in 20 years. Six years ago, no one thought we could get more revenue, cut down on tax cheats, strengthen the peso and move the stock market. No one thought we could bring our

budget into balance, which we did last month, or prepay our debts and raise employment, but we have.

We must both grow our economy and sustain our natural environment at the same time. We are developing and promoting our “Green Philippines” agenda. It emphasizes a sustainable economic model that brings together economic opportunity and concern for our environment.

At the Secretary-General’s High-level Event on Climate Change earlier this week, United Nations member nations focused on what the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol meetings in Bali to be held in December 2007 should do. The Clean Development Mechanism under the Kyoto Protocol has allowed developing countries such as the Philippines to voluntarily reduce their greenhouse gas emissions through private sector initiatives. But there is a need to expand the carbon market and to expand international cooperation and financial support to promote strategies to adapt to climate change.

Too many nations, both developed and developing, believe the environment must be sacrificed at the altar of growth. We believe otherwise. We believe that we have a unique opportunity to get it right from day one: to introduce new industries that are clean and profitable.

That includes a biofuels industry that helps our energy independence, creates jobs and keeps our nation clean for future generations. We are further developing our geothermal power, which is one of the two largest in the world.

We reiterate our commitment to the global trading system and, when that fails us, to strengthening the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and regional relations in order to bolster our economy.

The multilateral trading system, through the Doha Round, remains the best option to address poverty and improve standards of living around the world through an agreed set of international trade rules. The Doha Development Agenda was launched with an emphasis on creating a developmental dimension and integrating it into all elements of the negotiations. To make the Doha Round truly a development round, there must be a greater coherence of policies among international development institutions, such as the World Bank, the

International Monetary Fund, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Trade Organization, so that trade is mainstreamed in the development agenda and capacity-building can be focused on trade competitiveness.

As part of capacity-building, we call on the United Nations and our partners among developed nations to strengthen South-South cooperation, wherein developing nations with specific strengths can share with other developing nations in need of their strengths, funded by developed nations or multilaterals such as UNDP.

The developed nations were the prime movers of global trade when it suited them; now some countries are slowing things down. That is not right, nor is it good for our respective economies. But there has been a ray of hope, with the developed countries declaring that they are willing to maximize flexibilities in exchange for greater market access.

On the sidelines of the current session of the Assembly, we hope the contending countries can continue consulting to find the right formula of subsidy cuts and market access to break the Doha impasse.

But let us be clear: even as the Philippines works tirelessly to move the talks forward, we are not going to stand by and do nothing. For us, it is full speed ahead; preferably with Doha, but full speed nevertheless. We recognize that if the multilateral trading system is fragmented into trading blocs, it will result in a more complex set of trade rules. That could be incompatible with and detrimental to the interests of developing nations. In the meantime, while we are hoping for a successful conclusion to the Doha Round, we have to maximize the economic opportunities provided under bilateral and regional free trade agreements. That will complement efforts under the multilateral trading system.

At a time of uncertainty, when the Doha Round is faltering, ASEAN has taken a bold step forward by drafting its Charter. That is our first step to creating a permanent sense of community. We are working towards a single market with free movement of goods, ideas and skilled talent.

In APEC, the world’s largest economy, the United States, and the world’s fastest-growing economy, China, are active participants. We have a strong alliance with the United States, which remains our

largest trading partner and our strongest strategic ally. We have stood shoulder to shoulder for many generations. We expect to continue building on our mature relationship with the United States.

We have also forged a strong relationship with China. China's rise is a significant opportunity for the Philippines. Our overall relations are now more confident and comprehensive.

Relations are not just about trade. They are also about people, and this includes migration, a worldwide reality. We thank the Secretary-General for supporting the Philippine hosting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development next year, and we invite all Member States to participate.

Overseas Filipino workers are honoured by the Government and the people for their sacrifice and dedication to work, family and nation. We welcome their contribution, but we are working towards the day when Filipinos no longer need to go abroad for a job, the day that overseas work is just another career option. We believe that our ambitious economic reforms will increasingly keep our best and brightest right in the Philippines, closer to friends and families, helping to build our communities and provide the next generation of leadership.

The United Nations is a pillar of security and human rights. It remains the central pillar underpinning conflict resolution. Our country is among the largest, if not the largest, contributor of police officers to United Nations peacekeeping missions. The Philippines has peacekeepers, both military and police, in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire, Georgia, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, the Sudan and Timor-Leste. We will continue our participation to safeguard communities so that they may overcome conflict and regain the peace needed to pursue development.

Closer to home, I have personally advanced the process of peace in Muslim and Christian Mindanao to a new level of engagement, focusing on interfaith dialogue, economic development and mutual security. We have done so with the largest possible international involvement, including that of the United Nations. Peace in Mindanao is very much an issue of human rights, as is poverty alleviation, our number-one issue.

The Philippines is the most democratic country in our region. We have no tolerance for human rights violations at home or abroad. We support the effort to

revitalize and refocus the work of the United Nations in human rights. For that reason, the Philippines sought and won a seat on the Human Rights Council.

The attention of the international community has been drawn, with great reason and justification, to the current situation in Myanmar. This is the time for Myanmar to return to the path of democracy, to release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi — now — and to involve all the parties, including the National League for Democracy, in the democratization and constitutional processes.

In conclusion, the number of globe-sized issues we will face in the twenty-first century will require globe-sized cooperation. We must build bridges of peace and prosperity, and the place to start is in building a stronger United Nations.

*Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of the Philippines for the statement she has just made.

*Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

## **Agenda item 8 (continued)**

### **General debate**

#### **Address by Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa**

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa.

*Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

**Mr. Malielegaoi (Samoa):** Samoa would like to congratulate the President on his election as President of the General Assembly. We fully support the agenda that will guide our work during his tenure. In the same spirit, Samoa would like to extend its best wishes to



the new Secretary-General as he leads our Organization through new and uncharted waters during these difficult times.

The High-level Event on Climate Change held earlier this week underscored two fundamental truths, namely, that climate change is solvable — with the solution firmly in our hands — and that the United Nations continues to be an indispensable institution in our search for answers to the global challenges confronting humankind. From all accounts, the High-level Event was a considerable success; but success is measured not in the number of statements delivered, nor in the level of participation, but in the political will to translate undertakings into concrete results on the ground to usher in an effective and comprehensive post-Kyoto agreement. The time for rhetoric is over. We need to convert our good words into deeds.

Climate change, like many other global challenges, crosses borders uninvited. It has no respect for national sovereignty and does not discriminate between countries — whether rich or poor, large or small, resilient or vulnerable. Its dire consequences are real and everywhere for all to see, including those who would prefer to remain unconvinced. Climate change cannot be wished away. Even those countries that have been in denial to date must surely now accept the weight of scientific evidence and concede that climate change, facilitated largely through human-induced activities, poses one of the gravest threats to humankind and to the continuation of life in our world as we know it today.

Obviously, we have failed badly as custodians of the planet and its future. But apportioning blame for the present state of our environment is itself yet another human failing. It serves no useful purpose. Being judgmental will not restore our environment. Those who exploit the traditional divide between developed and developing countries, and ideological and political differences, do so conveniently to mask their unwillingness to be part of the solution to an impending catastrophe.

Climate change is a societal problem that requires a decisive response from the world community. It is a global challenge that should unite us. In division there is little we can do. But as a truly united world community there is a great deal that could be achieved to at least arrest, and even reverse, the threat of climate

change. A timely example of what can be achieved when the political commitment to cooperate is present is the Pacific Alliance for Sustainability, an innovative approach by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for expedited access to GEF resources by Pacific island countries to meet some of the adaptation and mitigation needs associated with climate change.

The United Nations remains our last best hope to provide the political will and the necessary commitment to turn the tide against climate change. Samoa calls upon those Member States of the Organization in a position of world leadership to lead the charge in finding and implementing solutions to the causes of climate change. As present custodians of our world's environment, we owe it to our children and to future generations to do what needs to be done quickly and decisively, before we run out of time. It is therefore imperative to complete a post-2012 climate change agreement that is effective, binding, capable of being swiftly implemented and universally owned and respected by the 192 Member States of the United Nations.

In the global work that needs to be done to address climate change, and indeed in any of the other weighty challenges facing our world, we of course look to nations in positions of leadership to lead by good example. In the all-important pillars of the United Nations — concerning economic development, human rights, peace and security — nations in leadership roles must as a matter of principle protect the interests of the weak and vulnerable. They should accord priority and give their full attention to finding solutions to issues of global concern.

In the same way that nations in leadership roles are called to account in doing the right thing for our world, so must all the Member States of the United Nations uphold their part of the bargain in the work that needs to be done. Without that cooperation from all Member States, reaching the objectives we all know should be achieved will continue to elude us. Solutions to liberate our world from the tyranny and futility of war, the social and economic inequalities that we are trapped in and the uncontrolled and wild spread of epidemic diseases have all been mapped out. They have been discussed, debated, negotiated and, in most cases, agreed to over the life of the Organization.

As with climate change, global long-term challenges that continue to remain unsolved should be

approached collectively and positively within the framework of the United Nations. An integrated approach is desirable, given the interconnectedness and the mutually reinforcing nature of the issues. That calls for visionary and far-sighted leaders, statesmen and stateswomen who are not deterred from making the right decisions.

That is much to ask for in a world of unequal resource endowments, size, status and strength — where national interests take precedence over the global good and where policies are selected, not because they are the right and correct thing to do, but because of their acceptability to the voting constituents, how much they cost and who pays the bill at the end of the day. But times are changing.

The world is one global family, and no country exists in isolation. Interdependence is the norm, and none is immune from the reaches of the global problems challenging our very existence. As history has shown, no one country, however powerful and willing, can remain aloof and be able to solve all those problems on its own. The United Nations therefore remains the best means to achieve multilateral cooperation in so many important areas. With unity of purpose and mind among the membership of the United Nations, we would have every reason to be optimistic about finding solutions to the problems that beset our world.

That is why Samoa supports the efforts to strengthen and reform the United Nations and its constituent parts to make them cost-effective and efficient when responding to the needs of stakeholders. Central to the reorganization is a revitalized General Assembly as the primary policy- and decision-making organ of the United Nations. It should also include a functioning Security Council, whose membership should be increased in both categories to mirror present day realities, including those with the capacity and the disposition to contribute to the Council's work and its legitimacy. Moreover, we encourage the efforts under way to streamline the work of the different United Nations agencies to eliminate wastage of resources and unnecessary duplication of time and effort.

In the Pacific region, the long-promised United Nations presence in island States where the Organization is not represented has yet to materialize. That is unfortunate, given the time that has passed and

the importance island leaders attach to the enhanced visibility of the United Nations to assist in forging partnerships and building capacity to help sustain the development efforts of island nations.

Samoa recently hosted the largest-ever South Pacific Games in the event's 43-year history. The fact that Samoa was able to successfully stage that largest of the Pacific regional events notwithstanding the paucity of its resources demonstrated the importance to small island developing States of working successfully with their development partners. In the particular case of the South Pacific Games, Samoa needed to demonstrate the importance of sports to the socio-economic development of our young people, both at the national and at the wider Pacific regional levels, in making submissions for assistance to its development partners.

The People's Republic of China was able to respond positively to the call to provide critical infrastructure to meet the requirements of the Games. Similarly, in other key sectors such as education and health, Samoa's other development partners have accepted our requests and agreed to work with us in our efforts to improve those vital areas.

The decision by the Economic and Social Council early this year to graduate Samoa from the status of least developed country is a clear reflection of the immense value to Samoa of the contribution of its development partners — including Australia, China, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand and a host of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Commonwealth, to name some.

As is well known, we argued strongly at the Economic and Social Council debate and at the General Assembly the case of the continued vulnerability of our small, isolated island economy, with all its attendant disadvantages, its lack of natural resources and its vulnerability to devastating natural disasters. None of those conditions and risks will disappear after Samoa graduates from the group of least developed countries. We therefore ask our development partners for their continued understanding and support of Samoa's development efforts in the future.

People trapped in the different troubled spots of the world will not be able to experience true peace

unless they are consulted and have a voice in any negotiated solution conducted in a spirit of genuine goodwill to find outcomes that create conditions for harmonious coexistence. Samoa therefore welcomes the recent attempt to resume the Middle East peace process and the new hope it rekindles that perhaps a durable solution may finally be achieved, where Palestinians live in a permanent and an independent State of their own alongside a secure and safe Israeli State.

The Sudan's agreement to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation is a courageous first step towards solving the humanitarian situation in Darfur and deserves full support. Hopefully, it will signal the end to the long and horrific suffering of innocent people caught in the midst of that tragic conflict.

Iraq's early gains through its democratically elected Government are being eroded daily by disruptive elements bent on derailing the process to return the country to normalcy. Ultimately, it is the Iraqi leadership that should promote and manage any national reconciliation process to guarantee its long-term sustainability. However, it is also clear that, with the wider international community now able to play a more active role in Iraq, their understanding and contributions will be critical in helping with the efforts to bring peace to Iraq.

I have on previous occasions from this rostrum expressed Samoa's unwavering support for the peacekeeping work of the United Nations. I again reaffirm that support, which is underpinned by my country's contribution and involvement in the United Nations peacekeeping missions in Timor-Leste, Liberia and the Sudan. Additionally, Samoa continues to be an integral part of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands under the umbrella of the Pacific Forum.

Terrorist acts committed the world over, under whatever pretext or purpose, are deplorable and morally unjustified. In its various forms and manifestations, terrorism is responsible for the permanent scars of horror and fear that have gripped international attention in recent years. Terrorism should therefore be condemned in the strongest way possible, to send out the clear and unequivocal message that it is neither accepted nor condoned and that perpetrators should not expect any sympathy for their actions.

Samoa strongly supports the anti-terrorism resolutions of the United Nations. We have put in place the relevant legislative framework and have implemented measures in line with intergovernmental efforts to combat international terrorism.

In concluding my statement, I wish to again emphasize the important role of nations in key positions of leadership in the achievement of the objectives of the Organization, whether in peacekeeping, the environment, poverty alleviation, the fight against terrorism or the many other challenges that threaten our world. They must lead by good example, make decisions and take action based on the well-founded conviction that what they do is morally and ethically correct for the ultimate benefit and greater good of the world. When nations with leadership roles and responsibilities are able to do that, they will find ready support from the rest of the Organization's membership.

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, Prime Minister of the Independent State of Samoa, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia**

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

*The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

**Mr. Badawi (Malaysia):** I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President on his election to preside over the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. Malaysia will work with him towards realizing the objectives of the Organization, particularly in efforts aimed at conferring more power on the General Assembly in managing the affairs of the United Nations.

The course of human history is marked by a few pivotal moments during which we had an opportunity to make either the correct or the wrong decision, which had an impact on the destinies of those who come after. We are now living in such a time. There are certain problems that touch all our lives without exception. The change in climate and the increasing discord between cultures and civilizations are two such problems. The first problem is now globally affecting the well-being of planet Earth, while the second is threatening to tear apart the fabric of peaceful relations between peoples and nations. Let me first say something about climate change.

We are now fully aware of the gravity and the immediacy of the situation. Natural disasters and other extremes in the weather are occurring now, often in parts of the world that never before experienced such calamities. The worst is yet to come. Indeed, the 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has made it clear that the scale and urgency of the challenge is greater than we had thought or feared.

In December of this year, Indonesia will be hosting on Bali the thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We must agree to launch the process for negotiations on a post-2012 agreement. Ongoing national and regional initiatives to deal with climate change must not compete with, and should instead complement, the negotiations under the United Nations framework. Malaysia will fully support Indonesia in order to ensure that the Bali Conference achieves the success that it deserves.

We need to achieve consensus on certain fundamental issues, even before the negotiations begin for a post-2012 agreement. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities must prevail. We must recognize the fact that the poorest countries of the world have the least capacity to adapt and should therefore be apportioned the least responsibility to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

A post-2012 agreement needs to build upon the architecture and other fundamentals of the Kyoto Protocol. For example, there should be absolute emission-reduction targets for developed countries, expanded mechanisms that facilitate contributions from developing countries and special provisions for the least developed countries and the small island developing States.

We know that climate change has implications not only for the environment but also for the global economy. That is an important additional reason why the principle of differentiated responsibilities must apply, so that developing countries can maintain their capacities for sustainable development. Of course, developing countries have their part to play in the management of climate change, but it must be commensurate with their abilities to perform.

On this subject, we must never forget the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where it all began. Caring for the environment and ensuring sustainable development were the themes of that global conference. The message of that Summit was that nothing less than a transformation of our attitude and behaviour will bring about the necessary changes. Those principles remain fully valid, and they should guide us as we begin the process of negotiations for the post-2012 agreement on climate change.

Let me now turn to the problem of the discord that is growing between Islam in general and the West as a whole. The main cause is the misperception in the West that Islam promotes exclusivity and encourages extremism. We must take action to generate greater understanding between the followers of different cultural and civilizational traditions. Malaysia fully supports the various efforts being made in that regard at the international level. We are confident that such dialogue will establish the truth that Islam is a religion that espouses universalism and not exclusivity, and tolerance rather than bigotry.

Malaysia is equally convinced that it is wrong to put the blame on religion as the cause of existing disputes between nations. All genuine religions advocate peace and harmony among peoples, as well as acceptance of others. That is certainly the case with Islam, which teaches its believers to practice tolerance, forgiveness, peace, fraternity and coexistence. The Koran, which is the foundation of the religion of Islam, is very explicit in recognizing the existence of religions other than Islam.

That religion is not the root cause of the world's troubles, as has been confirmed by the report of the High-level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations that was released on 13 November 2006. The report maintains that, although religion is often cynically exploited to stir passions, fuel suspicions and support alarmist claims that the world is facing a new war of

religions, the root of the matter is political, not religious. We should support various initiatives at the national and regional levels to promote the message and recommendations of the 2006 report.

Nevertheless, it is Malaysia's view that such national and regional initiatives must finally culminate in a truly universal dialogue based on the multilateral intergovernmental process. It is only such a process that can establish binding commitments. Indeed, the success of such a dialogue has now become an important condition for securing the wider goals of global peace, security and prosperity.

There is a tendency to blame history, but there is no evidence in history that points to religion as the cause of the current discord between cultures and civilizations. Religion is not the explanation for the existence of conflicts between Western and Muslim countries. The answer lies in more recent times: the repeated use of force by the powerful over the weak to secure strategic or territorial gains. The vestiges of those wars for control and domination persist today as the gnawing problems in Afghanistan, Lebanon, the Golan Heights and Iraq.

With regard to Iraq, we cannot deny the fact that many of the problems now confronting the people of Iraq emanate from foreign occupation of that great country. Iraqis should be given a full opportunity to determine their own future. For that purpose, Iraq needs a government of national unity. That can be accomplished through national reconciliation.

I place great emphasis on national unity, because it has been our experience in Malaysia that national unity is best achieved through the practice of power-sharing in a government in which ethnic groups of different religious faiths are represented. Our Government has succeeded in bringing peace and prosperity to the country for the past 50 years of Malaysia's independence. The international community has a clear responsibility to assist the people of Iraq to achieve peace and stability, so that the unity of Iraq as a nation is preserved, and the territorial integrity of Iraq as a State is not compromised.

With equal candour, I must also say that the problem of Palestine, which has been festering for 60 years without a solution being found, tops the list of grievances that the Islamic world holds against the West. We are all aware that there are fresh initiatives to bring Israel and Palestine, together with other States, to

high-level peace talks in the very near future. Although I take the position that any final settlement of the issue of Palestine must necessarily take place within the framework of the United Nations, let us support the peace talks and hope that they create momentum for a true meeting of minds.

In particular, we should urge the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to act courageously so as to meet the needs and expectations of their peoples, who have suffered long enough. Of course, real peace can only be achieved if the legitimate rights of peoples are recognized and protected during the negotiations. Palestine has been partitioned before. That should never happen again.

All of us must play the role of honest brokers, assisting the parties through a difficult negotiating process on the path towards true peace. Both sides to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must commit to reaching solutions through compromise. This opportunity must be seized. The onus of delivery is on all of us.

I believe that the single most important issue in the way of peace and fraternity between Islamic and Western countries is the unsettled problem of Palestine. I am equally certain that once the problem of Palestine is settled, there will be greater harmony between Western and Islamic countries, the inheritors of the world's two greatest religions and civilizations.

For their part, Muslims have a responsibility to present to the world the true face of Islam. It must be made clear that Islam is a religion that abhors conflicts, more so between Muslims. When disputes do arise, Islam enjoins forgiveness and reconciliation through *mushawarah*, which can be translated as engaging in dialogue and peaceful negotiation. Furthermore, the teachings of Islam put a very high premium on peace and development. Islam is definitely not an encumbrance to progress and prosperity. In my country, Malaysia, although Muslims constitute the large majority of the population, the Government has used the progressive teachings of Islam as the basis for good governance to deliver benefits to all sectors of our multi-ethnic and multireligious society without discrimination. We call this approach Islam Hadhari.

I have highlighted two major challenges that we now face in our time. I remain optimistic, however, that universal human fraternity and coexistence are attainable if, and when, critical political and strategic issues are resolved in tandem with the closing of the

gap of misunderstandings between cultures and civilizations. That effort requires our collective wisdom and courage to recognize the problems. The well-being of planet Earth and all the people who inhabit it are actually within our control. We must have the will to moderate our excesses and cater for the needs of future generations, using science and technology as our tools. The time for us to invest in our collective future is here and now.

I would be remiss if — Malaysia being a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) — I ignored the situation in Myanmar. ASEAN has done everything possible to encourage Myanmar towards reconciliation and democracy. Their failure to do so has brought upon them the current situation. Let me express my country's disapproval, along with that of other ASEAN countries, of the use of excessive force by the Government of Myanmar to put down justifiable civilian protests. Malaysia supports the efforts of the United Nations in sending Under-Secretary-General Ibrahim Gambari to Myanmar. We call upon the Government of Myanmar to give him its fullest cooperation to enable him to fulfil his mission on behalf of the international community. Let me also call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and for direct engagement between the leaders of Myanmar and various groups — in particular the National League for Democracy.

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Malaysia for the statement he has just made.

*The Honourable Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Prime Minister of Malaysia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Planning, Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Planning, Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

*The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Planning,*

*Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Planning, Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. Gonsalves** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): It is with a profound sense of anticipation that I welcome Mr. Kerim's assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. In accepting the presidency, he succinctly outlined an exciting *raison d'être* for a modern, active and engaged United Nations, namely, a focus on multilateral cooperation to combat the challenges of globalization, climate change, terrorism, immigration and sustainable development. I have every confidence that, under his enlightened presidency, the General Assembly will fashion positive, tangible and creative solutions to those global challenges.

Our recent history has taught us that triumphalist, imperialist unilateralism is a consistent cause, but an infrequent solution, to the problems confronting today's world. But it is at this moment, as the philosophy of unilateralist misadventure is in its death throes, that a modern, multilateral United Nations must seize the day, fill the vacuum and live up to the noble and immutable principles of its Charter. That modern and multilateral United Nations, under Mr. Kerim's presidency, should never sacrifice principle for an ignoble practicality, but should instead be suffused with a fairness that views the world through the eyes not of imperial tsars, indifferent diplomats or apathetic agencies — to whom suffering is but a television event easily erased with the flick of a remote-control button — but through the eyes of the vast majority of the world's citizens, who struggle daily for survival, who dodge bullets in their backyards, who coax a meagre living from parched and exhausted soils and who have been globalized to the brink of extinction. It is not idealistic or naive to assert that engaged, fair and genuinely concerned States working together can solve the seemingly intractable problems besetting our imperfect planet. Our problems are largely man-made; so too are the solutions.

The recent focus by the United Nations on the issue of climate change and global warming is a welcome development. It is the prayer of humankind that this belated momentum has not come too late to reverse the damage already inflicted on our planet. After all, we are short-term caretakers of the Earth, and it is our sacred duty to preserve it for future generations. This is a great cause of our time, and we must not be timid or doubtful in the face of any great cause.

I would like to remind the General Assembly that, 15 years ago, the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognized that global warming would have a special impact on small States, countries with low-lying coastal areas and countries with areas prone to natural disasters. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, the overwhelming majority of our hard-won infrastructural developments, by way of geographic necessity, lie mere inches above sea level and perilously close to the coastline. Through absolutely no fault of our own, the physical manifestations of our emerging post-colonial State can be obliterated by inexorably rising sea levels.

The Caribbean's vital banana industry, already buffeted by the winds of iniquitous globalization, has been repeatedly devastated in recent years by increasingly intense hurricanes, which have placed a hitherto dominant economic sector on veritable life support. In any event, the environmental damage caused in producing quality bananas for the European Community over the recent decades is ignored by those whose consumerist demands engender further environmental damage.

The solutions to the problem of climate change are multifaceted, but an indispensable component must be the adoption by the States parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change of the climate change Adaptation Fund for environmentally challenged African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and Pacific States. The Fund would put flesh on the skeletal commitments of the Convention on Climate Change, which compelled developed countries to provide additional financial resources to assist developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of global warming. The Fund should be a source both of disaster relief and of the technological and infrastructural support needed to adapt to climate change.

The developed States Members of the United Nations can no longer afford to view the increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters as individual events, capable of narrow prescriptive solutions and subject to the vagaries of donor fatigue. They must live up to their obligations, both legal and moral, to assist the developing world in dealing with challenges that were born in the smoke-belching factories and car-clogged highways of the polluters.

The quest for energy self-sufficiency and environmentally friendly energy consumption has led to a rush towards the production of ethanol in some countries. This, however, requires careful thought and sensible implementation. For example, the use of corn to produce ethanol is driving up the price worldwide of grain, beef, chicken and milk. The poor will suffer unless a prudently balanced approach is adopted. The United Nations has a vital role to play in that regard.

As a proud citizen of the Republic of Macedonia, the President is all too familiar with the terrors wrought by wars born of ethnic conflict. It is my earnest prayer that his personal experience will lend urgency to what has been the seemingly heartless neglect on the part of the United Nations, in practical terms, of the genocidal campaign being waged in Darfur. While recent developments — including the Security Council resolution 1769 (2007), authorizing the establishment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, and the recent appointments of Rodolphe Adada as the Joint African Union-United Nations Special Representative for Darfur and General Martin Luther Agwai as Force Commander — are somewhat encouraging, let us not delude ourselves: the force on the ground is still insufficient, its mandate is ambiguous and its emerging presence is years too late. For too long we have looked the other way. We in the United Nations have caused the world to wonder about the relative worth of a Sudanese or Rwandan life versus an Israeli, Chinese, American or European life. What is happening in Darfur is genocide. Let us call it what it is. The United Nations must remain committed to alleviating the suffering of the men, women and children of Darfur.

In the same vein, the Government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stand unequivocally with the people of Myanmar in their current struggle for democracy and life without tyranny.

The drama of war, the fight against global terrorism, insecurity and poverty, the struggle for reparation for the descendants of African slaves in the New World and the insidious impacts of climate change must continue to hold the collective attention of the General Assembly. But there are other eminently avoidable ills afflicting the developing world that also demand our focus. The Caribbean faces the worst epidemic of chronic non-communicable disease in the Americas. In 2004, the six leading causes of death in the Caribbean were heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, injuries and hypertensive disease — each of which claimed more lives in the region than HIV/AIDS.

That looming health crisis, although largely self-inflicted, has an obvious global component. Globalization has spawned a creeping cultural hegemony and homogeneity with a distinct mass-consumption bias. Our home-grown Caribbean culture and our Caribbean civilization are being challenged and undermined by a shallow consumer ethic driven by multinational corporations whose sole interest is to create a standardized population of global purchasers. The explosion in media and information technology, for all its obvious benefits, has been an all-too-willing handmaiden to that cultural invasion. The homogenized, vapid and consumerist culture of the multinationals' empire is exported worldwide, beamed directly to our computers, televisions, newspapers and cinema screens. It is devoid of context, yet rich in subtext. Its message, in a nutshell, is simple: our culture, our civilization, is better than yours. It is a subliminal message that too many of our people have unfortunately been accepting at a faster rate than the ability of our health care systems to adapt. Colonialist, imperialist, mindless and homogenizing globalization has wrought havoc. Its deleterious contemporary manifestations must be resolutely resisted.

The acceptance of a core of universal human values does not mean a submission to the consumerism of any empire. A quest by some to establish a global hegemony in everything will never be able to erase or subjugate the legitimacy of the particularity of civilizations, including our Caribbean civilization. In that context, the call for an alliance of civilizations has our support. It is likely to be more uplifting and enduring than a quest for dominance by one over the other.

The erosion of trade preferences at the multilateral level has brought with it new challenges to the small and vulnerable economies of the Caribbean, requiring Governments to engage in structural adjustments and fiscal calisthenics to keep our economies afloat. At the same time, the development deliverables that the Doha Round promised to our countries — which, like the Biblical manna, are urgently needed for our sustenance — have yet to materialize, owing to the floundering negotiations of that Round. Let us recall that the first and last of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) speak, respectively, to the eradication of poverty and to global partnership for development. But for small and vulnerable economies the attainment of those two goals will be significantly compromised if the multilateral trade rules and provisions are not sufficiently accommodating to the special needs of countries like ours.

Special and differential treatment for developing countries is vital to offset the potential losses that are occasioned by globalization and the liberalization of markets. That is why aid-for-trade and a mobilization of resources must be on the agenda of multilateral organizations, to be used as an instrument for economic growth and capacity-building in developing countries. The recent launch of the MDG call to action by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is an initiative that my Government supports, and it may well act as a much-needed spur to get us back on track to achieving the MDGs by the target date of 2015.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines yet again pleads with the United Nations to permit Taiwan to be accorded its rightful admission to the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Taiwan, a democratic and progressive country of 23 million people, remains a legitimate and vibrant political expression of the ancient and magnificent Chinese civilization. There is no adequate justification for the continued exclusion of Taiwan from participation in the numerous global exchanges in the United Nations and other international bodies. We urge Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to accept and deal with Taiwan's membership application in accordance with the Charter. Taiwan possesses all the attributes and qualifications for membership of the United Nations. Let it therefore be done. Furthermore, the United Nations must play its role in reducing tensions across the Taiwan Strait.



Aggressive conduct must be restrained in a context where Taiwan is committed to peace and a comprehensive political dialogue.

I shall conclude as the Assembly President began, by urging swift and effective multilateral action to tackle the challenges of the modern world. As the Cuban poet and national hero José Martí once said, “It is a sin not to do what one is capable of doing”. By that measure, the sins of omission and commission of the United Nations are manifold and manifest, despite its successes. Our collective multilateral and principled penance must be measured even more by our actions from this day onward. We must therefore now act together on each of the world’s enduring challenges. Each nation and each person has a vital role to play. An arrogance born of triumphalism that seeks to exclude so many who look askance at an imperial agenda must cease. The master poet from Martinique, Aimé Césaire, addresses this issue well in his famous *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*:

“No race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength ... There is room for everyone at the convocation of conquests ... We know now that the sun turns around our Earth, lighting the parcel designated by our will alone ... [and that] every star falls from sky to Earth at our omnipotent command”.

**The Acting President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Planning, Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for the statement he has just made.

*The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves, Prime Minister; Minister for Finance, Planning, Economic Development, Labour, Information, Grenadines and Legal Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius**

**The Acting President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius.

*The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The Acting President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. Ramgoolam (Mauritius):** May I, on behalf of my delegation, and in my own name, extend our sincere congratulations to Mr. Srgjan Kerim on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. I assure him of our fullest support and cooperation in the daunting tasks that lie ahead of us. His election is a personal tribute to his engagement and rich experience in international politics and diplomacy. Allow me also to convey our sincere appreciation and thanks to his predecessor, Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, for the effective and efficient manner in which she conducted the business of the sixty-first session. May I also take this opportunity to pledge my delegation’s support to the new Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, in his efforts and approach in charting out a vision for the Organization that will respond to the needs and aspirations of the twenty-first century.

International peace and security constitute the bedrock of the Organization. We have come a long way since 1945 in securing peace and security in many parts of the world. However, a lot remains to be accomplished in order to have a conflict-free world. We are seriously concerned about what is happening in the Middle East. Conflicts in some parts of Africa continue to be a major source of concern to us. The trail of violence and death continues to plague the Middle East. In order to give peace a chance and allow it to take root in those regions and manifest its positive effects in the day-to-day lives of citizens, we need to redouble our efforts and explore all possible avenues to achieve peace, stability and security, in the larger interests of the citizens of those countries.

The fragility of the Middle East situation, and in particular the question of Palestine, needs a holistic approach that, inter alia, includes linkages embedded in the socio-cultural, political, economic and security issues of the region. I should also once again like to reiterate our full support for the establishment of an

independent and sovereign Palestinian State side by side with the State of Israel.

With regard to Darfur, we welcome the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur which is expected to assume the peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations there. We call on all the parties concerned in the conflict to demonstrate their real commitment and resolve to engage fully in the search for lasting peace.

In Somalia, despite the serious efforts to contain violence during the past six months, the situation remains highly volatile. In that context, I would like to add my voice to the call made by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Konaré, to the Secretary-General to consider the possibility of deploying a United Nations force to assist the African Union Peace Support Mission in Somalia.

*The President returned to the Chair.*

The world today is confronted with growing threats of terrorism — be it home-grown, cross-border, regional or international in nature. That scourge should be confronted with all the means at the disposal of the international community. We also believe that more effective and efficient mechanisms should be put in place to capture the financiers of terrorist organizations.

The United Nations remains the cornerstone of the fight against terrorism. Mauritius has lent, and will continue to lend, its fullest support to the numerous initiatives and resolutions of the United Nations on counter-terrorism. We are happy to note that the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism entered into force in July of this year.

The world of the twenty-first century is a world of interdependence, with the national frontiers between peoples and countries falling faster than we had envisaged. This has brought about the interphase and interaction between peoples from different parts of the world. We are today living in a world intertwined with interreligious and intercultural predicaments.

Mauritius, as the Assembly is aware, is a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Unity in diversity is the solid foundation on which we have built the framework for the peaceful coexistence of peoples of different faiths and cultures. Cultural diversity,

understanding and respect for different faiths and religions are today part and parcel of Mauritian society.

We warmly welcome the convening of the High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, which is to be held in October 2007 at United Nations Headquarters, for the promotion of tolerance, understanding and universal respect on matters of freedom and religion. We will certainly be part of the Dialogue.

Furthermore, we reaffirm our determination to support all initiatives that promote a culture of peace and tolerance. We are also happy to note that the General Assembly recently adopted resolution 61/271 to observe and celebrate the International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October each year in recognition of the great apostle of peace and non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi.

Mauritius is a strong advocate of all human rights and fundamental freedoms — so much so that the founding fathers of our constitution ensured that human rights figured prominently therein. Since our independence, in 1968, we have persistently endeavoured to place our citizens at the core of all forms of human rights and have ensured that they enjoy all political and civil rights irrespective of their status, colour or creed. We have enacted several pieces of legislation and we continue to enhance our legislative and institutional framework for the further protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have set up the National Human Rights Commission, the Sex Discrimination Division, the Office of the Ombudsperson for Children and the Human Rights Centre to ensure and promote compliance with fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual and the international instruments on human rights.

Mauritius is party to all major international and regional human rights treaties. We continue to extend our unwavering support to the United Nations in the promotion and protection of human rights. As a member of the Human Rights Council, we are lending our fullest support to make it more effective, efficient and relevant in the eyes of the world. Our quest for universal respect for human rights demands that the perpetrators of massive violations be brought to justice promptly. Impunity gives rise to violations.

We cannot but admire the Buddhist monks of Myanmar and the courage of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, whose party won a democratic and fair election in 1990, only to be removed from office by a military coup. She has now spent 11 of the last 17 years under house arrest. And now the legitimate stirrings of the people's will are being brutally repressed in blood, as we are speaking here at the United Nations. It is our duty to let the people of Myanmar know that the free nations of the world stand by them. But we need to do more than just stand by them. The time has come for the most stringent sanctions to be taken against the military junta that has proved again and again that it is totally impervious to good sense and common humanity.

I am proud to say that in 1997, in my first term as Prime Minister, I took the decision to stop buying rice from Myanmar. I applaud the decision of the President of the United States of America to apply sanctions. All of us should do the same. The military junta must be sent a clear message: that the free world will not tolerate gunning down people who are demanding freedom and justice.

While the Assembly has made responding to climate change the thrust of the general debate, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has qualified climate change as the defining issue of our era. We cannot agree more with that. Climate change affects all of us. Indeed, if it is not addressed head on, it will have irreversible consequences and devastating effects on the survival of human beings and the habitability of our planet Earth. We all have a stake in addressing climate change and global warming.

We commend the laudable initiative of the Secretary-General in convening the High-level Event on Climate Change on 24 September. We remain confident that the strong message that has emanated from the High-level Event will provide the necessary impetus and political will and act as a catalyst to the Bali meeting later this year. However, in our approach to finding a global solution to climate change we should avoid making those who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and who are yet the hardest-hit, pay the price on the same scale as others who have led to the increase in global warming as early as the eighteenth century. Mauritius, for its part remains committed to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

The rise in sea level constitutes a danger that threatens most of the low-lying island developing States. Those States have limited capacity to withstand the negative effects of natural disasters and external economic shocks. Their sustainable development becomes more trying and rigorous in the light of their inherent vulnerabilities. Mitigation and adaptation capabilities of countries may vary depending on the level of their economic development. Small island developing States (SIDS) face, in their adaptation choices, fundamental constraints of inadequate data and technical capacity, weak institutional capacity and limited financial resources.

In that respect we call for the full and effective implementation of the commitments, programmes and targets adopted in the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. A special SIDS fund to assist the development and implementation of adaptation measures in the same manner as the special fund for the least developed countries under the umbrella of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and regional climate observational systems to better monitor climate variations associated with global warming and sea-level rise, need to be set up.

While it is true that if the present pace of climate change goes unchecked, the face of the world may change dramatically in the next hundred years with devastating effects for future generations, it is equally true that underdevelopment, poverty, hunger and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in the developing world are the present challenges that require the immediate and undivided attention of the world as laid down in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The 2007 Millennium Development Goals midterm report underscores that "the MDGs will be attained only if concerted additional action is taken immediately and sustained until 2015" (*Millennium Development Goals Report 2007*, p. 4). Africa, unfortunately, in spite of serious and strenuous efforts, continues to lag far behind on the MDGs.

Mauritius for its part, is on track to meet the MDGs by the year 2015. Nonetheless, since my Government took office in 2005, we have allocated considerable resources in our national budget for the

empowerment of the poor and the social uplifting of vulnerable groups. The development challenges of Mauritius go well beyond the achievement of the MDGs.

In order to improve the prospects for attaining the MDGs, it is essential for donors and development partners to honour their undertakings and commitments made at the 2002 Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development. In that respect, we hope that the follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development in 2008 will provide the much-awaited response from the concerned parties to adequately address international commitments on financing for development.

In our efforts to find ways and means to alleviate and ultimately eliminate poverty in our subregion, Mauritius, jointly with the Southern African Development Community will be hosting an International Conference on Poverty Alleviation and Development in April 2008.

While there is no denying the fact that globalization has led in its wake to economic growth in the world including developing countries, it is also true that many countries, especially the most vulnerable ones, are unfortunately not reaping the benefits of globalization. This is particularly true of LDCs, lower- and middle-income countries and countries in transition, which continue to face huge difficulties in integrating the globalizing economy.

We call for a new global strategy that would create an enabling economic environment for development. It would require greater coherence between the international trading, monetary and financial systems. We therefore reaffirm our dedication to the establishment of a new international economic order which emphasizes globalization with a human face whose benefits will be more widely shared.

More than six years after the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS "Global Crisis — Global Action", the pandemic still remains a global crisis requiring global action. The negative impact of HIV/AIDS on human resources in the 25-45 age group, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa is simply overwhelming. The alarming rate with which the HIV/AIDS pandemic is ravaging innocent lives in our societies has far-reaching implications for our socio-economic development. It undermines the efforts

towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Mauritius is merely 0.2 per cent, with between 20 and 30 per cent of the cases affecting vulnerable groups, such as prison inmates and intravenous drug users. Our policies are geared towards containing the level of contamination, in particular by combating transmission via the sharing of contaminated needles. We are providing substantial funds for the development of a needle exchange programme and a public awareness information and communication campaign on HIV/AIDS.

I wish here to put on record our appreciation to the Clinton Foundation for having included Mauritius amongst the countries that can benefit from the Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative.

*(spoke in French)*

Every year at this time heads of State and Government meet here in this Assembly, because we believe in the virtues of multilateral diplomacy. All of us here are sincerely concerned about the multiple tensions across the world. I am convinced that we all wish to make our full contribution to the search for practical, viable and long-term solutions. We are all inspired by the same will to manage our differences in dialogue and understanding. We want to call attention to the problems of globalization and participate in launching and strengthening the economies of our countries.

We recognize and welcome the enormous role that the United Nations plays on the international scene, a role that needs to be considerably enhanced. The scope of diplomacy has considerably widened in recent years. Through the lever of international relations, the United Nations has the means and the duty to promote cooperation based on conflict prevention and the efficient management of natural disasters. But the United Nations still needs improvement in its structure and functioning, and we hope that reform will soon be brought about.

*(spoke in English)*

We continue to follow with keen interest and participate actively in the ongoing reform process of the United Nations, particularly on the question of the reform of the Security Council, the revitalization of the General Assembly, system-wide coherence, the mandate review and the management reform.

For us, meaningful reform of the United Nations must first pass through a comprehensive reform of the United Nations Security Council. At the 2005 World Summit, we expressed our resolve to support early reform of the Security Council with a view to making it more broadly representative, efficient and transparent. There has been enough talk on this subject and it should not remain as mere words and intentions. My Government welcomes the decision of the Open-ended Working Group dealing with the reform of the Security Council, which has decided, inter alia, to start intergovernmental negotiations on the reform of the Security Council. We are convinced that the intergovernmental negotiations should be results-oriented.

Mauritius remains committed to the African common position, which calls for two permanent seats and five non-permanent seats for Africa in a reformed Security Council. We continue to support the legitimate aspirations of the Latin American and Caribbean countries for a permanent seat. Mauritius reiterates that a permanent seat for India in the Security Council is long overdue. As the largest democracy and a secular state, India is a living example of the peaceful coexistence of major religions, cultures and faiths. India can be a source of inspiration as well as a testing ground for the outcome of the forthcoming United Nations High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.

In 1965 at the Constitutional Conference for the granting of independence to Mauritius, the Chagos Archipelago, among many other islands, formed an integral part of the territory of Mauritius and should have remained as such in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and General Assembly resolutions 1514 (1960) and 2066 (1965). Resolution 1514 (1960) states, inter alia:

“Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.” (para. 6)

The excision of the Chagos Archipelago by the colonial Power at the time of our independence constitutes a dismemberment of our territory in total disregard of resolutions 1514 (1960) and 2066 (1965). Furthermore, it is also a violation of the Charter of the United Nations itself. We therefore, once again,

reiterate our request to the United Kingdom to engage in bilateral dialogue with us as soon as possible with a view to enabling us exercise our sovereignty over the Chagos Archipelago.

Equally, on the question of our sovereignty over Tromelin, we note the progress registered at the recent Mauritius-French joint commission. The United Kingdom and France, two permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, are two major and important economic, trade and development partners of Mauritius. We fully appreciate their continued support in the development of our country. We have been striving to reach an amicable agreement on these issues but we cannot — and will not — compromise on our territorial integrity and our sovereignty over those islands.

To conclude, I should like to reaffirm my country's full faith in the United Nations. It remains the only organization that offers us hope for peace and security for a better world for future generations.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius for the statement he has just made.

*The Honourable Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda.

*The Honourable Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. Spencer** (Antigua and Barbuda): Let me first congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the sixty-second session of the General Assembly. I

also congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon at this, his first General Assembly session as Secretary-General.

I am humbled to once again address this Assembly, and I stand before you humbled and emboldened. Humbled by the magnitude of the socio-economic challenges we face as a community of nations and emboldened by the trust that has been placed in me by the people of Antigua and Barbuda to articulate their interests in an increasingly competitive international system. I am further humbled by the gravity of the environmental challenges facing our world today and emboldened in the knowledge that without courageous and timely action, countless lives will continue to be plagued by misery and countless more unnecessarily lost.

As the Prime Minister of a small island State, I am also humbled and emboldened by the show of confidence we have received from the Group of 77, having been elected Chairman for 2008. It is not a responsibility that we take lightly, and you can rest assured we intend to rise valiantly to the task of chairmanship, executing the responsibilities of the Chair with the sort of professionalism and skill the Group rightly expects of us. As Chairman of the Group of 77 for 2008 and like the Chairs before us, we pledge to uphold the principles and objectives of the Group, to preserve, at all times, our collective interest as developing countries, safeguard our common positions, and, by so doing, achieve significant advancement in the development agenda.

I am humbled and emboldened enough to quote Albert Einstein, who once said:

“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”

“Looking on and doing nothing” is no longer an option for any of us.

Let me, at the outset, unequivocally state that multilateralism should be the preferred means for effecting international peace, security and human development. There are some who would prefer for multilateralism to recede and for the world to be run by a few dominant Powers. They should be reminded of the intent and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, which, among other things, reaffirms in its Preamble the faith of humanity: “in fundamental

human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small”. It is no small wonder, then, that the crafters of the Charter pledged their determination “to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”.

The Charter of the United Nations is perhaps more relevant today than it was at the time of its creation. The challenges to peace, security and development that require collective action have multiplied immeasurably. At the same time, humanity has so advanced that today it is possible to achieve the intentions of the Charter on a scale beyond what might have been achievable at the time of its crafting. Regrettably, fulfilment of the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations seems to be hindered to an unprecedented degree by a paucity of political will and determination.

However, an equitable international system responsive to the needs of all countries and people is not beyond our reach. In that context, there is a role for all nations, large and small, that includes the firm resolve to strengthen the multilateral system in order to correct systemic imbalances that hinder the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals. Systemic imbalances in international trade, finance and international governance keep millions locked in poverty and millions more in a perpetual state of insecurity because they remain underrepresented.

Indeed, there is a role for all States. It should therefore come as no surprise that Antigua and Barbuda is of the view that small States can and should play a crucial role by being voices of reason — voices that are not shackled to the dogmatic positions that power necessitates. The absence of so-called high power allows small States to be pragmatic and practical in coming up with solutions to some of the most pressing international problems.

We can no longer continue talking while humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate. The situation in Darfur calls for our immediate and swift action. We cannot continue talking while women and children are forced to live in refugee camps. We cannot continue talking while tens of thousands of persons continue to die.

We must act now. There must be swift action to strengthen the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, which will support the African troops already there. Every citizen has the right to life and the right to live in peace. We call on all parties to end arm sales to the fighting factions. We must ensure that that happens.

While acknowledging the reality that the distribution of power is skewed among nations, we believe that talent, ability and good intentions remain in abundance in all countries, large and small. Further, no country is too small to be able to contribute innovative solutions to some of the most pressing international problems.

We in Antigua and Barbuda may be among the small and the powerless in terms of might and money, but we are willing and able to play our part to achieve international peace and development through active multilateral diplomacy, and we are intent on doing so.

Global poverty and economic inequality can be resolved only through sustained economic growth. Central to sustaining the economic growth of poorer countries is the establishment of a pro-development trading regime with a fair playing field, where large and small play by the rules — rules meant to create a fairer system and to allow the maximum benefits from international trade to be widely distributed among countries.

In that regard, we re-emphasize that it is important that individual United Nations Member States abide by fair trading practices, which eliminate targeted barriers designed to deny access to small, vulnerable countries seeking economic opportunities through such options as Internet trading.

Equally important is the need for Member States, big and small, to play by the international trade rules. The economic survival of our people depends on that. Our tourism and financial services sectors depend on that. Wealthy nations will ultimately have to pay a high price for actions that further pauperize already poor societies.

In a local context, the reduction of income inequality is a key priority for the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. My Government has ensured that affirmative action to ease the economic squeeze on the poor is embedded in all revenue-generating mechanisms. My Government resolves to ensure that

the benefits of economic growth are shared among the entire population, by focusing on employment generation and the provision of free or low-cost social services in the areas of health and education, among others.

Climate change is a global problem requiring a collective response, and, if we do not respond quickly, the result will be disaster on a global scale. This represents a monumental test of the political will and courage of humanity in general, but especially of the political leaders of the most powerful countries.

For small island States, the challenge of adapting to climate change is not new; what is new is its urgency. The increased risk of natural disasters adds an extra dimension to the vulnerability of the island States of the Caribbean. Because of our size and the nature of our primary economic activities, the infrastructure of an entire country can be destroyed by, for example, the passage of a single hurricane. The livelihood of the entire population is at once threatened.

Antigua and Barbuda, like many of our Caribbean brothers and sisters, has had to place greater priority on disaster preparedness, resulting in increased competition for the already meagre resources of the governmental budget. Our situation is not unique.

I take this opportunity to highlight the importance of international action to support our efforts at disaster-risk reduction, through an ambitious climate change regime within the ambit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. That must, of necessity, include a commitment to increasing the level of international financing for adaptation in vulnerable countries.

The proliferation of crime in our already vulnerable societies represents a threat to the peaceful and stable communities for which the Caribbean is known. In all Caribbean societies, the bulk of violent crime is drug-related. It so happens that the bulk of narco-trafficking activity in our region is linked to illegal drugs bound for North America and Europe. That means that small Caribbean economies are required to pay a high price to protect societies to our north and in the Atlantic from drug shipments headed their way. We urge the United Nations family of agencies, in recognition of the link between globalization and crime, to provide the Caribbean with increased assistance in this area.

We also need the support and cooperation of individual Member States, particularly those that carry out a policy of criminal deportation. That practice parachutes graduates of metropolitan criminal systems onto societies in which they often have no families and no social network to assist in their re-entry into the vulnerable Caribbean societies from which they had long been exiled. That is a monstrous assault on several of our societies.

With regard to the problem of drug-related crime and the proliferation of handguns, Antigua and Barbuda reiterates its call for the strengthening and implementation of the various United Nations treaties on small arms and light weapons. The scale and scope of the disruptions and destruction caused by the proliferation of small arms in the hands of unemployed youth in the Caribbean is tremendous. Here, too, small developing States which produce no weapons are confronted by the tragedy wrought by guns manufactured in countries that fail to control their weapons of death and appear untroubled by the ease with which those weapons cross international borders. Even a miniscule increase in violent crime has a negative impact on development in small island States. These perspectives should inform the international debate on peace and security.

All countries, large and small, have a national interest in eliminating the threat to development caused by international terrorism. Antigua and Barbuda continues to play its part by adhering to the various anti-terrorism resolutions of the United Nations, including our obligations under Security Council resolutions 1540 (2004) and 1373 (2001), among others.

Additionally, we have taken the added initiative to enact our own national legislative requirement by way of our National Anti-Terrorism Act of Parliament in 2005.

Combating international terrorism should not depend on the trampling of religious and cultural diversity and individual rights and freedoms. Cultural and religious intolerance and prejudice and the stifling of cultural diversity will only serve to perpetuate the causes of terrorism.

Earlier this year, Antigua and Barbuda, along with the rest of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), held activities to commemorate the bicentennial anniversary of the abolition of the trans-

Atlantic slave trade. CARICOM also led an initiative for the anniversary to be commemorated here at the United Nations. That is an issue that should remain on the agenda of the United Nations. My Government is proud to have been a part of the initiative led by CARICOM member States at the United Nations to get the international community to recognize this anniversary.

Such international recognition is important because it provides the opportunity to carry forward the fight for justice. Despite all the modern treaties and international statutes and recognition of the slave trade as a crime against humanity, this crime remains unpunished; the entities remain unaccountable for their participation and profiteering. Maintaining international focus on this issue gives our nations and the world the opportunity to make progress in repairing the damage caused by 500 years of slavery and colonialism, so that those who profited from such a crime may be urged to take responsibility for rectifying the effects that remain today.

Progress may be slow in the fight for justice for the descendants of slaves, but we must not give up. As a community of sovereign nations, Antigua and Barbuda and the other CARICOM member States consider it necessary for the international community to become accountable for this crime against humanity. The question of reparations must be placed on the United Nations agenda now.

We urge the United Nations system and Member States to continue to pay special attention to the issue of gender equality and empowerment of women. The dividends from investing in gender equality and empowerment of women are two-fold: democratic gains, on the one hand, and development gains, on the other. My Government has placed top priority on empowering women politically and economically. The Speaker of the House of Assembly in Antigua and Barbuda is female. So, too, are the President of the Senate and the Clerk of Parliament. My Government has the honour of having the first female elected Member of Parliament, who currently holds the position of President of the Inter-American Commission of Women.

We have not stopped there. The Chairman of the Integrity Commission, pursuant to the Integrity in Public Life Act, is a woman. The Governor General of Antigua and Barbuda, appointed earlier this year on the



advice of the Prime Minister, is female. The Ombudsman, a creature of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda, is also a woman. The Chairman of the Public Service Commission, also a creature of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda, is a woman.

We continue to focus on increasing women's participation in the political decision-making process. In that regard, we have been helped by the normative framework of the various United Nations gender entities. We will continue to work towards even greater gender parity in the political, economic and social spheres, and we encourage all Member States to do the same.

As we in the Caribbean grapple with the increase in HIV/AIDS cases, we are also confronted with another great threat to the survival of our people. Chronic non-communicable diseases have become a major concern for the Caribbean. Recently, an historic summit of heads of CARICOM on chronic non-communicable diseases held in Trinidad and Tobago agreed to give full support for the initiatives and mechanisms aimed at strengthening regional health institutions through the signing of a comprehensive declaration highlighting a plan of action on this critical health issue. We strongly believe that the health of the region is the wealth of the region, which underscores the importance of health to development.

It is therefore necessary for the United Nations, through its various organs and agencies, to lend support to our initiatives to develop strategies to prevent and control heart disease, stroke, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and cancer in the region by addressing their causal risk factors of unhealthy diets, physical inactivity, tobacco use and alcohol abuse, in addition to strengthening our health services. We must act together now to reduce the suffering and burdens caused by non-communicable diseases on the citizens of our region, which is the worst-affected in the Americas.

We seek the cooperation of the United Nations and our international partners in the development of initiatives for the screening and management of chronic diseases and risk factors so that, by 2012, 80 per cent of people with non-communicable diseases will receive quality care and have access to preventive education based on regional and international guidelines.

Allow me to conclude on the point at which I began, by referring once more to the Charter of the United Nations. Sixty-two years ago, when the United Nations was formed, the international system was less complex and colonialism was still the dominant concern. Humanity was reeling from the effects of a second world war. It was not the best of times.

Today, in my opinion, it is still not the best of times for a majority of the people on planet Earth. The primary catalysts to positive change and improved lives for the global population are the United Nations and the leaders of its Member States. I am hopeful that sharing our collective wisdom, and drawing from this source, the sixty-second session of the General Assembly will translate into meaningful and enduring benefit for the peoples of the world.

I am equally confident that our deliberations on climate change will lead to solutions that will ensure the protection of our planet and its peoples.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Winston Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Antigua and Barbuda, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by Mr. Željko Šturanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro.

*Mr. Željko Šturanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Željko Šturanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. Šturanović** (*spoke in Montenegrin; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me, Mr. President, to join others in welcoming you and congratulating you on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We are convinced that your leadership will contribute to

promoting both your country and our entire region, as well as to a successful outcome at the current session.

May I also extend wholehearted congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon. He can count on the full support of Montenegro, as the youngest Member of the United Nations. Particular thanks go also to Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa for her successful presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session.

It is time for all countries — and particularly smaller and developing countries — to realize that multilateralism is the pre-eminent form of interaction in our changing world. Multilateralism provides a framework for choosing democratic, development and cultural options that can most effectively meet the major challenges ahead, including the maintenance of peace and security, climate change, development processes, the fight against terrorism and the protection of human rights.

Mindful of the importance of multilateral organizations, in particular the United Nations, Montenegro stands ready to actively participate in making those principles a reality. As a society that is implementing major structural economic and social reforms, we understand and support the reform processes taking place under the auspices of the Organization. Furthermore, as a Member State, we are aware of our obligation to respect the international legal order and to contribute to the consolidation of peace and democracy in the international community.

Good-neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, as integral components of the processes of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, form the basis of Montenegro's foreign policy. We strongly believe that Montenegro and the Western Balkans clearly have a European future. In that context, we support the efforts of all of our neighbours to adopt and implement European standards and values.

In mid-October, we shall sign a stabilization and association agreement with the European Union (EU), thus establishing the first contractual relationship between Montenegro and the Union. That will complete the current phase of intensive activities on our path towards Europe, which will enable us to enter a new and enhanced phase in our European relations. It is in that context that we view our recent accession to the Partnership for Peace initiative. Our commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration has been

reaffirmed in all the strategic documents that we have adopted since the restoration of our independence.

Many development processes are now taking place in Montenegro: an expansion of our open-market economy, the transformation of ownership structures and reform of our public sector, judicial and security structures. Our institutional reforms and development programmes, which have been the focus of our political activities during the current phase, are guided by the principles of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which are a guarantee of stability and prosperity. It is with a full sense of responsibility that we are creating an environment that ensures the rule of law, equality and respect for human, minority and religious rights. In that way we can contribute to regional stability as well.

Although we are a small State, we stand ready to contribute, to the best of our ability, to the establishment of conditions that will enable the region to continue along the path of mutual trust, enhanced stabilization and unhindered cooperation.

By becoming independent, Montenegro has taken charge of its integration into the system of international relations as an equal partner and has shouldered its responsibility for the maintenance of peace, security and stability in the region, while building an open and democratic civil society.

In that context, we believe that the direct negotiations that have begun on Kosovo's future status will be fruitful. Montenegro strongly supports that negotiating process, in which the international community has invested considerable effort, convinced that it will lead to a lasting and sustainable solution that will contribute to the strengthening and preservation of regional stability over the long term.

Montenegro is particularly sensitive to the theme underlying the sixty-second session of the General Assembly: our response to climate change. As the Secretary-General stated in paragraph 8 of his report on the work of the Organization (A/62/1), “[C]limate change, and what we do about it, will define us, our era, and ultimately our global legacy”. Here, the idea of the world as a global village, an indivisible whole, is perhaps most evident. Without a common approach, there can be no correct response. No one has the right to remain indifferent to this challenge, either individually or in global terms.

The negative impacts of climate change could be many. It could affect countries such as my own in ways that include a rise in the level of the Adriatic Sea, rising temperatures and damage to forest and other ecosystems and to biodiversity. In that context, Montenegro is making efforts to keep pace with global trends, contributing to endeavours to ensure better living conditions and a more humane environment for us and future generations. We are carrying out many activities and projects to that end, including efforts in fulfilment of our international obligations. We have ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, and we have begun to prepare our first report on implementation of the Protocol. We also recently adopted a national sustainable development strategy and are now establishing a network of public institutions to plan activities related to the challenges of climate change.

Mindful of our country's natural resources and of our responsibility to preserve them, the parliament of the Republic of Montenegro decided in 1991 to declare Montenegro an ecological State. As an ecological State, Montenegro has an additional obligation to support United Nations efforts to promote sustainable development throughout the world. Through robust efforts, we shall continue to strengthen Montenegro as a State that guarantees sustainable development for its citizens.

We therefore welcome the efforts of the United Nations and particularly of the Secretary-General in this area. We are encouraged by the messages emanating from the present General Assembly session and the recent high-level event on climate change. We hope that those messages will contribute significantly to the success of the Bali process in December and that the Bali Climate Change Conference will produce additional constructive proposals and sustainable solutions, particularly with regard to the post-2012 goals.

In recent months, we have seen the United Nations continue to make significant efforts in hot spots throughout the world. The contributions made by the United Nations in Darfur alone have repeatedly demonstrated the Organization's capacity to adapt and to play its appropriate role in today's world.

We therefore believe that the United Nations is capable of undertaking comprehensive reform of its system to respond to the increasingly complex

challenges facing it. Given the importance of the Organization to world peace and security, the modalities of such reform should result in a stronger, more organized, better coherent and more effective United Nations.

We are of the view that effective coordination among the principal United Nations organs is vital. We have seen some progress in this area since the 2005 World Summit.

Another essential aspect of United Nations reform is reform of the General Assembly, which remains the primary decision-making organ of the United Nations. Work on that aspect, together with others, must be intensified and made more results-oriented.

The same thing applies to the ongoing debate on reform of the Economic and Social Council and, in particular, of the Security Council. Equitable representation for the Group of Eastern European States, to which we belong, should be guaranteed in that important organ.

For a small country like Montenegro, effective cooperation with the United Nations is crucial. We are therefore most interested in being the agent and promoter of that cooperation, be it through the One United Nations Initiative or through a similar modality. Our commitment to cooperation with the United Nations is also demonstrated by the project to build the first United Nations eco-building as the focal point for all United Nations activities in Montenegro.

As a developing country, Montenegro looks forward to the High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development and to the successful conclusion of the Doha Round negotiations, which we hope will lend fresh impetus to bringing together economic, financial and social issues with the aim of achieving comprehensive progress and development. The world today faces a multitude of challenges in this area. Montenegro stands ready to contribute to the global partnership for development.

In that context, Montenegro will continue its activities conducive to the full implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, for we are convinced that in that way we will contribute to improving quality of life and overall stability.

With a view to meeting the legitimate security interests of nations, we must be united and decisive in

tackling terrorism, which continues to threaten the world. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and its Plan of Action (resolution 60/288) are of great importance, and call for agreement on a comprehensive convention on international terrorism.

Montenegro will continue to demonstrate its full and unequivocal commitment to, and compliance with, international obligations through its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). We shall continue our concrete cooperation with the ICTY, contributing not only to the rule of law but also to implementing the Tribunal's completion strategy.

We shall continue to craft our policies and to work towards our development on the basis of the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which represent the foundations of modern democracy. We therefore view the United Nations as the most important forum for achieving progress, a more equitable future and a community of equal nations.

Our country is proud of its multi-ethnic and multiconfessional harmony. That is one of our cherished values, which distinguishes Montenegro in the regional and broader international context. With our traditions and culture, Montenegro is part of the age-old historical currents of the Balkans, the Mediterranean and Europe. We are at the crossroads of civilizations and religions, and share the intertwined influences emanating from them. We want to preserve and enhance that legacy by working together not only with our neighbours but also with all other countries with which we share such advantages of geography, culture and values.

The world Organization is the only true global forum, because it reflects all the diversity and qualities of its Members, which are united by principles and values that, after 62 years, continue to serve as a beacon in an increasingly changing and dynamic world. Following that course while being prepared to change is an imperative for us all.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Željko Šturanović, Prime Minister of the Republic of Montenegro, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by Commodore Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji.

*Commodore Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Commodore Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Commodore Bainimarama (Fiji):** On behalf of the people of Fiji, I extend to you, Mr. President, and to the General Assembly, our warm greetings: *Ni sa bula* and *Namaste*. We would also like congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We wish to extend to him our warmest congratulations, as this is his first full Assembly session as Secretary-General. We note with gratitude the initiatives he has taken in the brief period since he assumed leadership to enhance momentum in the work of the United Nations. Fiji appreciates in particular his policy of inclusiveness and the attention that he is giving to the vulnerable situation and the special needs of small island nations.

At the outset, Fiji wishes to reiterate its unwavering commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), pursuing environmentally friendly and sustainable development activities and addressing the challenges of climate change. As those issues have been widely debated in the Assembly, I would like to take this opportunity to address other issues of particular concern to Fiji.

United Nations-led peacekeeping operations are renowned worldwide and have become the human face

of this multilateral body in war-torn and conflict-prone regions of the world. For its part, Fiji continues to stand ready to shoulder the burden of promoting international peace. In that regard, we have offered our services to the African Union-United Nations hybrid peacekeeping operation in the Sudan. In the same vein, Fiji is committed to our collective resolve to enlarge the presence of the United Nations in Iraq. We are willing to contribute further towards that end, should the need arise.

Today, the demand for peacekeeping continues to grow. With it comes the need for institutional reform to adequately cater for the ever-changing nature of world conflict. I would like to reiterate Fiji's support for all reform efforts, including the latest initiative of the Secretary-General to reform the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. At the same time, I would urge the Secretariat to continue to resist the politicization of United Nations peacekeeping and to maintain the sanctity of its independence as a forum wherein the willing may volunteer their services freely and without bilateral mangling and interference.

I now seek your indulgence, Mr. President, and that of the Assembly, to speak about the situation, particular circumstances and needs of Fiji at this stage of its nationhood as an independent sovereign nation. Fiji's overall situation is that it is in a deep rut. It needs the understanding and support of the international community to be able to move forward to regain its dignity and its rightful place as a responsible member of the international family of nations. I am mindful, as I stand here today in the presence of the Assembly, that members may see me as the military leader who removed an elected Government. I cannot begrudge them that, because that indeed is a fact. I submit to the Assembly that, although the Government of the day was removed from power last December, such action was taken with extreme reluctance. I am not a politician; nor do I aspire to be one. I am certainly not much of a diplomat, and I am not used to speaking in forums such as this. Therefore, in what I say and in how I may put it, if in any way I am remiss with regard to the protocols of the Assembly, I seek understanding.

By the time the military intervened last December, Fiji's overall governance situation had regressed to a catastrophic level. The international community needs to fully understand the special local context of Fiji's situation. Fiji became independent on 10 October 1970, inheriting an institutional

infrastructure that could potentially have evolved further and been strengthened to allow democracy to take root. At that time, almost four decades ago, Fiji's future appeared to be one of promise and potential. For instance, in terms of per capita income, Fiji was then in the same league as Malaysia and Thailand. We, the people of Fiji, viewed our country with pride and dignity and felt that that was the way the world should be. For more than a decade after achieving independence, Fiji did continue to make steady progress in economic development, education, poverty reduction and generally improving the living conditions of its people.

Yet, in 1970, Fiji started its journey as a young nation on a rather shaky foundation, with a race-based constitution that rigidly compartmentalized our communities. The "democracy" that came to be practiced in Fiji was marked by divisive, adversarial, inward-looking, race-based politics. The legacy of leadership, at both community and national levels, was a fractured nation. Fiji's people were not allowed to share a common national identity. Of the two major communities, indigenous Fijians were instilled with fear of dominance and dispossession by Indo-Fijians, and they desired protection of their status as the indigenous people. Indo-Fijians, on the other hand, felt alienated and marginalized as second class citizens in their own country, the country of their birth, Fiji.

The dates 14 May and 25 September 1987 are fateful in Fiji's history and also for Fiji's military forces. The military coups of that year were motivated by an ethno-nationalist, racist supremacy agenda. Those political, communal and military leaders who were responsible for the coups and related actions in 1987 carry a very large burden in their collective conscience for the severe ruptures to the very fabric of Fiji society and the dislocations and suffering that they caused in the lives of many of Fiji's citizens.

In May 2000, Fiji suffered yet another major setback. Again, a group of ethno-nationalist opportunists, backed by a small errant group within the Fiji military, overthrew the Government of the day. As Commander of the Republic of Fiji military forces, I did not support or condone the coup. I drew upon the structural and cultural organization of the military to intervene and to restore order and a state of security.

The stand-off between the coup perpetrators and the military in May 2000 was potentially explosive at

the time and, if not resolved, could have resulted in much bloodshed and even greater chaos. As military Commander, I played a key role in the handing executive authority back into civilian hands in the wake of the 2000 coup. This rested on a number of critical preconditions being met in taking Fiji forward.

An Interim Government was appointed by His Excellency the President of Fiji, with Laisenia Qarase as caretaker Prime Minister. The Interim Government was tasked to pave the way to fresh elections to be held in September of 2001. The other fundamental conditions were that all of the perpetrators of the May 2000 coup, including the military rebels, would be prosecuted, and that the 2000 coup would be publicly renounced as racially motivated.

It is tragic that Fiji's recovery from the brink of chaos in May 2000 did not endure. In the ensuing years, Fiji's overall governance took a dramatic turn for the worse. In particular, this was characterized by the politicization of the prison services and the criminal justice system. There was also a significant weakening of the key institutions of governance, a pervasive increase in corruption, serious economic decline combined with fiscal mismanagement, a sharp deterioration in the law and order situation and a deepening of the racial divide in the country. The convicted coup perpetrators were prematurely discharged from prison, and certain coup perpetrators and sympathisers were appointed as senior Government ministers and officials. There was also a series of legislative acts that were deeply divisive and overtly racist.

The 2001 and 2006 general elections were not credible. They were characterized by massive rigging of votes, with an incumbent Government using the State's resources to buy support. By late 2006, Fiji's overall situation had deteriorated sharply, heightened by massive corruption and lawlessness, a severe erosion of confidence and an economy on the brink of collapse. Also, during the latter part of 2006, Fiji's military had to pay particular attention to certain external threats to the sovereignty of the nation.

Under our current constitution, Fiji's military is charged with national security, defence and the well-being of Fiji's people. Under the circumstances, the military, under my stewardship, could not possibly see such an unacceptable situation unfold without seeking to address it.

History is testament to how I did in fact respond to the situation. For almost four years, I was strenuous in my efforts to constructively engage the elected leadership of the country, seeking to cause it to reverse its course of action, which was taking the country down the path of destruction into an abyss. The protracted efforts that I made to constructively engage with the previous Government came to no avail. On the contrary, a prominent High Chief connected to the ruling Soqosoqo Duavata Lewenivanua (SDL) party incited a mutiny within the military, and attempts were made not only to remove me, but also to eliminate me.

It was with the utmost of reluctance that Fiji's military, under my leadership, removed the former Government from power in December 2006.

Many have criticized that decision. In response, I say this: Fiji has a coup culture, a history of civilian or military coups executed in the interests of a few and based on nationalism, racism and greed. In order to remove that coup culture and to make a commitment to democracy and the rule of law, policies which promote racial supremacy and further the interests of economic and social elites must be removed once and for all. Racism, elitism and disrespect for the law are undemocratic. They lead to hatred. They lead to violence, poverty and moral bankruptcy. We saw that in the years leading to the Second World War. We saw the genocide, the concentration camps, the rampant imperialism — which resulted, in turn, in the creation of the United Nations.

Within a month of the removal of the previous Government, the President of the Republic of Fiji resumed his constitutional authority. On 5 January 2007, the President appointed an Interim Government which is mandated to govern Fiji until a new Government is duly elected. With the exception of myself, the make-up of the Interim Government is all civilian. The presidential mandate provides the framework within which the Interim Government, in which I serve as Prime Minister, administers the affairs of the State. We are resolved to take the measures necessary to convene free and fair elections as soon as practically possible. On this, the Interim Government is coordinating closely with Fiji's fellow members of the Pacific Islands Forum and the larger international community, including the European Union.

Steady progress has been made in a number of areas pertaining to upholding the existing constitution,

investigation into alleged abuses of human rights, maintaining the independence of the judiciary and preparatory work for the return of Fiji to parliamentary democracy.

Fiji's situation is not only complex; its problems are also deep-rooted and structural. There are no quick or easy fixes. The country is now at a very critical crossroad; the situation could escalate into more serious deterioration and instability. It is imperative that any such greater disaster or civil strife be averted.

We therefore seek constructive dialogue and engagement with the international community, with all our bilateral and multilateral development partners, whom we urge to work with us, to help support us, in addressing our fundamental problems in moving Fiji forward. Fiji needs the support of the international community to develop a political and governance framework that is truly democratic, accountable, inclusive, equitable and non-racial and that unifies Fiji's diverse communities as a nation. That is indeed the larger and most critical of challenges that Fiji now faces.

For our part, we firmly resolve to tackle these challenges on at least four levels: first, to restore stability, law and order and confidence; secondly, to strengthen institutions for good governance including transparency, accountability and an independent and effectively functioning judiciary; thirdly, to carry out major reforms in the economy to facilitate sustainable private-sector-led growth; and lastly, to convene free and fair general elections within a constitutional and governance framework that will ensure that parliamentary democracy is not only restored but can be sustained in Fiji.

To achieve all this, the Interim Government is preparing to launch a major national initiative, referred to as the Peoples Charter for Change and Progress — the PCCP. Through the PCCP, the broad cross section of Fiji's people will be fully engaged and involved, through consultation and participation, in the development of a comprehensive agenda of actions and measures, as Fiji's own way of addressing its problems.

For the future, Fiji will look at making the necessary legal changes in the area of electoral reform to ensure true equality at the polls. At present, all citizens have the right to vote for two candidates: one for a national seat of any ethnicity, and another from a

communal raced-based seat. This in turn has kept our races apart.

Although democracy in the form of electing a Government was introduced in Fiji at the time of independence, researchers and analysts have suggested that Fijians live in a democracy with a mentality that belongs to the chiefly system. In essence this means that at election time, Fijians living in village and rural areas are culturally influenced to vote for the candidate selected for them by their chiefs, their provincial councils and their church ministers. This leads me to ask whether the countries that are demanding that Fiji immediately return to democracy really understand how distorted and unfair our system is, both legally and culturally.

This must change. Every person will be given the right to vote for only one candidate, irrespective of race or religion. This will send a message to our people that Fiji's leadership no longer tolerates racial divisions and race-based politics. All men and women are equal in dignity and in rights. Electoral reform in this respect will be looked at by a National Council for Building a Better Fiji, which is designed to entrench the very principle on which the United Nations was founded.

The draft Peoples Charter that will emerge from such a national-level undertaking will provide the political and governance framework, with effective supporting and functioning institutions, to make Fiji a truly democratic and progressive nation.

The draft of the PCCP proposal was circulated widely within the country, with comments and suggestions invited. Additionally, I personally wrote to the leaders of Fiji's bilateral and multilateral development partners, including the United Nations Secretary-General, on the PCCP initiative.

I am pleased to report that in general this initiative has been received with very strong support within Fiji, in particular from highly reputable and respected civil society and community leaders in the country. The Peoples Charter, once formulated and adopted, will provide the strategic framework or fundamental foundation within which the Interim Government, and successive elected Governments, will be expected to operate.

In the current absence of an elected Government, there is the issue of legitimacy and mandates. To deal with this, the Interim Government is willing to

consider putting the draft Peoples Charter to a referendum to get the mandate of the people for the fundamental changes, including changes to the Constitution of Fiji, as may be considered necessary and appropriate.

Fiji needs both financial and technical support from its bilateral and multilateral development partners to be able to effectively realize the vision that underpins the PCCP initiative. Above all, we seek the understanding of the international community to help us rebuild our nation in the true spirit of internationally acceptable precepts of good governance and a democracy that can be made to work and that can be sustained in Fiji.

We must thank those Governments that have stood by and supported Fiji in our hour of need. Fiji is indeed very grateful and is deeply touched by their understanding and goodwill.

Some in the international community, including the closest of our neighbours in the Pacific, have seen fit to impose punitive measures upon Fiji. Of course we know that those powerful States are protecting their own economic and political interests in the region. However, we in Fiji are protecting our democracy and strengthening our democratic institutions. Those powerful States are undermining our attempts to rebuild our nation on strong foundations and are undermining our attempts to appoint people of merit and honesty to our State institutions, regardless of race and religion. Current sanctions target any person appointed by the Interim Government.

This is hypocrisy at its worst on part of those States as they are clearly undermining our efforts to promote and practice good governance. These actions — such as the travel bans, described as smart sanctions — have had a debilitating impact on our struggles to revive, to recover and to reform.

Good governance requires effective, functioning institutions. Since the coups of 1987, Fiji has suffered a massive exodus of the country's skilled and educated people. The major beneficiaries of the transfer of those quality human assets have been Australia and New Zealand, and from those neighbours in particular we seek understanding and support. Our capacities and institutions have been severely eroded over the years. In all of this, we desperately need help, not a closing of doors.

I shall conclude my statement by reaffirming Fiji's commitment to the United Nations and to the various United Nations conventions on human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance. Fiji does not seek any unwarranted exemptions from any of those obligations. All we seek is your deeper understanding of our particular circumstances and the complex situation of Fiji. We hope that you will work with us, assist us to rebuild and move Fiji forward.

In closing, I take this opportunity to extend to the Secretary-General an invitation to Fiji and indeed to our Pacific region during his tenure.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Josaia V. Bainimarama, Prime Minister and Commander of the Military Forces of the Republic of Fiji, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**Address by Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia**

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia.

*Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The President:** I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. King (Saint Lucia):** The pleasure is mine at this juncture, to join the other Members of the United Nations family in congratulating you, Mr. President on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session. We wish you success in all your efforts and assure you of our full cooperation. We also wish to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Sheika Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa, for the diligent manner in which she spearheaded the work of this body at its sixty-first session.



In similar vein, we express our continued support for the endeavours of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. We are confident that he will continue to provide committed leadership to this Organization in the defence and promotion of its noble principles and values in every corner of the globe.

I begin my address on a sad note. It is with much pain that I must inform this body that the person who brought Saint Lucia to independence and consequently to this body and who, but for the will of the Almighty would have addressed you today — Sir John George Melvin Compton, our first and latest Prime Minister — was laid to rest in Saint Lucia last Tuesday, 18 September. Our nation and region suffered a great loss, but we remain committed to seizing every opportunity to carry on his life's work of aiding the cause that needs assistance against the wrong that needs resistance, and in so doing continue to honour him. What I am about to say reflects his thoughts on and aspirations for this Assembly and for the United Nations Organization in general.

We note that a significant part of our journey towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been covered in terms of time and that in some respects there has been some achievement to date. However, it is also true that only mixed progress, regionally and internationally, has been recorded so far. Millions continue to live in conditions of abject poverty, despite the commitments made in 2000 and 2005. The sad fact is that a great deal of work still remains to be done, and urgently, if we are to achieve the MDGs and see real changes in the conditions of existence for such large numbers of people.

We would be well advised to embark upon a period of serious reflection and stock-taking, an exercise involving an honest assessment of our achievements and failures, with a view to repositioning ourselves as necessary to ensure that we achieve the noble objectives set out in the Millennium Development Goals by the projected year 2015.

On our own front, Saint Lucia has made significant strides over the years towards the achievement of the MDGs. We intend to continue on a steady path towards that end. Not only has the country attained universal primary education, but a programme of universal access to free secondary education for our young citizens has been introduced.

Saint Lucia's progress in the health sector is also evident. Over the last 25 years, the country has experienced significant improvements in most health-related indicators, including life expectancy, immunization coverage and infant mortality, while significant reductions have been experienced in respect of communicable diseases and lifestyle-related illnesses. A universal programme of free health care is currently in the early stages of implementation.

Over the years, too, Saint Lucia has consistently worked toward a reduction in the incidence of non-communicable diseases. Serious attention has also been given to combating the HIV/AIDS problem, which remains a major challenge to Saint Lucia and other countries in the Caribbean region. Efforts to address this issue are being pursued, mainly through education, including the elimination of stigma associated with this disease, early detection and treatment programmes and the provision of free or subsidized antiretroviral drugs.

As a small island developing State, Saint Lucia finds it beneficial to undertake this daunting task through regional and international cooperation. Accordingly, through the Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV/AIDS, we collaborate with other countries in the wider Caribbean region in addressing the pandemic. While this regional mechanism, which includes the 15 members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as well as other countries in the wider Caribbean region, has facilitated our cooperative approach to addressing this challenge, it is clear that increased and sustained international cooperation is critical to our efforts if we are to succeed in our fight against this disease. In this regard, we welcome the assistance being provided by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, working with other partners, and we look forward to its continued support.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our traditional friends and donors, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, France, the European Union and the Commonwealth, to name the most prominent, who over the years have provided much financial and technical assistance to our country and to the region. We also welcome the contribution of those other States and institutions that have demonstrated their readiness to work with us in the realization of our development objectives. We are, of course, always willing to develop new beneficial relationships and to collaborate with all who

understand and appreciate our efforts and our principles. In this regard, we take special note of the announcement by Norway of its pledge of \$1 billion over 10 years to support the Millennium Goals on child and maternal support.

Within the context of South-South cooperation, Saint Lucia will continue to work with other developing country partners in its quest for economic and social development. In the light of the positive benefits gained from cooperation programmes with those partners, we remain convinced that, according to the United Nations Development Programme Administrator's report on this issue, South-South cooperation is one of the main drivers of development effectiveness, requiring its integration in the development cooperation activities of all the organizations in the United Nations system.

Saint Lucia therefore welcomes continued United Nations support for efforts geared towards strengthening and advancing South-South cooperation. We are convinced that this cooperation modality should be strengthened in partnership with our developed country partners and other stakeholders and should therefore complement rather than substitute for North-South cooperation.

The Government of Saint Lucia reiterates its commitment to the ideals of regionalism and to the deepening of the integration process within our region. Saint Lucia continues to partner with sister States of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and the wider Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to develop mechanisms, including the Eastern Caribbean States Economic Union and the Caribbean Community Single Market and Economy, to enhance the prospects for improving the quality of life of our people. We therefore welcome the assistance of this body and that of those who have travelled the road to regionalism before us.

Saint Lucia is pleased to note that Haiti's march toward democratic governance, recommenced just over one year ago, continues to be assisted and sustained by the generous efforts of the international community. While we had hoped for a longer mandate period for the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti in that country, we accept the decision of the Security Council to extend that mandate to enable it to continue to work towards ensuring that Haiti's political and social stability are restored and maintained.

Under no circumstance should Haiti be left stranded in midstream, as the consequences would be too catastrophic to contemplate. We continue, therefore, to call for the sustained release of pledged development resources so that the Government and the people of Haiti may continue to meaningfully, and in a sustainable manner, address the numerous challenges facing their country.

Saint Lucia places great importance on the follow-up of the international development agenda espoused in the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development. Given the plethora of challenges confronting developing countries such as Saint Lucia in this increasingly globalized and inequitable international economy, financing for development continues to be key to the achievement of the MDGs and the internationally agreed development goals.

Saint Lucia recognizes the important commitments made over the years by some developed country partners with regard to development finance. We also appreciate the pledges made to significantly improve the level of official development assistance (ODA) in order to achieve the goal of 0.7 per cent of developed countries' gross domestic product. Moreover, we are pleased about the Group of Eight decision in 2005 to forgive the debt of some African countries, and its more recent decision to double development assistance to Africa.

We lament, however, that, despite these commitments, development assistance declined in 2006. Moreover, development financing continued to be subject to conditionalities imposed by donors and failed to meet and support the nationally defined priorities of developing countries. It is our hope that the 2008 Doha Review Conference will seriously address those concerns in the light of the significance of financing for development at this stage of our journey towards 2015.

Saint Lucia is well aware of the increasing interdependence that characterizes this international community, the importance of building partnerships and the need to work within a multilateral framework in order to meet the challenges of this century. For this reason, we welcome the continued search for ways to reposition the United Nations system so it can better fulfil its mandate in accordance with its Charter. While we are conscious of the magnitude of the task of reforming the United Nations, we remain confident that

Member States will bring the requisite political will to bear on the process.

Saint Lucia continues to underscore the importance of social and economic development, basic human rights, mutual respect and goodwill among nations, and their relevance to the maintenance of international peace and security. For these reasons, we are concerned that peace and security remain the exclusive preserve of the Security Council and a few select Member States. Saint Lucia continues to support reform and expansion of the Security Council aimed at making it more representative. It is our hope that this reform would reflect the role and contribution of developing countries in helping to resolve the ever-growing and increasingly complex challenges of today's world.

Many, if not all of our countries celebrate our sovereignty with pomp, ceremony and pride, and in accordance with that sovereignty, we take our seat in this body. All of the rules and requirements for membership are spelled out in the Charter of our noble institution. Within this body our relationship with our partners is based on a commitment to the principles of mutual respect and understanding. For this reason, we recognize that the Republic of China — Taiwan — a democratic country of over 23 million people, has continued to abide by the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, although it is not a Member of the United Nations. Taiwan has made significant contributions to global development by providing economic and technical assistance to other developing countries in their pursuit of development and their attainment of the MDGs.

We believe that sovereignty is derived from the will of peoples and from the realization or actualization of the right to self-determination. We are therefore saddened that the will of the people of Taiwan, expressed by their duly elected representatives, continues to be ignored by this body. Saint Lucia therefore looks forward to the day when Taiwan will assume its place alongside other countries of the world in the halls of this Organization.

For small States, peace and security are critical to their sustainable development. Thus, the spread of small arms to our region continues to be an especially disturbing issue and is a major contributing factor to crime and insecurity. This situation is particularly ironic given the fact that neither arms nor ammunition

are produced in our region. We therefore call on those States that produce small arms and ammunition to enact appropriate measures to reduce their illicit export, which threatens the security and stability of the Caribbean.

Saint Lucia and other small island developing States continue to express concerns about our extreme vulnerability to the adverse impacts of climate change. Small islands and low-lying coastal areas are threatened daily by the impact of a rising sea level, while others are already experiencing the untold effects created by the increase in the melting of polar ice and the consequent loss of significant portions of their land mass.

For us, this climate change issue is directly related to our development. It threatens the very core of our social, economic and political security. It threatens our very existence.

The dangers we face as a result of the hazardous level of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere are well known and documented. Urgent, resolute action is therefore required to reverse this situation.

Saint Lucia welcomes the efforts currently being made to place the issue of climate change more visibly on the agenda of the United Nations. We acknowledge the recent G-8 commitment to work positively within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to address the issue. We maintain the view that this important issue should be discussed within the appropriate forums in order not to lose sight of the real development-related objectives that vulnerable small island developing countries like Saint Lucia are seeking to promote.

Saint Lucia joins with other members of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) in calling for the problems of the rise of sea level and climate change to be addressed as a matter of urgency. We will continue to play our part through the development of appropriate national development strategies and the creation of mechanisms to enable us to mitigate against and adapt to the adverse impact of climate change. We stress, however, that the largest producers of greenhouse gases must bear the responsibility for the damage being caused to the global environment and in particular to the vulnerable countries whose sustainability and very existence are increasingly threatened by their actions.

We remain concerned that the international community has yet to honour its responsibility and commitment to the full implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. We insist on the urgent and proper mainstreaming of the Strategy into the appropriate work programmes of the United Nations agencies and international conventions. We look forward to the thirteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties on Bali in Indonesia in December of this year, where we hope significant negotiations will be launched with a view to seriously addressing the disastrous effects of climate change on small island developing States. It is our wish that this Conference of Parties should seek to achieve substantial and legally binding emission reductions in the shortest possible period, as well as explore ways to significantly increase the level of resources available to developing countries, and to the small island developing States, in particular, to assist in adapting to the impacts of climate change.

While economic and trade policy reform, in principle, holds much promise for small developing countries, the international community must understand that the “one size fits all” approach to trade arrangements is inappropriate and unrealistic and will not advance the cause of equitable global economic development. This approach has led to a reversal in many small States of the progress made through hard work and sacrifice by their populations.

This fact is most evident in the case of Saint Lucia and other small banana- and sugar-producing countries of the Eastern Caribbean. The mindless application of inappropriate rules has caused much pain among the same populations that are being challenged to meet the MDGs. Saint Lucia therefore reiterates its call for the establishment of a set of trading rules flexible enough to take into account the concerns of small States, assist them in promoting economic development, provide opportunities for their people and, consequently, assist them in achieving the MDGs by the stipulated deadline date.

Lastly, and looking towards the future, children are the future, and poverty impacts children disproportionately, seriously affecting their ability to achieve. Unless we can all maintain the development momentum achieved by previous generations, the

future of our children, and indeed our societies, will be characterized by insecurity.

Saint Lucia therefore looks forward to the high-level plenary meeting devoted to the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children, to be convened in December to evaluate progress made in the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action (resolution S-27/2, annex), bearing in mind that several of the time-bound and quantified commitments should have already been met.

We in Saint Lucia will continue to spend a considerable amount of our resources on our children, and we hope that the international community will come to the aid of all those who recognize the future in children, providing for them an enabling environment for advancement through opportunity, safety, love and peace.

**The President:** On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Stephenson King, Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, External Affairs, Home Affairs and National Security of Saint Lucia, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** The Assembly will now hear a statement by His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, to whom I give the floor.

**Mr. Abbas (Palestine) (spoke in Arabic):** It is a pleasure, Sir, to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the Assembly at this session. We have every hope that your efforts will be successful. It is also a pleasure for me to convey our appreciation and pride to Her Excellency Sheikha Haya Rashed Al-Khalifa for the tremendous effort she undertook as President of the General Assembly at the sixty-first session.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our full confidence in the role of the United Nations and all of its specialized agencies with respect to their historic responsibilities regarding the Palestinian question, responsibilities they will continue to bear until this question is comprehensively settled. For many decades, those institutions have continued to reaffirm the established national rights of the Palestinian people and to provide varied support for

our people, in the political, economic and humanitarian realms. Here, we must commend the exceptional ongoing work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other institutions in safeguarding the future for generations of Palestinian refugees and providing them with the basic services they need. Our appreciation goes also to those who have upheld the basic human rights of the Palestinian people and who have provided support in the areas of education and culture and in strengthening the role of the Palestinian Authority since its inception, as well as in building and strengthening our national institutions.

I would like also to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who has given top priority to the Palestinian question, who has worked to reach a solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and who has placed this matter at the centre of his concerns. He has, in addition, creatively contributed to seeking the means to relaunch the Middle East peace process.

The confrontations, wars and conflicts in our region and their tragic repercussions for the peoples of the region constitute the primary threat to global peace. They call all of mankind to awareness. They demand rapid intervention from the international community with the aim of settling this situation boldly and without delay. Our experience over the years and decades shows that the policy of delaying a settlement of the principal conflicts in the region, the policy of providing partial solutions and the policy aimed at containing the conflict by limiting the damage only further complicate things, to the point where, today, there is a clear threat of civil war or regional war. Moreover this climate has been conducive to terrorism, which unfortunately has spread to become a global phenomenon.

However, this grim picture should not mask the fact that hope is still alive. Indeed, thanks to the determination of the vast majority of our people, and thanks to the support of the international community, our people are capable of overcoming the tragic situation that we are being pushed into by the forces of occupation, extremism and aggression and, by those who seek to provoke war and terrorism in our region.

There are on the other hand responsible, active forces in the Middle East, representing the consciousness of the people and possessing a true desire for freedom, progress and democracy for the

people. Although these forces are working in extreme difficulty, they are firmly committed to overcoming the current situation in order to create a new future for the Middle East in which our peoples would enjoy freedom and equality.

There can be no doubt that defending Islam — a religion of moderation, of love and brotherhood; a human religion — is the responsibility of those active forces in our region who seek to counter any attempt to undermine that true religion or to portray it in an unfair manner that is entirely out of keeping with its precepts. Islam is a religion of tolerance that opposes killing, terrorism and assassination. It is a religion of enlightenment, not ignorance or backwardness; a religion of openness to the world. It is against extremism and close-mindedness. We need to work hand in hand to preserve our shared human values.

Those values are today being violated, undermined and weakened. We need to work to strengthen human understanding among religions and cultures because the attempt to foment conflict among religions, cultures and civilizations is one of the most dangerous methods used by international terrorism today.

That is why a dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations is necessary today, particularly because we know that world wars have not been wars of religion or culture, but rather wars of interest. That reality is only one fragment of the overall picture. In fact, missing recurrent opportunities to address the issues of our region seriously so as to reach bold, comprehensive solutions, in particular to the Palestinian question, moves our people to the precipice of despair and depression and makes them easy prey to the forces of ignorance and fanaticism.

Is it not high time to take this opportunity, the beginnings of which we see today, as the international community is moving towards relaunching the peace process, which enjoys the support not only of Israelis and Palestinians, but also of the international community and the world at large? Is it not time to move seriously towards negotiating a complete end to the 1967 Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories, thereby achieving the vision of two States? Is it not time to create a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to settle the refugee issue and to put an end to six decades of suffering? Is it not time to reach a fair, agreed settlement under General

Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948? Is it not time to end the policies of settlement expansionism, of taking land from Palestinians under various pretexts, of building the apartheid separation wall, laying siege and creating checkpoints around cities and towns and refugee camps? Is it not time to end the policy of collective punishment and of denying freedom to the more than 11,300 Palestinians who are rotting in Israeli prisons, some for more than 25 years?

Is it not time to make Jerusalem a city of peace for all faiths and religions? Is it not time for Israel, the occupying Power, to end any work that would change the sacred nature of that city and all attempts to displace its inhabitants and to violate sites sacred to Islam and Christianity? Is it not time for Israel to end the daily assassinations, displacements, destruction of houses and seizure of land? Is it not time for our people to be able to enjoy freedom and independence on equal footing with all other peoples of the world so that they can build a peaceful future together with all of their neighbours, including the State of Israel?

I hope that I will not have to come back to this rostrum next year to ask the same questions.

There is not the slightest obstacle to the successful holding of the upcoming peace conference, because our brotherly, Arab countries have demonstrated through the Arab Peace Initiative their true readiness to bring about a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, from which all States of the region would benefit. Those States would have normal relations with Israel, once the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories had ended and an independent, sovereign Palestinian State had been created within the 1967 borders. That is why we are committed to the substance of that proposed meeting, which should be held soon with the participation of all parties concerned.

Let me say quite frankly that not a single responsible political figure or leader who does not know that the solution to the problem lies solely between us and our Israeli neighbours. Reaching such a lasting solution can only be a result of the many resolutions of the General Assembly, as well as of the initiative of President Bush, who has urged a two-State solution: a Palestinian State living side-by-side with the State of Israel. It must also be based on the Road Map, endorsed in Security Council resolution 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative and the various

negotiations, projects and plans that have been proposed by many parties since 2000.

I therefore address myself to the Israeli Government, with whose head I have recently met. We discussed the important issues in depth, attempting to end the cycle of lost opportunities so that the international conference will become a substantial reality. We can move towards that conference together, with clear, realistic, detailed plans with a view to settling all of the final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees, water security and other key issues. I reaffirm here the full readiness of our people to join a genuine peace process that will lead to a comprehensive, full agreement on all final status issues.

As we promised, we will put such an agreement to a popular referendum that will include all Palestinian factions and groups so that they can give their views and opinions on any decision that would lead to defending and safeguarding peace comprehensively and strategically.

I also reaffirm that we will continue to deal with the rebellion that took place in the Gaza Strip. We shall do so in conformity with our basic laws and so that we can preserve democracy in our country. Attempts from whatever group or faction to impose their will and dark ideas by force and armed revolt will not derail our democracy. It would be wrong for anyone to think that our people, which has for decades sacrificed martyrs, prisoners and the wounded in order to obtain freedom, independence and democracy and to build a free and prosperous country, will follow such an armed group, a closed regime and a closed, backward society.

Some have attempted in the past to play the Palestinian issue as a political card in the service of regional interests in order to achieve expansionist goals or to promote specific ideas or ideologies that would ignore the true interests of the Palestinian people. But we who have struggled all our lives for our national cause, for the protection of the rights and interests of our people and for rejection of hegemony and occupation will not allow such a tragedy to reoccur. We will not allow those who tried to undermine our national destiny to achieve their aims.

I came to this rostrum to convey a message from an exhausted people which has long suffered from occupation, displacement, prison and martyrdom. At the same time, however, they are a people who, imbued

with dignity and faith, will build their own future, even though their past has been the work of those who have plotted against them and against their rights.

I have come to reiterate the words of our immortal leader Yasser Arafat, who was certain that the green branch of peace, which never withers or dies would never fall from his hand. I have come to express the pain and suffering of every Palestinian man and woman, of all those who have lost loved ones or whose loved ones have been wounded, of all those who are waiting for the release from prison of their brothers, fathers, mothers and sisters, of all those who remain trapped on the Iraqi or Syrian borders and of the millions of Palestinians who are living as refugees on their own land. I have come to affirm that the messages of peace of the prophets and the other divine messengers who trod the paths of our land remain vibrant, like a tree that continues to grow and bloom. I have come to affirm that the voice of peace remains stronger than any other voice in our country. That is why I urge that we move forward, hand in hand, on the

shining path towards peace, leaving expediency and short-term interests far behind.

In conclusion, and from this rostrum of the United Nations, I say to the Palestinian people, both those in Palestine and those abroad, that an important historic opportunity is emerging. Therefore, let us be united in order to make that opportunity a reality so that our people, who have suffered so long, can recover their legitimate national rights and achieve the peace, stability and prosperity to which they aspire and which they deserve. We also hope that peace will come to other peoples who are suffering daily, such as the brotherly Iraqi people, and to those who deserve to live in security and stability within the framework of democracy, such as our dear friends the Lebanese people. Together, let us build a stable world — a world of mutual assistance based on respect for life and for the right to self-determination. I thank the Members of the United Nations for their support.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*