



*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



STATEMENT BY

SENATOR THE HON. MAXINE MCCLEAN
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE

AT THE
GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
72ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

22 SEPTEMBER, 2017

Mr. President,

On behalf of my delegation, I congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly. Please be assured that you have the full support and cooperation of the Barbados delegation as you undertake your important duties as President of this august body.

I also take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, for his able leadership of the 71st session. He has served as a worthy example of the valuable contribution which Small Island Developing States (SIDS) can make to international organisations. Barbados is pleased that he will continue to serve the international community.

Mr. President,

The theme of this year's General Debate, ***'Focusing on people: striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet'***, serves as a reminder of the purposes and principles that the United Nations has embraced from its inception and which are enshrined in its Charter. It brings into sharp focus our responsibility to pursue the best interests of the people who occupy planet earth. For if we fail to advance the causes of security, sustainable development and human rights together neither will succeed.

Mr. President, I stand before this august body for the eighth time. On each occasion that I have addressed the nations gathered here, I cautioned about the ramifications of unchecked climate change. I highlighted the existential threat faced by vulnerable Small Island Developing States such as Barbados.

In his first address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2008, the Prime Minister of Barbados, the late David Thompson described the Caribbean as ***“A region at the epicenter of the global climate crisis.”*** Citing scientific evidence and devastating impacts of climate change which were already evident in the region, he told the General Assembly that ***“failure to take urgent, ambitious and decisive action would be nothing short of reckless indifference”***.

Seven years later the Prime Minister of Barbados, the Right Honourable Freundel Stuart reminded the world that:

“None of the nations represented in this Assembly will enjoy sustainable prosperity if we continue to abuse the environment which we hold in sacred trust for future generations The very existence of small island states like those in the Caribbean and the Pacific could be imperiled if current trends are not halted or reversed.”

I have heard many other leaders from small island developing states consistently warn of the inherent danger to lives, livelihoods and the very existence of sovereign nations of inaction or insufficient action to reduce global emissions and provide support for resilience building in vulnerable countries. Year after year our leaders warned of the escalating costs of responding to climate impacts and that decades of development gains could easily be washed away in a few hours from an extreme weather event. They also warned of the persistent and frustrating challenge our region faced in accessing resources to strengthen our resilience and to protect our peoples from the ravages of climate change owing to a narrow

focus on per capita income by donors and international development banks and agencies.

This clarion call from the Caribbean was ignored.

Today, we bear witness to the results of this act of reckless indifference.

Today, I regret that I must report, not on a potential threat, but rather on the destructive impact of climate change on the globe. I speak most specifically of the utter devastation being visited on several Small Island Developing States in the Caribbean overwhelmed by an unprecedented wave of hurricanes.

On Saturday, September 16th when I arrived in New York, the people of Antigua and Barbuda and in the Caribbean we were working feverishly to restore some semblance of order to the islands shattered by Irma, the ninth named hurricane of the 2017 season. A mere two days later, in the early hours of Monday, I read with horror the pleas of the Prime Minister of Dominica as he reached out to the world to share the trauma he was experiencing as his small island was ravaged by the brutal force of nature from the 11th hurricane in a season which has not yet ended. Barbados, by the grace of God has so far been spared but we in the Caribbean are one family; we are brothers and sisters and when one of us hurts we all feel the pain.

For much of the Caribbean, tourism is the major economic sector. This has been built on offering to the world a zone of peace and health. The threat of disease must be avoided. One possible consequence of the recent floods and serious infrastructural damage in the region is the outbreak of diseases. Our ability to detect and respond to such biological threats must be strengthened. There must be bilateral and multilateral cooperation to minimise and indeed eliminate such threats. A focus on Bio-security must be part of our response. There must be attention paid to a global health security agenda. As an island state, the Ocean is a priority for Barbados. Ocean governance and the promotion and conservation of marine resources is therefore one of our primary concerns.

The road to recovery and reconstruction for Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica and the other islands affected by this year's devastating hurricane season will be long and difficult. I take comfort in the spirit, will and determination of Caribbean people. We are down but not defeated.

Our neighbours in the Caribbean affected by the recent hurricanes can be assured of the full and unconditional support and solidarity of the Government and people of Barbados.

However, our friends in the international community must accompany the Caribbean region on this journey to rebuild Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and the other affected islands. We are all morally obligated to

do so. In this regard, I call on the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of the World Bank to convene an International Pledging Conference on the Recovery and Reconstruction of the Caribbean Islands affected by the Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I urge all member states to support the recovery and rebuilding of the Caribbean.

Mr. President,

For Barbados and other SIDS, whether in the Caribbean, the Pacific, Asia or Africa, climate change is a matter of life or death. It is not an issue for sterile debates and endless meetings. For our people, it is about loss of life and livelihood. For our economies, heavily dependent on tourism, it is about a cycle of constant recovery and rebuilding which is a serious impediment to sustainable development.

Barbados remains committed to ambitious action on climate change. We continue to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and view the Secretary General's Climate Summit in 2019 as an important opportunity to take stock and to give additional impetus where necessary.

Barbados' support for global climate change action is a component of its overall policy of promoting and protecting the environment. We have taken concrete steps to build a resource-efficient green economy, which is integrated into our national framework for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Barbados takes this opportunity to convey its solidarity with the Government and people of Mexico suffering the painful effects of two deadly earthquakes in quick succession.

PEACE

A key element of this year's theme is *Striving for Peace*.

Barbados is a democratic, peace-loving nation. Last year, my country celebrated its 50th anniversary of Independence gained, after negotiation and mutual agreement. We cherish and nurture our political and social stability, based on our history of over 375 years of unbroken Parliamentary Government. We believe that peace is an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable human, social and economic development. For us, it is an essential pillar supporting the national mission of the Government of Barbados - sustainable economic and social development for the nation, protecting the environment, maintaining good governance and strengthening citizen security.

We are committed to inclusive development as a means of achieving lasting peace and stability at the national and international levels.

We regret that there can be no peace of mind for the people of the Caribbean who must rebuild their homes and their livelihoods.

But the Mission of the United Nations is to secure global peace. We were reminded by the Secretary General at the very start of our deliberations that "*We are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace.*" So each and every member of this international community has an obligation to support efforts and take action to create an environment in which peace can flourish. The countries of Latin America and Caribbean have declared the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace. I use this opportunity to express the unwavering support of Barbados for the protection and preservation of the territorial integrity of our sister CARICOM countries of Guyana and Belize.

Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet

Mr. President,

Barbados joins with other UN Member States in the effort to address collectively the many other diverse challenges to which the international community must find and implement solutions.

In the last few years, the countries represented here have made historic international commitments. These include the SAMOA Pathway, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

As an international community, we must now take action to implement these commitments, if the destruction referenced earlier in my statement, is to be addressed.

In recognition that our citizens are our most precious resource, we have resolutely taken a path to development that is people-centred.

Our national policy framework aligns naturally with the philosophy guiding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This has facilitated our implementation efforts. The Prime Minister of Barbados has clearly demonstrated the priority which Barbados accords to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. He has appointed a Permanent Secretary in his office with the mandate and special responsibility to lead the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level.

Mr. President,

Barbados has been a consistent and vocal advocate for the treatment of SIDS as a special case for sustainable development because of their inherent natural vulnerabilities. There is a pressing need for the international community to address the specific needs and interests of SIDS in a holistic manner. Effective partnerships on a multi-sectoral basis are also required to assist them in implementing the SDGs.

Mr. President,

Barbados welcomes the on-going efforts of the UN to focus international attention on the challenges facing our oceans and the need for the international community to take meaningful steps to protect the marine environment.

I was pleased to head the Barbados delegation to the UN Oceans Conference in June this year and I commit to ensuring the continued active participation of Barbados on this issue. Barbados signals its interest in working with UN agencies and other international partners to develop an Oceans economy trade strategy, as well as effective systems to manage our fish stocks.

Mr. President,

Barbados has built an enviable record on the basis of its promotion of social development. Since independence, successive administrations have committed to a targeted social policy focusing on the people of Barbados. Substantial investment has been made in sectors such as education and health, in order to develop a skilled, healthy and productive population.

The result of this investment has been a significant improvement in the quality of life of Barbadians over the years. This is borne out in the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index and other indices focusing on transparency, corruption, gender balance and human rights inter alia.

The promotion and protection of the human rights of all Barbadians is a primary concern of the Government of Barbados. This is in keeping with our commitment to a human rights-based approach to development, and with our adherence to the principles of good governance, the rule of law and ensuring that our people have the highest levels of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

We pay special attention to the rights of the vulnerable, including children, women, and persons with disabilities. With respect to the rights of persons with disabilities, Government, working together with civil society, continues to make progress in promoting full integration into mainstream society.

Barbados wishes to participate more fully in the international community on issues of inclusiveness. We are pleased, therefore, to present the candidature of Her Honour Senator Kerryann Ifill for membership of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), for the term 2019-2022. She is the youngest President of the Senate ever appointed in Barbados, the first female and the first person with a disability ever to hold that position. Senator Ifill's candidature has been endorsed by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Mr. President,

The Caribbean Community has been in the forefront of initiatives at the United Nations to address the problem of non-communicable diseases.

During this session, Barbados will work with regional and other partners to bring greater focus to the growing challenge of childhood obesity, a serious problem which could become the next major development challenge.

Barbados looks forward to the convening of the Third UN Conference on NCDs, scheduled for next year. I encourage Member States to participate actively in this Conference. It presents an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our action on this important issue and to move closer to our goal of improved health for our people.

Mr. President,

Barbados takes this opportunity to express once again its deep concern at being penalised for any success that it achieves in its development efforts. Its categorisation as a Middle Income Country with the resulting restriction in access to international development assistance and concessionary financing is unfair and does nothing to advance the cause of sustainable development. We reiterate our call on the international community to create an enabling global environment and partnership for development. Countries such as mine require assistance in building economic resilience not challenges such as de-risking, black listing and indebtedness.

Mr. President,

Transnational crime constitutes one of the major threats to international peace and security. It can take many forms - trafficking in illegal drugs, trafficking in persons, the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons as well as money laundering. These all present significant threats to the security of Barbados.

Barbados reiterates its commitment to protecting the security of its people. We will remain actively engaged in cooperative mechanisms seeking to confront and address these challenges.

Barbados welcomes the convening of the Third Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We encourage all States Parties to take action to implement the Treaty. We further acknowledge the nexus between the ATT and the SDGs and their contribution to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Mr. President,

The long-standing economic embargo on Cuba continues to be cause of serious concern for Barbados. We join with the overwhelming majority of UN Member States in opposing this unilateral action and encourage constructive engagement between the two sides.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate Barbados' unwavering commitment to the United Nations and to the principle of multilateralism. If we are truly committed to a decent life for all people everywhere must have be heard. That includes those in small states such as Barbados.

Barbados agrees that there is the need for reform in the UN System. However, even as the United Nations undergoes reform to better equip itself to respond to today's global challenges, due care must be taken to ensure that the process is inclusive and transparent. No Member State, particularly the most vulnerable, must be excluded in the restructuring process.

Barbados supports the view that a spirit of cooperation and dialogue should be the foundation for our interaction at the multilateral level. Cooperation and dialogue represent the best means of achieving our international goals and objectives.

I thank you.