



Permanent Mission of St. Kitts and Nevis to the United Nations

STATEMENT

BY

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OF THE FEDERATION OF ST. KITTS & NEVIS

**AT THE 63RD SESSION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Your Excellency, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon; Your Excellency, President Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann; Excellencies; Distinguished guests; Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. I wish to begin by thanking His Excellency, Serfjan Kerim, for his leadership over the past year as President of the 62nd Session of this august and venerable body. I also wish to congratulate and extend best wishes to His Excellency, Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua, on his assumption of the presidency of this 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

2. Twenty-five years ago, Mr. President, almost to the day, two Caribbean peoples who had always been separated by water, but had long been united by history, culture and circumstance, joined forces to embark upon a bold experiment. Having between them a land mass of just over 100 sq miles, and a population of approximately 50,000, the people of St. Kitts and the people of Nevis decided to step forward, as one nation, to join the world community of sovereign states.

3. It is an honor and a pleasure for me to be here to represent this nation at the United Nations, a potent symbol of freedom and sovereignty. That symbolism, Mr. President, means all the more to my people at this particular time, as this 63rd Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly coincides with the celebration my nation's twenty-fifth anniversary of political independence.

4. Mr. President, building and reinforcing the pillars of nationhood has not been easy, but always we have considered it an essential task and a challenge worth facing. And so, as chief servant of my people and my cherished land, I stand before you today, emboldened by the pride of a nation which has taken its full and rightful place among the community of independent nations, a vibrant democracy with a thriving economy and a deep commitment to justice and human rights, and an abiding faith in social equity.

5. Mine is a pride which comes not only from realizing the benefits of the practical policies and programs created over the years to improve the standard of living and uplift our people, but from the sense of community, and partnership, civic and personal responsibility that have shaped the destiny of my nation.

6. It is also the pride which comes from witnessing firsthand the true value of freedom; a freedom which has enabled us to share in the triumphs of democracy and to mould the creative genius and the industrious, enterprising spirit of our people into a single community of goodwill and commitment which moves our people and country forward.

7. It is a pride born of weathering storms of external economic shocks, including fluctuating commodity prices and the withdrawal of preferential market access, while being able to successfully transform three centuries of a mono-cultural, sugar-based economy into a vibrant and competitive services-driven economy without the typical

social and economic shocks that so often accompany so drastic an economic transformation. Many other small states have not been as fortunate however.

8. This is evident in our sister Caribbean nation of Haiti where the devastating effects of four consecutive hurricanes in the space of one month, the consequence of high commodity prices and rising energy costs continue to undermine the government's effort to build strong institutions as well as to invest in the productive enterprises and infrastructure that generate employment and improved living conditions.

9. Mr. President, the progress witnessed in St. Kitts and Nevis was not achieved by chance. Since the birth of our nation twenty-five years ago, we have faced a multitude of problems; some of which are fortunately behind us; but several others have emerged and grown in intensity and scope.

10. However our experience in St. Kitts and Nevis demonstrates, Mr. President, that good governance and prudent management of one's resources; appropriate investment in people and systems, protecting people's freedom of association, religion, and speech; the support and facilitation of a free and vibrant press; success at advancing the socio-economic well-being of one's people; and the upholding of democratic ideals, are determined not by land mass, but by national character and political commitment. They are the result, not of demographic or geographic size, but of long-standing socio-cultural traditions. They are a function, not of GDP, but of an entrenched ethos of striving and determination. Our faith has steadied our resolve and belief in ourselves and our future. And of course, along the way, we have relied understandably on institutions such as our beloved United Nations.

11. Through membership, St. Kitts and Nevis has built important and strategic partnerships; and stood shoulder to shoulder with other member states to protect our individual rights and collective freedoms; and have fought battles far bigger than the expectation for a country of its size. We have also been witnesses, Mr. President, to the positives and negatives, the strengths and failings of our world, but have soldiered on together in common cause.

12. And that is why, Mr. President, that twenty-five years later, I remain optimistic about the progress of the United Nations and its ability to defend the poor and needy despite the pull of competing powerful national agendas that has occasionally risked undermining the ethos of the institution, and indeed the common good. From where I stand today, Mr. President, I have come to appreciate these achievements, and to appreciate that even at this juncture, providence affords us still new opportunities to renew our cherished institution.

13. It is very easy to take side with the cynics when the Security Council becomes frozen in stalemate or when the need for action fall victim to political posturing. But the history, particularly of the past two decades, instructs me that the United Nations is far more than the sum of its weakness. Because for millions of people around the world this

organization is their only hope – a bridge between life and death - a bastion of freedom and a beacon of hope.

14. It is my hope, therefore, that in this “Assembly of Frankness” there will be a sober and unrelenting analysis of the human consequences of sweeping and globally-enforced trade and economic regimes, on small states all across the globe. And it is also my hope that the economic uncertainties now being experienced in some of the world’s larger economies will sensitize us all to the breadth of the uncertainty, the depth of the anxiety, and the real psychological trauma that often grip small states when policies that are formulated far beyond their shores, and are utterly unresponsive to their entreaties, are nonetheless thrust unflinchingly upon them.

15. Recent events have called into focus the issue of the stability of the world financial systems and financial institutions. The circumstances that have led to collapsing financial institutions and rising prices for food and energy were not created by small States such as St. Kitts and Nevis. But yet again as in the case of climate change we are victims of the act of others with no resources to combat the consequences.

16. Earlier this year, I participated in the high-level conference on World Food Security. The upbeat response from several Heads of State and Government and from the numerous ministers of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, water, energy and environment who participated in that meeting was, for me, a strong indication of the relevance and timeliness of the conference for nations seeking to take positive action on the issue of food security.

17. The current trend continues to have a lopsided impact on the poor, and the increasing numbers of extremely poor and vulnerable people, who are least able to counter the impact of economic dislocations facing our countries. Mindful of our personal responsibility as leaders and of the heightened expectations of our citizenry, the government of St. Kitts and Nevis has been taking practical measures to alleviate the suffering on our resilient people.

18. We have addressed the important dimensions of availability and access to certain food staples such as rice, flour and sugar. We have looked at how best to stabilize prices to inject predictability into the system without prejudice to free market economics. We have also begun to rationalize and promote proper utilization of agricultural lands through land use diversion and diversification; providing financial and seedling support to farmers; and recommending water rationalization and enhanced irrigation techniques.

19. These problems to which I have alluded, Mr. President are not unique to St. Kitts and Nevis. You will recall popular riots in some countries including Haiti which led to the resignation of that country’s government. This is evidence of just how the impact of the rising cost of food and the despair visited upon whole communities could easily undermine peoples’ faith in their governments to deliver on the promises of democracy, free market economics and globalization.

20. In January 2008, the FAO Food Price Index jumped by 47% over the previous year which included increases in cereals by 62%, dairy by 69% and vegetable oils by 85%. In some instances, prices of staple foods such as maize, wheat, rice and beans have risen by more than 100%. This global economic downturn coupled with the dramatic upsurge in commodity prices has created the worst food crisis in recent years.

21. This new phenomenon, Mr. President, will make it more difficult for us to address the growing incidence of poverty in and among our nations and our ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger throughout the world by 2015.

22. Against this backdrop and the need for urgent action, we also urge that the issue of reform, a recurrent United Nations agenda for some 15 years, be re-visited with renewed vigor and commitment. Far too much time has passed. Far too little has been done. And far too much now hangs in the balance. Let us equip the United Nations with the tools necessary to fulfill its mandates, especially in the areas of protecting individual freedoms and human rights as well as promoting economic development as an integral element of human security around the world. For as Clarence Darrow said: "You can only protect your liberties in the world by protecting the other man's freedom. You can only be free if I (also) am free."

23. Mr. President, the continuous suppression of freedom – overt or disguised - under the cloak of civil order or territorial integrity, must be tackled openly. Freedom and personal responsibility go hand in hand. How can we encourage people to take personal responsibility but deprive them of their personal freedom?

24. Mr. President, our presence here today is both a demonstration and an acknowledgement of the increasingly interconnected nature of our world. I wish to say that much of what St. Kitts and Nevis has achieved over the past twenty-five years has been the result of our people's hard work and discipline, combined with the benefits that have accrued from both our multilateral, as well as our bilateral, relations. In this regard, the UNDP has been a vibrant partner in advancing the programmatic goals of our twin-island Federation, as have UNESCO and other UN agencies. Our relationship with this organization is one that we cherish dearly.

25. We have worked with and through sub-regional entities such as the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS); regional mechanisms such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM); and hemispheric institutions like the Organization of American States. Through regional mechanisms we have been able to map a course for functional cooperation on issues such as trade, security and health. Within a Pan-Caribbean Partnership (PANCAP) we have developed a regional response to tackle the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. In the area of environmental protection, we continue to collaborate on and to work towards disaster reduction and mitigation; and we are assiduously exploring renewable energy sources including geo-thermal energy with which we have made encouraging progress.

26. On the issue of bilateral relations, I am pleased to say that we have built many deeply valued relationships over the years, and we continue to further strengthen these relations. In light of this, we urge that a way be found to facilitate the participation of the Republic of China on Taiwan in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. As world challenges have expanded, the Republic of China on Taiwan has stepped forward to provide technical assistance in the areas of social and agricultural development, as well as disaster relief in many countries, bringing enormous benefits to both public and private sectors.

27. Mr. President, whatever the tone and tenor of the on-going debate, climate change is a factor of our modern experiences. Because of our activities and assault on Earth's atmosphere, many processes have negatively impacted rivers, lakes and oceans, resulting in fast melting polar ice caps, rising sea levels, and exposed us to greater risk of harmful solar radiation and greenhouse gas emissions. Wherever culpability may reside, these processes all have serious implications for and consequences on small island states.

28. These changes impact, in varying degrees and at different levels hundreds of thousands of small scale farmers, fishermen and other people who depend heavily on the natural environment for their livelihood, but who are already witnessing lower crop yields and smaller catches.

29. It is no longer sufficient simply to lay blame at the feet of countries, business and people who pollute. We need effective strategies based on scientific consensus, and solution-focused approaches which address such issues as the suitability of land for different types of crops, dedicated areas for livestock, pasture development, marine environment, the impact on health and healthcare, productivity of forests, the increased incidence of pests and diseases as well as the implications for biodiversity and ecosystems. We must collaborate in addressing these effects and take necessary corrective action in order to build a safer environment for ourselves and future generations.

30. Our destinies and our freedoms are all interwoven, Mr. President. It was Franklin D. Roosevelt who said, "...true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence." As St. Kitts and Nevis commemorates its jubilee year of independence, we therefore feel compelled to call on the United Nations and the members of the Security Council to work together to put an end to the genocide in part of Africa. I also call on the United Nations to take firm action in the lead-up to the "Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development" so that this event brings real relief and development even to the far corners of Africa.

31. Mr. President, for much too long, we have, perhaps unwittingly, separated human security from representative democracy, and economic development from human rights. These are inextricably linked. When we fight for the freedom of our brothers to vote, but ignore their inalienable right to food security, this is a skewed principle, a half measure of selective morality in which our fight will always be only partially won.

32. We cannot simply tell our citizens they are free to vote but fail to help them transform freedoms into practical systems which support and advance personal dreams. Democracy is the best vehicle through which humankind can realize our dreams and aspirations. I firmly believe, Mr. President, that “true independence, like freedom, can only come from doing what is right.”

33. And I continue to believe in the United Nations. But beyond that I have faith in the people of St. Kitts and Nevis whose confidence in themselves as a nation and their commitment to the future have made possible the successes, positive growth and development as well as the international partnerships established over the last twenty-five years.

34. Therefore, I say to the member states of this United Nations, let us commit to doing the right things. Let us continue the important work to reform and revitalize the United Nations. Let us tackle food security by recognizing that globalization was meant to improve our lives, not to worsen it. It was meant to facilitate free movement of goods and services not as an opportunity for artificial and unilateral barriers that punish poor and more competitive countries. Let us do the right thing about climate change – together, one step at a time. Let us use the “Follow-up Conference on Financing for Development” to address the fundamental development challenges facing developing countries in Africa and around the world.

35. Mr. Chairman, distinguished leaders, all this and far more is within the power and capacity of a reordered United Nations and member states who are willing to take personal responsibility.

36. I thank you.