

“ The impact of the global food crisis on poverty and hunger in the world as well as the need to democratize the United Nations.”

**Mr. President
Mr. Secretary General
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me extreme pleasure in extending to you Mr. President my congratulations on your election. I believe that your appointment to this high office as a leader in your own right, and as a God-fearing servant of the Republic of Nicaragua to the UN and to this Assembly, is timely in these challenging times.

May I also extend my appreciation to His Excellency Dr Srgjan Kerim for his successful leadership of the 62nd General Assembly.

I am deeply honored to be able to address this august assembly as the first President of the Republic since Vanuatu's admission to the United Nations in 1981. In this respect, Mr. President, please allow me to also extend my congratulations to the distinguished Secretary General on his appointment, and for his sterling commitments to revitalize the United Nations.

I am therefore humbled and privileged to stand before the 63rd General Assembly, to share some words and thoughts on behalf of the people of Vanuatu.

Mr. President,

In June this year I read with great interest your statement following your election as President of this 63rd General Assembly and I quote:

[For the United Nations] to be more effective it, must be what its name implies – an organization of nations united, not nations dispersed, or even worse, subjugated. “Our nations must be united in the struggle to democratize the United Nations, united in their determination to preserve the world[...] for the sake of present and future generations from the scourge of war among Member States and acts of aggression....”.

Unquote.

That is our mission statement.

Mr. President,

Twenty seven (27) years ago, on 15th September 1981, Vanuatu became the 155th member of the United Nations Organization family.

On that same day, our first and longest serving Prime Minister, and founding father of our nation, the late Dr, Chief and Priest, Father Walter Hadye Lini, “with pride, humility and gratitude” spoke to this esteemed Assembly “in the name of the people of Vanuatu” and acknowledged the support of the United Nations through the “active concern and assistance” of the Committee of 24 on Decolonization.

Father Lini said that “Because of [that] the United Nations has a very special place in [the] affections and esteem [of the people of Vanuatu]”. He also expressed our nation’s debt of gratitude to the many “number of countries represented in

this assembly”, who assisted our nation’s difficult progress towards independence.

In the same spirit I call on the United Nations to continue to pursue the interests of those countries and peoples who continue their struggle for freedom, and a permanent place amongst us.

Mr. President,

The United Nations is the organization of the family of independent sovereign nations and peoples of the world. It must stand firm to promote **peace, security and equality** throughout the world. The world’s majority has accepted the phenomenon of climate change as a reality and no longer an academic theory. From Kyoto to Bali that observation was consistently re-stated.

The increase in and destructive powers of natural calamities is again a stark reminder of the increasing vulnerability of today’s global environment where nature respects no boundaries. The severe impact of natural disasters will constantly remind us of the harsh experiences and critical development challenges confronting many of the island countries.

I join my fellow colleagues from the Pacific region in our call to the international community for more concerted action in addressing climate change as a security issue. Unless the present trend of global warming is reversed through sincere and concerted international action through the UN framework, some of our Pacific colleague nations will be submerged.

If such a tragedy does happen, then the UN and its members would have failed in their first and most basic duty to a member nation and its innocent people.

Mr. President,

Since 2003, Vanuatu's economy rebounded to 3.2 percent from -2.60 percent and -7.40 percent in 2001 and 2002 respectively. Continued Growth was recorded in 2004 and 2005 with published rate of 5.50 percent and 6.80 percent respectively driven mainly by growth in the service sector and in particular tourism.

As you know, a dimension of the LDC status is the tri-annual review by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the list of LDC countries with the view to recommend countries for graduation out or inclusion in the LDC Group of countries.

It is in this regard that I wish to bring to the attention of our Assembly an area of serious concern to my Government and several other small island developing States of the Pacific.

It is our view that the current graduation rule poses a systemic issue that could easily be resolved if member States were willing to recognize its importance to countries like Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

Mr. President,

The decision of graduating a country from LDC status, in our view, must imply the recognition of **undisputed sustainable socio-economic progress** in the country. The criteria the UN leans on to arrive at a decision are by and large sound and fair, and I will briefly recall them: **first**, one expects the country to enjoy a higher income per capita; **secondly**, the

country's human assets or human capital is expected to have made significant progress; and **thirdly**, the country ought to have achieved greater resilience to external shocks, in other words, to have become economically less vulnerable.

A country is recommended for graduation if it meets any two of these three criteria. In other words, the graduation rule implicitly postulates that all three criteria are equally important. A country, no matter how vulnerable, has risen to a level of per capita income above US \$900 (which is not difficult in a small State) and enjoys improved human capital, it is assumed this country has become structurally stronger and is now ready to pursue its development efforts without LDC treatment.

Mr. President

Kiribati, Tuvalu and Vanuatu believe it is critical to recognize the vulnerability criterion as the **paramount criterion** and accordingly should be given prominence. It is indeed the only criterion that ultimately matters to small and vulnerable States such as ours.

The three small island States I just cited, which include my own country, are deemed eligible for graduation on the basis of their improved income per capita income and improved human assets. They remain among the **most vulnerable countries in the world**, both economically and environmentally and this must be recognized by the UN. Our countries may graduate from LDC status because they have achieved a higher per capita income performance, even though the sustainability of this income is constantly challenged by the high vulnerability of the island economies to shocks such as frequent cyclones, earthquake, volcanic eruption and sea level rise.

The recent hurricanes in this part of the world remind us of the destructive impact such natural phenomena have in the development process of island countries and LDCs.

Mr. President,

You may be aware of the "**island paradox**" – when relative prosperity overshadows high vulnerability -- continues to be disregarded, despite the repeated call for a reform of the graduation rule that would make vulnerability a *sine qua non* --or compulsory-- criterion.

This is not the first time Vanuatu, in addressing this august assembly, calls on the UN to reform the way Least Developed Countries are identified. Some eleven years ago in 1997, a former Prime Minister called for an urgent **review of the LDC graduation criteria, which as a result** brought the UN to introduce a vulnerability criterion, a fair and sound move on the part of this organization.

Mr. President,

I therefore reiterate Vanuatu's plea for a reform of the graduation rule, and wish to point out that the reform we are calling for is a mild and reasonable one, one that could easily be adopted by ECOSOC and the General Assembly without altering the main components of the established methodology.

We believe the time has come for the UN to come full circle by making the same criterion a superior one, so that no highly vulnerable country be forcibly reclassified and bound to lose the level of concessionary support it remains in need of.

Such a reform would do justice to countries that have not achieved the implied structural progress.

We are also urging experts from the CDP to seriously consider merit in undertaking in-country visits to assess first hand the development experiences of affected countries rather than making conclusions on statistical indicators that are anomalous and theoretical to say the least.

Mr. President,

In 2004 the Government of Vanuatu established its MDG National Committee, which adopted a Plan of Action to implement the MDG's. In its first report of 2005 the MDG National Committee concluded that Vanuatu's outlook for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals or its respective targets were poor to fair. These can be attributed to poor linkages to Government priorities, and inadequate allocation of resources to implement the Plan of Action.

Nevertheless, we are pleased to report that in collaboration with the United Nations Development Program, Vanuatu is endeavoring to put in place mechanisms to operationalise its sector strategies by identifying key issues, required interventions to address them, defining the coverage of interventions and their costing. We believe that if we succeed in doing this we will be able to accelerate progress on the MDGs and come 2015 Vanuatu will be able to provide a more positive report to you.

Mr. President,

At the Millennium Summit the then Prime Minister of Vanuatu Barak Sope Maautamate called on the United

Nations to review the legality of the United Nations action in 1962 to endorse the New York Agreement to administer the so-named “Act of Free Choice” over West Papua.

The Charter of the United Nations espouses the principles that continue to guide the Organization’s efforts in the process of self-determination. This manifestation calls for recognition and respect of the fundamental and inalienable rights of people and territories still under colonial rule to determine their future. We cannot champion democracy if the United Nations continues to hang this blanket of silence over the case of West Papua.

Mr. President,

An issue of extreme national importance is the submission to the United Nations on the Extension of Continental Shelves. Like some other smaller nations technical capacity constraints and financial resources have inhibited progress on submissions and therefore we are requesting that the United Nations consider extending the deadline for submissions to enable countries like Vanuatu, participate fully in this process. We urge the understanding of our development partners to consider providing funding for this important exercise.

Mr. President,

On the question of reforms at the United Nations we believe that to make the organization truly democratic reforms are essential in the Security Council in making it more representative of the membership. In this respect, we believe Japan, India and a representative from Africa deserve permanent membership.

Mr. President,

At this critical point in global crisis I wish to remind all members of one of the aphorisms underpinning the foundations of the United Nations taken from the book of the great prophet Micah, engraved on the walls of the UN Headquarters.

Quote:

“They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more”.

Unquote

It is no coincidence that the theme for this Assembly is a much clearer manifestation of those prophetic words, which the United Nations has neglected over the years.

As one of the smallest members of the UN family of nations Vanuatu reaffirms its commitment to building global peace and security. We also remain committed to supporting UN peace keeping missions as our modest contribution to this worthy cause.

Mr. President,

Finally, we welcome 2009 as the Year of Reconciliation. We all hope and pray that this will be a time for real compromises and political goodwill. We are encouraging all members of our family of nations to approach 2009 with open hearts. If we are to turn the tide of tension and

animosity, we must have the courage to be able to reconcile our differences and converge on those dimensions that will enhance the role of this noble organization in peace building and development.

In closing, I would like to express my Government's gratitude to all our development partners who have generously complimented Vanuatu's development efforts. In particular we wish to thank Australia, China, the European Union, New Zealand, Japan, the United States of America, and France. We would also like to acknowledge the support of other partners, namely India, Turkey, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Italy, Cuba and Canada, and multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and ADB, and other UN agencies.

Mr. President,

We are living in perilous times. In our Father's hands were we created. In our hands He has entrusted upon Leaders of the world the responsibility to ensure a world safe and just for all His peoples and children. The world's destiny is in our hands. This must be our inspiration.

These are my words.

May God Bless the United Nations
May God Bless you all.

Thank you.
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