



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

High-Level Event of the General Assembly

“Contributions of Human Rights and the Rule of Law

in the Post-2015 Development Agenda”

Opening Session

New York

9 June 2014

Please check against delivery

H.R.H. Crown Princess Mette-Maritt, UNAIDS International Goodwill Ambassador,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of UNICEF,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to this last High-Level Event in a series to set the stage for the post-2015 development agenda. Over the next two days, we will discuss how human rights and the rule of law can and should contribute to the post-2015 development agenda.

Respect for human rights and the rule of law falls into a category of factors that can either greatly enhance development or severely undermine development, depending on whether it is present or absent. For this reason, during each of the five previous events I have convened, concerns about human rights and the rule of law have never been far below the surface. There has been an undeniable consensus that respecting human rights and the rule of law is central to the development process.

Excellencies,

History is replete with examples of peoples rising up in anger and frustration at what they see as gross and consistent deprivation of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Meanwhile, there are also numerous cases of peoples who suffer these injustices in silence and endure deprivation.

As Member States of the United Nations, we have made solemn commitments to honor the rights of these oppressed peoples – whether they be organized and strident, or silent and submissive. It is safe to say that the Charter of the United Nations belongs to these peoples; it is their Charter.

Our UN Charter reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women everywhere, and of nations large and small. This, and this alone, I assure you all, is the concern that drives this High-level Event on Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Amongst all stakeholders, there is a unanimous recognition that respect for human rights and the rule of law provides a context that facilitates development, just as development facilitates the establishment of a regime of respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Matters related to human rights and rule of law must be considered when identifying the relevant goals and targets of the next development agenda. But they must also be an outcome in their own right.

There have been various proposals from a wide range of stakeholders on how to integrate human rights and the rule of law into the post-2015 development agenda, including proposals for stand-alone goals.

At the same time, we are aware of the challenges that exist and concerns that have been raised. For example, some have asked, how do we measure human rights and the rule of law? Others have inquired, is this exercise too subjective to be truly helpful to development processes? Furthermore, there is the question whether such an exercise can amount to cultural imperialism. For example, does our attention to these issues lead to conditions imposed upon the South by the North, or to the forging of a world order that favors the West over the East?

And when a nation lacks a regime of respect for human rights and the rule of law, but seeks to have one, what kind of technical assistance can be given?

Our challenge is to contemplate how we may address these concerns, or, even debunk them, as we consider practical ways to operationalize our commitment to human rights and the rule of law in a manner that supports poverty eradication and sustainable development. Furthermore, let us give strong consideration to how we can support the integration of these objectives into the post-2015 development agenda.

This is the central exercise of our deliberations.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you deliberate over the next two days, I encourage you to be ever mindful of our unfinished business.

Children remain unfed, *uneducated*, *unprotected* and many of our young *unemployed*. Women's equal rights remain *un-fulfilled*, as are those of many marginalized groups. This undermines their potential and leaves many destitute, without recourse to justice and in some cases living in fear of retribution. At the same time, many nations remain underdeveloped, subject to systemic imbalances, with empty promises from development partners.

Coming out of Rio, the Future We Want must be transformational for all. We have agreed that the post-2015 development agenda must be inclusive and people-centred. At its core, it must respect the inalienable rights and freedoms of all peoples and promote the rule of law.

We must therefore, in the words of the late Maya Angelou, aim towards fashioning for this earth [quote] “[a] climate where every man and every woman / Can live freely without sanctimonious piety / Without crippling fear.” [end quote]. Only then can we ensure a life of dignity for all, in larger freedom.

I look forward to your thoughtful contributions.

Thank you.
