

PLEASE, CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



Opening Address

by

H.E Ambassador John Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

New York

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Excellencies,
Secretary General,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three months ago I stood at this very podium and expressed my gratitude to all of you for electing me by acclamation as President of the General Assembly at its 68th session. Today, I am once again deeply gratified and humbled as I address you for the first time in the singular capacity of President of the United Nations General Assembly at this 68th session. In so doing I am deeply aware that I am indeed fortunate to have had the distinct pleasure of working with many of you as colleagues and friends over a number of years – probably far too many years for us both to recall – assuming that you would want to. It is those years of friendship and goodwill that give me confidence that I can draw upon our shared sense of past collaboration and partnership to forge a new working relationship, which will lead to a successful conclusion of this session.

Distinguished Colleagues,

At the outset, let me thank my predecessor, H.E Vuk Jeremic who has presided over the just concluded sixty-seven (67th) session of this Assembly, for his valuable contributions to its work. I commend our Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the tremendous diligence and commitment he has shown in leading this Organization and I look forward to working closely with him and his team in ensuring that the General Assembly remains the pre-eminent deliberative body of the United Nations. And because the United Nations is a family of agencies spread throughout the world, let me also recognize the staff of the UN and its various agencies for their consummate professionalism and hard work on behalf of so many across our globe.

Excellencies,

In the months since my election, I have met with nearly all of you – either individually or through your regional groupings to discuss the priorities for the 68th session of the General Assembly. These discussions have been both informative and constructive, and they have afforded me the opportunity to hear your views, priorities and concerns on the 68th session's agenda. In return, I have had an opportunity to exchange ideas on my theme for the 68th session, namely: "The Post 2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage!" Many of you shared positive feedback and specific thoughts about how to enhance the theme and the six events I will be holding, and for this, I thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your almost universal pledges of cooperation were very encouraging, which should make the collective task of tackling the bolder aspects of our work all the more feasible. Dare I hope that it also means a new sense of urgency and an end to protraction and delay in the negotiations and work of this body, so that we can complete the ambitious agenda of our General Assembly in a timely and effective manner? Many of you are now involved in a number of intergovernmental processes that will ultimately feed into the Post-2015 Development Agenda, so you are well aware of the challenges that lie ahead. The upcoming year will be pivotal for this Assembly as we seek to identify the parameters of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The magnitude of the task before us will require decisive action and the highest levels of collaboration and we must prove ourselves and our efforts to be equal to the enormity of the task.

To assist you to set the "stage" for the aforementioned Agenda, it is my intent to convene an equal number (three (3) in each case) of High-level Events and Thematic Debates. There will be a High-level Event to discuss the role of women, youth and civil society in the post 2015 Development Agenda. We simply cannot reach our development goals, or advance human well-being without addressing the needs and challenges of women and youth, while also making use of the contributions of the both. And as we reminded

ourselves at the recent Rio+20 Conference, governments cannot go it alone in the implementation of the development agenda, so let us therefore explore where and how we can partner more actively with civil society in this regard.

Another High-level Event will explore the contributions of Human Rights and the Rule of Law in the post-2015 Development Agenda, particularly looking at the appropriate framework to ensure that human rights, the rule of law, and good governance practices anchor the evolving policy platforms in a manner that empowers people to contribute to sustainable development.

The Third High-level Event will look at the contributions of South-South, Triangular Cooperation and ICT for Development in the Post 2015 Development Agenda. In the past two (2) decades, dramatic global change and national and regional transformations have led to unprecedented and increasingly complex socio-economic and environmental threats, challenges and concerns. Responding to these new threats, as well as existing challenges, will require new forms of collaboration, innovation and partnership, which in turn, can maximize the potential for ICT to contribute to reaching our development goals.

Distinguished Colleagues,

The concept of partnerships is becoming increasingly important in discussions on the future of development - and rightly so. The Secretary General has placed renewed emphasis on this area, which is the eighth and much overlooked MDG. Technology and knowledge transfer, financing and innovative means of implementation will be critical parts of the coming debate. The new development agenda will require collaboration among all actors – based on mutual trust and respect. Accordingly, one of the three (3) thematic debates will focus on the role of partnership and its contribution to the post-2015 Development Agenda.

Another thematic debate will examine how to work towards and ensure stable and peaceful societies in the post-2015 development framework, including by creating an enabling environment for development and progress, diminishing external stressors that contribute to conflicts, ensuring accessible institutions of justice, reducing violence, and enhancing the capacity and accountability of good governance mechanisms and practices that benefit peace and sustainable development.

The third Thematic Debate will focus on the roles of Water, Sanitation and Sustainable Energy in the post-2015 Development Agenda. With some 1.4 billion people without reliable electricity; 900 million lacking access to clean water and 2.6 billion without adequate sanitation, action is urgently needed to address these persistent challenges. With so many initiatives in these three fields, let us try and draw upon and share the existing knowledge, while scaling up initiatives that have already worked in the areas of integrated water management, sustainable energy and sanitation services for the proposed post-2015 development agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While I have focused my remarks today on my selected theme, the 68th session will certainly include a range of other critical issues. A handful of these, such as migration, nuclear disarmament, the MDGs and disabilities will be discussed in our High Level meetings during the upcoming weeks. During the session, we will also hold a High-Level thematic debate, mandated by this General Assembly, focused on investment in Africa and its role in achieving development objectives.

Throughout the 68th session, I am committed to working with you, providing any assistance you might require so that ultimately, we can set the stage for the strongest possible global development agenda - one that fully respects all people on this our shared planet.

As I laid out in my acceptance speech, I intend to dedicate significant time and resources to the issues of reforming and revitalizing the major bodies of this institution: this very Assembly and the Security Council. We are all in agreement that reform of these bodies is needed and it is simply unacceptable to do nothing since this poses a major hindrance to the completion of our work and is an immense disservice to the peoples of the world who rely on us and look to us with a sense of hope and possibility. To this end, in keeping with your decision to roll-over the issue from the 67th to the 68th session, I will reconvene the working group on Security Council Reform in mid-October.

Distinguished Colleagues,

Over the course of the next twelve months, I look forward to your active engagement and cooperation on the entire agenda of this Assembly. I call on each and every one of you to join me in making this a productive and meaningful session, one in which we work in solidarity and collegial respect, toward the vision of this organization as laid out in the Charter and toward solutions to the problems that confront us all. Together we can make this a watershed year in the history of this organization by building a new and meaningful development agenda, which both protects our planet and creates equity, justice and prosperity for people the whole world over.

I thank you.