



The
Bahamas

**STATEMENT
BY**

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AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**AT THE
FIFTY-NINTH SESSION
OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President,

1. It is my honour to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of this the 59th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of the Prime Minister, Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I take this opportunity to also congratulate your predecessor, HE Mr. Julian Hunte of our sister Caribbean State of St. Lucia, for his outstanding leadership of the 58th session. His legacy is one of which we in the Caribbean can be proud, and we wish him well in his future endeavours.

2. I would also like to pay tribute to the esteemed Secretary General of this body for his stalwart defence of multilateralism and the rule of law.

Mr. President,

3. Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan, and Jeanne, have ravaged the Caribbean islands and parts of the United States. Lives were lost in Haiti, Grenada, Jamaica, Cuba, the United States and The Bahamas. The damage to homes, infrastructure, the interruption to normal life and commerce compel us to stress the need for immediate and dramatic measures to ensure reconstruction and rehabilitation. What has been on offer to the region so far is woefully inadequate.

4. Our country's northern islands Grand Bahama and Abaco received double hits. First there was Hurricane Frances that struck on 13th September leaving hundreds without food, water, homes and power. Then came Jeanne two weeks later over the same islands that were hit by Frances, further exacerbating the problems. The Bahamas has many islands and fortunately for us tourism facilities remain open in the capital, Nassau, and facilities on other islands in the archipelago will be operational shortly. This will not be the case in Grenada and Haiti. Regional heads have called for an international donor conference to meet the needs of all countries adversely affected by the hurricanes. The Bahamas supports such a conference. We hope that emerging from that conference, if not earlier, will be a moratorium on Grenada's debt repayment. We also recommend a Regional Disaster Relief Fund be established to support the reconstruction effort.

Mr. President,

5. The word 'hurricane' comes from a word first used by the indigenous people of the Caribbean region, the Arawaks. This pre-Columbian civilization must have seen the phenomenon so often that it invented the word for it. That means it has been around for some time, and is likely to be with us for some time to come. It behooves us therefore to understand the phenomenon that we are facing including its connection - if any - to climate change that low lying states have been warning about. These facts also demand that our own societies should better plan for the eventualities that we know have been and are going to continue to be part of our lives. We cannot let lack of planning be a possible cause of the undermining of our sovereignty in this way. The world is soon wary and weary; the phenomenon of donor fatigue sets in. We lose our dignity if we cannot be seen to help ourselves. But if as the scientific evidence suggests, the hurricanes that we now experience are related to climate change, it is clear that we cannot defend ourselves alone. A major shift on the part of the most active polluting countries is required. They must shift gears if the people in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are going to survive. It is a moral imperative for them to shift gears. In

this regard, The Bahamas welcomes the preliminary moves by the Government of Britain toward putting climate change closer to the top of the agenda. We urge them to continue to use their influence on their friends to cause a major shift in attitude. The implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States adopted at the Global Conference in Barbados in 1994 becomes even more urgent. The follow up meeting on this issue in Mauritius in January 2005 now takes on even greater significance.

Mr. President,

6. In this context, I wish also to highlight the region's efforts to designate the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area in the context of sustainable development. We also reiterate our grave concern over the serious threat posed to the security and economic development of Caribbean countries by the transshipment of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea, and continue to call on States involved in transshipments to desist from this practice.

Mr. President,

7. The scenes of death and destruction from the hurricane that we witnessed in Haiti over the last days reminded us of the political turmoil that this country has endured during the past year. The Bahamas extends its deepest condolences to the Haitian nation for this tremendous and sad loss of life. The year, which began with the celebration of the 200th year of their Independence on 1st January with so much hope, in the celebration of the deeds of Toussaint L'Overture fell quickly into the abyss of despair on the fateful evening of 29th February. No one will ever know what truly happened on that night as an elected President left his country with armed rebels nipping at his heels but it filled the entire Caribbean with sadness. It raised the spectre of mistrust of friends. That feeling has still not died, but we must soldier on, if we are to help the people of Haiti achieve democracy, economic upliftment; a just and fair society. The Bahamas stands ready to do what it can to assist the people of Haiti in these developments. Haiti sits ninety miles from our southern shores. Each year thousands of migrants seek to enter The Bahamas illegally from Haiti looking for a better way of life. We have practical reasons therefore to ensure that justice and democracy prevail in Haiti. We echo the call of all Caricom countries for the return to democratic order in Haiti and we pledge to help. We regret the failure of the Security Council to act in a timely fashion when Haiti's friends begged for the authority to intervene or to authorize an intervention. Perhaps this failure heralds the need for its reform. The Bahamas supports such reform efforts and awaits the report on reform of the High Level Group appointed by the Secretary General. But the United Nations must never stop trying and trying to address the issues that face Haiti, because there is a moral imperative to eliminate hunger, poverty, disease and discrimination. In this regard, we welcome the work of Presidents Lula of Brazil and Chirac of France, Pope John Paul and other world leaders in seeking to ensure that the moral imperatives to which we have referred are placed at the forefront of the world's agenda. We must never forget what Haiti has done for our region and for the world.

Mr. President,

9. While the fight against those who would subvert our democratic values by attacks on civilian targets remains high on our agenda, we must not allow the drums of war to drown out the calls of the world's poor and disenfranchised. In 2000, we gave ourselves

a set of goals with respect to development with a human face, and we must all do what we can to achieve them. The Bahamas has committed itself to the fight. We offer our heartfelt condolences to the survivors of all who have lost their lives in such senseless attacks, particularly in the United States, Kenya, Tanzania and Indonesia. But we also admonish all states that terrorism cannot be the excuse to limit freedom, and to dispense with the very liberties that we are trying to defend and that form the foundation of free and democratic societies. No one can defend the increasing reliance on detentions without charge, detentions without access of families to legal representation, to administrative decisions that truncate rights without the right of a person to be heard. All states ought to act with caution in putting in place rules and regulations for travel, lest the denial of those rights cannot be defended by logic or objectivity. This is especially so where we note that developed countries argue in favour of free trade and globalization but deny the benefits of that trade to legitimate travellers by administrative discrimination and bureaucratic procedures and delay. The appeal therefore is to bring some sense of balance before we lose the very thing we seek to save.

Mr. President,

10. As a part of this overall process of reflection, my delegation welcomes the high level reviews planned for 2005 of our commitments with respect to social development and the advancement of women. We must ensure that we undertake an unflinching examination of the progress made in achieving the priority goals of the Copenhagen Programme of Action and the Beijing Platform for Action to determine how far we have come, and what remains to be done. It is critical that the outcomes of the respective appraisals will acknowledge the gaps in implementation and allow States and the international community as a whole to move forward and achieve the timely and effective implementation of the commitments undertaken at Copenhagen, Beijing and beyond. We must also make certain that the results of our deliberations feed constructively and synergistically into the high-level event in September 2005, so as to ensure that no ground is left uncovered.

Mr. President,

11. HIV/AIDS continues to threaten to undermine decades and centuries of progress in healthcare in developing healthy populations that facilitate economic growth throughout the world. The Bahamas is a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean region. We urge the continued and unrelenting fight against the disease, to rescue the world's developing nations from the clutches of this scourge. It must take all of the political will and financial power of the world's nations to ensure that the scourge is brought under control and then eliminated. In this context, The Bahamas welcomes the recent grant to the Pan-Caribbean Partnership from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. This grant will provide a much-needed infusion of resources for prevention, care and treatment programmes. The Bahamas also welcomes the convening of the June 2005 high-level meeting to review the progress achieved in realizing the commitments set out in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. The Bahamas acknowledges the pledge made by the United States to set aside fifteen billion dollars to fight HIV/AIDS globally, including in Haiti and Guyana in the Caribbean region.

Mr. President,

12. It is an inescapable fact that there can be no meaningful social or economic development without security. For many of us in the Caribbean in particular, this security is being undermined by the activities of those trafficking in illegal drugs and weapons. By virtue of its geographical location, The Bahamas is an unwitting transit point for illegal drugs from producing countries to the south of our borders to consumer nations to the north of our borders. What is often overlooked by those who are the consuming countries is that The Bahamas neither produces these substances, nor is it the final destination for them. However, as a transshipment point, The Bahamas, as do other transit countries, experiences the illegal activities associated with this trade. These activities undermine the economic and social fabric of our nations. We therefore welcome the convening in June 2004 of the first session of the open-ended working group to negotiate an international instrument to enable states to identify and trace, in a timely manner, illicit small arms and light weapons, some of the tools of undermining our safety and security and our economic and social fabric. This meeting was a small but important first step in reaching agreement on an instrument on tracing, to enable States affected by the illicit trade to more effectively identify lines of supply, put measures in place to interdict existing lines and prevent new ones, and to cooperate with other states at the bilateral, regional and international levels. At the same time, we continue to call on developed countries to take the same extraordinary measures they use in seeking to stop drug trafficking into their countries, to stop illegal small arms from reaching our shores from their countries.

13. The Bahamas joins with other Caricom countries in voicing our concern about the persistent attempts on the part of some of the developed world's unelected multilateral bodies to exclude developing countries from decision-making and norm setting processes, thereby undermining our economies. Chief amongst these is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. The decisions of these bodies are not friendly acts. We repeat the call we made last year about the need for a Global Forum to deal with these unfair practices. We welcome the work that has been done in the Economic and Social Council of the UN to redress the balance in favour of a level playing field. The arrangements for dealing with international tax matters in particular are a source of concern. We pledge to continue to work with the UN toward establishing a world body that will deal with these matters in a fair and balanced way.

Mr. President,

14. Yesterday The Bahamas marked 275 years of continuous representative, Parliamentary democracy. This then is a propitious time to reaffirm The Bahamas' commitment to the principles enshrined in the Charter of this great Organization, which will stand as a guiding beacon as we continue to chart a rocky, yet crucial, course towards peace, security and sustainable development for all of the world's inhabitants. While progress may seem meager, we must not be swayed from our course and we must remain confident that the benefits of our activities and efforts will redound to future generations. Now more than ever the world needs the United Nations.

I thank you, Mr. President.