



**Statement by
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Belize**



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Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I stand before you and renew the commitment of the Government and people of Belize to the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We reaffirm the pledge made by the Father of the Belizean nation, the Rt. Hon George Price, when he said from this podium: "Belize with the help of God and the support of its people, will stand upright and will do its duty to help bring peace, stability and prosperity to our region and the wider circles of our planet Earth."

Madam President, we congratulate you on your election and pledge the support of my delegation to our important work in this session of the General Assembly.

We express our solidarity with our Secretary General, whose imprint on this institution at this critical time in international affairs will be appreciated and remembered through the ages.

Twenty Five Years Ago

Belize became independent twenty five years ago. It was a different time then; 1981; the Cold War was being waged. There was a clash of economic philosophies, and countries were being forced to circle in one of two orbits. But many countries did not; we proclaimed our non-alignment and worked to establish a New International Economic Order. We sought to create a world which was fairer and more just and which put people at its centre. We never achieved that dream of a New International Economic Order!

In fact, in 1989 the wall that not only divided a nation, but the entire social and economic order of the world came tumbling down.

The Berlin Wall was torn down nearly two decades ago. But, Madam President, we are yet to tear down the most important wall of all: the one that separates us into rich states and poor states, wealthy and poor, developed and developing.

International Trade and Development

Almost 15 years ago we were told that if we tore down barriers to trade, opened up our markets to foreign capital and imported goods, and if we privatized our state owned enterprises our economies would grow by leaps and bounds. We were also told that our partners in the developed world would afford us greater access to their markets; that our commodities would receive fair prices; that international financiers would make capital readily available for us to borrow.

Please Check Against Delivery

The question we now ask is: Are we better off having adhered to this so-called development cocktail prescribed by the Washington Consensus?

All is not well, Madam President. In the Caribbean, thirty percent of our people are living in poverty. In Latin America, the figure is an obscene 40.6%! But more, 16.8% of the people in Latin America live in extreme poverty! Fourteen of the fifteen Caribbean countries are among the most indebted emerging market countries. In fact seven are in the top ten - all with debt to GDP ratios of about 100%.

To quote from a recent World Bank Report:

“... a closer inspection of the data leaves little room for complacency about the world's progress against poverty. Indeed, the picture that emerges is one of highly uneven progress, with serious setbacks in some regions and time periods. And we find more people living near \$2 per day became worse off over the period than the number who gained. Thus the number living under \$2 per day rose.”

In 2006, now more than ever we need a New International Economic Order.

The WTO – Fix it!

In 2001, members of the World Trade Organization adopted the Doha Development Agenda. The Ministerial declaration proudly proclaimed: “The majority of WTO members are developing countries. We seek to place their needs and interests at the heart of the Work Programme adopted in this Declaration.” We sought to design a multilateral trading system that was to “ensure that developing countries secure a share in the growth of world trade that was commensurate with the needs of their economic development”.

But, Madam President and distinguished delegates let me tell you what our reality, the Belizean experience with the WTO, has been.

Since Doha, a panel set up by the WTO decided that the European Union organization of its sugar market was incompatible with WTO rules. To solve that problem, Belizean sugar farmers now get paid less for the sugar exported to the EU. The WTO has made them worse off!

Since Doha, the EU has liberalized its banana import regime. This is supposed to make the regime WTO compatible. The statistics now show that imports from non-ACP countries into the EU have out-stripped imports from the Caribbean, and prices paid for bananas have fallen.

In the five years since Doha, our hopes have been dashed, ambitions smashed,

and the development dimension once again ignored. The accord reached at Doha has been systematically dismantled with each subsequent meeting, from Cancun to Hong Kong to Geneva.

Madam President, we say that there is something inherently wrong with a system which promises development and delivers lower prices for exports! We say that there is something fundamentally unfair in a system which promises a development agenda and delivers suspended negotiations and less market access to small vulnerable economies.

It is in such an environment, defined by multilateralism and the primacy of the markets – liberalism writ large, that small states in Caribbean operate. It is a system where unknown people sitting in unmarked rooms in Brussels and Geneva make decisions that determine how many boxes of bananas the Caribbean can export to Europe, and what price we get paid for our sugar.

Righting the Imbalance

At the end, ladies and gentlemen, it is all about social justice and social equity! Is something wrong with this picture: of the 6 billion people on planet earth 1 billion has more than 80% of world income, and 5 billion has less than 20% of the income.

Our common charge is to right the imbalance. The fight against poverty cannot and will not be won with arms and instruments of war. We need a New International Economic Order where the rights of people to jobs, and fair wages, and of fair prices for commodities takes precedence over rules of trade which are inherently unfair and inequitable. And for small vulnerable economies like ours in the Caribbean we need special and differential treatment.

Unless we wage the fight against poverty there will be no peace. In the absence of peace insecurity prevails.

Peace and Security

It is no wonder that in this time we find ourselves in retreat, living in a culture of fear, divided by a so called Clash of Civilizations. A general sense of lost hope is pervasive and the enthusiasm of the new Millennium squandered.

Here at the United Nations our own concept of dialogue among civilization seems to be fast fading. We must find a way to build a greater sense of security renew our faith in each other and deconstruct the walls that divide.

This can best be accomplished through our work at the UN, and my delegation commends our efforts in endorsing an integrated approach to address the transition from conflict to recovery with the establishment of the Peace Building

Commission. Together with the General Assembly and the Security Council, the Commission should, in the spirit of its constitution, help to answer those critical questions related to the maintenance of international peace and security and above all development.

In these times when the rejection of the rules that govern our collective responsibility to international civility and the comity of nations, seem to be eroding along with the respect for international law, we must look to our institutions to restore our common values.

United Nations Reform

We are reminded that the primary responsibility of the Security Council is the maintenance for international peace and security. The Charter in giving this mandate specifies that the conferral of that responsibility is to ensure prompt and effective action when required. But as we have seen with the delayed reaction to the recent events in Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the Council failed to discharge its mandate. The situation in the Middle East necessitates *prompt and effective action*.

We acknowledge that the shortcomings in the Council's exercise of its mandate may be attributed to its structural imbalances. These imbalances are not insurmountable and indeed beckon reform. The Council must reflect the current geopolitical realities.

Belize supports the need for a comprehensive reform of the Security Council including the expansion of membership in both permanent and non-permanent categories and through the improvement of its working methods. We detect a momentum to change and we are ready to engage as equal partners to this end.

We now have a Human Rights Council which we hope will be vigilant in its work to protect the rights of those unable to protect themselves. We will only be truly civilized when we stop the victimization of the weak at the expense of the ideology of the strongest.

We must bring to an end the violence and death of the innocent in Darfur. Our collective conscience is stained by the genocide in Darfur. For every innocent life that is lost to conflict and the denial of basic human rights we carry the scars of their oppression.

In Belize we have started a dialogue on the relevance of small states and the role we must play in the maintenance of international peace and security. I have provoked the idea that in the global war on terrorism we in the Caribbean and Central America are less important because we operate in a culture of peace and respect for life, that because most of us lack the great armies to join coalitions, we are seen as unwilling or even irrelevant.

Yet our people feel the same fear as those in larger countries; we suffer the economic effects that others suffer and dare I say more so because of our vulnerability due to our size. As people at risk we want to see the billions spent to make war used to bring prosperity and hope to those who live in such despair that they can be enticed into the spreading of terror. We will not be dissuaded from our belief that violence and destruction beget war. Only hope and sustainable development can bear peace.

Today in our sister Caribbean nation of Haiti we see the resilience of her people. In the turbulence of the last few years, the people of Haiti refused to despair. Their desire to live in a democratic society prevailed when they recently went to the polls to elect a new government. We must not suffer Haiti to irrelevance. We all owe Haiti our commitment to nurture her growth by building those institutions necessary for a sustainable nation state.

Social Justice for all

In a time when the world has so much wealth that \$900 billion is being spent on military expenditure; \$300 billion on agricultural subsidies, but only \$60 billion on development assistance too many of our people remain under the strangulation of poverty, relegated to the dungeons of destitution and social inequality. Yet we come to these occasions and speak of our strong commitment to preserving the dignity of all human beings, we speak of their rights and promise to continue to foster dialogue. And when it comes right down to it, where the agreements count most the plight of the poor is sacrificed for the bottom line, personal wealth and political survival.

In the Caribbean we cannot accept this, and while we applaud the efforts of this organization and the work that has gone into defining agreed development goals, including addressing the needs of our poorest people, the protection of our environment and efforts to promote meaningful sustainable development, we must do more.

Each child who goes to sleep hungry contributes to the shame we must all feel in failing to protect his basic rights. Each person who dies of HIV/AIDS is a reflection of our lost value for life and every time the poor die for want of food we have failed humanity.

Conclusion

Twenty-five years ago, as a newly independent country, Belize was welcomed into the United Nations assured of its territorial integrity and its equal place amongst this community of nations. We earned our rightful place by example, and by commitment to this organization's highest principles. In return, we received the solidarity of all.

Our political independence remains imperfect until we find a peaceful and just solution to the territorial claim of Guatemala. We remain committed to finding a solution that respects our territorial integrity and honours our sovereignty.

Membership in the United Nations is as an affirmation of the will of sovereign peoples. The United Nations has served as a platform for the expression of that will for many of the nations seated here today. Let us in turn ensure that the United Nations remains a beacon of hope for all peoples who continue the struggle as our brothers and sisters in Palestine, Western Sahara, Taiwan, and the non-self governing territories.

Madam President,

Our conversation begun with my seeking answers to the question of the relevance of Belize and other small states in today's global order. I find comfort in the winds of change occurring in our Organization, a change that will bring to this Sixty-first session of the General Assembly a new Secretary-General. Change that will continue the process of reform mandated in the World Summit Outcome. We must however make changes relevant to our time and true to our Charter.

Let us seize this opportunity and face the challenges boldly, together! For us in Belize: "Our mind imbues the democratic process. Our hearts beats with social justice and our soul cherishes the treasures of the spirit."

Thank you.