

**REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA
DE SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE**



**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE**

Speech by

H. E. President

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Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary-General,

Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to be here today. I bring you greetings from the people of the Democratic Republic of São Tomé and Príncipe.

This is my first opportunity to personally congratulate you, Mr. Ban Ki Moon and to thank you for taking on the huge responsibilities you has assumed as Secretary General. We offer you our full support for the difficult tasks ahead.

I would also like to congratulate Mr. Srgjan Kerim for his election as President of this Session, while thanking Miss Sheika Haya Rashed al Khalifa for her work in guiding the 61st Session so well.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary General for the choice of the topics for this Session, such as Climate change, Finance for development, the Millennium Development Goals and countering terrorism.

We come together this year at a time of enormous challenges for the United Nations. The world situation is very serious. One difficulty is that the problems are of such enormous complexity that the mass of facts presented to the public by the media make it exceedingly difficult for average people to understand the situation.

Many of us in this room today live distant from the troubled areas of the earth. So perhaps it is hard to

comprehend the plight of long-suffering peoples like those in Darfur, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, among so many others. But we must reject prejudice and discrimination, and end these conflicts.

My country, São Tomé and Príncipe, for those who still ignore our existence, may I remember that we are an African nation composed of two islands in the Gulf of Guinea and independent from Portugal since 12th July 1975. So, I was saying that we also joins the calls to defeat terrorist extremism everywhere. However we have already seen that this will not be achieved by military force, but by ideas and ideals that win hearts and minds.

Regarding the Millennium Development Goals, I want to express my regret that so little progress has been made towards these worthy ends.

How can we ignore those to be helped by these goals, the least, the last and the lost? As the Nobel laureate Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." End of quote.

Despite of all technology and science advances, half of the world's population lives on less than two dollars (\$2) per day. Twenty percent (20%) of everyone alive suffers from chronic hunger. Every single day 30,000 children die needlessly from dehydration, diarrhea, or infections, all so easily prevented or cured. In many countries children are not even given a name until they are one month old because so many of them do not live that long. One billion adults today are illiterate. 100 million children cannot go to school because of their poverty.

Now, as far as how to finance the development is concerned, we are told that globalization is the way, that a rising tide will lift all boats. But this rising tide of globalization in many parts of the world lifted the yachts and swamped the rowboats. Can private corporations realistically be expected to combine their entrepreneurial activities with furthering social causes? Obviously, some companies must improve their practices and be held accountable for cleaning up their environmental disasters like those in the Niger Delta, for example. But to put companies into the role of economic reformers is unrealistic. It seems that perhaps globalization has made the right to shop more important than the right to vote.

At the same time we must also be real with the results of aid. It seems the international organizations sometimes suffer from a poverty of expectations. Our own people in the developing world also are at times crucified on the poverty of their own desires. Instead of raging against our

destiny, we have lowered our standards. I think the humiliation of poverty actually scorches the heart and creates despair.

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

How can we come here year after year and see this despair, disease and hunger and not feel enormous sorrow? We must accept that global poverty is the disgrace of our affluent era.

So how do we alleviate poverty? Many say that Africa is poor because of bad governance and corruption. I strongly reject that view.

Is it ashamed to remind how all our countries in Africa were, all of us, when we became independent

even those like São Tomé and Príncipe most recently.

Let me tell you a little bit about how it was and how it is in São Tomé and Príncipe. The majority of the people grew up in a wooden shack, with no running water, no electricity, no toilet, no chance for education. In 1975, the country emerged from centuries of slavery and oppressive colonialism to independence with almost no teachers, no doctors, totally unprepared to govern ourselves or create an economy that did not depend on slave or contract labour as the only means of profit.

We have struggled. We have stumbled. But we have today a vibrant and stable democracy that we are proud of. We have a great percentage of girls in school. We have literacy rates far above the average in the developing world. We have free healthcare for all our citizens, though it is woefully inadequate for lack of funds. We have almost eradicated malaria.

We have low corruption, while also being rated among the best in the world for press freedom. We spend almost no money on defence and we have never fought a war.

We are grateful for aid. My people would suffer even more than they already do without the World Food Program, for example. The World Health Organization and The Global Fund for the Eradication of TB and Malaria are working with us very well. Republic of Taiwan, with its so known generosity and its special attention to our realities, has been crucial in our own success against malaria. Many organizations and individuals have worked with us for many years with open hearts and generous spirits and we thank them all for that.

During our 32 years of independence, we followed the advice of international organizations and built up some \$350 million in bilateral and multi-lateral debt, most of which has recently been forgiven under HIPC

and other programs. Let me take this opportunity to present, on behalf of the people of São Tomé and Príncipe, our deepest gratitude.

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As long as massive poverty, injustice and obscene inequality persist in our world, none of us can rest. I say to you all, please do not look the other way. Do not hesitate. The future might say that what we failed to do was tragic, but let me also say that what we did do was truly heroic.

Finally, before ending, and again as I've done it in prior years, I'm going to refer to two situations for which I call your attention and implore your solidarity. No matter if we are poor or rich.

There are 23 million people living in a Formosa island called Taiwan. They don't ask the international community to help them because they are poor. It is the contrary – they are a real recognized one of the main world economic power and they are helping other countries. They only ask to be recognized as sovereign country and be included in the list of the United Nations and its Agencies, as such. This is a question of justice!

Also is a question of justice if the U. S. Government could lift the embargo against Cuba, repealing the Helms-Burton Act of 1996, allow for free trade and free travel. Let the Cuban settle their problems among themselves. This is a democratic act!

Thank you for being here today and listening. May God bless us all.