

JAMAICA

**Statement by Senator Dr. the Hon. Ronald Robinson to the
General Debate of the Twelfth Session of UNCTAD
Accra, Ghana
Wednesday, 23 April, 2008**

**Mr. President, Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
other distinguished delegates, and Secretariat Representatives.**

It gives me distinct pleasure to deliver this statement from the bustling, vibrant West African capital of Accra. Ghana is a nation that has deep and strong historical ties to my own country Jamaica. Those historical ties, built around the transatlantic slave trade and the painful memories of the unbridled mercantilism of past centuries, have given rise to a resilient people and a Caribbean culture, heavily influenced by its African heritage, and rich in its diversity, impacting on the world through its music and other creative art forms.

I would like to express my delegation's deep appreciation to the government and people of the Republic of Ghana for their very warm welcome and hospitality, as well as for the excellent arrangements. For me, being in Ghana is like coming home. We would also like to thank the Secretary General and the Staff of UNCTAD for their work in preparing for this Conference.

Mr President, we live in a world which has changed significantly since the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) held in Geneva in 1964. How we assess those changes and how we define the future will be an important element of the outcomes of this Accra Conference. It will be a large part of what we

must seek to accomplish over the next few days. Nevertheless the nexus between trade and development, which led to UNCTAD's establishment, is as relevant today as it was in 1964.

Certainly, over the last few years we have witnessed significant changes in the global environment. This has been characterised by rapid technological advancement and changing patterns of trade in goods and services, especially within the developing world with the emergence of dominant economic powers in the South.

Despite these economic gains this period has also been characterised by growing inequalities within and among countries and between the developed and many developing countries. Today as I speak, 1.2 billion of the 1.5 billion people who live in the developing world are confronting the ravages of poverty. An estimated 162 million of those live on less than one United States dollar per day.

We meet this week against the background of the phenomenal increase in the prices of basic food commodities, including soybeans, corn, rice and wheat. In the case of wheat prices have increased by 120% over the last year, while the price of rice has increased by more than 140% since the start of this year.

This has led to social unrest, disaffection and economic hardship thereby threatening social and political stability especially in the more economically vulnerable and marginalised developing countries. These increases in food prices are made more unbearable by the steadily rising energy prices, which just this week crested at a

new high of US\$117 per barrel on the world spot market. The confluence of these developments has led the World Bank to suggest that a further 100 million persons could return to a state of absolute poverty.

Our answers as leaders to the current food crisis must be clear, precise and immediate. We must find short-term solutions, amongst which must be a review of the financing of the World Food Programme in order to provide a buffer against hunger and starvation. At the same time countries need to find the resources to strengthen their agricultural production capacities, including Net Food Importing countries such as my own.

Even while we search for the means to address the current trends, these efforts must be matched by implementing social safety nets, devising creative welfare schemes and dealing with the larger question of refinancing external debt and stimulating growth in our national economies.

Jamaica recognizes that a successful conclusion to the Doha negotiations in the World Trade Organization will be an important signal to the world economy at this time of uncertainty. We share the hope that such a conclusion will be possible by the end of this year. As we are about to enter a possible end game, we need to ensure that the development dimension, promised by Doha, is fully realized. A successful agreement is one which puts development at the core and fully reflects the interests and capacities of all developing countries, in its various outcomes.

Further, our discourse in international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF must match the levels of ambition in the global debate on trade. Many of the trade and financial issues are cross-cutting and speak ultimately to providing, not only for the immediate needs of our population, but also to bringing the marginalized into the mainstream economy, especially the poorest.

These are all issues that we need to bear in mind as we address the main theme of the conference, “the opportunities and challenges of globalization for development”. There is no doubt that many countries have benefited from globalization. However, in many developing countries the benefits have not been evenly distributed, underscoring the fact that globalization, in itself, is not a panacea. The opportunities and challenges of globalization must be carefully managed to create a balance between trade and development objectives while allowing countries the necessary policy space in keeping with their socio-economic and cultural realities.

Mr President, in Jamaica, we are currently engaged in nation-wide consultations to craft a national development strategy for attaining developed nation status by 2030. The realisation of this vision will require deep reflection and a policy shift in how we integrate trade into our development objectives. Over the past several years, UNCTAD has remained a key partner organization and has helped Jamaica through its sound research, policy analysis and technical assistance.

Jamaica, like so many other member states, values these functions and would like to see the strengthening of UNCTAD's capacity to deliver more effectively on the consensually agreed mandates. The independence of the policy advice given by UNCTAD must, however, be maintained.

Mr President, Jamaica, as a small, middle-income economy Jamaica is committed to the multilateral process and continues to regard the alliance, cooperation and discourse facilitated by UNCTAD as crucial to our attempts at fostering constructive diplomacy. As we leave Accra and return to the Geneva-based discussions with renewed focus, we as Member States must give UNCTAD the mandate to strengthen the organization in order to continue its valuable support to the developing world, particularly in light of new challenges such as climate change and migration.

At UNCTAD XI in Sao Paulo four years ago, we set ourselves certain goals centred around deepening South-South cooperation, addressing the situation of the LDCs, and working towards creating opportunities for the marginalized women and men of the world to have access to gainful employment, as well as stable and adequate remuneration. That call to action is even more relevant today and any decisions we take in Accra must be guided by the overarching objective to improve the quality of life for all our peoples, including in particular our brothers and sisters in this great continent of Africa. The world, Mr. President, is depending on us to give life to that vision.

I thank you.