

United Nations Nations Unies

THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

LE PRESIDENT DE L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE

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Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte, President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly, at Medgar Evers College

Mr President, Excellencies, Faculty Members, Government Officials, Distinguished Guests, and Students: Good evening.

President Jackson, it is my pleasure to be here at Medgar Evers College tonight. I wish to thank you for hosting this reception in my honour, and to express my appreciation to Mr Eugene Pursoo and all those who made this visit possible.

Medgar Evers College is an outgrowth of the Community it serves. Here, people from countries of the Caribbean and of Caribbean descent in significant numbers, have joined their African-American brothers and sisters and people from all over the world to build a strong and diverse community that all can call home.

Coming as I do from St Lucia, I am sure that tonight, I am in the company of family and friends.

I believe it fitting that this College, in this community, should be dedicated to the memory of Medgar Evers. Medgar Evers was a man of immense courage, a committed and dedicated leader and stalwart champion of the rights and dignity of African-Americans, and of racial equality in America. He paid the supreme price for a cause in which he passionately believed. This College is living testament that the spirit and values of Medgar Evers lives on.

The United Nations was also built on the premise of community - the community of nations. The Charter of the United Nations states that within this community, all nations, large and small, should have equal rights.

St Lucia has taken the United Nations at its word, and it has not been disappointed. I had the honour, in June of this year, to be elected President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, as the representative of the smallest country ever to hold this post.

In September, I took up the Presidency, which is universally regarded as an onerous task. All of the United Nations 191 member states have a seat in the General Assembly, the only universal organ of the United Nations. Other organs - the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council and the International Court of Justice - are limited membership bodies, to which member states must be elected.

St Lucia did not aspire to the Presidency because we were striving for power, pre-eminence or dominance. In an Assembly in which the powerful and the mighty sit as equal members, this

would not be a practical proposition. We sought and accepted the Presidency because we were confident that we could provide global leadership, render useful service and effectively manage the affairs of the General Assembly. We are, after all, a country with no hidden agenda, and no national interests at odds with those of the wider international community. Therefore, St Lucia could assume the role of honest broker in addressing the complex, wide-ranging and challenging issues on the Assembly's Agenda.

My Presidency is, in many respects, an innovative one. My Prime Minister, the Honourable Kenny Anthony, agreed that the Presidency should be treated both as St Lucian and CARICOM. CARICOM Heads of State and Government supported this approach. I therefore have a Cabinet comprised of accomplished St Lucian and CARICOM diplomats and professionals. Altogether, nationals of some ten CARICOM countries, including St Lucia, are in the Cabinet.

I am pleased to say that two interns from Medgar Evers College also serve in my Cabinet, and are making a contribution to the important work we are doing. I trust that the hands on experience in international relations they are acquiring will add value to their tertiary education and assist in preparing them for the future.

CARICOM is making a further contribution to the St Lucian Presidency. CARICOM Ambassadors to the United Nations have formed a five member Ambassadorial Advisory Group, to counsel me on matters of critical import on the Assembly's agenda, and to otherwise assist me in carrying out the responsibilities of the Presidency.

I took leadership of the General Assembly at a very testing time for the United Nations. You will no doubt recall that earlier this year, some were questioning the relevance of the organisation. The matter centred on the Security Council's inability to reach agreement on what would be the best course of action to pursue in response to Iraq's unwillingness to comply fully with previous United Nations resolutions. There was also, at that time, a very real fear that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

The passage of time and events still unfolding have underscored that despite its shortcomings - and yes, these do exist - the United Nations is still an essential actor in international affairs. It is only the United Nations that can confer legitimacy on collective action in response to threats to international peace and security, whether taken by a group or by the international community as a whole. The United Nations also has unparalleled strengths and experience in the area of humanitarian relief, and more importantly, in the sensitive and complex area of nation-building in post conflict settings, where its neutrality and objectivity are critical advantages.

This having been said, it is quite clear that people the world over are sending a message, through their Governments, through civil society and through other channels that they want the United Nations to more effectively live up to its Charter principles. Sustainable development, poverty alleviation, globalisation and trade liberalisation, arms and narcotics trafficking and other forms of transnational crime, terrorism and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS are among the pressing global problems on which demands are being made for action. Above all, the organisation is

being called upon to better carry out its responsibilities to maintain international peace and security.

These and other developments have been challenging. They have had the effect of heightening the sense of urgency to revitalise the General Assembly and generally, to reform the United Nations, to better implement its Charter functions; to bring development back to centre stage on the organisation's agenda; and to better maintain international peace and security.

I have therefore seized the opportunity to move forward with priorities I have set in these areas, with encouraging results to date.

Under my Presidency, the General Assembly has held two successful events: a High-level Plenary on HIV/AIDS and a High-level Dialogue on Financing for Development. In the context of this latter issue, the General Assembly has focussed especially on commodities and tax cooperation, two issues of particular importance to the Caribbean, and to the developing world in general. I had the honour of inviting Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni to address the Assembly on the commodities issue - he did so in a manner that should give incentive to further international action in this area.

There have also been important developments in respect of the General Assembly's consideration of matters relating to international peace and security. While primary responsibility in these areas rests with the Security Council, the General Assembly may discuss any questions of peace and security that member states bring to it. Member states have twice during my Presidency brought issues concerning the situation in the Middle East to the General Assembly, when the Security Council could not reach agreement on them. I have, therefore, reconvened and presided over two Special Emergency Sessions on Palestine.

There is a significant ground swell of support for reforming the now fifty-eight year old United Nations, so that it might more effectively carry out its mandates in all areas. The more than eighty Heads of State and Government who addressed the General Assembly's General Debate at the opening of the session all emphasised this point. I have, therefore, taken the initiative to advance the reform agenda in respect of the General Assembly. A Group of Facilitators that I have appointed are currently examining the question of revitalisation of the Assembly, with a view to adopting a resolution on this matter sometime in December.

Reform of the Security Council is another issue, as this bears centrally on the matter of permanent membership of five countries - the China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States - and of their right to veto decisions of the Council. We are now engaged in a process of stocktaking on reform of the Council, and hope to put these matters before the membership shortly.

In the meantime, I am actively implementing other reforms proposed earlier, but which had not been implemented. Notably, I am summing up important debates in the Assembly, and organising briefings for the general membership on critical issues before the Assembly.

I hope that this brief snapshot of activities to date of the St Lucian Presidency will give you a general idea of the work we are doing and the leadership we are endeavouring to provide to the General Assembly. I am ever conscious, however, that we began with only a year, and now down to only ten months, to achieve the results on which our Presidency will be assessed. We want our report card to be a good one, and are working assiduously to attain this objective. But we are fully aware that the complexities of the General Assembly and of the United Nations as a whole will challenge us until the day our Presidency comes to an end. I am reminded, in that regard, of the saying that, "if you are not be able to make a world of difference, you should strive to make a difference in the world". The St Lucia Presidency will do its utmost to live up to this adage.

I thank you.