

Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary General,
Colleague Permanent Representatives,
Excellencies,
Delegates,

Allow me Mr. President, to congratulate you on your astute leadership and management of the General Assembly during the current session. Your calm demeanor and steady hands lend to our deliberations an atmosphere of assurance and control that usually profit multilateral processes.

Today, I stand humbly before this august house of Plenipotentiaries, with immense gratitude to all 193 Member States for the confidence they have reposed in me to serve as President of the 78th session; an undertaking that is both an honour and a privilege. I have been overwhelmed and yet, at the same time, buoyed by the extraordinary demonstrations of support, solidarity and goodwill that have consistently accompanied me on this journey over recent months. My heart is truly full, even as I remain keenly aware that being called to serve as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations constitutes a weighty responsibility.

It is often said that education is the great liberator, lifting people up the social and economic ladder and strengthening society in the process. Not only is that assessment valid; it is also a truism. I exemplify that pattern, having over the course of my career repeatedly found myself in places and called upon to undertake onerous responsibilities.

Such experiences would never have seen the light of day had I not had great parents who appreciated the extraordinary power and potential of education and moreover, having been part of a generation that benefitted from an enlightened government policy that challenged and democratized the colonial practice whereby education was, by state policy, reserved exclusively for the privileged, that is, only for those with the means to afford it.

When therefore in the context of the SDG's we postpone or neglect to offer support to the millions the world over who lack access to quality education, aren't we consigning them facelessly to an inter-generational cycle of poverty, degradation and misery, from which they are hardly likely to emerge? It seems to me that the more pragmatic choice would be to do all that we can materially to save those children and young people from near certain defeat; defeat of circumstance, by affording them, through education, the option of choice and thus, the capacity to self-actualize, to their own benefit and that of their communities and societies.

I find this to be a compelling argument for an all-out effort, come the forthcoming SDG Summit, to recommit and re-energize action to complete and deliver Agenda 2030 and the SDG's, the empowerment of people everywhere through the removal of the shackles that constrain their growth and independence and deny them any possibility of creating their own success. The pursuit of policies that support and encourage investing in people and therefore, in the creation of social capital in the medium to long term, is unarguably among the most effective strategies for promoting and achieving sustainable development.

It is education that brought me to this place and ultimately, to this podium and I am so proud and gratified to have been born in a country, Trinidad and Tobago, that for almost 70 years has ascribed the highest value to education. Allow me, therefore, to express my profound appreciation to my Minister, Senator the Honourable Dr. Amery Browne, and through him, to the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for believing me worthy of shouldering this awesome responsibility as President of the Seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly.

Over the forty odd years of my career as a diplomat, it never once occurred to me that I would find myself sitting as the President of the General Assembly but as I look back, it was my good fortune to have been schooled by some of the finest and most accomplished diplomats that Trinidad and Tobago has ever produced; foremost among them being the late Mr. Lennox Fitzroy Ballah, former Head of the Foreign Service of Trinidad and Tobago, a brilliant international lawyer and former member of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, who tutored and indeed mentored several generations of professional foreign service officers, insisting that the target must always be excellence. I pay tribute to him and to several other distinguished masters of diplomacy, whose dedication and work have left an indelible mark on Trinidad and Tobago.

I am ever conscious of the sensitivity and weight of responsibility that serving as President of this General Assembly imposes on the incumbent. In this regard, I commit to discharge the responsibilities of the Office with transparency, accountability, vigor and dedication, bearing in mind that all members have the same rights.

On Trinidad and Tobago's admittance to the United Nations in 1962, Sir Ellis Clarke, our first Permanent Representative, in making a comparison between our population and that of the international community, affirmed that *"We have, however, developed in our society tolerance, camaraderie, respect for the rights of others, an unswerving opposition to oppression, injustice and racial discrimination, a love of liberty, a supreme faith in the dignity and worth of the human person, and belief in the value of co-operation."* These principles will form the basis of my actions as President of the General Assembly.

I will prioritize encouraging and facilitating meaningful dialogue, in various formats, in order to ensure that there is clarity of priorities and the strengthening of common purpose in the interest of coherence. It is my hope to bring forward, with your help and support, a renewed atmosphere of conciliation, cooperation and shared commitment in addressing the many challenges and seizing every opportunity, however nascent, before the General Assembly. I will seek to enhance current approaches and adopt new ones with probable solutions, as we endeavour to deliver or at least to strengthen the bases for delivering Peace, Prosperity, Progress and Sustainability.

I count on your support during the impending session and call for your fulsome engagement, in good faith, as we purposively accelerate our action towards the achievement of sustainable development for the benefit of **all**.

Permit me to end on a personal note by expressing my special thanks to my hardworking staff at the Mission whose exceptional devotion to duty and professionalism is a matter of great personal pride and satisfaction.

I should also like to thank my six siblings, for their unending love and loyalty, whom I know will say to me, “don’t think you’re the President here; you are still the last,” I nevertheless thank them for a lifetime of support and for being here with me today, either in person or virtually, to share in this moment of jubilation. Thank you also to my lifelong friends from the Class of 1973 of Woodbrook Secondary school, whose genuine friendship and love, I can never get too much of. And finally, my grateful thanks to my dear wife Joy, whose smile lights up my day, every day and whose love, support and encouragement contributed in no small way to making this day possible.

Finally I share with you a recent discovery: the Latin translation of the words “All Glory to God” is “*Soli Deo Gloria-SDG*”. Perhaps more than a coincidence.

Thank you, Mr. President.