



The Honourable Trevor Walker
Minister of State
Antigua and Barbuda

ADDRESS TO THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

On the occasion of the
General Debate
of the 60th Session
United Nations General Assembly

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**Mr. President,
Distinguished Heads,
Fellow Ministers,
Other Distinguished Guests:**

This is the first time that a representative from the island of Barbuda has the honour to address the General Assembly of the United Nations.

For my country, the nation of Antigua and Barbuda, and more importantly for my fellow Barbudans, this is indeed an historic and significant milestone.

The government and people of Antigua and Barbuda have full confidence in the multilateral system, and in the United Nations as the primary instrument of multilateralism.

Further, we believe that only through cooperation at the international level can micro-states like Antigua and Barbuda begin to address the global threats and challenges that jeopardize our existence, our way of life, and our ability to progress.

Antigua and Barbuda attaches great importance to the work of the United Nations, and to the outcome of the collective decisions of this family of nations.

We look forward to safeguards for small developing states in all stages of the multilateral processes, and specifically in the outcome document of the 2005 World Summit.

Taking stock of the achievement of the objectives of the outcome of major UN conferences and summits is a task we approach with trepidation.

Antigua and Barbuda is attempting to achieve and sustain a decent standard of living for our people and for future generations. Our progress report is a mixed one, tinged with hope and frustration.

We are hopeful because we have achieved a lot with our meager resources.

In the face of severe economic hardships, we have managed to achieve a literacy rate of over 90% among youth 15-25 years old; access to primary and secondary education is mandatory and provided free of cost by the government to all students ages 5-16; all public school students are provided with school uniforms and the required text books free of cost; to accommodate our expanding student population only this week we commissioned a new school on my island of Barbuda.

Poor people need access to the necessary resources so that they can take charge of their own development. This is why the Barbudan people are extremely proud of what we consider a very progressive land policy for the ownership of lands on our island.

The Barbuda Lands Act, scheduled to be tabled in Parliament shortly, stipulates that all lands on Barbuda be owned, in common, by the Barbudan people.

In the area of health care, we in Antigua and Barbuda have a national medical benefits programme that provides low-cost access to health services and prescription drugs; our child mortality rate is among the lowest in developing countries; and our nutrition levels of children 5 and under among the highest.

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women have been a priority area for Antigua and Barbuda. We signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and are currently working on the ratification of the Convention's optional protocol.

With regard to the MDG on the empowerment of women, Antigua and Barbuda have made noteworthy strides in this area. We have had our first female elected into Parliament in the last general elections; our Speaker of Parliament and President of the Senate are women; and there are two females in our Cabinet. Concerted efforts have been made to promote women's political participation at all levels.

In spite of such progress, however, we continue to experience a high level of frustration with our development efforts.

This is because the progress we have made so far is at risk of being wiped away.

As a middle-income small-island developing state, we are continually handed the sharp edge of the sword to hold on to, when it comes to a number of issues in international development.

It is as if we are being punished by the international community for having achieved some measure of progress, with very meager resources and despite severe external challenges.

The Monterrey Consensus represents a pact between developed and developing countries, the objective of which is the scaling-up of financing for development.

Yet, Mr. President, there is nothing in the Monterrey Consensus that so-called "middle income" countries can benefit from.

We have fulfilled the responsibilities accorded to governments of developing countries, as stipulated in the Monterrey Consensus.

We continue to go beyond those responsibilities to consolidate the principles of accountability, transparency and good governance in laws we introduced in Parliament in

the seventh month of the first term of the incumbent government of Antigua and Barbuda.

All of this took place against a backdrop of a declining trend in the flow of ODA to the Caribbean region.

It is necessary for international agreements on financing for development, like the Monterrey Consensus, to include all developing countries, and not sideline those that have achieved some measure of progress.

Our frustration with the Monterrey Consensus, and financing for development in general, would not be so acute had it not been for the brutal struggles we face in other areas that are potential engines for economic growth and development.

We have been forced to ask ourselves if a pro-development trading regime is something the international community really wants.

Our CARICOM neighbours have been dragged through brutal trade battles, struggling to keep their agricultural sectors alive – namely the banana and sugar industries.

Mr. President, the Caribbean Community has for years been lamenting the importance of these two sectors to the livelihood of our people.

A pro-development trading regime would not amputate the feet of such small vulnerable players and leave them to hemorrhage – and that is exactly what has transpired with our banana and sugar producing CARICOM neighbours.

As if that were not enough, we in Antigua and Barbuda now find ourselves under attack in yet another sector.

Last week, during the 2005 World Summit, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda spoke of the need for us to seek WTO intervention in the dispute with the United States over Internet gaming.

Mr. President, with trade in agriculture proving continually difficult for developing states in general, small-island states in particular, the services sector is just about the only option we have presently for diversification.

For Antigua and Barbuda, the tourism sector has been good to us, but it is extremely volatile, and our high level of environmental and economic vulnerability necessitates strategically identifying other options for economic growth and development. One such option is Internet Gaming.

But due to the unfair trading practices of highly developed countries, notably the United States, we are finding it increasingly difficult to realize development benefits from Internet Gaming.

In addition to this, the principle of special and differential treatment for countries with special needs, like small-island developing states, is under perpetual assault by highly developed countries.

After careful consideration and evaluation, we are forced to conclude that there is nothing tangible for small developing states in the Monterrey Consensus; we are losing the battle on the issue of trade; and so we attempt to hitch our proverbial wagon to foreign direct investment as a means of stimulating economic growth and development. But once again our valiant efforts are met with frustration. Why? Because of unsustainable debt.

Our experience has shown that highly indebted countries find it extremely difficult to attract private international finance.

The international community now realizes the importance of debt reduction and debt forgiveness to development.

We urge that the situation of heavily indebted middle-income countries be given serious attention by the international community.

If more is not done to address the debt problem of middle-income countries, we risk reversing our development gains, and instead of a reduction, the net result may actually be increasing levels of poverty.

Antigua and Barbuda is in full support of all efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

With regards to environmental sustainability, small islands like Antigua and Barbuda face the challenge of very limited land space, fragile eco-systems, and are highly vulnerable to natural disasters and the effects of climate change.

Compounding these challenges is our heavy dependence on the natural environment to support our tourism product, which accounts for almost 80% of our gross national income.

Two-thirds of the island of Barbuda is merely a few feet above sea level. Threats to our natural environment are threats to our very way of life and existence.

We therefore welcome paragraphs 51 to 53 in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, on the issue of climate change.

The devastation wrought by the increased intensity of hurricanes has set us back years, even decades on the development scale.

Antigua and Barbuda stresses the need for policies to mitigate the effects of hurricanes and other natural disasters on small developing states, as well as the establishment of an effective system of long-term support for countries recovering from disasters.

International drug trafficking has major security implications for our islands. Drug traffickers often use our shores and surrounding waters as transshipment points for their illegal cargo, resulting in an increase in the criminal element within our fragile societies. These criminals operate within very sophisticated networks that are beyond the reach and capacity of our resources. It is a situation that puts the security of the entire region at risk. This is one area that begs for greater international attention.

Antigua and Barbuda is in agreement with many of the recommendations to strengthen the United Nations, as contained in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit.

We support those reform proposals the objective of which will make the UN more democratic, increase its legitimacy, and enhance its work.

At a time when multilateralism comes under attack, we, as small developing states, remain ever mindful of the need for the UN.

We share equally in the quest for peace and security, and are heartened by the growing recognition that there can be no peace and security without development. We call for further and unambiguous acknowledgement of this security-development nexus, and for the economic development of all countries to be accorded equal priority as international peace and security.