

**REPÚBLICA DEMOCRÁTICA  
DE SÃO TOMÉ E PRÍNCIPE**



**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF  
SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE**

Speech by

H. E. President

Fradique Bandeira Melo de Menezes

To the 61st session of the

General Assembly of the United Nations

New York, NY

20<sup>th</sup> September 2006

Madame President,

Having just been re-elected, this is my first opportunity to speak to this forum during my second term. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that I am here today for this sixty-first session of the General Assembly.

Please allow me to congratulate you, Madame Haya Khalifa, on your election as the new President of the General Assembly. We are fortunate to have a diplomat with such magnificent credentials as our president. In addition, this is a milestone for the United Nations, which makes us all proud. My country, Sao Tome and Principe, is a firm believer in gender equality. I am proud to say that we have a very high percentage of girls in school. We have also had a woman as president of our National Assembly. The head of our Supreme Court is a woman. We have had two female Prime Ministers, and today women head half of our government ministries. We, therefore, are delighted by your election, and wish you every success.

I also thank the outgoing President, Mr. Jan Eliasson for his remarkable work, especially in the area of advancing the reforms of the United Nations organization.

Words are insufficient to pay tribute to outgoing Secretary General Kofi Arman. A very special son of Africa, he has been an extraordinary leader of our organization. He worked without ceasing, showing enormous vision and great courage. No challenge was too large or too dangerous. My country and I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Secretary General, whose intervention during a 2003 coup attempt helped preserve democracy in Sao Tome and Principe. My people and I thank you, Mr. Secretary General. We can only hope that his successor will prove as praiseworthy as Secretary General Annan.

Madame President, we meet here today at a time of growing international tension, an increase in terrorism that attacks innocent civilians on every continent. We see unending conflicts, even genocide. Never have we needed the United Nations more than at this time when life as we know it on our planet is threatened by climate change. It is tragic that with all these

challenges, the United Nations is often unable to act, because internal politics and a lack of resources constantly hamper the ability to respond as needed.

No country can live in a vacuum in today's world. For better or for worse, we are together in deciding the fate of our planet. We can no longer be only citizens of our town, our region, or our country. We also cannot blindly think that the only religion is our religion, when God created so many, all believing in a Supreme Being, but worshiping in different fashions. God also painted us in a rainbow of colors, and did not leave instructions for one color to be in charge of all the others. Nor did he choose a special region or language to rule over everyone else. We must pull together, so that nobody is left behind. There is enough for everybody, if only we shared. We can all live free, in peace, with work, health, education and dignity, if only we would work together.

While we must work together for certain common goals, we must also respect our cultural differences. One size does not fit all. The practice of democracy in Latin America may not be the same as democracy in Asia.

What worked to create economic growth in Europe may not work in Africa. Each country, each people, each region, each town must have the freedom to decide what is best for them, while also respecting the rights of all and everyone's responsibility as a world citizen.

HIV/AIDS is still out of control. In my own tiny isolated country we were long immune from this pandemic. Despite desperate efforts at education and prevention, our tiny population is being laid waste by a shocking spiral of HIV/AIDS cases. We have only one hospital, a handful of doctors, and we are helpless in the face of this crisis, as we cannot afford the retro-virals we need for all our sick, nor do we have the ability to police our maritime borders to keep out the main source of infection. Our women and children are faceless victims, among the millions of others around the world, and without help, we could one day face extinction.

Climate change is already sabotaging many efforts to achieve sustainable development goals, augmenting poverty in developing countries, especially in the Least Developed Countries and the Small Island Developing States. There is new and strong evidence that most of the warming observed is

attributable to human activities. As the polar ice caps melt, my low-lying island country faces a second kind of extinction: that of disappearing beneath the waves of the ocean.

Madame President,

I cannot continue without again asking why a country with 23 million people is not represented at the United Nations where every country is supposed to have one vote? I want to mention Taiwan, an established democracy, whose people live in freedom and in peace. Their dynamic and technologically advanced economy is a model for creating wealth in today's global economy. Taiwan is also an excellent world citizen, generous in humanitarian and development aid.

For centuries the people of Sao Tome and Principe were debilitated and thousands died from endemic malaria. Countless attempts to control the mosquitoes carrying this disease failed, until Taiwan brought the necessary know-how and resources to bear. Today cases of malaria are reduced by 60%. Our doctors and nurses have never seen so few cases of malaria in

living memory. Thanks to Taiwan and also to the Global Fund, we are well on the way to finally bringing this scourge under control.

In addition to humanitarian and development aid, Taiwan also maintains productive commercial ties with many U.N. member countries, and is a member of the World Trade Organization, the Asian Development bank, and the Asia Pacific Economic Group. The principle of universality is consecrated in the United Nations' Charter. Permanent Members of Security Council should not continue to ignore the case of Taiwan.

Another issue that requires urgent attention is the embargo on Cuba. This is a relic of the Cold War which should be lifted immediately.

While mentioning the Security Council I must say that my country supports the calls that have reverberated through these halls for more than a decade.

We must reform the Security Council. The membership and institutional structures reflect outdated geopolitical realities and political thinking, shaped by the world of 1945. Giving only five permanent members vetoes and special privileges puts the Security Council out of touch with the world.

Africa, for example, does not have a single Permanent Member. This is not acceptable.

I will close by talking about poverty, or rather what we are all seeking, which is the end of poverty.

The Millennium Development Goals are a noble project. Sao Tome & Principe is grateful to Secretary General Annan and the Goals' Director Jeffrey Sachs for their tireless efforts to pull poor countries out of what Professor Sachs so rightly calls "the poverty trap."

But how did so many countries get into the poverty trap? We are unlikely to get out, and stay out, unless we know how we got in there in the first place.

I think it is time we all faced some of the unspoken truths about poverty.

Why are we poor? Economists traditionally told us that economic wealth comes from a combination of man-made resources (roads, factories, machines, telephone systems), human resources (hard work and education), and technological resources (technical know-how and technological

machinery). But if this were true, then poor countries could simply build some schools, some roads and buy some computers and we would quickly catch up with the rich countries. But there is something wrong. While Taiwan, South Korea and China have all been doubling their incomes every decade; many poor countries making these changes are not growing faster than rich countries. In fact, they are growing more slowly, or even getting poorer.

So there is a new theory that says that the more you have, the faster you grow. This could explain why rich countries stay rich and poor countries fall farther behind. Except it does not explain how Chile, India, Singapore, Mauritius and Botswana are catching up. These dynamic countries, not Japan, not Switzerland or the United States are the fastest-growing economies on the planet. Fifty years ago they were trapped in poverty. No longer!

Why have so many other countries been left behind? The newest theories tell us that the answer is simple. With or without natural resources, with or

without human resources, with or without technology, badly governed countries are poor countries. Bad government causes poverty.

When states do not protect property and people; when national revenues benefit self-interested political insiders who oppose any actions that would lead to more equal distribution of income and resources; when government officials waste funds; when people are hired on the basis of being from the right family or region or political grouping; when nobody monitors government spending; when corruption is noted but never punished; and illegal activities are not restrained by law, the press or democratic opposition, then miserable results follow.

We have all heard about the "natural resource curse" which shows that large amounts of oil or diamonds, for example, tend to make democracy and good government less likely. But recent studies have also found that there is also an "aid curse." Without meaning to do so, multi-lateral and bilateral donors can actually make governments worse.

And just as badly governed countries tend to be poor, so badly governed aid projects, without transparency or accountability, also tend to fail.

Humanitarian aid has proven far more successful than long-term development aid, because it is given in highly targeted bursts. It is also usually given as medicine, food, clothing, or tents, taken directly to the location of the tragedy, with doctors and nurses on the ground rather than consultants.

Of course, there have been some beautiful successes in aid programs, mostly in healthcare, with victories over small pox, drug-resistant TB and river blindness. Adult literacy has risen, as had life expectancy until the AIDS pandemic wiped out that improvement.

Aid gives hope to millions of people around the world. We simply need to mend it, not end it.

My own country has certainly suffered from its own share of bad governance, mostly unwillingly, because of our own inexperience. But we

are learning quickly in our short history, and we now have one of the most stable and robust democracies in all of Africa.

We have the prospect of oil in our waters and in waters shared with our neighbor, Nigeria. We have already taken steps to ensure that any potential petroleum resources are not wasted, but are protected for the benefit of all our citizens, with an Oil Revenue Management Law that was passed unanimously in our parliament in 2004.

We cannot let the past bury the future. We can lift billions out of poverty. When I was first elected president of my country five years ago, I lit a candle of hope for the long-suffering people of Sao Tome and Principe. We are not there yet, but the light is getting brighter.

If development were easy, everyone would already be developed! We cannot sit in supine indifference. Let us renew our efforts, and work together with respect, dignity and dedication for the benefit of all the peoples of the world and the fate of our beautiful planet.

Thank you.