

STATEMENT BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR JULIAN R. HUNTE

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His Excellency the President of Brazil, Esteemed Heads of State and Government, Mr Secretary-General, Ministers, Mr Secretary-General of UNCTAD and Heads of United Nations agencies, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish to join all those who have expressed their appreciation to the Government and People of Brazil for warmly welcoming us here in Sao Paulo, and for the excellent arrangements made for this meeting. As President of the United Nations General Assembly, I am appreciative of this special opportunity to participate in UNCTAD XI, and thank the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, Mr Rubens Ricupero, for extending an invitation to me.

UNCTAD XI has a significant task, on which we are all agreed. It is to review the critical issue of coherence. That is, how can we best enhance consistency between the development strategies we plan at the national level on the one hand, and global economic processes on the other. The premise of this exercise may seem relatively simple, but it underpins the more complex, multidimensional issue of how to further economic growth and development, particularly of developing countries, in the current global environment.

Four years ago at UNCTAD X, we concluded that globalisation and interdependence opened up new opportunities for growth and development, a proposition that, together with trade liberalization, has been gaining in significance since the mid 1990s. This was an encouraging proposition for developing countries, one which offered new opportunities for integration into the global economy; improvement in overall economic performance through the opening of markets; promotion of the transfer of technology, information and skills, and an increase in financial resources available for development.

It was a straightforward matter therefore, for developing countries to buy into the premise of globalisation and trade liberalization, which could, on the face of it, spur economic growth and development. A clear distinction must be made, however, between the premise of globalisation and trade liberalization and the reality. The premise was that all would prosper; the reality is that many, particularly in the developing world, have yet to do so. Consequently, numerous developing countries are still clutching at economic growth and development straws, while others, mostly developed countries, are afloat on an ocean of prosperity.

The challenges of globalisation and trade liberalization, I submit, are in some measure part of the growing sense of uncertainty that seems to be permeating our world in these the initial years of the twenty-first century. The lack of significant progress in the Doha round of trade negotiations and the setback of the Cancun World Trade Ministerial Conference, for example, raise questions about whether there is common ground sufficient to lead to a truly equitable global trading system, a system that would be as advantageous to developing countries, as it is, to developed countries.

Another key matter influencing current uncertainties is the impact of multinational corporations on development. National interest is not the principle factor driving corporations or underpinning their business decisions - more generally, it is the profit motive. Yet, the influence of corporations on the

national economy can curtail the freedom of action of many governments, particularly in the developing world, to set and implement development policy. After all, corporations are free to shift industries and jobs to lower costs, lower wage countries. Indeed, such shifts do not necessarily take into account benefits that might accrue in a new location, but rather, maximizing profits. Our decisions to hold multinational corporations to responsibility and accountability, therefore, must stand.

Poverty, challenges to sustainable development, human rights abuses, transnational organized crime, the deadly HIV/AIDS pandemic, conflict and war worldwide, and terrorism are all also critical developments adding to global uncertainty. They constitute part of the significant threats that challenges the global community, and for which change is urgently needed. If these words strike a familiar chord, yes, they are a reflection of the "work in progress" of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel, whose report is expected to shed important light on these and other matters.

But we have come to UNCTAD XI not only to focus on the troubled state of the global economic order, or indeed on the myriad challenges we face. Our attention must be fixed primarily on the challenge of determining how to remove the barriers preventing synergies between national and international action, so as to promote growth and development. In doing so, we must take fully on board important courses of action to which we have all pledged commitment, such as those set out in the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit for Sustainable Development.

Parliamentarian and Minister I am, Economist I am not. I do, however, have clear views on the issues before UNCTAD XI, which come from my experience as Minister of International Trade of my country, St Lucia, and from the vantage point of President of the United Nations General Assembly. I believe this is an opportune time to share some of these views with you.

Let me begin by emphasising that developing countries benefit most from liberal and fair markets to which they are able to export their agricultural and manufactured goods and services; indeed, markets that are free of discretionary standards, technical, environmental and other requirements, work best.

Support mechanisms for developing countries have greater impact when they provide not only technical cooperation to implement multilateral trade agreements but other essential support as well, including adjustment support and institutional and capacity building. Equitable trade rules, fairly applied, provide developing countries essential development space. Factoring in Special and Differential treatment in structural and emerging asymmetries between the developed and developing countries help to provide such space.

In the case of small, open and vulnerable economies, including those of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and in respect of least developed and landlocked developing countries, special and differential treatment creates a more level playing field for their industries and enterprises to compete. Asymmetries should, I believe, be addressed in existing and new agreements, which should also include as essential elements - developmental, financial and trade considerations.

Multilateral trade negotiations are about balance - between rights and obligations, costs and benefits, in processes, selection of issues, sequencing and timelines and importantly, between ambition and practical outcomes. In the complex negotiating and decision-making processes of world trade and of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in which we are engaged, care must be taken that creating balance on the one hand, does not create new imbalances on the other. In that regard, levels of development continue to be a key priority to be taken into account in reaching accommodation advantageous to all, and particularly to developing countries. It is also important to bear in mind that true consensus on trade rules require that we are all at the negotiating table, and that our negotiations and outcomes are transparent.

I believe that Commodities must have a more prominent place on the international trade and development cooperation agenda. It is a fact that some fifty developing countries, a full quarter of the United Nations membership, depend on some two to three commodity exports. Thirty-nine countries depend on exports of a single commodity. Unless we urgently review and address the commodity situation and the operation of markets, accomplishing development goals will continue to be a challenge for many.

The international community made a commitment, in the Millennium Declaration, to make the right to development a reality. This, I believe, requires us to address critical issues such as poverty eradication, the provision of a social safety net and deadly pandemics. A fair and equitable trading system helps to spur development; our initiatives in the area of international trade, therefore, must be responsive to these key development issues.

I am a strong believer that development efforts and the global processes that support them must be underpinned by coherence in the multilateral system. As an advocate for the creation of appropriate linkages between trade, financial, technical and development policies, I am particularly pleased that the UNCTAD, the agency charged with trade and development, is now a participant in the High-level dialogue among the Economic and Social Council, the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organisation.

This is an important time for UNCTAD, as we review its essential mandate as the sole United Nations body addressing trade and development matters. UNCTAD has made tremendous strides under the leadership of Secretary-General Ricupero - I commend him for his accomplishments. UNCTAD must continue to provide invaluable policy guidance for development initiatives, including those focused on creating a more inclusive and equitable global economic order, and on implementing internationally agreed development goals. Not only should UNCTAD have requisite resources to carry out its mandate, but its technical expertise should also be tapped to help meet broader trade and development objectives.

There are many obstacles on the path to development - each government must confront their own. We are generally agreed that our efforts for economic growth and development should focus, in particular, on developing countries. I dare say that developing countries efforts to surmount obstacles and create an

environment conducive to socio-economic development and to take decisive action, individually and collectively in this area are not about seeking help to survive in turbulent economic times; It is about taking their rightful place as partners in the global economy. UNCTAD XI gives us the opportunity to address these issues. It is critical that we use this invaluable forum as a time for dialogue; a time for decision; and, a time for action.

I thank you.