



The
Bahamas

**STATEMENT
BY**

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**AT THE
FIFTY-EIGHTH SESSION
OF
THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President,

1. It is my distinct honour to congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of this the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, on behalf of the Prime Minister, Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. We share in the celebration of the election of a distinguished son of the Caribbean to steer the course of this body for the next year. My delegation pledges its full support to you and your bureau in the performance of this challenging task. I take this opportunity to also congratulate your predecessor, Jan Kavan of the Czech Republic, for his outstanding leadership of the 57th session.

2. I would also like to greet and pay tribute to the Secretary General, who continues to serve with great distinction, honour and exceptional courage. My delegation salutes the Secretary General, for the tremendous amount of work he has undertaken since we last convened this august body.

3. Mr. President, I wish to pause at this time to pay tribute to Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, the late Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General in Iraq, and all UN staffers who were killed or wounded in the deadly bombings of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad on 19 August and 22 September, 2003. We feel this loss most deeply. For us, the United Nations is paramount in ensuring the rule of law and justice in an increasingly complex world. An attack on the United Nations is an attack on the principles that bind us as an international community. We must stand firm against efforts to undermine those principles. There is no finer tribute to those who lost their lives than by saying today: "Now more than ever we need the United Nations."

Mr. President,

4. Such events remind us that the world is changing dramatically. It is imperative that we, as an Organization, are able to respond to these changes quickly and appropriately. The Bahamas welcomes the ongoing efforts to revitalize the General Assembly and to reform the Security Council. It is essential that these principal bodies are able to function effectively if we are to have any credibility, and if we are to attain our goals of maintaining international peace, security, justice, and development. As we are all too well aware, the process of reform of the Security Council has stalled, as we remain deadlocked over critical issues. The time has come for us to take the hard decisions and agree to a practical programme of reform, that takes fully into account the need for more representative membership, as well as the need for a more democratic and transparent Council. My delegation has raised these issues in a number of bilateral discussions with other concerned states and we look forward to working with you and other delegations as we strive to rationalize the work of the entire Organization, while making it more transparent and accountable.

Mr. President,

5. While the problems in our own part of the world may not have received as much international attention as conflicts in other parts of the world, their resolution is of paramount importance to us. The Caribbean is our home, and we will spare no effort to protect it against those that seek to destabilize the region. The illegal transit of drugs, weapons, and human beings, is an affront to us, and a serious challenge to our national and regional security. The Bahamas is grateful for the support the region has obtained from the international community in addressing these areas but reminds that we need to continue to be vigilant. We urge this Assembly to enhance its cooperation with the Organization of American States (OAS) as that regional body strives to find solutions to difficult problems involving territorial disputes between Member States, and as it seeks to promote human rights and consolidate the foundations of democracy in a number of its Member States. In this context, we welcome the OAS Special Mission to Haiti as a demonstration of the region's commitment in this field.

Mr. President,

6. The Bahamas is strongly committed to the further strengthening of international efforts to prevent, combat and eliminate terrorism in all its ugly forms, and supports the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the elaboration of a draft comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. We are continuously reviewing our national legislation in order to strengthen it in these areas, with particular emphasis on cracking down on the financing of terrorism. Even now a Terrorism Bill is before our Parliament. It will further strengthen the laws which limit the ability of those who would commit these heinous acts to obtain monies to fund their activities. The commitment of The Bahamas in this fight is unyielding.

Mr. President,

7. The fight against the forces that would act outside the rule of law to achieve political objectives has forced each country to review its commitment to freedom within and without its borders and determine how to protect the freedom our citizens so dearly cherish. Last year in our address to this Assembly, The Bahamas reminded this body that in our quest for security we must not undermine the very values we want to protect, preserve and defend. But it is clear that our conventions and established and respected traditions are being challenged before our very eyes, and we must be careful to guard against this while ensuring that all of us are safe.

8. The Caribbean region as a whole is perhaps more sensitive than any other region to these issues of change and the implications for the way of life which we enjoy, characterized as it is by an abiding respect for the privacy of the individual. It should be remembered that most of us in the region are Small Island Developing States, that are especially vulnerable on security and economic

issues, but at the same time our peoples are fiercely proud of our independence and the traditions of freedom connected therewith.

9. Nowhere is the paradox of the pressure on our now independent status more sensitive and apparent than in the exercise of a presumptive legal authority by a body of powerful, but faceless, unelected bureaucrats, being advanced from some of the developed world's multilateral bodies which, in the view of many, threaten to re-impose the status of dependence without calling it so by name, by undermining our economies.

10. In this connection, The Bahamas is particularly concerned, along with its regional neighbours, about the threats to its way of life, in particular as it is underpinned by the legitimate wealth creation in its financial services sector. There are those who argue that the financial services sectors in our region undermine economic development and wealth creation in developed states, but we maintain that the evidence shows that the wealth accumulation facilitated by the financial service sectors in the region assists in the further development and economic growth of the developed world. Our country is committed to fair and equitable trade in services on a level playing field with established rules, without ever-changing goal posts.

11. Over the next year, we shall endeavour to bring this matter more clearly into focus by calling for, in this and other assemblies, the convening of a global forum on the pressures being applied to small and vulnerable states in ways which threaten the independence of these countries and which some argue is an unlawful interference in the internal affairs of a nation state. It is imperative that any rule-making forum on these issues be open to all member states of this august body. Similarly, all rules emanating therefrom must be equitably applied.

12. And so Mr. President, The Bahamas, as it brings these matters to the attention of the world repeats the obvious. The fight against international terrorism must be a major focal point of this Assembly and so should other matters such as the fight against HIV/AIDS, the protection of the environment and the sustainable development of our fragile ecosystems.

13. The Bahamas is committed to fighting on all of these fronts. It is especially concerned about the future of the world's children and young people, as HIV/AIDS threatens to undermine decades and centuries of progress in healthcare in developing healthy populations that facilitate economic growth throughout the world. The Bahamas is a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS in the region. We urge the continued and unrelenting fight against the disease, to rescue the world's developing nations from the clutches of this most recent scourge. It must take all of the political will and financial power of the world's nations to ensure that the scourge is brought under control and then eliminated.

Mr. President,

14. The Bahamas welcomes the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children, held from 8 to 10 May, 2002, and looks forward to participating in the consideration of the follow-up to its outcome at this session. It is of critical importance that we reaffirm our commitment to implementing the provisions of the outcome document 'A World Fit for Children', in the four priority areas of health, education, protection of children from abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS. Our country and its people are especially concerned about the safety and security, both physical and economic, of children and the need to foster an atmosphere of love and care so that they may grow into their rightful places in the adult world.

Mr. President,

15. The Bahamas, as do many of the Small Island Developing States, depends heavily on the environment, that is the natural beauty of the land, the sea and marine life. Tourism is our lifeblood. For the region the natural environment is the primary source of sustenance and therefore, we cannot allow our environment to be destroyed. Doing so threatens our very survival. We therefore, are acutely aware of the challenges Small Island Developing States face within the context of achieving sustainable development. The sustainable development of our country therefore remains of critical importance to the Government, and thus we, as a matter of the highest priority, continue to take steps to preserve and protect our environment.

16. We are also committed to working with all the other Small Island Developing States and the other members of this Organization, civil society and all other concerned stakeholders, including NGOs, to ensure that the Barbados Plan of Action is fully implemented. In this regard, The Bahamas welcomes the convening of the International Meeting to Review the Barbados Plan of Action, which is to take place in Mauritius in 2004, and we are proud to host the Inter-regional Preparatory Meeting in Nassau which will be held prior to that, from 26 to 30 January, 2004. It is our hope that the renewed commitment to this International Meeting, by all Member States, would take us a step closer to honouring our commitment to the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

Mr. President

17. It is an inescapable fact that there can be no social or economic development without security. For many of us in the Caribbean in particular, this security is being undermined by the activities of those trafficking in illegal drugs and weapons. By virtue of its geographical location, The Bahamas continues to be an unwitting transit point for illegal activities, including the illicit trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. What is often overlooked by those who are the consuming countries is that The Bahamas neither produces these

substances, nor is it the final destination for them. However, as a transshipment point, The Bahamas is suffering from a plethora of illegal activities associated with this trade, including the deadly nexus between illicit drugs and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. These weapons, which are illegal in The Bahamas, are contributing to an increase in violent crime in my country, and they are undermining the economic and social fabric of our nation. We therefore welcome the convening of the First Biennial Meeting of States to review implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July of this year. At the same time, we call on developed countries to take the same extraordinary measures they use in seeking to stop drug trafficking into their countries, to stop illegal small arms from reaching our shores from their countries.

Mr. President,

18. We believe that the United Nations Charter constitutes a viable and firm foundation on which the Organization can balance and achieve its objectives, to maintain international peace and security and to promote economic and social progress. I wish to reaffirm The Bahamas' commitment to the principles enshrined in that universal document which will stand as a guiding beacon as we continue to chart a rocky, yet crucial, course towards peace, security and sustainable development for all of the world's inhabitants. While progress may seem meager, we must not be swayed from our course and we must remain confident that the benefits of our activities and efforts will redound to future generations. Now more than ever the world needs the United Nations.

thank you, Mr. President.