

A Plea for Global Equity



**Address by the
Prime Minister of Jamaica
The Rt. Hon. P. J. Patterson, Q.C., M.P.
to the 52nd Session of the
General Assembly
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Mr. President, your election to chair the 52nd Session of the General Assembly, is a fitting and deserved result of distinguished service for your country in the international community.

I also wish to convey our appreciation to Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia for so ably directing the work of the 51st Session and congratulate him for a job well done.

I join those who have spoken before me in welcoming Secretary General Kofi Annan to this his first General Assembly since his assumption of office. Already he has impressed us by his sincerity of purpose and his willingness to take bold initiatives. He can always rely on Jamaica's full co-operation and support as he seeks to steer the United Nations into the new millennium.

Mr. President, in September, thirty-five years ago, Jamaica became a member of the United Nations, by one of its first acts as a sovereign nation.

We did so, born in the recognition of the central role in the management of global affairs, which only the United Nations can fill and from our desire to participate as equal partners in that process. Ever since then, Jamaica has actively sought to contribute in a constructive spirit to the building and strengthening of the international system.

One concrete result of these efforts is the location in Jamaica of an off-shoot of the system, the International Seabed Authority, established under the Law of the Sea Convention, which is acknowledged as a signal achievement in extending the reach of international co-operation. We feel confident that the Authority will be able to efficiently discharge its mandate as a completely autonomous institution.

THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Mr. President, we are constantly reminded that we are approaching a new century and a new millennium. This new era provides exciting possibilities and, at the same time, poses formidable challenges. It requires of us a creative effort in finding new directions and the search for fresh solutions.

The fluidity and changing currents in world affairs demand constant adaptation and adjustments to meet contemporary realities.

While some old disputes remain unresolved, an array of new problems continues to enter the international agenda. The situation in the Middle East should not forever remain a source of anxiety and frustration.

The rise of ethnic violence and inter-communal conflict must be averted.

Whatever cloud of uncertainty may hang over the future, we must not fail to lay the foundations of a more stable and equitable world order, which fosters greater hope and wider opportunities for mankind.

ROOT CAUSES OF INTERNATIONAL INSTABILITY

As we seek to strengthen the fabric of international security, there needs to be a concentrated focus on the root causes of instability, conflict and confrontation everywhere.

The danger signals are unmistakably clear. The co-existence of a world of health and prosperity and a world of poverty and misery is too profound a contradiction to be ignored. It lies at the heart of an emerging crisis.

More than one billion human beings are still condemned to abject poverty. The despair and frustration which form their daily experience, breed tension and trigger instability that are bound to erupt from time to time.

Mr. President, in a world where we note with increasing concern, the absence of appropriate measures by multilateral financial institutions to relieve the burden of debt, we are bound to question whether the economic measures applied in the last few years, represent the only way for developing countries to orient their economies. We cannot accept that the impoverishment of millions is a necessary cost for future world growth.

Globalization and liberalization, which have led to the breaking down of so many barriers between nations, are not removing the barriers between rich and poor. The process seems instead to be widening the differences and deepening the divide. The benefits of increased production and the expansion of global trade have been unevenly spread. Many developing countries are being increasingly marginalized in the process.

Expected transfers of resources from increased trade and investment flows have not materialized, while the burden of debt remains a major constraint on development. Simply put, the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

Mr. President, unless we redress the imbalance quickly, the disparities will increase exponentially. To avert imminent disaster, there has to be a reversal of the pattern of transfer of technology and more liberal access to the markets of developed countries.

Mr. President, in all this, the United Nations has a decisive and strategic role to play. It should direct and channel international co-operation to correct distortions and inequities in the system, and contribute to the creation of an international economic environment, facilitating economic growth and the benefits of development for all.

The new trading system is skewed in favour of the economically powerful. It is becoming more and more apparent that free trade, as practised by its loudest advocates, is not necessarily fair trade.

For developing countries, access to larger markets remain difficult, due to a variety of protective barriers. And where special and historic market arrangements for small producers exist, these are now under threat from alliances of powerful governmental and private interests.

Developing countries cannot afford to shut ourselves off from what is taking place around us. The pace of change is at times bewildering, but we cannot say "Stop the world, I want to get off."

We must make use of the positive elements of modernity, work organization and efficiency, to build the society we wish to leave for our children. The empowerment of all of the peoples of our countries is of paramount importance to the advancement of our societies.

DEVELOPING OUR HUMAN RESOURCE

Such empowerment requires that priority attention be given to Human Resource Development and Human Capital Formation; to the optimum utilization of all the available human and natural resources of our time.

Increasingly, our programmes of education and training will have, where we have not already started, to be redesigned and refocused to enable our peoples to function effectively in the emerging knowledge-based world economy. Applications of science and technology and advances in telecommunications must become all pervasive factors to be effectively and appropriately utilized for the benefit of our peoples.

Mr. President, nothing would more fulfil the lofty ideals of our Founding Fathers than an immediate global assault on poverty, ignorance and disease.

To win the battle, I call upon this august Assembly to emphasize the creation, application and dissemination of knowledge in every corner of the earth.

VULNERABILITY OF SMALL STATES

Mr. President, liberalization and globalization as being practised, have not shown the capacity or willingness to take into account the genuine interests or practical possibilities of small states.

This is the painful lesson that we as Caribbean producers of bananas have learnt. The recent panel ruling by the WTO in Geneva on the European banana regime, exposes to ruin the economies of the smaller states of the Caribbean Community, endangering the economic stability of the entire region. It demonstrates not only the vulnerability of small economies, but also the extent to which we are at the peril of those whose calculations are oblivious to the interests of our survival.

Mr. President, smaller economies operate under severe resource constraints and need to conserve the natural environment which is for us a precious resource.

That is why CARICOM countries attach special importance to international recognition of the peculiar circumstances and needs of small island developing states, as highlighted in the Barbados Programme of Action, adopted by the United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

It is with great disappointment that we note how little progress has been made to implement the Programme of Action. There is a special need for financing arrangements to develop production capabilities, infrastructure and environmental protection programmes.

Small island states suffer other disadvantages. The Caribbean is renowned for its natural beauty, but it is also vulnerable to a range of frequent natural disasters. To the physical limitations in resources and economic scale have been added the hazards of nature.

MONTSERRAT

Even as I speak, the people of the small island of Montserrat are struggling to maintain their existence in their own land, two-thirds of which has just been destroyed by a volcano that resumed activity just over two years ago after 400 years of dormancy. Less than half of the island's population remain in a "safe-zone" comprising the northern one-third of the island.

As a member of the Caribbean Community, Montserrat's plight is of grave concern to all CARICOM States.

I speak on behalf of the Community in acknowledging the categorical commitment declared by the administering power, the United Kingdom, both for emergency assistance to Montserratians as well as for the sustainable development of their territory.

Members of the Caribbean Community have offered constructive support in the recovery efforts. The costs of reconstruction are immense. We believe that the international community should also respond in a humanitarian gesture of solidarity. I therefore take this opportunity to appeal to the General Assembly, to appropriately demonstrate support for Montserrat, through the adoption of tangible measures to assist in the rebuilding and sustainable development of the island.

It is our hope and expectation that the membership of the United Nations will be able to devise a specific scheme of assistance for a courageous people.

THE PEACEMAKING ROLE OF THE UN

Mr. President, we look to the United Nations to help in emergencies, but above all, to be effective in keeping the peace. It should be ready to respond promptly to crises as they occur and defuse tensions and conflict situations through preventative diplomacy. We believe the present time affords a significant opportunity for creating the framework to fulfil this role and for us to shape a rapid response capability.

In recent years, a number of unilateral as well as multilateral measures have resulted in a more positive climate for international peace and security.

The conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty during the 51st Session of the General Assembly and the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention, have enhanced the prospects for real progress towards the goal of general and complete disarmament.

We nevertheless acknowledge that more needs to be done in the areas of arms regulation and disarmament, especially in respect of conventional weapons and the proliferation of small arms.

We welcome the steps being taken to prohibit the use of anti-personnel land mines, which should be regarded as a category of inhumane weapons that can no longer be allowed to cause the maiming and loss of life of civilians. We urge member states to give full support to the Ottawa Process for the conclusion of an international treaty to ban this category of weapons so as to command universal obedience.

DESTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE OF ILLICIT DRUGS

Mr. President, the threat to international peace and security can no longer be viewed in purely military and political terms.

Illicit trafficking in drugs poses a serious threat as all too often we witness the pervasive and pernicious effects of the production and consumption of illicit drugs. The massive demand and the lure of profits from the trade have spawned a transnational network of criminals with considerable resources and influence. The activities of these groups are particularly threatening to small states such as those in the Caribbean, where the state apparatus is often stretched to deal with their coercive capability.

Within the Caribbean Community, we have taken these threats seriously and have committed significant resources to confront them. Our geographic proximity to the

major destination for the consumption of drugs, makes the Caribbean particularly vulnerable as a transshipment point.

We, therefore, view bilateral and regional co-operation as critical to combatting drug smuggling.

An associated problem that is particularly dangerous for us is the smuggling of arms and weapons of destruction, a significant factor in spreading a cycle of crime and violence. CARICOM has pushed for a regional initiative to attack this problem. We look forward to hemispheric support, particularly in restricting illegal exports from the main areas of manufacturing and sale of small arms.

MULTILATERALISM IS KEY

Mr. President, it is evident from all the forces at work that the imperatives of interdependence, the impact of globalization and the inter-linkage in global problems require a renewal and strengthening of multilateralism.

With the end of the Cold War, we now have within our grasp, the opportunity to establish a lasting framework for international co-operation and build genuine partnerships that will guarantee a secure future for all. The challenges of the emerging world order are best addressed by multilateral approaches. Isolationism and unilateralism cannot be viable options, but multilateralism can only thrive if there are effective multilateral institutions.

UN — ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

Mr. President, the United Nations remains indispensable as the only universal mechanism capable of addressing issues of global impact and concern. But we must realise that the international society which the United Nations now serves, is vastly different from the one in existence when the Organization was originally created.

The reshaping of the United Nations, therefore, has to take into account new and complex international realities.

Without compromising the fundamental objectives of the Charter, we need new rules and procedures to guide us.

Of special importance is the reform of the Security Council, both in terms of composition and its mode of operation. The Security Council is a vital organ in the working of the United Nations. It is essential for its effectiveness that it commands the confidence of the international community.

Jamaica supports an expansion of membership which will make it more representative of the international community. We advocate the adoption of procedures which will make it more democratic and transparent in decision-making.

We recognise that there are important and delicate issues at stake, and that we should proceed with care, but we have a concern that the process should not be mired in endless debate.

We believe there is a sufficient consensus on proposals to form the basis for decisions soon.

We also acknowledge that, essential to a strengthened United Nations structure, is more efficient management and more scope for effective initiative by the Secretary-General and his officials. We support him in this endeavour.

Jamaica also endorses the need for measures to improve efficiency, and we have no quarrel with reform to streamline and rationalize the system. In welcoming these steps, we must emphasize, however, that reform is not synonymous with cost cutting. Reform is not about doing less, it is about doing better.

We would, therefore, wish to see a process that strengthens the capacity of the United Nations to deliver the services required by Member States, as well as cements the linkages among the organs of the system, while preserving comparative advantages, complementarities and synergies.

The exercise must improve the capacity of the United Nations to take preventive action and respond to crises. Above all, for small developing nations such as my own, it is important that the Organization continues to play a leadership role in defining global development priorities.

Not all member states will readily embrace the reform proposals introduced. Yet no one can deny the need for meaningful action to strengthen and improve the United Nations system.

We must seek, therefore, to find common cause and summon the collective will to implement the measures that are necessary for its revitalization.

It is our collective responsibility.

Effective reform of our global institution requires broad agreement on the main features of the new global environment. We must clearly define the role the United Nations is expected to play in the next millennium.

A UNITED NATIONS OF HOPE

Our common vision must be one in which the United Nations can act as the catalyst for change and an instrument of progress on behalf of all peoples of the world.

Mr. President, let us resolve to equip the United Nations with the necessary tools, including the requisite financial resources, in accordance with Charter obligations, to enable it to effectively undertake its leadership role in safeguarding international peace and security, in ensuring the economic and social well-being of mankind.

It is our responsibility, and our peoples are looking for an institution energised to act effectively and swiftly to address the challenges that confront us as we approach the 21st Century.

Let us exploit the opportunity we now have to fashion a United Nations which reflects the hope and aspirations of all mankind for sustainable development, for lasting security and enduring peace.

Mr. President, the new millennium beckons with its endless possibilities and challenges. Let not narrow self-interest prevent us from taking bold and decisive steps to meet these challenges. Jamaica and the Caribbean Community stand ready to play their part in a co-operative effort to attain global equity and prosperity. All of us owe it to ourselves and to succeeding generations.

I urge the international community to wholeheartedly embrace this venture in a genuine spirit of solidarity and harmony. History will not forgive us if we fail to do so.