



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT

BY

**THE MOST HONOURABLE ANDREW HOLNESS, ON, MP, PC
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA**

AT THE

**GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

*Theme: Building resilience through hope - to recover from COVID-19,
rebuild sustainably, respond to the needs of the planet,
respect the rights of people, and revitalise the United Nations*

**UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK
FRIDAY, 24th SEPTEMBER 2021**

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Your Excellency, Mr. Abdulla Shahid, I extend warm congratulations on your election to the Presidency of this 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I also commend your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Volkan Bozkir, for his work, during the historic 75th anniversary, a particularly difficult year for the United Nations and its membership, as we grappled with the insidious COVID-19 pandemic.

Your Excellency, you can be confident of Jamaica's continued commitment to collaborate with the membership to seek viable solutions for persistent global challenges, notably the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. We must take a fresh look at how we rebuild sustainably, attain the Sustainable Development Goals, and renew our focus on social justice and climate action.

Mr President,

The theme for this year's debate with its emphasis on building resilience, is welcomed as the world searches for ways to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, with its dreadful impacts on all aspects of human existence.

We must inspire hope to drive our emergence from the scourge of this pandemic better and stronger than we were before.

Vaccines and the Global Response

Mr President,

At the core of building resilience is restoring the health and well-being of our people. The pandemic has exacerbated challenges in this area, especially for Small Island Developing States, like Jamaica, which already face limited resources in the health sector.

Most regrettably, many lives have been lost and we extend condolences. There are increasing uncertainties as the pandemic continues and new variants emerge. While mitigation efforts to help to reduce transmission and mortality remain crucial, the long-term solution must be vaccines that are accessible to all. We know that vaccines only work if a critical threshold is attained. Sharing vaccines in a strategic manner, serves the global common good, as no country will be safe until all are safe. Jamaica supports a globally coordinated approach to the scaling up of production and equitable distribution of vaccines, with the United Nations at the core.

We welcome the support received from bilateral and international partners and through the COVAX Facility.

COVAX was conceived as an expression of multilateralism, bringing widespread aspirations of hope in the collective approach. To date, however, it has not met expectations, as its noble ideals have been displaced by nationalistic endeavours, ironically, at a time when a pandemic requires global coordinated action. Notwithstanding, we believe in the essential merits of the Facility and call for urgent, increased international collaboration to avoid the widening gap in recovery across countries and regions.

Closing the Digital Divide

Mr President,

Today, we see some countries receiving a 'digital dividend' while others suffer the consequences of a 'digital divide.' There is need to address urgently the latter in support of COVID-19 adaptation measures, response and recovery efforts. Accelerated digitalization, remote work and education, e-commerce and the virtual delivery of essential services, have

allowed the digitally connected to thrive while severely exacerbating the inequalities faced by the digitally disconnected. This is particularly evident in our rural areas, along gender lines and generally among the poorest and most vulnerable.

Addressing the negative consequences will require greater engagement of the public and private sectors in building foundations for long term development. Leaving no one behind today means leaving no one offline. That is why Jamaica has been working to ensure that the tools needed to adapt and thrive, are provided to our citizens.

Mr President

The COVID-19 pandemic has also spurred innovation and new forms of collaboration across sectors. We are committed to the development of a sustainable framework to ensure the availability of human capital to meet the growing and changing needs of the economy. Jamaica is taking an inclusive approach to improve digital literacy, through increased access to, and use of ICT, by 50% in public institutions, schools and key public areas in the country, over the next four years. We are engaging our private sector to improve the application of science, technology and innovation in educational institutions, towards national development.

We believe that countries should be supported in their efforts to build robust and resilient digital infrastructure. Public investments of this sort can serve as a force multiplier in narrowing the gaps that result in inequitable developmental outcomes. Universal, secure and affordable digital connectivity is needed to ensure inclusive and sustainable development. We, therefore advocate for an increased digital alliance within the global community and support the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on the Digital Cooperation Roadmap.

Banking on the SDGs and the FfD Initiative

Mr. President,

The multiple challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, have placed severe pressure on our fiscal accounts, threatening our hard-won macro-economic stability. The pandemic has demonstrated how quickly our development gains can be eroded and that much more needs to be done by the international community to secure a resilient future for the most vulnerable. We must retain hope in our ability to meet the targets for the SDGs, even with adjusted timelines.

Mr. President,

Last year, along with the Prime Minister of Canada and the UN Secretary-General, Heads of State and Government and key international partners, I convened the *Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond*, Initiative. The outcome was ambitious, yet practical, with policy options to support COVID-19 response and recovery for consideration by the international community. It now remains for us to take action.

Mr. President,

For Jamaica, we anticipate real GDP recovery within 4 years, given the relative strength of our economy and the stimulus packages implemented both locally and internationally. However, we will require adequate fiscal space and funding to achieve the SDGs and to be able to respond and recover from the health, social and economic implications of the pandemic, in light of high debt-servicing requirements.

The continued use of measures of development which do not take into account the full spectrum of vulnerabilities of small island developing states is a major impediment to our efforts to attain the SDGs. We who live in one of the most disaster-prone regions of the world are more vulnerable than our income data suggests.

We reiterate today, that consideration of our developmental level must be linked to our socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities. This rationale underpins the basis for a multi-dimensional vulnerability index for SIDS and for the ongoing work by the UN on this matter, as endorsed by the General Assembly last year.

Mr President,

The Caribbean Development Bank has reported that SIDS debts have risen to unsustainable levels since the pandemic. The number of Caribbean countries with a debt to GDP ratio above 60% has increased from 9 to 13 with the average debt to GDP ratio increasing to 85%.

Jamaica maintains its call for a revision of the graduation criteria, as the classification system utilized by international financial institutions is simply not appropriate. We concur with the UN Secretary General in his assessment, that graduation must be a reward, **not** a punishment. As we strive to build forward stronger in this decade of action, we call for the commitment of the international community to a post Covid-19 reality that guarantees greater investment and financing to support development and economic growth in SIDS. We also seek the reorientation of the international financial system to align financing with sustainable development to accelerate our push to achieve our SDG Goals.

Climate Change and Economic Vulnerabilities

Mr. President,

Climate change remains one of the defining global challenges of our era and of even greater concern for future generations. Our ability to achieve sustainable development will be compromised if we do not find real solutions to the ongoing climate emergency.

The demand for climate adaptation is increasing, but so is the fear that it will be unmet. A more worrisome truth is the IPCC's finding that human influence on the earth's climate has already led to unprecedented and irreversible changes. In their efforts to combat these changes, SIDS have been unable to access climate finance at the pace and scale necessary.

We have instead, been forced to spend significant funds on loss and damage, with limited financial support from large emitters. Jamaica joins with all SIDS in calling for delivery of the 100 billion dollars per annum, committed in 2015, by the international donor community.

COP-26 must deliver significant progress on the priority issues of climate financing, loss and damage, adaptation and mitigation, as well as the development of effective climate change plans.

Mr President,

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea recognises the ocean as the common heritage of mankind. As the science and the research have shown, we must also see the oceans as playing a vital role as a climate mitigator. We support the development of a legally binding international instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas

beyond national jurisdiction. We look forward to the successful conclusion of negotiations of an international Treaty under the Convention, in 2022.

Threats to International Peace and Security

Mr President,

We reaffirm the importance of multilateral approaches to the issues of peace and development, and the central role of the United Nations in their treatment. We support the resolution of disputes, whether in the Middle East, in the Caribbean or elsewhere, through dialogue and negotiated settlements.

We call for the end to the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba.

Mr President,

The illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons remains a daily challenge to citizen security and a grave concern to Jamaica. The widespread availability of these arms and their ammunition is a key enabler of conflict and endemic crime, and represent a significant danger to our internal security, fostering criminal activities which destabilize the social order. We will work with all our partners to enhance the capacity of member states to address issues related to arms control and disarmament, by preventing the diversion of conventional arms to the illicit market. This matter remains a priority for Jamaica, as we seek the assistance of our bilateral, regional and international partners in addressing the issue.

Mr President,

The celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations, recognized the pivotal role of the Organization, to which we continue to assign new mandates and challenges. Let us, with equal fervor, resolve to equip the Organization with the necessary tools and financial resources, to enable it to effectively undertake its leadership role in safeguarding international peace and security, and in ensuring the economic and social well-being of mankind.

Our common vision must be one in which the UN can act, and will act, as the catalyst for hope, for change, for peace and as an instrument of progress on behalf of all peoples of the world.

Thank you.