



Address by

His Excellency Mr. Donald R. Ramotar
President of the Republic of Guyana

to the

Sixty-Seventh Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

September 27, 2012

New York

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a distinct honour for me to speak today for the first time as President of the Republic of Guyana in this general debate of the Sixty-Seventh General Assembly.

To you, Mr. President, I extend my delegation's sincere congratulations on your election to preside over the current session. You bring to this task the invaluable experience gained as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, a country that has surmounted turmoil and divisions in the quest for a better future for its peoples.

I also pay tribute to your distinguished predecessor, His Excellency Mr Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser, who presided with dedication and resolve during a testing time for this body.

For his unstinting service to the Organisation, the distinguished Secretary General deserves commendation as well as our continued support as the United Nations negotiates the many issues that confront our world.

Mr. President, the present international system is characterized by change and crises. A tide of change is evident at all levels, from the local to the global, and is either being precipitated or accompanied by multiple crises within the global community.

In the economic realm, continuing adverse conditions stymie global efforts at achieving internationally agreed-upon development objectives. Recovery from the global financial crisis is at best incipient and sluggish. Several of the major contributors to global output are grappling with unsustainable fiscal balances, which hinder their ability to stimulate lasting recovery. The problems in these economies continue to place a drag on global growth. Compounding these difficulties is the slowdown in output in major emerging economies. Naturally, these events have had serious negative impacts on developing countries.

Although more resilient than in earlier times, developing countries have paid a heavy price as a result of the present difficulties experienced in the world economy. This is reflected in growth that is generally lower than pre-crisis levels. Already grappling with adverse trading arrangements, and the consequences of an inconclusive and disappointing Doha Development Round, the plight of developing countries has been made worse by the prolonged global slump. Much of the gains that were made in the

pre – 2008 period have been erased by the continuing difficulties in the world economy. The small vulnerable economies of the Caribbean face special challenges, compounded by generally high levels of indebtedness and falling export revenues.

It is within this unfavourable international climate that we have to judge our own performance. Guyana has had to face many serious challenges. However, we have worked steadfastly in an effort to build a more resilient economy. We have managed to forestall the worst effects of the international economic crises. Over the past six years, we have achieved an economic growth rate of approximately five percent per annum. This growth rate I believe is the result of the investments that we have been making in our people. More than thirty per cent (30 %) of our budget is dedicated to Education, Health, Housing, Water and Social Programmes to help the most vulnerable.

Today Guyana has achieved universal primary education and we have come a long way towards attaining universal secondary education. However, significant challenges remain in reaching people in the remote areas of our country. If we are to encourage our youth to become responsible citizens and to prepare them to be the leaders of tomorrow, we must ensure that our education systems allow for the development of their full potential. I am therefore honoured to join the Secretary General of the United Nations to promote his initiative on education.

We are nonetheless conscious that sustainability of our growth and that of other developing countries could be hindered if the weakness in the international economy is prolonged.

Guyana therefore continues to advocate for:

- reform of the graduation policies and aid allocation criteria of the International Financial Institutions to take account of the structural vulnerability and level of economic resilience of small states;
- measures to ease the debt burden;
- renewed access to concessionary financing for highly indebted Middle Income Countries: as well as
- the strengthening of financial regulations.

Mr. President, the international economic crisis has also seen growing negative social problems in its wake. Despite great efforts by many countries the war against narco-trafficking is far from over. This scourge is having an impact on all our countries. It has directly and indirectly engendered a growth in criminal activity in our region. The availability of guns in many societies, most of which is a by-product of the narco-trade, has contributed to the growth of gun crimes and murders in the region and beyond.

To deal with this problem, Guyana is ready to cooperate fully with the international community to bring the criminals to justice and free our people from the multiple dangers that drug trafficking creates.

Even as our society advances, the issues we have to deal with often seem to multiply. The issue of trafficking in persons has arisen over the past decade as a major concern. We join with all democratic and decent people throughout the world in condemning this crime. Again, this is an area that requires a high level of cooperation to deal with it. We are ready to play our part.

If solving these collective problems requires greater will, then other transnational problems such as the climate crisis requires urgent, immediate and decisive action. Our failure to do so risks causing irretrievable harm to humanity.

Despite the strong scientific and economic case for action, the global response to the climate crisis falls far short of what is required both in terms of scale and in urgency. The projected level of reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is much too low. The scientists are warning us of catastrophic consequences if the rise in greenhouse emissions is not halted. Already some states are facing imminent extinction. To add insult to injury, the promise of fast-start financing made at Copenhagen a few years ago has not materialized. The result is that those most at risk are effectively deprived of the means to adapt to this existential threat. We cannot continue to deal with threats to the survival of the planet with such casualness.

As a low lying coastal state, Guyana is mindful of the dangers posed by climate change. We have been at the forefront of appeals for the international community to match its concern with tangible action. It is clear that some countries are taking this issue seriously. Norway has led the way by giving tangible support in fighting climate change. Guyana, for its part, has chosen to pursue a Low Carbon Development Strategy in order to assure economic growth, social progress and environmental sustainability for

present and future generations of our citizens. But as our experience patently demonstrates, this path is not without its hurdles.

Just three short months ago in Rio de Janeiro, we renewed our collective commitment to sustainable development and to ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet. We also agreed that the eradication of poverty is the greatest challenge facing the world today and we recommitted ourselves to freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency.

We must therefore as a matter of exigency respond to the plight of more than one billion of our fellow citizens who bear the ache of hunger on a daily basis. They are found on every continent, in every city, and in rural communities across the world.

Their plight is worsening. Food prices are surging once again and risk rising even further as severe droughts decimate crop yields. Those who suffer from chronic hunger today cannot wait until the international community agrees on a post-2015 development framework. They cannot wait until we craft new sustainable development goals. They need action now. The decades-long under-investment in agriculture and rural development needs to be urgently reversed if food security is to be guaranteed on a sustainable basis. In line with the Rome Principles for Sustainable Global Food Security, Guyana calls for an acceleration of the twin-track approach to enhance direct action against hunger for the most vulnerable, and for promoting medium to long term sustainability in agriculture and rural development. In this context, increased international support for the expansion of rural infrastructure is critical.

If we are to maintain our credibility, we must avoid indecisiveness on these issues that afflict humanity. We are only three short years away from 2015, the year we set ourselves important goals to improve the security of our planet and enhance the quality of life for all. We must do what we promised to do and we must do so without delay.

Mr. President, greater alacrity is also needed in the arena of politics where tensions and unrest in many corners of our globe threaten to undermine international peace and security. The tide of democratic change that has swept the planet has raised the expectations of peoples for social progress and better standards of life in an environment of enlarged freedoms. These legitimate aspirations deserve the respect and encouragement of the governments concerned and the support of the international community. No people should be denied the right to live in dignity, nor to a life free

from fear and from want. At the same time, we must be careful to guard against the superimposition of agendas based on ulterior designs that are alien to these noble aspirations. While we give solidarity and support where needed, let us not forget that this body crafted an important principle of self-determination.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are best preserved in an environment of peace and security. Respect for the rule of law and tolerance for the faiths and beliefs of all mankind must continue to be the guiding principles through which we build harmonious societies. While we condemn the attacks and insult that the recent film heaped on Islam, we believe that nothing of that nature can justify the murder of diplomats and the violence we have seen. We extend our sympathy to the people and government of the United States of America on the murder of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and others in Libya. We believe that the best homage we can pay to their memory is to work even harder for a just, peaceful and tolerant world.

Mr. President, in concert with the proposed theme of this debate, the United Nations must continue to pursue peaceful solutions to political conflicts, no matter how slow or painstaking the process may be.

It is my country's sincere hope that peace will soon come to the Syrian people. Guyana urges the renewal of efforts to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table. The international community must contribute to peace and not to the exacerbation of strife and conflict. Any abandonment of its role in bringing peace to Syria will result in greater suffering in that country and the undermining of security in that part of the world. The United Nations must therefore persevere in finding a peaceful end to the conflict. We therefore support the efforts of the Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States in working for a just peace in Syria.

I wish also to underline Guyana's strong support for the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We are of the view that the resolution of this conflict, which has lasted for too long, is key to a lasting peace in the Middle East. Guyana recognises the State of Palestine based on its 1967 borders and supports her aspirations to full membership of the United Nations. The Palestinian people deserve the same right as people everywhere: to live in dignity, security, freedom and independence, at peace with all their neighbours and with the right to move freely within their homeland.

Guyana is encouraged by the continuing efforts of the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan to resolve their differences through negotiations. We are

hopeful also that the people of Mali will be able to overcome their current crisis and restore the celebrated legacy of Timbuktu.

Having regard to the principle of sovereignty of States within the United Nations Charter, Guyana wishes to again place on record its firm opposition to the economic, financial and commercial embargo imposed against its sister Caribbean State of Cuba. We call for an immediate end to this policy. Cuba has made great contributions to the social development of many developing countries. The lifting of the blockade can allow it to do more.

Mr. President, the myriad challenges affecting our world today pose a formidable test to the multilateral system which embodies our collective aspirations for peace and development. These challenges tax our collective resolve to act in the best interest of humankind.

The United Nations was established at a time when the vast majority of the human family was not represented in its councils and could not speak in their own right. This is not the case today. The near universal representativeness of its membership gives the United Nations unparalleled legitimacy among world institutions. The governance of the Organisation needs major reform if it is to reflect the realities of the present time and give full expression to the aspiration of the world's peoples. For the Security Council, the imperative for reform is particularly urgent. I reaffirm Guyana's steadfast support for early reform of the Council through an expansion in both the permanent and non-permanent categories with particular regard to the representation of developing countries.

The United Nations must also be reformed in a manner that will enhance its contribution to global economic governance in keeping with the purposes of its Charter. This body has an important role to play in addressing the democracy deficit in decision-making on these matters which often have far-reaching implications, particularly for small states.

Reforming the United Nations along these lines will provide it with greater legitimacy which is the key to its effectiveness in the eyes of the world. That legitimacy will be enhanced by the delivery of results that meet the expectations of the global citizenry in areas where action is most needed.

Mr. President, in conclusion, allow me to recognize the great role played by this body over the years in promoting world peace. It has done a lot to contain and resolve regional and local conflicts. In our times, the United Nations has become indispensable in tackling pressing global issues. We must therefore all work together to strengthen the Organisation to make it more effective in the face of the many challenges that are ahead.

I thank you.