



*Permanent Mission
of Barbados to
the United Nations*



**Statement of the Prime Minister of Barbados
The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley, Q.C., M.P.,**

On the Occasion of the

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

AT

THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Friday, September 24, 2021

Madam Vice President,

Permit me at the outset to congratulate His Excellency Abdulla Shahid for his election as President of the 76th session of the General Assembly as well as Secretary-General, António Guterres, and the Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed on their reappointment to their posts and to assure them all of Barbados' support.

If I used the speech prepared for me to deliver today, it would be a repetition. A repetition of what you have heard from others and also from me. How many more times will we then have a situation where we say the same thing over and over and over to come to naught?

My friends, we cannot do that anymore. Three years ago, when I made my maiden speech, I indicated from this very podium and told the international community that the world appeared perilously similar to how it looked like 100 years ago. Barbados made that position clear.

We have not come to say we told you so, but, regrettably, we have come to say that the needle had not moved and that we have not seen sufficient action on behalf of the people of this world.

I am not here therefore to keep you long today. I shall be very, very brief.

How many more variants of COVID-19 must arrive, how many more, before a worldwide action plan for vaccinations will be implemented? How many more deaths must it take before excess vaccines in the possession of the advanced countries of the world will be shared with those who have simply no access to the vaccine?

And I ask, how much more fake news will we allow to be spread without states defending the public digital space? We have come together with alacrity to defend the right of states to tax across the digital space, but we are not prepared to come together with the same alacrity to defend the rights of our citizens to be duped by fake news in the same digital space.

How many more surges must there be before the world takes action? None are safe until all are safe. How many more times, will we hear that? And how much more must we do, Madam Vice President, before we get the global moral strategic leadership that our world needs?

How much more global temperature rise must there be before we end the burning of fossil fuels? And how much more must sea levels climb, imperiling Small Islands Developing States like mine, before those who profited from the emission of greenhouse gases address the loss and damage that they occasioned, rather than asking us to crowd out the fiscal space that we have for development to cure the damage caused by the greed of others?

How many more hurricanes must destroy, locust devour and islands be submerged before we recognized that 100 billion dollars in climate finance are simply not enough? The answer, Madam Vice President, is that we are waiting for urgent global moral strategic leadership. How many more crises must hit before we see an international system that stops dividing us and starts to lift us up?

How many more times must we come to this podium and speak about the plight of the people of Cuba and Haiti and see very little being done to lift the floor of social development to give them the right to pursue their legitimate aspirations?

How many more, how many more crises and natural disasters before we see that assistance does not reach those who need it most and those who are most vulnerable.

How much wealthier must tech firms get? The top 5 tech firms have a market capitalization of 9.3 trillion dollars. I did not say “billion”, I said “trillion”. How much wealthier must they get before we worry about the fact that so few of us have access to data and knowledge and that our children are being deprived of the tools that they need to participate in online education?

The answer, Madam Vice President, is that we have the means to give every child on this planet a tablet and we have the means to give every adult a vaccine and we have the means to invest in protecting the most vulnerable on our planet from a changing climate, but we chose not to. It is not because we do not have enough; it is because we do not have the will to distribute that which we have. It is also because regrettably, the faceless few do not fear the consequences sufficiently.

How many more leaders must come to this podium and not be heard before they stop coming? How many times must we address an empty hall of officials in an institution that was intended to be made for leaders to discuss with other leaders the advancements necessary to prevent another great war or any of the other great challenges of humanity?

How many more times must we stand idly by and see women of color and men of color and women (period) be attacked disproportionately when at the leadership of international organizations?

Yes, how many more times must great needs be met simply by nice words and not the goodwill that is necessary to prevent nationalism and militarism? The answer, Madam Vice President, is that this age dangerously resembles that of a century ago.

That was a time when we were on the eve of the Great Depression and a time when we fought a similar pandemic; a time when fascism, populism and nationalism led to the decimation of populations through actions that are too horrendous for us to even contemplate. Our world knows not what it is gambling with, and if we don't control this fire, it will burn us all down.

As I said two years ago, this is not science fiction. We heard the Secretary-General make the same comment on Tuesday 21st September. This is our reality. It is not science fiction; and if the truth be told, the Secretary-General's speech said it all. But who will stand here and support him? Who will give him the mandate to pursue his vision in our institutions, be it the WHO, the IMF, the World Bank, the Regional Development Banks or the Development Institutions? Who will give them the mandate to go forward if we continue to refuse to summon the political will to confront what we know we must confront? I ask who in here would sign the new charter? A new charter for the 21st century that is appropriate not for the next 75 years - because the world in which we live moves too quickly - but for the next 25 years. So that we can meet the needs of the 21st century, not the needs of the middle of the 20th century and the aftermath of a world war that few of us can really relate to today.

In the words of Robert Nesta Marley "who will get up and stand up" for the rights of our people? Who will stand up in the name of all those millions who have died during this awful pandemic? Who will stand up in the name of all those millions who have died because of the climate crises? Who will stand up for the small island developing states who need 1.5 degrees to survive as we go to COP 26? Who will stand up? Not with a little token but with real progress.

Who will stand up for all in our countries who suffer the indignity of unemployment and underemployment and whose access to food is now compromised by increased food prices and increased transportation prices? It is not beyond us to solve this problem. If we can find a way to send people to the moon and solve male baldness, as I have said over and over, we can solve simple problems like letting our people eat at affordable prices and making sure that we have adequate transport.

We have been told that democracy is what matters in our countries and democracy is fundamentally an issue of the majority in numbers. But why don't we count who stands up in here and why don't we take a reckoning for the numbers in here?

My friends, it is against that background that I say to you this is not 1945 with 50 countries, this is 2021 with many countries that did not exist in 1945 who must face their people and answer the needs of their people. Our people want to know what is the relevance of an international community that only comes to talk and not to listen.

This is why I say that our voices must be heard and our voices must matter. And today, at this dangerous fork in the road, Barbados calls on the nation states of this assembly and the people of this world to indicate what direction we want our world to go in and not leave it to the faceless few who have worked so hard to prevent the prosperity from being shared. A prosperity that is sufficient to be shared with all of our people.

I ask you today to support us because we will bring a resolution in plenary to endorse the approach of Secretary-General Guterres. When I met with him two days ago, I told him that we shared the same philosophy, we want the same destination. The only issue is what road we take and what potholes are in the road ahead and what obstacles we must overcome.

My friends, I fear we leave this session of the UN General Assembly in need of another General Assembly: one with real engagement and one to secure real progress. That is what the Secretary-General called for on Tuesday. Token initiatives will not close the gap.

On Monday morning I said to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom that when I was a student in his country and as we got off the train there would be a pre-recorded message each time that simply said: "Mind the Gap". Let us, my friends, not only "Mind the Gap", but determine as a global community of nations that numbers matter. We have the population and the member states to send the signal of the direction that we want our world to go in at this dangerous moment. Let us do so with the calm assurance that those who labour in great causes never ultimately fail. But we must summon the courage to do it.

I ask us, in the name of our people, to find the global moral strategic leadership that can take us forward.

Global: because our problems are global

Moral: because we must do the right thing.

Strategic: because we cannot solve every problem of the world, but we must solve those within our purview immediately.

Thank you.
