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## SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

*H.E. Mr. Álvaro Colom Caballeros*  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA

GENERAL DEBATE

New York, September 24, 2009

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STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF GUATEMALA, ALVARO  
COLOM CABALLEROS AT THE 64<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED  
NATIONS

(New York, 24 September, 2009)

Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Esteemed colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the outset, I would like to salute Doctor Ali Treki, our recently installed President and distinguished diplomat from the Lybian Arab Jamahiriya. I wish him much success in leading the deliberations of this session. At the same time, I would like to express our admiration and respect for Father Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, our fellow Central American, and to thank him for his tireless work in leading the session that just concluded.

My presence also highlights our commitment with multilateralism in general and the United Nations in particular. In that context, I salute Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and reiterate to him our appreciation for his work. The Organization has played a prominent role in the recent history of our country, and continues its presence up to today. The Guatemalan people appreciate and value this presence, and tries to reciprocate, in part, with our participation in various peacekeeping operations.

Mr. President,

I would like to briefly touch on five topics that appear in the center of our national concerns, but that at the same time have an important international dimension.

First, as occurs with the other countries of our region, Guatemala has been strongly impacted by the international economic and financial crisis. This fact is reflected in the value and volume of our exports, in the level of family remittances, in the flows of private overseas investment, and especially in the level of economic activity, employment, and the collection of fiscal receipts. In more general terms, the crisis has made it more difficult for us to meet the Millennium Development Goals.

Further, our efforts to mitigate the impact of the crisis have been partially annulled by an irregular climatic event, inasmuch as we are suffering the worst drought experienced in the last thirty years. This phenomenon has affected our basic grains crops, with a grave impact in over half of the national territory. We thus face an emergency in the area of food and nutrition, which obligated us to declare a state of national calamity at the beginning of this month. We are highly appreciative at the rapid response of the United Nations System as well as that of the international community to this emergency.

This situation, which illustrates one of the manifold manifestations of climate change at the level of diverse regions, is an added burden to the regressive effects experience during the first half of 2008 by the double crisis of food and energy, followed by the above-mentioned effects of the economic and financial crisis. Although all of these factors affect us adversely at the national level, unfortunately their adverse effects hit disproportionately those sectors of the population with the least capacity to defend

themselves. This panorama is further complicated by the fact that the imperative to address the needs of the population on the part of the State are severely restricted due to fiscal considerations.

Nevertheless, we are by no means sitting still. We have managed to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis through coherent economic and monetary policies that pursue recovering the capacity to grow while at the same time maintaining financial stability. At the same time, my Government persists in its plan to promote a dynamic Program of Social Cohesion which provides services to the poorest and excluded regions of the country, placing emphasis on the most vulnerable people, including women and children, especially of the indigenous communities.

Here the complementary role of international cooperation is obviously highlighted; to address the needs of developing countries, to unify efforts that aim at countering the global economic and financial crisis, and to avoid that recent bouts of trade protectionism expand and become the norm. In this regard, we applaud the steps that have been taken on the part of the international community to face the crisis in a coordinated manner. We will follow with interest the deliberations of the G-20, meeting precisely today in Pittsburgh, and we trust that this restricted forum will also take on board the concerns of small and medium sized economies. In addition, we support the efforts being promoted in the framework of the international financial institutions and the United Nations to improve their capacity to assist developing countries to confront the crisis.

In the second place, I would like to refer to the insecurity that, much as occurs in many countries of our region, constitutes a serious blow to our citizens. The origin and causes of common and organized crime are complex and I will not tackle the matter at this time. But there is no doubt that a good part of this phenomenon is transnational in nature, and as such it should be addressed in an integral manner and with a multilateral approach. In more mundane terms, the topic of trafficking in drugs produced in a certain country and consumed in another, but utilizing the Central American Isthmus as a transit route, generates such a volume of financial gains that its capacity to corrode national democratic institutions is truly alarming. The response to this phenomenon requires extraordinary efforts on the part of the State and of civil society, especially when account is taken of the fact that in many countries such as mine those institutions are still raked by historical weaknesses, in spite of the progress achieved in some areas.

Thus, we have undertaken tireless efforts to respond to the public clamor to improve the citizens' security. Here, again, international cooperation is indispensable. We have adopted very concrete mechanisms of joint actions with our partners of the Central American Integration System and with our Northern neighbor, Mexico. We have also received assistance from the donor community. In particular, I wish to highlight the crucial role played by the United Nations through the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which has the solid support not only of my Government, but of all of civil society. We appreciate that the mandate of the Commission has been extended for an additional two years, and recognize its important achievements since its establishment.

In the third place, I would like to touch on the topic that was the object of our attention on Tuesday: climate change, its impact on the future, and the imperative that humanity close ranks in defense of our common habitat: our planet. Guatemala is one of the highly vulnerable countries to the negative impacts of this phenomenon. In the past ten years the country has suffered four extreme meteorological events, either drought or flooding, which have caused great human and economic damage, putting at risk environmental security, food security and the health of the population.

The last Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change proves that if emissions continue increasing at the present rate and we tolerate that these are doubled in relation to the previous pre-industrial level, its effects would be devastating. It is for this reason that we join those delegations that have argued for tangible and measurable results in the upcoming Conference of the Parties to be held in Copenhagen.

In the fourth place, I would like to stress our commitment to the principles and norms aimed at guaranteeing the protection and full observance of human rights, within our own country and also at the international level. We are a multi-ethnic, pluri-cultural and multilingual country that demands the respect and exercise of political, cultural, economic and spiritual rights of all Guatemalans. We understand that one of those rights refers to the right of free expression and access to information. Consequently, we promoted a Law on the Free Access to Information, which entered into effect this year. At the international level, we have adhered to most of the human rights instruments, and we have the firm intention of adhering to the International Criminal Court, pending the approval of our Legislative branch. Further, in the context of the United Nations we have supported advancing in the implementation of the concept of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

The fifth matter I wish to address refers to the threats to democracy and the legal order that Guatemala has experienced in recent months. As a result of the regrettable assassination of a prominent lawyer – the motives are still being investigated – some sectors opposed to the democratic reforms promoted by my Government attempted to bring about the equivalent of a technical coup d'état. The immediate response of the international community, the huge popular support received, and, above all, the attitude of my Government to demand and respect a judicial investigation, permitted that this political crisis was quelled and that the democratic institutions and the rule of law were protected.

It was providential for Guatemala that the above-mentioned International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala was created and in full operation at the time. We have had the enormous advantage of counting with this impartial entity and have witnessed the first fruits of the investigation. A few days ago, nine of the material perpetrators were captured. The arbitrary and despicable charges aimed at the highest levels of Government on alleged responsibilities in the assassination have been completely discredited. We trust that the investigations conclude so that the Guatemalan population and the international community can be informed on the true intellectual authors and the intermediate operators of this repugnant act.

Mr. President,

As to our international agenda, it is not necessary to enumerate our national position regarding the huge range of topics that will be considered this year by the United Nations. Suffice it to point out that we assume with responsibility our commitments in the multilateral arena. At the same time, we have opened spaces and maintain cordial and fruitful relations at the bilateral level with all member countries of this Organization, and, especially, with our neighbors of Latin America and the Caribbean. In this regards, I reiterate our special vocation for Central American integration.

I will only refer to two concrete topics on our international agenda.

First, we profoundly deplore the events that occurred in our sister republic of Honduras as of 28 June. We totally support Resolution 63/301 adopted by this Assembly on June 30. As is obvious, the present situation, which continues without an acceptable outcome, affects not only the people of Honduras, but of all Central America. We trust that the proposals that have been put on the table to resolve the crisis in our sister country can form the basis of a settlement of the crisis. What is at stake for the whole world is much more than the Presidency of Manuel Zelaya. We cannot and should not accept the establishment of a precedent to remove a Government through a coup d'etat. The announced intention of holding presidential elections in the close future does not erase, nor justify, nor legitimize or make acceptable said overthrow, which is a situation no one should accept.

Second, I am pleased to inform on the very concrete progress achieved to put an honorable end to our historical territorial dispute with Belize. Last December, and under the good offices of the Organization of American States, both Governments signed a Special Agreement which, prior to complying with the domestic ratification process, commits us to seek a juridical settlement through the International Court of Justice. The internal ratification process includes the convening of a plebiscite, whose preparation has already been initiated.

Mr. President,

I conclude with some very brief reflections on our Organization and its agenda for the immediate future. It is self-evident that in a world subject to continuous change, we must permanently think of how to adapt the United Nations to maintain its relevance, in terms of its agenda, its system of governance, and its working methods.

The General Assembly is the appropriate place for us to analyze together the nature of emerging problems and to offer guidelines on how to resolve them. In general, we want the promotion of development to have an important presence in the United Nations' agenda, as well as in the defense of the environment of the planet and in the defense of the most vulnerable populations, including the indigenous peoples.

We recognize the imperative of adapting the Organization to the present circumstances of the world, both at the level of the intergovernmental forums – particularly the reform of the Security Council – as well as the Secretariat. We will work together with the other member countries of the Organization to assure its continued timeliness and relevance; to that effect, Guatemala will contribute proposals and national positions on specific topics that will require our attention during the present session.

Thank you, Mr. President.