



**GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

**Check against delivery**

**STATEMENT**

**by**

**The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar, S.C., MP  
Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago**

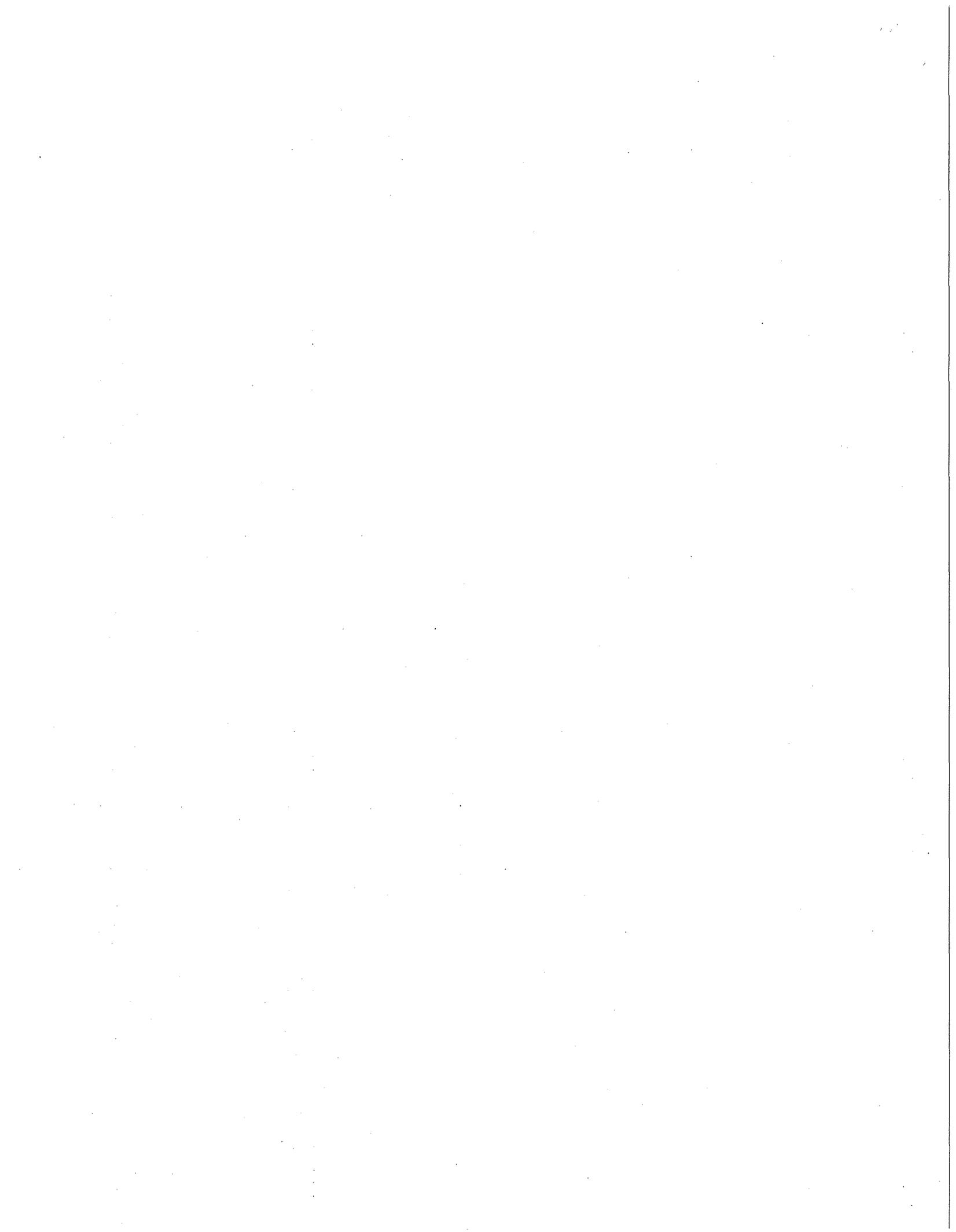
**at the**

**68<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

**United Nations, New York**



## ***Introduction***

Mr. President  
Secretary General  
Excellencies  
Ladies and gentlemen

As the Chairperson of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I am both delighted and honoured to extend to you, congratulations on your assumption to the position of President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly.

Your elevation to preside over this central organ of the United Nations is testimony to the contribution that CARICOM, as a grouping of small States, continues to make to the advancement of the global agenda for peace, security and development.

Indeed, it is evidence of the principle of the sovereign equality of all States enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Nowhere else is this principle more recognizable than in the General Assembly.

Trinidad and Tobago is confident that you will discharge your mandate with distinction and in an impartial manner for the benefit of all States.

## ***The year 2000...the MDGs conceptualised***

Mr. President,  
In 2000, world leaders gathered in this Assembly and launched the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were aimed at achieving specific targets on poverty alleviation; universal education; gender equality; child and maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; environmental sustainability and partnership for development, by 2015.

At the time, there was renewed faith in the UN as the vehicle to assist developing countries, especially the most vulnerable, in their efforts to help reduce poverty and hunger, and to provide an enabling environment to assist States, working as partners, to develop their economies so that their people may live in conditions without persistent poverty; inadequate health care and other developmental ills. A new chapter was opened for the UN. It was seen as proactive and not reactive.

## ***From 2000 to present...the reality***

But what has the international community witnessed since the commitments made at the Millennium Summit in 2000?

The evidence shows that progress towards achieving the MDGs has been uneven.

I am proud to report that Trinidad and Tobago has made tremendous strides in achieving the goals, and in some cases has surpassed them. Nevertheless, a number of countries are not on track to realize any of the targets. By 2005, and again in 2010, it was evident that greater efforts were necessary if developing countries as a whole were to meet their MDG targets by the stipulated deadline.

However, despite numerous constraints in the difficult international economic and financial environment, developing countries have done much to finance their own development.

In contrast, many commentators have advanced that developed countries have not done enough to honour their commitments, to provide development assistance to their partners, consistent with the agreement reached at the Millennium Summit. Arguably, developed countries have not done enough to reform their trade, tax and transparency policies.

Moreover, insufficient attention has been paid to appropriate regulation of the global financial and commodity markets. These in turn have negatively impacted the ability of many developing countries to achieve the MDGs.

Mr. President,

Since the 2000 summit, there has been some progress, in the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the MDGs, but too many pitfalls. It has become apparent that business as usual approaches will not suffice to address and eradicate poverty on a global scale; ensure food, nutrition and energy security; reverse environmental degradation and deal with climate change.

Current approaches will not advance the MDG agenda by 2015 or ensure sustainable development in the Post 2015 context, as agreed at the Rio+20 Conference in June 2012.

Transformative change at the national, regional and international levels is what is required.

### ***The UN Post 2015***

In reflecting on the role of the United Nations in addressing the issue of development, so that all peoples of the world may live in larger freedom, it is with great pleasure that I welcome the declaration adopted today, for a renewed commitment to the MDG agenda and intensification in the efforts toward its achievement by 2015.

I also welcome the decision to launch the intergovernmental process toward the agreement of the Post 2015 development agenda, which should provide a new and

more inclusive architecture, to assist us in achieving our global sustainable development objectives.

Consequently, we applaud you, Mr. President, for focusing us on these efforts. We agree with you that it is an opportune moment to begin the discourse on setting the stage for *the post 2015 development agenda*. Some of the preparatory work has already been done.

At the Rio+20 Conference, world leaders pledged action on sustainable development.

We recognized the shortcomings of the MDG process and the need to embrace a new partnership involving governments, the private sector, civil society, and multilateral banks, amongst others, to advance action on sustainable development. As leaders, we agreed to an outcome document to chart, "*The Future We want*", that is, a more sustainable future for the benefit of present and future generations. "*The Future We want*", addresses many facets of what is required to stimulate sustainable development for all countries. Trinidad and Tobago was an active partner at that Conference.

Mr President,

Trinidad and Tobago will continue to support the emphasis placed on poverty eradication, as the greatest global challenge facing the world today, and an indispensable requirement for the achievement of sustainable development.

We are also committed to work already underway on the establishment of the sustainable development goals:

- The development of the green economy as a tool for achieving sustainable development;
- The development of measures which go beyond GDP in assessing development;
- The adoption of a framework for tackling sustainable consumption and production; and
- A focus on gender equality and the need for greater engagement of civil society in national efforts for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

Secretary General Ban ki- Moon remarked that: "The [Rio+20] outcome document provides a firm foundation for social, economic and environmental well-being. It is now our responsibility to build on it. Now the work begins".

Trinidad and Tobago and many developing countries also shared the sentiments of Her Excellency Dilma Rousseff who said: "I am convinced that this Conference will have the effect of bringing about sweeping change."

As we begin to set the stage for the post 2015 development agenda, Trinidad and Tobago submits that the General Assembly must provide the platform to achieve this "sweeping change", which would ensure that we realize the objective of integrating sustainable development at all levels for a better world for all of humanity.

In keeping with this renewed commitment, we applaud the launch of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to provide an appropriate level of involvement and high level political oversight for the implementation of our collective sustainable development aspirations.

Trinidad and Tobago therefore also supports your announcement Mr. President, to commence in a robust manner, during the current session of this Assembly, deliberations aimed at arriving at a development agenda for the post 2015 period. We support your plans to convene High-Level events aimed at addressing, women, the young and civil society; human rights and the rule of law; and, south- south cooperation and ICT development.

In our view the topics you have selected to guide the three (3) thematic debates scheduled for this session of the General Assembly, are well-chosen, namely, the role of partnerships; how stable and peaceful societies can contribute to development; and, the way water, sanitation and sustainable energy can contribute to the post 2015 development agenda.

The areas to be tackled at these events, demonstrate, Mr. President, that you have a clear vision of the elements that are needed to give effect to the outcome of the Rio+20 Conference, which embodies the hopes and dreams of the most vulnerable members of the international community.

That grouping called for the new development agenda to embrace the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, to maintain the best of the MDGs, but also to go beyond them.

It is imperative that these high-level meetings underscore that we must go beyond business as usual.

There must a coordinated effort to use these events, to formulate a development agenda which builds on, and further accelerates the reduction of poverty levels, which has already witnessed the fastest reduction in history, since the launch of the MDGs.

The discourse must also be people-centered, or as some commentators have postulated, it must be based on our common humanity.

We also find merit in the comments of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons, appointed by the Secretary General, who indicated that the targets to be agreed for the post 2015 development agenda should be:

*"monitored closely and the indicators to track them should be disaggregated to ensure no one is left behind and targets should only be considered 'achieved' if they are met for all relevant income and social groups."*

### **Trinidad and Tobago, CARICOM and SIDS Post 2015**

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, of which I have the honour to lead, also recognizes the importance of having people at the centre of our development goals. Consequently, upon my election to office as Prime Minister in 2010, we embarked on a national development policy which is built on the premise, 'Prosperity for All'.

An examination of our National Policy would show that in Trinidad and Tobago, we have also observed the importance of an integrated approach to not just development, but development that is sustainable- one that integrates the social, economic and environment pillars; similar to the plan outlined by you, Mr. President, to set the stage for the post 2015 development agenda.

My Government has implemented, with varying measures of success, seven pillars that are intended to propel the country's development in order to achieve prosperity for all. Permit me here, to enumerate them:

- People Centered Development
- Poverty Eradication and Social Justice
- National And Personal Security
- Information and Communication Technologies
- A More Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy
- Good Governance
- Foreign Policy

Trinidad and Tobago will continue to do its part in assisting the community of nations to craft a post 2015 development agenda to integrate the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability.

Mr. President

Trinidad and Tobago joins with other small island developing states in outlining our many development successes, achieved through SIDS leadership, as well as with the assistance of the international community.

In addition to this, and in keeping with the recognition of SIDS as a special case for sustainable development as a result of our unique characteristics, challenges and vulnerabilities; we must also highlight that SIDS have made significantly less progress in the area of development, than other vulnerable groups of countries. In some cases SIDS are on the frontlines of experiencing a reversal of many of the gains that have been achieved.

In this regard, as Chair of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I wish to bring to the attention of this august body, a matter of significant concern to the Member States of CARICOM, that of Small Highly Indebted Middle Income Countries (SHIMICs).

Almost as if we are being penalized for our relative success in getting ourselves out of the morass of poverty, the Member States of CARICOM that are categorized as middle income countries, have been graduated out of the economic space where they were previously afforded access to concessional financing.

The use of per capita income to determine a country's level of development and its need for grant and concessional financing, does not provide the true picture. Per capita income is, at best, an arithmetic ratio that does not address levels of poverty, distribution of income, levels of indebtedness, vulnerability, and the capacity to self-generate sustainable economic and social development.

If one were to add to that the impact of natural disasters and the deleterious effect of sea-level rise and climate change, the fallacy of the middle income categorization can be wiped out in an instant.

This issue must be considered within the context of SIDS and the Post 2015 Development Agenda.

Indeed in the preparations for our participation in that upcoming discourse, the recognition of the vulnerabilities of small island developing states is one of the guidelines that CARICOM will apply when considering its commitments to the overall Agenda.

The economic vulnerability and ability of the Member States of CARICOM to build resilience are exacerbated by a debilitating debt overhang which continues to bedevil the Region's growth and development prospects.

Similarly, CARICOM, takes the view that anachronistic embargo apply to Cuba constitutes a drag on the sustainable development prospect of that country and as such should be lifted sooner rather than later.

CARICOM's debt stock currently stands at approximately US\$19 billion, while the debt to GDP ratio ranges from 60 to 144 percent for many States.

Many CARICOM States have been recording lower than satisfactory growth rates in comparison with other developing countries in Latin America and the world in general.

In the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis, CARICOM States continue to experience considerable difficulty in accessing reasonably-priced development finance, as several of these States have been categorized at middle-

It must be acknowledged that the debt overhang did not result from profligate spending by CARICOM Governments, but resulted from the geographical make-up of our countries; our proneness to natural catastrophes; our very small physical size which does not lessen the per capita cost of development expenditures for necessary economic infrastructure and necessary social development projects.

CARICOM States therefore appeal to the international community to support our call for:

- The immediate review of the narrow criteria used by multilateral financial institutions and even some development partners which graduate small highly indebted middle income countries (SHIMICS) away from access to concessional resources; and
- An early review of the economic and financial situation of graduated small highly indebted middle income countries, towards developing programmes for the orderly resolution of their debt overhang, without compromising the future growth prospects of these States.

In this regard, we look therefore look forward to our participation in the Third Global Conference on Small island Developing States (SIDS) to be held in Samoa in September 2014 and to the observance of the International Year of Small Island Developing States also in 2014.

I am of the view that both this third SIDS Conference, and the international Year of SIDS come at an opportune time and will, not only ensure the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and its Mauritius Strategy for the sustainable development of SIDS, but, also, that SIDS concerns are well articulated and adequately taken into account in the development of the Post 2015 development agenda.

### ***The Call for Reparations***

Mr. President,

This Assembly would recall that during the General Debate of the UN in 2011, the Honourable Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, and Dr the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, put forward the case for reparations for injustices suffered by African slaves and their descendants, citing that segregation and violence against people of African descent had impaired their capacity for advancement as peoples and nations.

They posited that former slave-owning States should begin a reconciliation process by formally acknowledging the cruelties committed over the 400 years of the African slave trade.

At the 34<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of the Heads of Government of CARICOM, held in Port-of-Spain in July this year, consideration was given to the issue of reparations for Caribbean Slavery and Native Genocide.

Heads of Government unanimously agreed to support action on this issue. CARICOM States therefore:

- Urge Member States that have not yet done so, to contribute to the UN Trust Fund to ensure the erection of a permanent memorial in honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, at a place of prominence at the UN Headquarters, and we were heartened when the winning design for the memorial was unveiled on Monday right here at the UN.

### ***Arms Trade Treaty***

Mr. President,

We recognize that peace, security and stability provide an enabling environment for sustainable development.

Indeed, national and personal security is one of the seven pillars of our own national sustainable development strategies.

At the international level, we are stalwart supporters of the Arms Trade Treaty, agreed to in March of this year, and which we have already signed and ratified.

In the light of our experiences and challenges with the impact of crime, violence and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, on our development efforts; we would encourage all States which have not as yet done so, to sign and ratify the ATT so that it may come into force at the earliest opportunity.

In fact Mr President, one of our brilliant young citizens Mr Ravindra Ramrattan, a former President's Gold Medalist for academic excellence was killed last Saturday in the terrorist attack on Westgate mall in Nairobi. He no doubt fell victim to illegal guns and other weapons in the hands of murderous terrorists. His death is merely one more example of the consequences of the illicit cross border flows of small arms and light weapons which in the CARICOM context, and indeed in many regions of the world, are our weapons of mass destruction.

In our view, the implementation of this Treaty would significantly enhance national efforts, aimed at providing a safe and secure environment for citizens, which is a contributory factor to development.

### ***The Syrian Crisis***

It must not be forgotten that good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law at the national and the international levels are essential for the achievement of sustainable development.

In this context, we wish to underscore our grave concern with the escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria, and reiterate our call for the situation to be resolved through dialogue, and not through the use of any measures, which would violate international law.

Trinidad and Tobago also submits that if there is prima facie evidence that individuals committed war crimes, within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC), during this protracted conflict, steps should be taken to bring those individuals to justice.

### ***Rio + 20 Working Groups***

Mr. President

As we move forward with the work of the Open-ended Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, of which Trinidad and Tobago is a member, we have already seen certain areas in which consensus are emerging.

These include; the inter-relationship between water, energy and food; the cross-cutting nature of climate change; the necessity of supporting the creation of sustainable jobs and livelihoods and the imperative of maintaining a focus on women, youth and other vulnerable groups.

Along with the work just begun on the Working Group on Sustainable Financing, these two outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference are key pillars of the Post 2015 development agenda.

Trinidad and Tobago pledges its continued support for these processes, and calls on all partners, public and private, as well as civil society and the NGO community, to continue to enhance their efforts in moving toward the achievement of our shared goals.

### ***Closing Comment***

In closing Mr. President, I wish to assure you that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be actively engaged in advancing your efforts in utilizing the General Assembly as the primary vehicle to engage in dialogue on the elaboration of the post 2015 development agenda.

