

Statement by Dr. the Honourable Timothy Harris, M.P., J.P.

Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis

to the General Debate of the

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“Making the United Nations Relevant to All People: Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies”

Madame President, Mr. Secretary General, Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed my privilege and honour, on behalf of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, to once again address this General Assembly. At the outset, permit me to congratulate you Madame President on your election to lead this august body at this most significant time and as the first woman from the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) to assume the post. I assure you of my country's fullest support during your tenure.

Reform of the United Nations

The opening session of this UN General Assembly featured excerpts from former Secretary General Kofi Annan of blessed memory, in which he made the case that to solve the wide range of global problems the United Nations was critical. Multilateralism with the UN system at its fulcrum has long informed our global engagements.

The United Nations has been, is, and will continue to be critical to global peace, progress and prosperity. That is why Madam President there is need to move

urgently to reform the UN making it more responsive to the needs and concerns of all and in particular Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The UN has become too preoccupied with summitry and less on delivery. The cooperation deficit among member states stymies the forward march of humanity. A reformed UN must become a body of greater action and fewer words. We need urgent action on climate change, Non Communicable Diseases (NCDs), global cooperation, peace, prosperity and the reordering of the international financial system.

Guided by this year's theme: "*Making the United Nations Relevant to All People: Global Leadership and Shared Responsibilities for Peaceful, Equitable and Sustainable Societies*", my delegation is of the view that this theme allows us to address the unfairness and inequity of the international development order and we urge a new and more inclusive, equitable and sustainable development paradigm.

Sustainable Society/ Climate Change

Madame President,

My country, though the smallest country in the Western Hemisphere, has always had its own set of goals, long before the MDGs and SDGs were enunciated. Over a week ago, we celebrated thirty five (35) years of Independence. We have made significant progress towards alleviating poverty, providing free primary and secondary education, providing access to affordable health care and enhancing the standard of living of our citizens.

All these gains can be erased by the phenomenon of climate change. The damage the OECS sub-region sustained last year from Hurricanes Irma and Maria was unimaginable. The United Nations High Level Pledging Conference in

the aftermath of these hurricanes was an attempt to chart the way forward in creating resilience and building back better. We ask that member states with outstanding commitments deal with these as soon as practicable. We applaud those countries which have already made good on their pledges. There is still a lot to be done to restore affected member states but it requires strong, meaningful and enduring international partnerships.

We continue to highlight, on the one hand, our inherent vulnerabilities to natural disasters, and on the other, an unflinching determination to maintain a sustainable society. Our responsibility is clear. Individually and collectively we must commit to reducing the amount of harmful materials we emit into the environment. It is a matter of great regret that Nations such as my own continue to pay dearly for a debt we did not create.

Madame President,

Our people see the impact of climate change on their lives and livelihoods. Climate change is largely the consequence of actions of more developed countries, their carbon emissions and harmful lifestyles. Yet SIDS pay an unfair price. A price so high that, for many of us, Climate Change presents an existential threat.

How will the UN assist our region with the prevalence of the Sargassum seaweed which has adversely impacted the Caribbean? Sargassum affects our marine environment in particular our coastal fisheries and has affected the revenues of the fisher folk of the region. Hotels, beaches and other tourism related activities have been severely impacted. It is my fervent hope that my plea today for international intervention will bring some relief to the people of our region. We have to hold countries accountable for environmental degradation not

only in their jurisdictions but also for the degradation they cause to other states. The United Nations system presents the best vehicle for this.

We welcome the funding mechanisms established to assist countries, particularly highly vulnerable SIDS. However, the process must be transparent, easily accessible and, most importantly, the commitments from donor countries must bear fruit. That being said, the international community cannot on the one hand claim to help SIDS while in the same vein classify us as middle and high-income countries based on archaic financial models that ultimately deny access to critical developmental assistance and hinder investment financing. We reiterate our calls for the international community to address with urgency the sterile measure of per capita income now employed. Equally important, the issues of disaster risk insurance and recognition of the unique vulnerabilities of small states must be addressed. My country remains committed to the Sustainable Development goals and the commitments in the SAMOA Pathway.

International Architecture

The developmental efforts of small states are being thwarted by an unfair financial architecture with the threat of de-risking and loss of correspondent banking relationships. This is compounded by the very discriminatory and irrational blacklisting of countries that are forced to divert scarce resources to address the onerous and arbitrary demands of the EU Code of Conduct Group and other entities created by large highly developed countries. It is absolutely unfair to subject some counties to evaluation and ever fluctuating standards while others are exempt. The threats to the survival of small states is real. I therefore call on this Body to bring the plight of small states like St. Kitts and Nevis to the forefront of

the international discourse and to bring an end to such discriminatory practices. At great cost, my country and other small states are attempting to rise to the challenges posed by the unfair international financial architecture. However, the frequency and arbitrariness of these unilateral demands derail essential development efforts in small states. I submit to this Body that we deserve and have a right to expect fairness, transparency and consistency of treatment of all states. A clear rules based financial system which applies to all states must be our collective goal.

Conflict / Peace and Safety

My Government is mindful that without peace there can be no shared prosperity. We have been aggressively confronting the problem of crime and violence from several fronts. We condemn all acts of violence and support efforts to maintain peace. My Government will use every resource available to achieve a stable, peaceful and equitable society that our people expect and deserve.

St. Kitts and Nevis supports the calls for diplomacy to address the conflicts around the world and is particularly heartened by the welcomed dialogue on the Korean Peninsula. The Caribbean is a zone of peace and our clear philosophy is to promote peace, friendship and dialogue whilst avoiding conflict with other territories. In this regard a denuclearized world is a most desirable objective for all humankind.

Throughout the Caribbean, we suffer from an increase in crime connected to the trade in small arms, light weapons and the drug trade. These weapons flow into the Caribbean where they are not manufactured and are linked to an insatiable drug appetite in the West. It is beyond our power to unilaterally control the flow of guns

into the region or the habit that drives the dangerous global drug trade. We seek the assistance of the international community as we work tirelessly to address this scourge. My country remains fully committed to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Our increasing internal budgetary allocations are an indication of our commitment to the maintenance of safety and security.

Health

Madame President,

St. Kitts and Nevis is elated that just this week, this august body joined together to commit to scaling up multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral responses for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Our region remains encumbered by the unfortunate burden that NCDs have placed on our society and economy. The statistics are stark and startling. 8 out of every 10 deaths in the Caribbean are attributable to NCDs, 40% of which are premature and 70% of this number is preventable. Hypertension is our leading risk factor for death. The Caribbean's diabetes rate is double the global rate. We are facing an NCD crisis in our region. In this regard we applaud the launch of the Defeat-NCDs partnership earlier this week and CARICOM and CARPHA shall provide the fullest support to this new partnership.

We endorse a holistic approach to health and I am happy to report that we have shifted into high gear to make an essential component of global health, universal health coverage, a reality for all citizens in St. Kitts and Nevis. I must remind us that NCDs and climate change are twin sides of the same coin. They are symptoms of the failure of the extant development paradigm.

Social Development

Madam President,

My government believes in making an equitable society a reality for all citizens in St. Kitts and Nevis. In keeping with our commitment to Transform Our World through the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, we have endeavored to create an equitable pathway by improving the standard of living for the most vulnerable so they can become self-sufficient and productive citizens and residents.

Partnerships

I cannot address this great body and not recognize our dear friend Taiwan. My government views the United Nations as a people's organization, for all people, including the people of Taiwan. We strongly believe Taiwan has an important and continuing role to play in international development strategies as they have had great success in technology, agriculture, health and renewable energy. We advocate that Taiwan be given space to add to the dialogue, progress and well being of the global community.

We also continue to voice our support of our Caribbean sister Cuba and to call for the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States of America to alleviate the real suffering caused to the Cuban people of this policy of exclusion.

My country is conscious of the current difficulties in Venezuela. Venezuela has been a very good friend to the Caribbean and St Kitts and Nevis continues to call

for peaceful dialogue to resolve issues in Venezuela with due regard to the rule of law and the democratic ideals we hold dear.

Conclusion

As I close Madame President, I must remind that our people want action. They want results. We need to see all Global Leaders come together to create and maintain stability, equality and peace in our countries, so that our collective contributions can prevent and avoid war and violence; end the proliferation of nuclear weapons, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create a level playing field for small states to thrive. May we be always mindful and proactive to ensure that no country is left behind in the pursuit and achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

It is our shared responsibility to create the best opportunities and fulfill the expectations of our current and future generations. I am convinced, Madame President that if we continue to work steadfastly, always vigilant and focused on the overarching goals, we shall contribute to a more relevant, fair, productive and meaningful United Nations, and by extension, a better world for all our peoples.

I thank you.