



NATIONAL STATEMENT BY

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77th Session of the UNGA September 24, 2022

Theme: “A watershed moment: transformative solutions to
interlocking challenges”

Check against delivery

H.E. Csaba Kőrösi, President of this 77th Session of the UNGA

H.E. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General,

Excellencies, Heads of State and of Government

Heads of Delegation

Ladies and gentlemen

Mr. President,

Please accept my warmest greetings and congratulations on your election to the presidency of this 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). I commit my delegation's fullest support and cooperation in the fulfilment of your important duties.

I also commend your predecessor, His Excellency, Abdulla Shahid, of the Maldives, for his able guidance of the last Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

I am extremely honoured to speak at this important global forum for the first time, on behalf of the Government and people of Grenada.

Exactly three (3) months ago, today, the people of Grenada exercised their democratic right and voted for *transformation*. In free and fair elections, and through a solid mandate at the polls, the Grenadian people placed their confidence in me to lead our country over the next five years.

Mr. President,

Today, I bring my transformational agenda to the UNGA, because although we are an island state, our world does not exist in isolation. Successful and sustainable transformation in Grenada is inevitably tethered to the sustainable forward movement of the global community.

Mr. President,

This noble institution is nearing its eighty (80) year anniversary, a significant milestone that is worthy of distinct recognition. As my own country also draws near to a noteworthy milestone, that of fifty (50 years) as an independent state, it is an appropriate time to renew our commitment to the principles of the United Nations Charter and to International Law.

It is also a fitting time to review the achievements of past decades and proffer solutions to the challenges that have stymied progress.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic brought our world to a standstill, without prejudice for the size and economic might of nations. For a time, this disease was the great equalizer and forced us all to re-evaluate our priorities and our approach to working together.

Grenada notes, with relief, news from the World Health Organization (WHO) that we might finally be entering the tail end phase of the pandemic. While we welcome the return to some semblance of “normal”, it is my sincere hope that the lessons learnt from the pandemic will remain and we will not return to business as usual.

Mr. President,

The monumental challenges posed by the pandemic were unprecedented and seemingly insurmountable. Amid this worldwide disaster, however, our global community rallied and demonstrated what is possible when we resolve to work together towards a common goal.

The pandemic taught us all the value of international cooperation, the timely exchange of information and the sharing of resources critical to avoiding and mitigating similar global occurrences.

Mr. President,

It is imperative that the matter of climate change be escalated to this level of urgency amongst our community of nations. The devastating effects of global warming can already be felt all over the world with higher temperatures worsening many types of disasters, including storms, heat waves, floods, and droughts. Our planet is undoubtedly in crisis, but as the ancient Chinese proverb reminds us: **“crisis is opportunity riding a dangerous wind.”**

This window of opportunity is quickly closing, however, and we no longer have the luxury to kick these issues down the road. We are now faced with the reality that tomorrow, is today.

Mr. President,

We have tinkered long enough and must now accept that the solutions to the problems we face may not be found in this grand hall, or in the highest echelons of global climate discussions, but rather with the people – especially our young people, who stand to lose the most from the inaction of our current leaders.

Mr. President,

Approximately sixty (60) percent of the world's population is under thirty-five years old. In my own country, fifty (50) percent of the current population is between eighteen (18) and thirty-five (35) years of age. Young people are therefore critical to the success of sustainable development policies and must play a central role in the implementation of the targets set by the 2030 Agenda.

Mr. President,

I call on all young people to take action. It is not yet too late to do what is necessary to safeguard our planet for future generations, but **the time for action is now.** The reality is, the leaders of today will not be around to feel the consequences of their decisions. It is therefore up to our youth, to lead the charge for the future they want to see.

To all young people: I challenge you today, to choose to be agents of change over victims of climate change.

It can start with small actions that cause ripple effects throughout your families and friend circles, your communities and eventually the wider world.

Mr. President,

It was not that long ago that I, too, was a young lawyer, seeking to evoke positive change in my community through small actions. I knew that I could no longer sit on the sidelines and wait for the leaders of the day to solve challenges that have plagued Grenadian society for well over a decade. **I had to become the change.**

In October 2021, I made the decision to enter political life and, shortly after, was elected as the Political Leader of the National Democratic Congress. Only eight months later, Mr. President, I led the party to victory winning nine (9) of fifteen (15) seats.

My presence here today is testament that we can create the change that we would like to see, but it will only materialise if we step forward and accept the call to be the leaders of today.

Mr. President,

As leaders, the onus is also on us to create spaces where young people feel empowered to propose innovative solutions to the challenges we collectively face. This is a priority of my administration and has been backed by gender forward, pro-youth policies and purposeful action. The appointment of the Honourable Kerryne James, as Minister for Climate Resilience, the Environment and Renewable Energy at 23 years old, is a milestone for my country and the region, as Honourable James is the youngest Minister in the Caribbean.

Mr. President,

Confronting the climate crisis will require a complete *transformation* of our mindset and behaviours but also, and importantly, the *transformation* of our energy sources, economic models, and land stewardship. This is a unique opportunity to come together, welcome innovative ideas, and tackle the problems we have struggled with for generations. Our goal, as responsible global citizens, should be to leave the planet as good as, or better, than we found it.

This plea is not without urgency, Mr. President. As the leader of a Caribbean small island developing state (SIDS), I am all too familiar with the devastating effects of climate change, and the stark reality that we may not have a country to pass on to future generations – in the face of increasingly strengthened hurricanes and sea level rise.

The small island states of the Caribbean are already experiencing significant adverse effects due to climate change. With each hurricane season, that now brings increased and more powerful storms, we watch and wait, with bated breath and a silent prayer, in the hope that this year it will not be “our turn.”

In 2004, it was Grenada’s turn, with Hurricane Ivan. In the matter of eight (8) mere hours, we lost 34 souls and the category three (3) storm destroyed over 80 percent of our housing stock and decimated our economic and fiscal bases with damage surpassing 200 percent of our Gross Domestic Product. Ten (10) months later, in 2005, it was Grenada’s turn, *again*, with Hurricane Emily.

In recent years, we have watched in horror as our brothers and sisters across the Caribbean experienced their “turn.” Most notably Hurricane Irma in 2017, which left the island of Barbuda nearly uninhabitable and wrought significant havoc on over ten other Caribbean island states, including the British Virgin Islands, which lost approximately eighty-five (85) percent of its housing stock. Only two weeks later, Hurricane Maria threatened, cruelly, to exacerbate the wounds freshly inflicted by Irma.

Mr. President,

The global community would remember the destruction visited on Dominica by said Hurricane Maria, which left 31 people dead, 37 missing, and an estimated USD 930.9 million in damages.

Mr. President,

I can continue in this vein, highlighting the devastating consequences that Caribbean islands suffer due to the warming climate, including the harmful effects on our rich biodiversity and underwater resources. We are truly on the front lines, and we know, all too well, the ease with which one hurricane can wipe away decades of progress.

As I stand here today, several Caribbean islands are reeling from the wrath of Hurricane Fiona. This is the reality we face, Mr. President, and why it is urgent that we act.

Mr. President,

Given the focus of my address here today, it is evident that climate change and youth empowerment are inimical to Grenada's transformational agenda. We continue to insist on a clear roadmap at the global level for ambitious climate action, to ensure that global average temperatures remain below the 1.5-degree Celsius threshold.

As we seek to bolster climate resilience in our island home, I reiterate the call for the urgent scaling-up of climate finance for adaptation and the removal of the challenges that developing nations face to access climate financing. Additionally, my Government calls for increased technology development and capacity building, especially for young people.

Mr. President,

We are encouraged, and indeed proud, that a son of the soil has been given the responsibility to manage global climate action. The appointment of Simon Stiell as Executive Secretary of the United Nations Climate Change Secretariat sends a clear message on the importance of island voices in the fight against climate change. We are optimistic that we will achieve the mandates of the climate convention and its protocols, as well as the agenda for sustainable development.

Mr. President,

The Government of Grenada is steadfast in its commitment to creating paths towards sustainability and promoting diversity. Evidence of our resolve can be found in the first ever long-term National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2020-2035, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which is

the anchor for the country's development agenda and priorities for the 15-year period.

In this regard, the Government of Grenada was pleased to be one of the 45 countries that presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, during the recently held High-Level Political Forum for sustainable development (HLPF).

Mr. President,

Our country-led review of progress towards the implementation of the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda comes at a critical juncture in our collective efforts aimed at recovering from the extraordinary socio-economic crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. President,

For Grenada, the pandemic exposed critical structural weaknesses and resource deficiencies in our health-care system. Managing the high incidence of non-communicable diseases, therefore, is an urgent priority and so too is addressing the mental health of our citizenry.

In addition, Mr. President, the economic fallout from the worldwide closure of borders and stagnation of tourism – a key economic driver – exacerbated already elevated levels of unemployment and poverty.

My Government intends to mitigate such dire circumstances in the future by diversifying our economy and developing a robust ICT and Digital Economy. Trends such as converging technologies and the digitalisation of production are rapidly transforming work and life and they must be factored into training and development opportunities for our young people.

Mr. President, we understand that to adequately equip our young people for the future, inclusive and equitable quality education is fundamental. To this end, my Government has taken the necessary steps to ensure the framework for free universal education up to the community college level, and is committed to providing second chance opportunities to all youth who did not complete a primary, secondary, or tertiary education.

Additionally, we intend to actively seek out opportunities for further studies in digital and creative fields to support our emerging creative and digital economies.

Mr. President,

The answers, once again, will lie with our young people and their invaluable contributions to the future of the labour force.

My Government will foster an environment where youth have access to the support and facilities needed to thrive. In particular, we intend to provide incentives to young entrepreneurs, upgrade our agriculture productions systems, and bolster our export capacity.

Grenada will act deliberately to attract the attention and support of the international community and the favour of friendly nations as we seek to improve the standard of living of all citizens through the exploration of new frontiers of economic and social development.

Mr. President,

As we emerge from the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, and optimistically prepare to transform our economy, we cannot ignore the new crisis in the East due to current geopolitical tensions and conflicts, which has devastating and disruptive consequences for energy and food security.

Mr. President,

Russia's war with Ukraine has already threatened international peace and stability and induced hardships upon nations unconnected with the conflict. Grenada associates itself with the call of many nations for Russia to relent its war efforts in Ukraine and for the parties to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the conflict.

Mr. President,

Mindful that peace is a supreme asset and a legitimate aspiration of all peoples, Grenada renews its firm call for the Caribbean to remain a zone of peace.

We also advocate for the economic, social and environmental development of all Caribbean states.

In this regard, Grenada is satisfied that the removal of the US imposed economic, commercial, and financial blockade against Cuba will facilitate economic and social change there. Additionally, we call for Cuba to be removed from the US State Department's list of countries that are co-sponsors of terrorism.

Mr. President,

In the same way, we lament that more has not been done for our brothers and sisters in Haiti, a country classified as one of the poorest amongst us. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Member States continues to pursue various initiatives to assist; however, we believe that more productive engagements must be undertaken, with all stakeholders, to help achieve political stability, peace, and economic progress in Haiti.

Mr. President,

Grenada also reiterates its support for the ongoing judicial process at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) aimed at bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Guyana/Venezuela border dispute and we reaffirm our unwavering support for the territorial integrity of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Mr. President,

We further remain resolute in our call for an end to the imposition of unilateral coercive measures against the Republic of Venezuela, contrary to the rules and principles of International Law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Conclusion

Mr. President

The net effect of the recent and ongoing crises continues to seriously dislodge the world economy and, in turn, the ability of countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The adverse impacts on production, employment and poverty are growing, while at the same time, jeopardising fiscal management in many countries.

The Government of Grenada is firm in its determination to achieve the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. We call, however, for the increased inclusion of youth voices as we seek to chart the future of our planet.

We further note, that if small island states are to eliminate poverty and attain sustainable levels of development, the vulnerability criteria, now applicable to our countries, must be comprehensively reviewed as a matter of urgency.

The consequence of upper middle-income status afforded Grenada, and many other small states, without consideration of our specific vulnerabilities, continues to hinder our ability to access concessionary and grant financing.

We continue to call for a new Multi Vulnerable Index (MVI), which would eliminate the threat to our economic development and security, and we encourage the

submission of additional proposals that seek to address similar challenges that prevent our countries from moving forward on equal footing.

Mr. President,

The United Nations system, over the last 77 years, has contributed immensely to humanity. It is now time to consider strategic *transformation* if we are to achieve the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda and safeguard our planet for future generations.

Thank you.