



PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE  
BARBADOS

Prime Minister The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley S.C., M.P.  
September 22, 2023

## Address to the 78th United Nations General Assembly (Edited Transcript)

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

And I'd like at the outset, to congratulate my dear brother from Trinidad and Tobago for his assumption of the office of the presidency of this General Assembly.

I'd also like from the outset to thank the Honourable Secretary General for his continued determination and holding us and the rest of the world to the principles that are sacred to this August institution.

The truth is that the speech which he delivered at the beginning of this General Assembly, can be adopted wholesale by the government and people of Barbados, because it reflects our aspirations, and it reflects our view of the current status of the world.

I asked myself on Monday night, as we met to determine the halfway point of the SDG goals. How many roads do we have to walk, just to make it to the door, only to be told that the door is closed? Those are not my words. Those are the words of Rocky Dawuni, a famous reggae artiste from Ghana, nominated for awards multiple times. But his words ring because in a very real sense, are we going to trod the roads, only to be told that it's too late? Too late for us to save as many as we can from the climate crisis? Too late for us to save as many as we can from the conflicts of war? Too late for us to be able to provide the food that so many need as we reflect on the fact that more people are likely to be hungry in this world in 2030, than in 2015? Or as we get to the basic numbers that 735 million people suffered chronic hunger last year at a time when so many others had so much to throw away and to use. Are we going to be too late for the SDGs that are really the promise of development and the promise of the conferral of dignity on our people?

We have today to determine what is the will of this body comprised of the member states to make the fundamental governance changes that will deliver in the third decade of the 21st century. Our world,



as you know, is replete with issues and I don't need to stand here and recount them in detail, for you have heard them in almost every speech delivered from this podium. But what is the issue, is whether we can summon the determination that is required of us to make the changes that are appropriate to the age in which we live. Our democracy cannot survive if we do not have the same facts. But yet we live in a world where the generation of fake news is almost a daily occurrence and where people act on those premises without consideration for whether the news is true or not.

The role that artificial intelligence, generative artificial intelligence will play in our world, must be for good purposes and not evil. But if we are to ensure that is the case, then an appropriate framework for regulatory action must be put in place. We therefore support the actions of the Secretary General, recognizing that the question will come one day from some, as to whether you sought to preserve our democracy or whether you allowed it to crumble. And whether you have failed us as individual citizens of the world. We asked that question recognizing that AI is not in the immediate focal point of many because the drama, and the crises that surround climate is taking out all of the oxygen, literally, in the world.

Those people who died in Libya recently, were going about their business. They had aspirations. They had business that they were hoping to do, families that they were trying to protect. And in the flash of an eye, all of that came to an end. And not because we didn't expect it or anticipate it. The records of the multinational companies who are engaged in fossil fuels, will show that they have always known for a considerable period of time, the consequences of their actions. And while they themselves are not the immediate cause, the absence of technology to be able to limit what they're emitting is the cause. And by extension, therefore, they must take responsibility. We can go no further without an engagement of the oil and gas companies that is meaningful and credible. And we need to stop talking about it and just simply ensure that that kind of conversation can happen.

But it is not just the oil and gas companies and we have nothing against them. We do not want to bankrupt them. But their actions continue to have implications for too many of our people. Their actions are equally bolstered by what I call the FIT group, the financial institutions, the insurance companies and the transport companies. They get a bye or a pass because they are invisible to the transactions and to the activity that leads to the problems that the world is facing. But they too are as responsible and need to step up to the plate. The notion that we can preserve global public goods only with public money ignores the fact that we have seen for the last 50 years, the absolute dominance of the capitalist markets lead into a consolidation of wealth and hence, the ability to be able to play their role must be summoned by the rest of us.

We cannot continue to put the interests of a few before the lives of many. I asked us today truly to pause because what keeps ringing in my head is that simple phrase. "Don't fail us now. Don't fail us now. And that phrase can come from that little boy or girl who is a victim of hunger, one of the 575 million people last year. That plea can equally come from those who lost families in the multiple crises across the world in the last few years. That plea can come from small states that may not exist in the future.



I ask us therefore, my friends to ensure that we summon the will. We listened to the Prime Minister of the Netherlands just now. And he reminded us ably that time is not on our side. And if time is not on our side, what must we do?

The truth is we have made some progress. Two years ago, the International Monetary Fund did not have a mechanism to focus on the cause of the problems that led to massive macro-economic instability. We now have the establishment of the Resilience and Sustainability Trust that for the first time will make funds available to middle income countries that are vulnerable. 20 year money with a 10 and a half year moratorium. A year ago, the President of the World Bank was questioning whether there was a Climate Crisis. Today we have a World Bank that for the first time acknowledges that there should be debt clauses that are suspended, debt pause clauses as they call it. Our battle now is to ensure that those that pause clauses are not just for future instruments, but for existing instruments. If not, it will not help many.

So we have made progress but there is still much to be done. The issues of debt sustainability cannot be left on the sidelines, particularly with the number of countries, more than 60 countries facing debt row today as we speak, because of the policy crises, countries being forced to choose between development and building of resilience to fight climate. In our small island states, we value education and health care and the dignity of life and therefore it will be anathema for us to tell our citizens that we do not have the space to provide for you those things that were the promise of independence. It is compounded by the failure of the developed world to accept that reparatory justice is a solemn obligation which we must confront. The conversation King Charles told us at the opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, when he was Prince Charles, was a conversation whose time had come, that of reparatory justice. But it can't be a slow conversation taken up when people feel like it has to be a conversation in which equal partners discuss, it cannot be an act of charity of those who simply feel that their conscience must be cleansed.

We were about to write to the leaders of the European Union last year on this issue of reparatory justice. And we pause because of the Russian incursion into Ukraine. But it seems as though there are not those who want to make peace there are elsewhere in the world and therefore we have to lift our finger off the pause button and resume the discussions because the development deficit caused by centuries of exploitation is now affecting our capacity to build the resilience that is necessary in our nations. Similarly, I want to thank, because a year ago, we did not have the Paris agenda for people on the planet. We had the Bridgetown initiative, and the Bridgetown initiative has allowed us to keep the debate going because we need to change, as I said Monday morning in this hall, the belief that we can have short term money financing development and building resilience. I shan't go into all of the details because we don't have the time. But suffice to say that we are committed to the twin battle of seven people and planet. And to ask us to do anything else is a false construct that does not work. The markets have to be educated as to why long term capital is the only salvation for developing countries and ultimately for people and the planet.

And my friends, year after year we talk about the need for global moral strategic leadership. I shan't go into all of the details. But in my own region, in Africa, in Latin America, in the Pacific, there are too many examples where we fall short.



And I speak specifically now first and foremost about Haiti. The world owes Haiti a resolution. It is not a matter of options. The world owes Haiti a resolution. A year ago we knew that the gas riots had led to serious instability and 12 months later, we cannot get out of this building and into the support that the people of Haiti need. There is no doubt a need for legitimacy with respect to the government of Haiti, and therefore, a national unity government may well be the only bridge that can carry us to safety.

The Caribbean community has appointed three former prime ministers as an Eminent Persons group. And as we heard the Secretary General say in this hall, politics is the art of compromise. Diplomacy is the art of compromise. I say simply to those who act in the name of the people of Haiti, there must be compromised in constituting that government of national unity, if we are to provide the bridge to provide the security to stop women from being raped, stop people from being killed, stop people from being affected by Cholera and other public health diseases.

But even when we put in the institutional support that Haiti may need, and I want to thank the governments of Kenya and Rwanda, who from as far back as 12 months ago, committed to being able to provide the kind of institutional support and leadership that the Haitian police need. But as they made that commitment, what they have not necessarily accounted for is the continued reduction in the numbers of the police, largely because of persons fleeing the lands of greater opportunity and being facilitated in so doing.

This cannot wait much longer. And I hope that those who constitute the members of the Security Council will recognize that they cannot use Haiti as a pawn because they have suffered for too long, and by the hands of too many.

I returned now to the history of Cuba, that Cuba can help so many in this world, and yet the continued victim of a blockade of over 60 years, but worse than that, a designation as a state sponsor of terrorism is wrong, wrong, wrong. We left Cuba last week and what the people of Cuba are being asked to face on a daily basis because of a designation by a dying presidency is wrong. And the voices of the global community, many of whom have been the beneficiaries of Cuban assistance, need to stand united and to be able to say that we cannot fight these battles when we need all hands on deck to save the planet. The artificial division of who is right and who is wrong and who is good and who is bad in the eyes of those who are powerful cannot continue to be the way in which this world functions.

And let us go to Venezuela. Oil prices are likely to go over \$100. And those small countries who do not produce oil will be the victims of it as will be our people, including in large countries like the United States of America. We must bring resolution to these issues. And it is not incapable of resolution. When the United States of America and many countries in Europe determined that they were recognizing President Guido without there being a presidency for him to assume because he faced no election, the members of the Caribbean community came to this August institution and met with the Secretary General and met with a number of countries. And little by little we saw people apply their hearts to wisdom and to recognize that the Charter of the United Nations did not allow for



that kind of unconstitutional conferral of presidency on anyone. I said today that there must be transparency. It cannot be that the Caribbean Community that needs a mechanism for stabilisation in an energy crisis cannot have access to the concessionary prices that the government and people of Venezuela are prepared to make available to its neighbours to minimise the suffering. How is it possible for Chevron and the European Union to access the oil and gas of Venezuela, but the people of the Caribbean cannot access it at the 35% discount offered by the people of Venezuela. How is it possible that we should have to carry a cost of an additional 4% of GDP in my own country simply because the rules that allow for one do not allow for the other.

There must be transparency and there must be moral strategic leadership if we are to build the team to save the planet, and to save and attain the SDGs in today's world.

My friends, there are many other things that we can discuss. We support the United Nations accepting the responsibility for tax. Why? Because as quickly as the world has been able to find a mechanism for a global minimum corporate tax as long as it has not found a mechanism to be able to inflate the financing opportunities available to developing countries. It cannot be. We know how to run fast in one set of circumstances when it suits one set of people. But yet we run very slow when it matters to billions of people and their access to life and livelihood.

I do not want to prey on your time anymore, but suffice it to say that we have reached a point where we must give thanks for the progress made, but recommit ourselves. For the mission was never simply to make progress, the mission is to be able to save the planet and to give the people of the world the best opportunity for life that is necessary for them as human beings; to be able to save the biodiversity of this world to be able, to save the soils of this world that must nurture the food that we eat, to be able to allow us to have access to safe water.

And if we don't change how we do our business, if we don't recognize that the Security Council needs to put itself in a position not to speak to Climate Change, but to protect us against the Climate Crisis, because it is as much of a crisis as the war in Ukraine or the wars in Africa or the instability and conflict elsewhere in the world. And if we don't take a proactive approach, then we truly shall be victims of it.

I believe that reform is critical at this point. But what I believe doesn't matter. What matters is the action of each and every country in this. And will we always be in a position of flux? No. There is hope because human beings want to survive. But the problem is that those whose actions we most need may be so confident in their survival that they do not act early enough for us. And that is I say, will we trod the road to be able to get to the gates only to find that we are too late and the gates have closed. It will be open for some but it will be closed for many.

You know, vision without action, Nelson Mandela told us, is just a dream. And action without vision just passes the time. But vision with action can change the world. Our citizens believe that we come into a talk shop when we come here. You and I know that it's potentially different. But it will only be different when those of you who have the responsibility to act on behalf of governments, can ask your governments to come to the point of the decisions that we need to make to provide the funding, the tools and the solidarity, rebuilding the trust that this debate calls for.



And if we can do that, then we will not save all, but we can save the majority of people who are currently on the front line. We, for those of us who work on the SDGs believe, that as we work to save the planet, we have to redouble our efforts. And I leave you with one thing. The efforts to provide education and to save people from hunger and to remove gender discrimination are not simply the actions of governments. They have now equally to be the actions of individual citizens. But governments must help personalise those SDG goals for their citizens. If we can do that, we can continue to make the case for finance. And if we can continue to stay focused on the climate crisis, then yes, we shall see a better world and we can shine the light on the future of many.

I thank you