

General Debate of the 67th Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Statement by the Hon. Frederick A. Mitchell

Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigration of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas

29 September, 2012

New York

Mr. President,

I congratulate you on the assumption of your duties to preside over the work of this august Body during its Sixty-Seventh Session and assure you of my Delegation's support and cooperation throughout.

I also commend your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for his stewardship of the previous Session of the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas commends the United Nations for the convening and outcome of the High-level Meeting on the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels last Monday. The Bahamas has committed itself to the principle of the Rule of Law and to ensuring good governance for the benefit of the entire populace of The Bahamas. The Bahamas is committed also to adhering to the rule at law at the international level and to upholding the principles of the Charter of this organization.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas commends the convening in June last of the third biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. The Bahamas unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, and reiterates its commitment to the fight against terrorism, as well as to the Strategy's full implementation.

The Bahamas renews her call for the timely conclusion of negotiations on a draft comprehensive International Convention for the Elimination of Terrorism.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas condemns in the strongest terms possible the violence that resulted in the deaths of Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other US diplomats a few weeks ago. We in the international community must commit wholeheartedly and sincerely to creating a culture of peace throughout the world, underpinned by tolerance and understanding, which precludes such outrageous occurrences and their causes.

Mr. President,

The increasing level of armed violence and crime plaguing our society, due in large part to the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and trafficking in narcotics, neither of which our country manufactures or supplies, cannot be allowed to continue if we are to save successive generations from a life steeped in violence and lawlessness. It has been more than a decade since the adoption in 2001 of the United Nations Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Yet, there has been no abatement in the level and intensity of armed violence impacting our country.

The Bahamas welcomes the recent convening and successful outcome of the United Nations Conference to Review Progress Made in the Implementation of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. My Government reiterates its unwavering commitment to the full implementation of the Programme of Action.

Mr. President,

The lives of too many of our young people are being destroyed. Now is the time to act.

Mr. President,

Creating a safe Bahamas is a top priority for the Government. We are committed to the creation of a National Intelligence Agency, National Firearms Control Strategy, including the establishment of a Firearms Department and Database, as well as to enhancing the operations of the Country's Defence Force to more effectively control the porous borders of The Bahamas. I take this opportunity to thank the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC) for their support and provision of equipment and capacity-building assistance in the area of firearms destruction and stockpile management. The Bahamas was pleased to conclude an agreement with the Office for Disarmament Affairs in April last, and to have participated in a number of regional training programmes and workshops sponsored by UNLIREC on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and the strengthening of border controls.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas joins other Delegations in expressing our profound disappointment about the outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty held in July last and the failure of member states to agree on a text despite six long years of protracted negotiations. The Bahamas supports the views articulated by the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of CARICOM, during the month long Conference. What do we say to thousands of innocent victims and their families who are suffering as a result of the irresponsible and unregulated international transfer of conventional arms? A re-assessment of human life and dignity versus profit, and, commitment are critical if we are to prevail in our fight against the scourge of armed violence and terror plaguing our societies. We look forward to a successful outcome of the next round of negotiations.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas solemnly reaffirms her commitment to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. Advancements continue nationally in important areas pertaining to the protection of our biodiversity and development of policies to promote renewable energy. Some argue that finding out how to provide reliable and affordable energy may be the single largest factor affecting the future development of The Bahamas. This issue is so important to us that the Prime Minister has taken it as a personal mission to seek to solve this issue. We know that we must do it sustainably.

The Bahamas has enacted legislation to foster the sustainable use and management of ecosystems, through better land-use planning. Under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea we have initiated actions to preserve our fish stock by introducing penalties for over-fishing. We have also taken action to ban long line fishing, to establish The Bahamas as a shark sanctuary, and, to establish and expand marine protected areas. For The Bahamas it is imperative that these Sustainable Development strategies are complemented with appropriate actions taken by the international community. In this respect, we view the historic outcome of the Rio+20 Conference as offering significant opportunities, particularly for small island developing States (SIDS). We are encouraged by the international community's call for continued and enhanced efforts to assist SIDS in implementing the Barbados Plan of Action (BPOA) and the Mauritius Strategy of Implementation (MSI). The Bahamas also welcomes the convening of the Third International Conference on SIDS (Barbados+20) and will participate actively in the upcoming General Assembly consultations to determine the modalities of the Meeting with a view to ensuring a successful outcome.

The Bahamas is also encouraged greatly by the decision taken at the Rio Conference to undertake work on universal, action-oriented Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In doing so, we must take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development, and, respect national policies and priorities. The Bahamas hopes to work in the context of the Open-ended Working Group for the development of the Sustainable Development Goals as well as in the Intergovernmental Committee on Financing, agreed at Rio+20, to ensure that our special concerns are fully addressed.

Mr. President,

In this connection, The Bahamas looks forward to the recommendations of the high level Panel of the Secretary-General on global post-2015 development planning, and commends the level of female participation thereon. The convening of this Panel offers a major opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past and build a vision for global development beyond mere crisis management. The Panel must be seen to operate with open transparency. It should also incorporate the views of geographical and economic anomalies such as those of the Caribbean sub-Region, and, be innovative and forward-looking.

The Bahamas welcomes the acknowledgement at Rio of the need to address the adverse impacts of climate change.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas believes that the United Nations has a central role to play in global economic governance.

The Bahamas welcomes the efforts of the G20, particularly Mexico in her role as current Chair, in helping to translate G20 deliberations into effective actions on a global scale through broad consultation among Member States and with the UN itself to find solutions to many of the major challenges of our times, most particularly with respect to strengthening the international financial system.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas also envisions a greater role for the United Nations in the area of international cooperation in tax matters. In this connection, The Bahamas, along with the wider Group of 77 and China continues to call for the conversion of the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation on Tax Matters into an Intergovernmental Subsidiary body of the ECOSOC in keeping with the Doha mandate. We also continue to deplore the use of some states of their domestic laws for extra territorial affect in such areas as human trafficking, financial services and drug smuggling. We continue to believe that these laws with extraterritorial affect are misplaced and put an unfair burden upon small states and may be interpreted as a departure from the international norms of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.

Mr. President,

In order to reverse current economic trends, one of the core imperatives of the Government of The Bahamas is the strengthening of the domestic economy and the attendant creation of jobs, the broadening of Bahamian ownership in the economy and the attainment of a higher standard of living. Creating job opportunities and reversing the unacceptable unemployment situation in the country, which presently stands at a rate of [15.9%], have been identified at the highest political level, as the most critical near-term priorities for the Government, especially in relation to young Bahamians, the demographic sector that has been most severely affected by the unemployment problem, with a rate of [34%] unemployment. We are committed to solving youth unemployment.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas underscores the need for enhanced policy dialogue and international cooperation on the question of building “green economies”, which will indeed require new investments, skills formation, technology development and transfer, and capacity building.

The Gross National Income (GNI) of The Bahamas is significantly affected by a small population of wealthy expatriates whose high incomes skew this measure away from true economic realities. The construct of per capita Gross National Income therefore takes on a unique interpretation in the context of developing countries like The Bahamas. The Bahamas continues to be deserving of considerations which will not deny us the right to develop sustainably, supported by financial, human and technological resources. Gross national income per capita should not be used as a pretext to restrict our access to financial assistance.

Mr. President,

The General Assembly is set to consider, during this Sixty-Seventh Session, the Scale of Assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations Regular Budget and Peacekeeping Operations for the period 2013-2015, The Bahamas takes this opportunity to reiterate her longstanding position that per capita gross national income, for the reasons given, should not be accorded overriding weight in determining capacity to pay.

Mr. President,

A representative, transparent, responsive, accountable, democratic and inclusive Security Council, predicated on an increased membership in both the permanent and non-permanent categories, as well as modification of its working methods, is overdue. My delegation sincerely hopes that the next round of negotiations on Security Council reform during this session will result in tangible progress aimed at making the Council all that it can and should be.

Mr. President,

Our desire for the realisation of unfulfilled potential also extends to our regional partner, The Republic of Haiti. The Bahamas has been unremitting and consistent in her support for the People of Haiti and their aspirations for peace, security and development.

The Bahamas commends the important role of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in providing security in Haiti and in laying the foundation for its long-term recovery and stability. Pledges made toward Haiti's recovery and reconstruction must be honoured and fulfilled so that the required work can be undertaken and completed.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas welcomes increased dialogue on improving international cooperation with respect to international migration and development. Illegal migration from Haiti is a vexing issue for our country. We agree that proper cooperation can certainly help to ensure that migration occurs through safe and regulated channels, as well as leverage the contributions that migrants can make to development. The Bahamas will continue to participate constructively in the process leading to the second High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development to be held by the General Assembly in 2013, with a view to addressing these and other related issues so crucial to our development.

Given the events over the past year in The Bahamas with regard to illegal migration, some tragic, and, poaching in our seas from illegal persons from the south of us, The Bahamas will be taking stronger measures over the next year to put a stop to these illegal activities. We appeal to all nations in the region to prevail upon their citizens to cease and desist from these unlawful activities. We intend to work both bilaterally and with the broader international community to stop these assaults on our national and economic security.

Mr. President,

The Bahamas has made significant strides in the areas of maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS. In this the 50th year since women obtained the right to vote in The Bahamas, we are committed to the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women, as was affirmed by the Minister of Social Services during consideration of The Bahamas' Reports by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women at its Fifty-Second Session held in July last. The Bahamas, nevertheless, remains concerned about the increasing incidences of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among her populace, in particular women who are disproportionately affected by such preventable illnesses.

Mr. President,

We can draw much strength, wisdom and inspiration from the remarkable successes of our Nations' athletes, nationally and sub-regionally at this year's Olympics. My delegation would like to pay tribute to the youth of the world for their stellar displays of camaraderie and talent. In particular we salute, in this forum, the gold medal athletes of The Bahamas: Demetrius Pinder, Michael Mathieu, Chris Brown and Ramon Miller. Indeed, the performances of the athletes from the entire CARICOM region are noteworthy, particularly those of our sister countries of Grenada, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago. Their example can be viewed as contributing as much to peace and development in our world as our deliberations and initiatives. Our warmest congratulations!

My delegation also wishes to record in this forum the passing of the late Paul L. Adderley, the longest serving Minister of Foreign Affairs of The Bahamas, whose tenure included the most critical foreign policy challenges to date of an independent Bahamas, who sadly died on 19th September. He believed in this world body and its tenets, and exemplified how it can assist small States. It is, therefore, only fitting that we mark, and record, his passing.

The Bahamas continues to believe that mankind can aspire to and achieve a higher inner strength which can not only cause us to excel beyond even our dreams, but can lift all around us, even nations and the entire world. May each one of us reach for this inner strength and change our world, transform an agenda of problems into covenants of partnerships. Now more than ever we need the United Nations.

Thank you, Mr. President.