



NATIONAL STATEMENT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

DELIVERED BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DR. AMERY BROWNE, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AND CARICOM AFFAIRS
GENERAL DEBATE-76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Mr. President,

It is an honour to address this august Assembly of States on this the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. On behalf of the Government and People of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend congratulations to you on your election to the Presidency. My delegation is confident that with your experience and able leadership, this crucial session will be highly successful in advancing our work for peace, progress and sustainability for humankind.

Permit me, to also express our gratitude to His Excellency Volkan Bozkir for steering our work during the 75th session. Notwithstanding the innumerable challenges encountered during his presidency, he has effectively advanced a comprehensive framework to ensure the continuity of the work of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

I also take the opportunity to congratulate His Excellency António Guterres on his reappointment as Secretary-General. The continuity of his astute leadership serves to ensure that the United Nations remains a critical partner in our aspirations to build back better.

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the profound fragilities of our interconnected societies and economies. None among us have escaped severe economic contraction and consequential loss of livelihoods. Most of all, the heavy death toll has created new and complex social issues in our societies that require intervention by governments. We are of the firm belief that multilateralism is the only vehicle by which we can jointly save humanity, safeguard livelihoods, and reenergize our economies.

It is happening right before our very eyes, COVID-19 has now become a pandemic of the unvaccinated, the majority of whom live in the Global South. As a responsible community of nations, we ought to take immediate measures to ensure equitable access to and distribution of vaccines across this globe. This would be the only secure way to protect our populations from further demise and our economies from further convulsions, as the current situation of vaccine inequity benefits only the virus.

In Trinidad and Tobago's experience, it has proven an uphill battle to source vaccines on the open market due, we were told, to our relatively small size and issues of low demand. Such dismissive and unfair responses really deny the universally accepted principle that every human being, whether they live in the Developed North or the Developing South, is entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.

Recognizing the dire consequences that countries of the Caribbean Community would have to confront, Trinidad and Tobago used its chairmanship of CARICOM to convene a Heads of State and Government Meeting to address the pressing question of vaccine availability. Such is our conviction of the relevance and power of multilateralism, that the Trinidad and Tobago Chairmanship took it one step further and raised with the Director General of the World Health Organisation, the convening of a global summit on vaccine availability.

In the meantime, as a result of diplomatic initiatives taken at the bilateral level, Trinidad and Tobago and other members of the Caribbean Community received donations of WHO-approved vaccines from several Governments. We also received supplies via the COVAX facility and from the African Medical Supplies Platform.

The People of Trinidad and Tobago and their Government express once more, their grateful thanks to all those countries and mechanisms whose generous assistance permitted us to scale up an aggressive vaccination campaign.

It would be remiss of me not to express Trinidad and Tobago's deep appreciation for the critical leadership role continuously demonstrated by the United Nations and more specifically, by the WHO in spearheading the global efforts to combat the COVID-19 virus.

The evidence is irrefutable that human induced climate change, threatens the very survival of humankind. Yet greenhouse gas emissions are at record levels, and the devastating impacts of climate change continue to worsen, landing on the doorsteps of Small Island Developing States, sitting as they are, on the frontline of this crisis.

It is therefore Mr. President, our moral responsibility to ensure the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement through credible, concrete, enhanced commitments. The commitment made by developed countries to mobilize one hundred billion dollars annually to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries must be met.

Notwithstanding Trinidad and Tobago's miniscule contribution to global emissions, we have committed in our Nationally Determined Contribution to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 30% in the public transportation sector, and to a cumulative decrease of 15% in the other main carbon emitting sectors by 2030. Consequently, these commitments would remove over 100 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from our atmosphere; placing us among the most ambitious in our region. Even so, we are currently updating our NDC with a view to further increasing our mitigation ambition.

We hope that COP 26 will agree to complete the outstanding issues and to fully operationalise the Paris Agreement on a scale that will support cooperation on mitigation, adaptation and compliance. That approach would be in keeping with the calls for more ambitious commitments to ensure that the 1.5-degree target remains within our reach.

Mr. President,

Our acute susceptibility to climate change stems from our inherently complex structural vulnerabilities as Small Island Developing States that trap us in a mire of compounding risks; sentencing us to a cyclical struggle of recovery, rebuilding and redevelopment.

Yet we are told time and time again, that our categorisation as middle and high-income countries render us ineligible to access concessionary finance and development support. It is as if the international system, almost by design, perpetuates the conditions that stifle our hard-earned albeit fragile progress.

The need to reassess the eligibility of SIDS for concessional finance, beyond income measures, has been widely acknowledged by the international community for almost three decades. In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago applauds the Secretary-General's efforts in advancing the development of a multidimensional vulnerability index that will more accurately reflect our composite challenges and open the door to SIDS-sensitive financing. The international economic and financial system must be transformed to better support the most vulnerable countries.

Mr. President,

We also recognize that the increasing incidence of violent crime domestically, bedevils our efforts toward achieving sustainable development and the maintenance of the rule of law. Much of this criminal activity derives from the operations of international criminal networks engaged in the illicit trafficking of small arms and increasingly sophisticated weaponry, illegal drugs, money laundering, human trafficking and piracy across our society.

Recognizing its value to us and to the members of CARICOM as a whole, Trinidad and Tobago played a highly constructive role in the process culminating in the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty. We remain keenly engaged to ensure that the Treaty fully achieves its objectives.

Mr. President,

As we reflect on the twentieth anniversary of the tragic events of September 11th in New York, we are reminded of our commitments to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. In this regard, the anti-terrorism act of Trinidad and Tobago establishes a robust legal architecture, including measures for criminal prosecution, to detect and interrupt the financing of terrorism, the collection and sharing of information, intelligence and evidence, and the enforcement of targeted financial sanctions in accordance with international law.

Mr. President,

What most preoccupies us, is an evident tendency for the entrenchment of a culture of violence in our society; most disturbingly, the prevalence of domestic violence and violence against women and girls. Trinidad and Tobago has therefore begun to create safe spaces for all women and girls and is now accelerating its efforts to change the negative behaviours and gender stereotypes, at all levels. Consequently, amendments to existing legislation on Domestic Violence, Sexual Offences, Child Protection as well as to allow for electronic monitoring of sex offenders were enacted recently, to provide further protection for women and girls.

Mr. President,

We are cognizant that in several parts of the world people continue to be systematically denied their fundamental human rights and human dignity. Such violations ought to offend us as a community of nations working to improve the standards of living and welfare of all our peoples. It is therefore necessary that we reject and punish impunity wherever it rears its ugly head.

Accordingly, Trinidad and Tobago remains unwavering in its commitment to the mandate and mission of the International Criminal Court, in the interest of banishing the worst forms of human rights abuses and violations from our civilization. We urge those States which are not yet members of the Court to subscribe to it in order to achieve universality.

Mr. President,

Despite recent contusions, Trinidad and Tobago is seizing the opportunity to emerge stronger and better. As an economy predominantly dependent on the hydrocarbon and petrochemical industries, we are sparing no effort to provide the necessary support and the enabling environment to foster diversification, through substantial transformation in the creative sector as well as in manufacturing, finance, medicine, security, commerce, agriculture and renewable energy. Our newly established Ministry of Digital Transformation is leading these efforts to create a competitive digitally - driven economy that will stimulate greater opportunities for all of our people.

However, the misuse of digital technology can pose serious threats to the economy, national security, governance, and social stability. Therefore, we must develop appropriate mechanisms to protect and secure the integrity of our economies and societies and to minimize its use as a disruptive tool.

Mr. President,

The thrust in all our efforts in pursuing sustainable development is to shape a better collective future on this planet, not only for ourselves, but for generations to come. Trinidad and Tobago remains dedicated to ensuring our children and youth, including those in vulnerable situations, have the necessary opportunities, tools and a safe environment in order to reach their highest potential.

Mr. President,

Evidence from the pandemic has shown that severe inequities continue to exist in our societies and that crises do not impact men and women in the same way. Therefore, in building back better, women's participation in all sectors of society must be at the heart of creating more inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities and societies; with enhanced preparedness to respond to future emergencies.

The promotion of gender equality is a priority for Trinidad and Tobago and so we have taken specific measures in certain key areas including access to health care, education and training, employment as well as in the provision of social protection. The important role of the family in the empowerment of women and girls has also been fully acknowledged.

Mr. President,

This year's High-Level Meeting on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action takes on even greater significance with the recent establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent and the convening of the first Africa-CARICOM Summit a few weeks ago. Africa has been a vibrant partner of CARICOM both bilaterally and in several multilateral arenas, including here at the United Nations. In historical terms, these ties have been umbilical, but with the joint decision for regular dialogue, cooperation and coordination, they will now be forward-looking as we seek to secure our broader interests in the international system.

The lack of meaningful progress on Security Council reform remains a matter of deep concern. Our commitment to instill new life into the intergovernmental negotiations should amount to more than mere rhetoric. It should serve as a clarion call to Member States to work collaboratively, in good faith, toward early reform of the Security Council to effectively respond to the urgent needs and challenges facing the diverse membership of the United Nations. A representative Council will add substantially to improving the effectiveness and credibility of our organization, as the leading international pillar for peace and security.

Mr. President,

As we have entered the Decade of Action and Delivery to implement the 2030 Agenda, it is important to ensure that no country is left behind. The unjust designation of Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism along with the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against that country, undermine its ability to cope with the pervasive impacts of the pandemic and its potential to achieve sustainable development. Accordingly, Trinidad and Tobago reiterates its call for the unconditional lifting of the embargo against Cuba, in line with the fundamental principles of the UN Charter.

Trinidad and Tobago remains deeply concerned that so little progress has been made in the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has led to extreme suffering on both sides. We urge both parties to respect and adhere to the temporary ceasefire, and to do nothing that would inflame the already tenuous situation. It is our hope that the parties will shortly resume the process of engagement to find a way forward that would guarantee the Palestinians a permanent homeland and recognize Israel's right to exist in peace and security.

Mr. President,

The United Nations provides us all with the opportunity to discuss our differences, to build understanding and to make common cause in protecting our planet and our civilisation. Let me reassure you of Trinidad and Tobago's unshakeable resolve to support this effort as well as the work of the United Nations.

Mr President,

I THANK YOU.