



General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

19th plenary meeting
Saturday, 28 September 2013, 3 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by Mr. Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.

Mr. Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Perry Gladstone Christie, M.P., and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Christie (Bahamas): Permit me to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the Assembly. As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Bahamas takes special pride in the election of one of our region's own — the third such person to be so elected over the years. You may be assured of our full support as you attend to the duties of the high office to which you have been elected and for which you are, if I may say so, superbly qualified. We consider it a privilege to extend Ambassador Paulette Bethel to your office as Chef de Cabinet, and we wish her well as well.

Permit me also to express my condolences and those of the Bahamas to the President and people of

Kenya following the tragic attack on innocent civilians in Nairobi just last week.

This year we in the Bahamas are celebrating our fortieth year of independence. It is appropriate, therefore, that we should pause today and look back to 1973, when our nation was founded and our membership in the United Nations began. In addressing the General Assembly for the first time on 1 October 1973, our then Prime Minister, Sir Lynden Pindling, spoke of our journey from the dehumanizing experiences of slavery and colonialism to the liberating achievements of freedom, majority rule and independence. He spoke, too, of the “perpetual interdependence of the big and the small,” and the fervent wish of the Bahamian people to be neither “dominated nor coerced.” He also had this to say:

“We have the means to give new hope to mankind, to create a stable international order dominated by total and absolute political and economic self-determination and human and moral values which make human beings paramount, not things or abstractions.” (A/PV.2135, para. 28)

Sir Lynden's call for us to be faithful to the responsibilities of our nationhood and world citizenship is as relevant and compelling today as it was when we were welcomed into the family of the United Nations 40 years ago. As the present Prime Minister of the Bahamas, I have therefore come here today, on behalf of the people of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, to renew our pledge to play our part to help make our planet the place of peace and stability and of collaborative

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endeavour and mutual support that it was intended to be, and must be, for the good of all humankind.

But we need to ensure that such pledges are not just so many catchy phrases. We need to not only talk the talk but walk the walk. We in the Bahamas are determined to do just that. That is why, to cite one very recent example, my Minister of Social Development, Melanie Griffin, on Tuesday of this week here in New York, signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on behalf of the Bahamas. This is an important step forward that we have taken, marrying our rhetoric to our actions and synching our domestic agenda with our international obligations. We intend to ratify the Convention in the shortest possible time, and later this year we will introduce the necessary legislation in our Parliament to protect the rights of the disabled and to give full effect to our obligations under the Convention. The end to discrimination against the disabled in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas is now clearly in sight. Indeed, it is now imminent.

I would also submit today that we are all of us under a moral obligation to ensure that the policies and aspirational goals that the General Assembly sets for itself, and to which all Member States subscribe, are in fact reflected in the way that we govern our respective nations internally and, to no less a degree, in the way that we interact with each other as Member States in the international community. For example, we cannot, on the one hand, proclaim that we believe in free trade, then implement policies that inevitably bring about the destruction of agriculture as we know it in the Caribbean, and, in response to the resulting moral outcry, simply shrug our shoulders and piously lament that the old order changeth.

We have to become more conscious of the practical outcomes of what we do. Too often, in the headlong rush for change, we damage the vulnerable and the weak. We then make pledges to help but seldom live up to those pledges in any sustained way. We simply cannot build a credible new world order on the basis of such practices. They run completely counter to our lofty pronouncements about the need for interconnectedness and mutual support in the pursuit of economic progress for all the nations of the world, be they large or small, developed or developing.

We see the same dynamic at work in the ongoing economic aggression of many of the more developed countries against small, offshore financial

service-based economies, especially in the Caribbean region of which the Bahamas is a part. Some have used their power, either unilaterally or in small groups of high-powered nations, to impose their will, arguing that there is something fundamentally immoral, something intrinsically sinister, about the accumulation of wealth in offshore jurisdictions.

We reject that premise and we criticize in the strongest possible terms the efforts of some to maim and cripple, if not destroy, the offshore economies within our region. Ironically, the anti-money-laundering, anti-terrorism funding and anti-criminal regulatory regimes of many of our countries are far more robust and demonstrably far more effective than the corresponding regulatory regimes in many of the same countries that are leading the fight against us.

We firmly believe that offshore financial services can be responsibly operated and regulated. We believe that the sector represents true tax competition and, in the great majority of cases, that it affords an honest opportunity for families and individuals alike to protect their privacy while accumulating lawfully earned capital for themselves and future generations. Moreover, the evidence is overwhelming that most of the investment of that offshore wealth takes place in and generally benefits the developed world.

Unilateralism and diplomacy by coercion are not the way the world should be dealing with that issue. Instead, we need to challenge the United Nations to take the lead in developing and refining multilateral global mechanisms for the governance of the offshore financial services sector — mechanisms that will meet the legitimate demands of the developed world for the protection of their fiscal systems and their need for greater security, while at the same time allowing offshore financial-service economies to continue to grow in an orderly and properly regulated way.

Let us not forget that the destruction of those offshore financial-service economies will destabilize the countries that depend upon them for their livelihood. To destroy that sector in the Caribbean would effectively cause tens of thousands of newly empowered middle-class citizens to slip back into poverty or to migrate to the developed world. The middle class of which I speak constitutes the anchor of social stability for the countries of our region. If it is taken away, social destabilization will emerge as a risk of the most ominous kind. And should that risk

materialize, the developed world may well end up finding that it has solved one problem only by creating an infinitely bigger one for itself.

The need for greater multilateralism is also evident in many of the other problems confronting the Bahamas and our region. A matter of the highest national priority for us revolves around our ongoing problem with illegal migration to our shores. We in the Bahamas suffer from the illegal migration of tens of thousands of desperate people from our sister Caribbean Community State of Haiti — an exodus undeniably driven by crushing poverty.

We also have a problem with illegal migration from other countries in the Caribbean, albeit to a much lesser extent. Of special note in that regard are migrants from Cuba. We believe that the policies rooted in the Cold War that largely account for that migration ought to be brought into alignment with the realities of the modern era.

Our archipelagic nation, though comparatively small in population, covers a vast area. With our hundreds of islands, the opportunities for illegal migration are greatly multiplied. At a time when it is imperative that we invest in the education and health and future of our people, we are forced instead to devote an ever-growing share of our resources to the problems associated with illegal migration.

The Bahamas, like the rest of the world, understandably places a great deal of emphasis on the human rights of migrants, but we also believe that there must be similar concerns for the ill-effects on migrant-receiving States such as ours. In particular, we are concerned about the increasingly unsustainable costs that are being incurred and the resulting erosion in the quality of life for the citizenry of the Bahamas. Our country, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, simply does not have the financial resources and infrastructural capacity, much less the psychological stamina, to endure that dilemma indefinitely.

That should also remind us of the economic disparities within our region and of the need to intensify global efforts to eliminate poverty and structural imbalances that impede economic growth within certain segments and sections of the Caribbean. For as long as those disparities persist, illegal immigration to the shores of countries that are comparatively more prosperous will continue to grow.

Another problem that is of special concern to us is the continuing influx of guns and the increase in gun-related criminality, not only in the Bahamas but throughout the region. As a world community, there is, I am convinced, a great deal more that we can and should be doing to fight that common menace.

The Bahamas has this year signed the Arms Trade Treaty, and we encourage all States that have not already done so to sign the Treaty as well. And we implore those countries that produce the guns that end up taking innocent lives and causing terror in our communities to become more proactive in controlling the export of guns. We implore them to step up the policing of their own borders against arms traffickers.

We therefore call for more robust surveillance and reconnaissance measures to be instituted. We already have the experience of joint anti-drug operational activities with the United States of America. However, more resources ought to be employed in a region-wide effort to fight crime. In particular, we call for a massive increase in joint tactical operations so that more air and maritime assets can be consistently deployed and the thousands of square miles that constitute the territorial waters of Caribbean States can be more effectively patrolled. We in the Bahamas stand ready to play our part in those joint efforts, without which the war on arms trafficking, human smuggling and the transshipment of illicit drugs will never produce the victory we all strive for.

In a recent talk that I gave to a meeting of the International Monetary Fund that the Bahamas hosted for the region, I made the point that we must all seek to mitigate the vulnerabilities of our small States in the CARICOM region. Of particular concern in that regard is the fact that we have as yet been unable to disabuse the international financial organizations of their conviction that gross domestic product per capita is by itself an accurate measure of the wealth of a nation or of its state of development.

The result of the continuing adherence to that dogma and the policies that have flowed from it is that the international financial assistance needs of countries in our region are being erroneously assessed and misunderstood. I therefore again join all of those calling for a revamping of the criteria in that regard so that the true financial assistance and development needs of developing countries can be evaluated in a fairer and more balanced and pragmatic way.

Another significant vulnerability for my country concerns the environment and the need to address comprehensively issues of climate change. The Bahamas is surrounded by the sea and is low-lying. Indeed, 80 per cent of the land mass of the Bahamas is less than five feet above sea level. The implications of climate change and associated rises in sea level are therefore obvious for my country and its people. I would submit that the world, particularly the developed world, has a stake in resolving those issues, for while countries such as ours may be the victims of climate change, we are not among the countries that are, in fact, largely responsible for the climate change that threatens our future and that of the planet.

In the Bahamas, we are waging our own battles. We are putting our fiscal house in order. We are introducing innovative tools to fight crime. We are training a new generation for twenty-first century jobs. We are creating new partnerships to tackle our most pressing problems. We are aggressively pursuing renewable energy. We are revamping and modernizing our structure of governance to make it more responsive to the needs of the twenty-first century. And by the increased use of the referendum machinery, we are demonstrating our commitment to a deepening of our democracy.

We are a small country with strong convictions and big ideas. But as we look beyond the borders of our nation and of the region to gaze upon the global scene, we see much eloquence and many handshakes and the ceremonial signing of one treaty after another. Rarely, however, do we see concrete steps or enforcement mechanisms with teeth. Ringing declarations have been made from Rio to Copenhagen and beyond, and we are constantly being challenged by our own citizens to demonstrate to them that real and measurable progress is being achieved at the global level.

We need to see more courage, more leadership, more sustained action on the global stage. So as the leader of a small but proud nation, I take the opportunity to say to the big and powerful nations: Find your courage because the hour grows late.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam.

His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah (Brunei Darussalam): On behalf of His Majesty the Sultan and the people of Brunei Darussalam, I wish to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. We thank our former President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, for his efforts and contributions over the past year.

Let me begin by expressing our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Kenya and to the families of the victims of the terrorist attack. Such an act deserves our condemnation. Our deepest sympathies also go to those affected by the recent earthquake in Pakistan.

Thirteen years ago before the Assembly, our leaders made a promise to our peoples to fulfil their hopes and expectations for a better life. This is why we see the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a highly important global partnership. It has shown us that progress can be made if we work together locally, regionally and internationally. I would therefore like to place on record our expression of appreciation to our Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his predecessor, Mr. Kofi Annan, for the support and commitment provided by the United Nations to realize that historic initiative.

We are now approaching the end of the 15-year period. Like many other nations, Brunei Darussalam has been able to learn much from its experiences in implementing the MDGs. We understand the high expectations for all to do well. However, we need to consider the problems that some Member States are struggling with. Those include limitations to natural resources, political conflict, socioeconomic problems and natural disasters. That is why this year's theme is so appropriate. It is focused on setting the stage. For

us in Brunei Darussalam, it means having a national vision — Brunei Vision 2035 — that clearly provides direction towards attaining a dynamic and sustainable economy in the interests of our people.

In line with the Vision, we place great emphasis on helping our younger generation realize their hopes. We have done this by providing quality education, encouraging innovation and creating better job opportunities. We also do what we can to assist fellow developing countries, either bilaterally or in partnership with other countries and international organizations, in human resource development, offering scholarships to study in Brunei Darussalam and training under community outreach programmes within the region. We hope that the people-to-people approach will promote cultural exchanges and understanding.

At the same time, our regional work has been strongly influenced by other Member States' efforts to achieve the MDGs. Within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we have an agreed plan to achieve an ASEAN community by 2015. Brunei Darussalam, as this year's ASEAN Chairman, has chosen the theme "Our people, our future together". It signifies our people's role in ASEAN's community-building efforts. In addition, we have also encouraged our member States to start working on an ASEAN plan beyond 2015, to further strengthen our mission in promoting peace, stability and prosperity. We will also continue to work together to strategically position ASEAN in the wider region and the world at large.

In that regard, we are pleased that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has accepted our invitation to come to Brunei Darussalam for the fifth ASEAN-United Nations Summit. We look forward to sharing our views and experiences with him, and hope that will strengthen cooperation between our Association and the United Nations.

We are also encouraged by the recommendations put forward in the recent report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Agenda on how we can better assist our people in their daily lives by providing food security and quality education and eradicating extreme poverty. Overall, the MDGs have offered us many lessons indeed, and now it is time for all of us to move forward. Regardless of the statistics of who has achieved the goals and who has not, we feel that much has been attained through the very concept of the MDGs. The Goals have opened up opportunities to

every Member to develop in its own way and to involve its people in that development, even beyond 2015.

Unfortunately, the options open to some people are severely limited. That is so when the basic, fundamental right of self-determination has been denied. We refer particularly to the people of Palestine, whom we believe can attest to that. Their legitimate struggle for a homeland of their own remains unresolved. Hence, we support the calls of the international community for intensified efforts towards realizing this basic right, which we take for granted today.

The date of 29 November 2012 was indeed a memorable day in the history of Palestine, when it was accorded observer State status in the United Nations (see A/67/PV.44). I would like once again to express our support for Palestine's full membership and for its people's legitimate struggle to exercise their right to their own independent and sovereign State.

The worsening situation in Syria continues to be of serious concern. We join the international community in condemning the use of chemical weapons, which has caused the loss of lives in that country. More importantly, we support all efforts, particularly those of the United Nations, to find a peaceful solution to the crisis. In that regard, we welcome the United States-Russia framework agreement for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons and the recent adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) on Syria.

Before I conclude, we would like to thank the Secretary-General and all his staff, as well as the United Nations Volunteers, for their hard work. We highly respect the peacekeepers for the sacrifices they have made in the maintenance of international peace and stability. We hope that our efforts within various United Nations agencies and bodies will lead us to the future that we all want.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam for the statement he has just made.

His Royal Highness Prince Haji Al-Muhtadee Billah, Crown Prince of Brunei Darussalam, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Thongloun Sisoulith, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Mr. Sisoulith (Lao People's Democratic Republic) (*spoke in Lao; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, I sincerely congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. I would like to assure you of our full support and cooperation in discharging your noble duty. I would also like to commend Mr. Vuk Jeremić for his successful completion of his mandate as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

The Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic offers its condolences to the Government and people of Kenya on the loss of life as a result of the terrorist attacks last week in Nairobi, and I join the international community in condemning that inhumane act.

The year 2013 marks a new turning point in promoting international cooperation for development and in addressing global poverty. At the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Brazil in 2012, world leaders initiated an international consultative process to chart a vision and concrete action for enhancing sustainable development in the post-2015 era. This clearly demonstrates that poverty eradication and sustainable development remain our overriding priorities.

In recent decades, despite the tremendous efforts of the international community to achieve poverty eradication and development targets, 1.2 billion poor people — 22 per cent of the world population — still live in poverty. In addition, the environment continues to be threatened and damaged, which has led to climate imbalance and the frequent recurrence of natural disasters that were rarely seen in the past. Moreover, political and social unrest and armed conflicts continue to rage in different parts of the world with no sign of imminent resolution. Likewise, the global and regional economic and financial crisis has intensified, with long-term effects on developing countries, especially least developed countries.

These situations in the development, political, socioeconomic and environmental spheres continue to obstruct and impede all nations from attaining the sustainable development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Against that backdrop, it is more crucial now than ever before for the international community to redouble its efforts to

strengthen development cooperation based on sincere and mutual assistance for the benefit of all and for a secure world. As the world today becomes increasingly interdependent, no single country can thrive and survive without the engagement and cooperation of the international community.

In that context, global institutions such as the United Nations have an important duty to advocate on behalf of international development cooperation. I commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts in promoting international cooperation, including between the United Nations and regional organizations throughout the world, in a complex and challenging global environment.

A nation's political stability and security are vital factors for enabling an environment and conditions conducive to advancing sustainable development. However, many regions of the world are experiencing social unrest, political strife and military confrontation, which pose a major threat to global and regional peace and security. In that regard, we share the common concern over the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, which has lasted for years now. We call on all parties concerned to work together and to find a peaceful solution in order to save the lives of innocent people. In that spirit, the Lao People's Democratic Republic welcomes the agreement reached by Russia and the United States on Syria's chemical weapons.

The international community must devote urgent attention to the issue of Palestine on the basis of the principle of creating the two independent States of Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace. In that regard, the Lao People's Democratic Republic commends the efforts of Israel and Palestine to resume peace negotiations, which mark an important milestone for the promotion of peace in that region.

The unilateral embargo on the Republic of Cuba, an independent State, is unjust and contrary to international law, and has a severe negative impact on the lives of the peace-loving Cuban people. Therefore, it is now time to put an end to the embargo.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has always attached great importance to creating a peaceful environment and to safeguarding political stability in the interest of national development, with a view to graduating from least-developed-country status. To that end, the Lao Government has made the utmost effort to pursue a consistent foreign policy and to promote

international cooperation at all levels. We continue to fulfil our international obligations to maintain peace and to promote the rule of law attentively.

In this regard, the Lao Government has mapped out a policy for governing the State by the rule of law and the promotion and protection of the fundamental rights of people of all backgrounds. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is party to many international human rights instruments. We have enacted and amended a national law on human rights, including the rights of women and children.

To continue fulfilling its international obligations, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has presented its candidatures for membership of the Human Rights Council, for the term of 2016-2018, and of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services for 2016-2018. We hope that the Lao People's Democratic Republic will be given an opportunity to work with the international community within the aforementioned frameworks.

At the regional level, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has played an active part in the process of community-building of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which consists of three pillars: the political-security community, the economic community and the sociocultural community. We believe that the political and economic strength of the ASEAN community will form a solid ground for regional cooperation, thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of peace, security and development in the region and the world at large.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic played an important role as Chair of the framework of cooperation between the continents of Asia and Europe — the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) — from 2010 to 2012, and was greatly honoured to host the ninth ASEM Summit on 5 and 6 November in Vientiane, under the theme "Friends for peace, partners for prosperity", which was successfully concluded. At the Summit, leaders from the two continents had a constructive exchange of views on the ways and means to promote peace and enhance development cooperation in their respective regions for the benefits of the peoples of Asia and Europe, as well as to ensure their legitimate rights to live in peace and to improve their well-being. The Lao Government was proud to have been given the opportunity to fulfil that important obligation, and I take this opportunity

to express my deep gratitude to all friendly countries and the international community for their support and assistance to the Lao People's Democratic Republic, which led to the successful outcome of the Summit.

Despite various achievements in its socioeconomic development, as both a least developed and a landlocked country the Lao People's Democratic Republic remains vulnerable and continues to face numerous challenges in its development and poverty-reduction efforts, as clearly reflected in the recent third national MDG progress report, issued early this month. If it is to achieve all the MDGs, the country must continue to overcome daunting challenges, such as child malnutrition, gender inequality in education and the impact of unexploded ordnance contamination. Nevertheless, the Lao Government will continue to lead its people in moving ahead together with the international community in tackling numerous challenges in order to achieve the MDGs.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is among those countries most affected by cluster munitions and unexploded ordnance, which continue to pose major constraints to national socioeconomic development and poverty reduction. In that regard, the Lao People's Democratic Republic calls on all countries to consider acceding to the Convention on Cluster Munitions with a view to ensuring a total ban on those weapons and to helping to address the impact of cluster munitions.

In 2014, the group of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) will hold a 10-year Review Conference on the Implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action to address the particular problems and special needs of the LLDCs. Addressing the specific problems of LLDCs has become a regional and international obligation. Regardless of their development level, these countries will not be able to address the impacts of their landlocked condition without international cooperation, especially from transit countries and development partners.

In that context, the 2014 Review Conference will be of great importance not only for the LLDCs, but also for all development partners. The Conference will provide an excellent opportunity for the international community to identify the emerging challenges and engage in new cooperation aimed at addressing the impact of the landlocked status faced by the LLDCs. We have high hopes and expectations for the outcome of the Conference, which could adopt a new policy direction and more concrete measures reflecting the

current development environment. This could form the basis for addressing the specific problems faced by the LLDCs in the next decade.

The success of the Conference would certainly demonstrate the spirit of genuine partnership and mutual assistance among members of the international community. Therefore, in my capacity as chair of the group of LLDCs, I call on all parties, international organizations — including the United Nations system — international financial institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organizations to participate actively in the preparation and organization of the Conference in view of ensuring its successful outcome.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Eamon Gilmore, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland.

Mr. Gilmore (Ireland): Every day, the peoples of the world whom we are privileged to represent in the General Assembly look on in helpless horror at the slaughter in Syria. They can see gassed children lined out, dead, on their television screens. They can access online the facts about the 100,000 Syrians who have been killed; the 4 million who have been displaced; and the 2 million or more who have been driven into refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan.

The peoples who have sent us, Government leaders and diplomats, to speak for them in this Hall are asking, “Why can we not stop this slaughter and this suffering?” They see the conflict in real time. It is not taking place in a remote part of the planet. Its brutality is made more visible by modern technology. The utterly callous attack in Ghouta on 21 August marked a new low in the endless litany of horrors.

From the very outset, Ireland has consistently argued that the United Nations and the Security Council must be central to any efforts to resolve the crisis and ensure that international law and basic human rights are upheld. And while it has taken much longer than we would all have wished, I welcome the decisive action the Security Council has now taken on Syria.

Mr. Sinhaseni (Thailand), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) marks a watershed in the international community’s engagement on the crisis. It offers renewed hope and confidence that the United Nations is capable of discharging

its responsibilities and meeting the aspirations and expectations of the peoples of the world. The resolution builds on the vital breakthrough achieved by the United States and Russia in agreeing to a framework for the complete elimination of Syria’s chemical weapons. Full compliance by the Syrian regime with its obligations is imperative. Ireland has already pledged €200,000 in funding to support the vital role of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, assisted by the United Nations, in implementing those arrangements.

Crucially, the Security Council has called for the early convening of an international conference to address all aspects of the conflict. The inescapable reality is that the crisis can be resolved only politically, not militarily. I am greatly encouraged by the indications that the “Geneva II” conference could be held within a matter of weeks. Peace can come only through all Syrians engaging in a genuinely inclusive process aimed at agreeing a new political dispensation in their country.

The Security Council has expressed its conviction that there must also be accountability for what has occurred in Syria. The International Criminal Court exists precisely for that purpose. We owe it to the Syrian people to ensure that those responsible for the war crimes committed against them are brought to justice.

There is also an urgent need to remove impediments to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Violence against civilians must cease. All parties must facilitate unimpeded access to people in need throughout Syria and guarantee the safety and security of humanitarian personnel who perform their duties at enormous personal risk.

The humanitarian efforts being made by Syria’s neighbours, including Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, are remarkable and deserve far more support from the international community. We should not underestimate the strain being imposed on those countries and the threats being posed to refugee populations. Ireland has contributed \$15 million to the humanitarian operation, and we stand ready to do more within our means.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, we also see the prospect of progress. In Ireland, we know what it takes to make peace after a protracted conflict. I want to acknowledge the work being done in the current direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, which all who wish for peace must welcome. I want to commend in particular the determination and

engagement of United States Secretary of State John Kerry, who has done so much to bring that about, and the leadership of President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, who have had to accept difficult choices to begin the process of negotiation. We all know, and they know, that many more difficult choices lie before them if they are to succeed and to secure a comprehensive peace settlement. They deserve all our support.

We are also encouraged by the stated determination of the new Iranian Government to address the concerns of the international community and build confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. We look forward to Iran's serious engagement in meaningful negotiations, leading to full compliance with all of its international obligations, and hope that that will also contribute to the creation of a positive dynamic in the Middle East region.

Ireland currently participates in seven United Nations peacekeeping missions, including each of the three missions in the Middle East. In response to a request of the Secretary-General, we are deploying Irish personnel to reinforce the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. We are doing so to help ensure that UNDOF can continue to implement its mandate at a difficult time. Ireland's deployment to that challenging mission is a signal of our deep commitment to the peacekeeping role of the United Nations. The Irish people are rightly proud of these soldiers and of the record of our Defence Forces, members of our police service and Irish civilians deployed in the cause of peace.

I join other speakers at this rostrum in condemning the recent attack in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi, which left dozens of innocent people dead and almost 200 injured. It was a chilling reminder that well-organized and ruthless international terrorist groups and networks are constantly searching for new locations and targets for atrocities. My profound sympathy and that of the people of Ireland go out to the victims of the attack and their families. We must be vigilant against terror and resolute in refusing to compromise our values in the face of such threats.

Many factors contribute to human suffering. Violent conflict, such as that in Syria, is one — and the toll of casualties there is escalating daily. But there are many parts of the world where underdevelopment, malnutrition and disease exact an even greater toll. Around the globe, 870 million people — almost 200

times the entire population of Ireland — are living in extreme poverty and hunger. Every single day, 18,000 children die needlessly from preventable causes in the poorest and least developed regions of the world; 7,000 of them are children under the age of 5, who die because they are undernourished. One in every four children is stunted, most of them in the poorest countries. And every day, 800 women die because of complications during pregnancy and childbirth, for basic reasons that could have been prevented.

Reversing those trends and creating a better future for the countless millions of impoverished people on our planet is, perhaps, the greatest moral and practical challenge we face today. We can, of course, draw inspiration and hope from our successes. And there have been successes. Thirteen years ago, at the United Nations, world leaders committed to taking tangible, measurable action to tackle global poverty. Huge progress has been made since then under the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Significant numbers of people have been lifted out of poverty. Millions of children are receiving primary education. Two billion people have access to improved water supplies, and HIV/AIDS and other diseases and pandemics are being tackled.

Nevertheless, fresh global challenges, such as climate change, are beginning to undermine the progress made. Communities in developing countries that have contributed least to the causes of climate change are suffering most from its effects. That is an injustice — clear and simple. It is a matter of fundamental human rights and equity. And it is critical for the future of all of our children, in a world which is reaching the limits of environmental sustainability, that this injustice be reversed.

I had the privilege of taking part in this week's special event on the Millennium Development Goals and co-chairing one of the round-table sessions. Ireland is proud to have co-facilitated the special event with South Africa and to have achieved an outcome document that will guide negotiations over the next two years on completing the MDGs and crafting the post-2015 development agenda.

I believe that when world leaders gather at the United Nations in 2015, we can and should be ready to adopt a new set of global goals aimed at achieving a sustainable, just and secure world for the future. I want to see a clear commitment to ending extreme poverty

and hunger in a generation. I want to see specific commitments in relation to the empowerment of women and girls. And I want to see an integrated approach on climate change and a strong focus on climate-sensitive agriculture.

In our own aid programme, my Government has prioritized hunger and malnutrition, a theme that resonates with Ireland's own history. We have a very simple message about the vital importance of investment in nutrition for mothers and babies. We are leading supporters of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement, and we are committed to doubling our aid spending on nutrition by 2016.

Ireland is today emerging from several years of an economic crisis that will soon be behind us. After many tough decisions and a lot of hard work, we are about to safely exit an international bailout and our economy is back on track. I am proud to say that despite the extremely difficult circumstances many Irish people find themselves in, we have sustained our commitment to the provision of development aid. I know that we are ready to play our part in a new global partnership, and that it is only through this body, the United Nations, that it can be achieved.

It is a matter of great pride to my country that Ireland was last year elected for the first time to the Human Rights Council. I warmly thank the Member States for their support in the election and the confidence they have placed in us. Ireland played a lead role in the adoption of two important resolutions by the Human Rights Council this week — one on preventable mortality of children under five; the other recognizing the important role played by civil society at the local, national, regional and international levels.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the Assembly states that recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. It also states that those human rights should be protected in law. Today, instead of offering protection, we increasingly see legal measures being adopted to discriminate against people on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. I welcome the courageous leadership shown by the Secretary-General when he promised in April to lead a global campaign for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. Ireland pledges its full support to the efforts of the Secretary-General, both here in the General Assembly and in the Human Rights Council.

Ireland is a small State that is deeply committed to the United Nations and to the principles enshrined in its Charter. We are proud to contribute to the important efforts of the United Nations in peacekeeping, in conflict resolution, in development aid and in humanitarian action. There can be no doubt that the United Nations is the unique and indispensable forum where the peoples of the world share their collective concerns and determine to take action to make the world a better and a safer place.

The membership of this Organization has conferred primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security on the Security Council. Accordingly, we look to the Council to show leadership in response to international crises. Membership of the Council is a privilege for any State, and Ireland has been honoured to serve on it on a number of occasions.

But the permanent members of the Security Council have a special responsibility to work together in a way that enables the United Nations to live up to the commitments made in its Charter. When the United Nations fails, or delays action, we are all the poorer for such setbacks. But when the United Nations works, we can achieve great things together. And those successes, such as the definition of a post-2015 development agenda, should serve as an inspiration and a springboard for the international community's responses to the other great challenges of our time.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Surapong Tovichakchaikul, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand.

Mr. Tovichakchaikul (Thailand): On behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Thailand, allow me to congratulate the Honourable Mr. John Ashe on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. My delegation stands ready to render our full support and cooperation.

I would also like to express our appreciation to the outgoing President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, for his exceptional leadership during the previous session. I am particularly grateful for his contributions to the second Asia-Pacific Water Summit, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, earlier this year.

Thailand is committed to the United Nations. Our faith in the principles and values it stands for has never wavered. The United Nations three pillars of security, development and human rights continue to

inspire and motivate us. When the 50 founding States came together in San Francisco in 1945, the world had high hopes for the United Nations. The United Nations was created in response to the demands of a different time, after millions of lives had been lost in a conflict between States. Today, it is conflict within States that takes the heaviest human toll, as we have witnessed in the unfolding events in Syria.

As we look ahead to the post-2015 future, we must not shy away from asking the hard questions. We must ask ourselves whether multilateralism has lived up to our expectations, be it in security, trade or the environment. We must ask how we Member States can do better in the face of critical challenges. That is because ultimately, the success of the United Nations depends on all of us. With such a diversity of viewpoints, it is all the more important for us to work together to find the unity and consensus we need.

The challenges facing us are particularly clear in the case of Syria. On 21 August, we learned that chemical weapons had been used against innocent civilians in Syria. Despite widespread condemnation and outrage, the United Nations was initially unable to act and the Security Council was deadlocked. We therefore welcome resolution 2118 (2013) on Syria, adopted yesterday by the Security Council. We urge Syria to ensure the full and effective implementation of the resolution, and to allow monitoring and enforcement by the international community. It is our hope that the Security Council, especially its permanent members, will continue to work to find a durable political solution for the sake of the Syrian people.

In setting the stage for the post-2015 development agenda, we must recognize that development cannot take root without peace, security, democracy and human rights. The three pillars of the United Nations must be developed together and nurtured together. To strengthen the United Nations, we need to seek ways to achieve unity and consensus on the issues that matter most. In the area of security, this means thinking of new, creative ways to respond to the changing threats. For instance, when States fail to protect their own populations, or even cause them harm, all our words will amount to little unless matched with action.

But what kind of action would make the most difference on the ground? When and how is it most effective? There are no simple answers. It is on such issues that the world looks to the Security Council for leadership. Too often, however, the Council is paralysed

just when action is most needed. Overcoming deadlock and achieving consensus must be a central objective of Security Council reform.

Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The United Nations is, of course, much more than the Security Council. Unity and consensus are also needed on development. Thailand believes that sustainable development must be at the heart of the United Nations agenda. The world has made great strides in tackling poverty and hunger, thanks in no small part to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but all of us still need to make a final push on the MDGs. That would enable us to tackle the deep-rooted poverty that still afflicts the so-called bottom billion.

Following the MDGs, the post-2015 development agenda must provide both continuity and a new source of hope. To build on the MDGs, Thailand believes that we should place special emphasis on the needs of the most vulnerable countries. That includes conflict and post-conflict societies, as well as those of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States. If we fail to do so, millions will be left behind.

The most pressing challenge to sustainable development that demands our concerted action is climate change. For a number of countries, particularly small island developing States, climate change strikes at the very heart of survival. For much of the world, climate change is also linked to another important challenge — food security. Extreme weather can cause great damage to agriculture. The impact will be felt not only in food-producing countries, but worldwide. That is why we need to work together to put in place systems — better weather prediction technology, better storage silos and more resilient strains of staple crops — that will mitigate the impact of climate change. Those are areas where countries should help one another by sharing their experiences and know-how.

Thailand believes that, if development is to be sustainable, it must be people-centred. We welcome the Secretary-General's report "A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015" (A/68/202), which puts people at the centre of the development agenda. People need to be given the chance and the tools to make the most of their potential. This can happen if we

focus more on promoting human security, for instance through education and health care. On education, we believe that the Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative is an important contribution to the post-2015 development agenda and deserves the support of all stakeholders. Health is also very much a development issue. When people are unhealthy, it imposes a cost on State finances and can even undo development gains.

As we look to the post-2015 future, we must not limit our goals to specific health challenges. We should now set our sights on the more general objective of universal health care. Initiated by the administration of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra 10 years ago, Thailand has been implementing a programme that charges only \$1 per doctor's visit. This universal health-care scheme is universal in its coverage of treatments, ranging from common illnesses and chronic diseases to lifesaving surgeries. Statistics have shown that through this programme, around 300,000 households have been saved from falling into poverty. Even non-Thai nationals, especially migrant workers from neighbouring countries are also benefiting from universal health care, making it truly universal.

The socioeconomic impact of this programme has therefore been tremendous. Those who benefit most from our universal health care have been the poor and the vulnerable. By working to empower the most vulnerable among us, we ensure that development is more inclusive. We believe that the model could be adapted to other developing countries, and we are willing to share the lessons we have learned from our experience.

We also believe that women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities must be treated fairly and encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of life. Particularly in situations of conflict, vulnerable groups are often at the greatest risk of violence. We therefore support the United Nations initiative to end sexual violence in conflict. We also commend the United Kingdom for its leadership in realizing the Declaration of Commitment on this important issue.

To provide an environment that facilitates unity and consensus, the international community must also forge a new global partnership. This new global partnership must rest on a common agenda for action. It will need to involve States — in particular like-minded States — the United Nations, regional organizations, civil society and other stakeholders. In South-East Asia, the process is well under way. The Association of

Southeast Asian Nations is strengthening its partnership to become a community of over 600 million people by the end of 2015. Regional discussions on the post-2015 agenda are also complementing ongoing global efforts. As a moderate, medium-sized country with an open society, Thailand is ready to work with all countries and partners. We want to do our part in helping bridge the gaps in communication, understanding and opportunity.

That is why we have put forward our candidacies to the Security Council for the term 2017-2018 and to the Human Rights Council for the term 2015-2017. We are keen to help build bridges to connect all stakeholders in a more cohesive, action-oriented global partnership. Building a global partnership means forging a common agenda for action on our most important challenges. It means reaching out beyond our borders, beyond our region and beyond our comfort zone.

Thailand has been building bridges not only within Asia, but also with Africa and Latin America. We believe that developing countries everywhere need to come together in a spirit of partnership to make their voices heard. What is more, that same sense of partnership must also cross the development divide, embracing developed and developing economies alike.

Since the beginning, the United Nations has been a force for good. As its membership has grown and the issues have become more complex, we have now reached a crossroads. Whether the United Nations takes the right path rests on our ability to achieve consensus and to act together in a meaningful manner. Now is the time for us to set aside our outdated assumptions and our differences. Our common future depends on our ability to come together to forge consensus on the new realities before us. The way forward is not through politics as usual, but through constructive dialogue and mutual respect. With goodwill and common purpose, the international community can once again rise to the challenge. Together, we can fulfil the promise of the Organization and the loftiest goals toward which we, the Member States, have always aspired.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Manasseh Maelanga, Deputy Prime Minister of Solomon Islands.

Mr. Maelanga (Solomon Islands): It is with much pride that the Government and the people of the Solomon Islands join me in congratulating a fellow islander, Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, on

his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. As one of his Vice-Presidents, we assure him of Solomon Islands' support and cooperation during his tenure in office.

I take this opportunity to commend his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić of Serbia, whose leadership guided us through over 300 resolutions, the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and the convening of a number of high-level thematic debates. Solomon Islands also wishes to acknowledge Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his service and commitment to our global world. I would also like to welcome Kiribati, whose permanent representation in New York completes the Pacific small island developing States (SIDS) presence in a single city.

My delegation welcomes the sixty-eighth session's theme, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". The world has changed since the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched. Populations have grown, cities have expanded, and consumption and production patterns have pushed us to our planetary boundaries. Solomon Islands' MDG national scorecard remains mixed. We have progressed on some fronts and remain off track on others.

The post-2015 development agenda offers us an opportunity to change the way we do business. In that regard, Solomon Islands seeks a new spirit of partnership that will reform the global economic architecture. My subregion in the Pacific supplies 60 per cent of the world's tuna. Over three decades, the Pacific Islands have developed fisheries institutions and legal and management frameworks. With international support, we can supply the world with fish. Solomon Islands, as Chair of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency and of the parties to the Nauru Agreement, calls for a new mindset that would provide the Pacific Island States with the space and capacity to develop its domestic industries and restructure the fishing fleets of distant-water nations in the region.

The Pacific Fisheries Vessel Day Scheme has allowed us to realize our development aspirations. Two new fishing industries have established themselves this year in Solomon Islands. We remain firm in our resolve that the Scheme shall remain the central pillar in all our fisheries negotiations.

Solomon Islands welcomes the President's proposal of convening a third thematic debate on sustainable energy during this session. We note that 1.3 billion

people, half of whom live in least developed countries, have no access to electricity. The Istanbul Programme of Action recognizes that access to affordable, reliable, renewable energy is crucial to accelerating sustainable, inclusive economic growth, increased social equity and a sustainable and clean environment.

Expanding energy access for our rural populations and reducing energy costs are national priorities for Solomon Islands. I am pleased to announce that Solomon Islands joined the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) last month. We hope to work with IRENA in unlocking some of our hydroenergy potential. I am pleased to say that we already have a working relationship with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank on hydro-projects. We are also in discussion with the Clinton Foundation on harvesting our geothermal potential. Once that gets off the ground, it will be a private-public sector partnership. Bilaterally a number of partners, including the Republic of China, Italy and Japan, have people-centred solar programmes in the country. Those programmes continue to light up our community schools and villages. Renewable energy also improves public service delivery to our rural populations and empowers Solomon Islanders to make sustainable choices in life.

Globally, the Pacific SIDS are themselves helping to fill the information gaps in global renewable energy databases, in cases where information on the Pacific is lacking. A Pacific renewable energy database will be developed in cooperation with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. The vision is to focus on enhancing the Pacific region's inclusion in the international energy dialogue and to provide sufficient data to inspire new global partners to concentrate more on on-the-ground investments, less on studies.

Infrastructure development is critical in opening more opportunities for our rural populations. We acknowledge New Zealand for the construction of our second international airport and other partners, such as Australia and the European Union, for the wharves, airfields and roads they have helped to build. Those structural investments allow Solomon Islands to enhance its trade and strengthen the unity of the country.

Climate change remains a global issue that needs a global solution. We join all small island developing States and least developed countries in conveying our concern about the slow progress of climate change

negotiations. The alarming pace of climate change is posing unprecedented threats to humankind's survival. In May, carbon dioxide concentration reached a new threshold of 400 parts per million. For Solomon Islands, this means that the livelihood and well-being of our people are now under threat. Corals stop growing at 500 parts per million.

We are heartened by the Secretary-General's proposal to convene a climate change summit next year. We hope that the summit will not be a talkfest, but that it will garner the necessary political will of Member States to increase their level of commitment to reducing and phasing down greenhouse-gas pollution commensurate with scientific guidelines. The summit remains our best hope for preventing the impact of climate change from reaching an irreversible level. We once again register our regret that certain countries have reneged on their historical responsibility and unilaterally decided to opt out of their multilateral obligations.

The world will celebrate 2014 as the International Year of Small Island Developing States. The SIDS conference is scheduled to be held in Samoa next year. We count on the world to enable small island developing States to eradicate poverty, build resilience and unleash the potential of our youths. That will require the enhanced implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for Implementation towards an evidenced-based outcome.

In seeking a sustainable future for our people, last year we announced that we would establish a national university. I am pleased to say that we launched Solomon Islands National University in April. A second university, the University of the South Pacific, has also completed all formalities and is expected to begin the construction of its fourth campus in one of our provinces. The development of human capital will allow Solomon Islands to build a knowledge-based society and have more job-ready nationals to meet our development needs.

This week the international community convened the first inaugural meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. In preparation for the Forum, the Pacific small island developing States formed the Pacific Islands Development Forum this year. Solomon Islands is one of the founding members of the Forum, an alliance of States and non-State and private-sector actors that focus on the green economy in the context of sustainable development. The Pacific

Islands Development Forum intends to speak with a united voice in the High-level Political Forum. Pacific SIDS look forward to working with the Forum.

I am pleased to announce that Solomon Islands began a new journey two months ago. The 10-year-old Pacific Islands Forum Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) — led by Australia and supported by New Zealand and Pacific small island developing States — went through a transitional phase. RAMSI, provided for under Chapter VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, now provides only police assistance. The success of the transitional phase belongs to our people and our region. On that note, I take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of Solomon Islands, to express our profound gratitude and appreciation to all our regional neighbours. We thank them very much.

Multilateralism remains a cornerstone of Solomon Islands' foreign policy. Country ownership remains a foundation of any cooperation and programme. This year, under United Nations Development Programme leadership, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Pacific (2013-2017) was launched. The \$292 million programme covers 14 Pacific countries and territories, all with the same priorities. We call on the United Nations to align itself with Solomon Islands national sustainable development strategy 2011–2020. It is for that reason that over the years we have called for an enhanced United Nations country presence. We renew the call to upgrade the United Nations Development Programme country office from the level of deputy resident representative to that of resident representative.

A peaceful, just and stable democracy is critical for sustainable development. Solomon Islands continues to invest in strengthening its governance system. A political party integrity bill is being introduced in our national Parliament. The political party bill aims to give more power to our electoral commission to properly manage our national election process. We are also putting in place a sustainable, cost-effective and inclusive voting registration system. That is an expensive exercise; we have sought partnership with the United Nations, the European Union and Australia. We thank our partners for their ongoing support to our electoral reform programme. That assistance complements work done on e-governance. Solomon Islands this year established a metro area network as a single secure network connecting 85 Government

offices. We hope that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Government's computer machinery.

Solomon Islands would like to see a strong United Nations. We are encouraged by the Assembly's commitment to achieving real progress on reforming and revitalizing two of our principal organs, the Security Council and the General Assembly. We assure the Assembly of our support on those two endeavours.

My delegation also welcomes the modernization of the Secretariat Building and the conference rooms and the renovation of the General Assembly. We are also pleased to note that United Nations competitive exams will be held in my capital in the next two months. We are holding the exams for the third consecutive year. I thank the Secretariat, and in particular the United Nations human resources personnel, for their outreach, and sincerely hope the nationals selected will contribute to the diversity of the Secretariat.

Changing global realities have seen the emergence and expansion of South-South cooperation. This year, Solomon Islands established two new diplomatic missions in Cuba and Malaysia, respectively. On 18 April, Solomon Islands raised its flag in Havana. We also welcomed Cuba as a Pacific Islands Forum post-forum dialogue partner three weeks ago. Similarly, in Malaysia last month the first resident Solomon Islands Ambassador presented his credentials. We intend to strengthen our ties with the wider Asian and Pacific region, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and India. We have some 100 medical students in Cuba; the first graduates are expected in 2014. We thank Cuba for its cooperation.

For more than two decades, the General Assembly has called overwhelmingly for the lifting of the more than five-decades-old economic blockade imposed on Cuba by our friend and partner the United States of America. Confrontational lines will need to be replaced with dialogue and cooperation. We cannot look to the future if we cling to the past. We hope that a forward-looking policy will be embraced by the United States of America in easing the blockade.

I turn now to bilateral cooperation with Papua New Guinea, my Melanesian neighbour. Papua New Guinea continues to provide opportunities for young Solomon Islanders in terms of employment and scholarships. Visa-free work schemes have been launched, and trade relations continue to grow to new heights.

In my subregion, the Melanesian Spearhead Group — composed of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands — represents one of the most diverse regions of the world. A quarter of the world's languages are spoken by the more than 8 million people of the subregion. Enhanced free trade has unified the culturally rich diverse populations. Today, the Group is exploring other economic, security and political cooperation.

On Fiji, Solomon Islands welcomes the progress put in place by the Government of Fiji for the people to freely express themselves through the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2014. Solomon Islands notes the adoption of Fiji's new Constitution and wishes the Government and people of Fiji every success in determining their own future.

The inalienable right to self-determination is a key pillar of the United Nations. With respect to New Caledonia, members of the Melanesian Spearhead Group continue to support the Territory's self-determination process in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the relevant human rights instruments and the Noumea Accord. In regard to the Territory of French Polynesia, I take this opportunity to thank the General Assembly and all Pacific small island developing States for adopting by consensus resolution 67/265, on the self-determination of French Polynesia in May. The questions of the Territories of French Polynesia and New Caledonia are scheduled to be discussed by the Fourth Committee next week.

On human rights, Solomon Islands recognizes that all States bear the responsibility to protect their citizens. We believe that all States must take feasible steps to ensure that the rights of their people are protected. Solomon Islands, in that regard, condemns all human rights violations against civilians, wherever they may occur.

On the Middle East, we continue to watch with horror the daily carnage and the humanitarian catastrophe in Syria. We note with concern the preliminary findings of the United Nations investigation team confirming the use of chemical weapons. Solomon Islands welcomes the Russian and United States initiatives to destroy chemical weapons in Syria, and further supports all efforts to find a diplomatic and political solution to the civil war.

On Israel and Palestine, we support all international efforts for the two States to resume negotiations and achieve a just, lasting and sustainable peace.

Solomon Islands remains an arms-free State. We note that the use of conventional and unconventional arms in the wrong hands threatens international peace and stability. Solomon Islands welcomes the recently adopted Arms Trade Treaty and hopes that major players in the arms trade will sign that international framework. That will strengthen the Treaty. Solomon Islands continues to follow and assess the Treaty's progress.

On the question of the Republic of China, Solomon Islands call for the Republic's meaningful participation at United Nations specialized organizations. We would like to acknowledge the Republic of China's recent participation in the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as a guest of the organization's President. We recognize that as a first step. We continue to seek observer status for the Republic of China both at ICAO and at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Those requests mirror the observer status that the Republic of China currently enjoys at the World Health Assembly.

Solomon Islands continues to serve on the United Nations Executive Board. We welcome the new Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, and assure her of our cooperation. We note with concern that the UN-Women strategic plan for 2014-2017 is underfunded. We call for political and financial support for the plan. We support the Executive Director's call that priority be given to the economic empowerment of women in rural areas. We hope the Executive Board can also address UN-Women's representation vacuum in the Pacific.

Gender violence remains an issue in Solomon Islands, and my country joins the international community in condemning sexual violence.

We continue to seek an inclusive society. In partnership with an Australian entity, Solomon Islands organized national games for persons with disabilities in our country and other events. Although we still have a long way to go in creating a disability-friendly society, we remain determined to achieve that end.

Let me close where I began. The post-2015 development agenda is our shared agenda. We must remain united and work as one, with one aim, to deliver

one set of goals, under a single process with common but differentiated responsibilities. Present and future generations depend on what we do today.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Vete Sakaio, Deputy Prime Minister of Tuvalu.

Mr. Sakaio (Tuvalu): It is a great honour and pleasure to participate in the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly on behalf of the people and the Government of Tuvalu. At the outset, I would like to congratulate the President on his new leadership responsibilities; he has all the blessings and support of Tuvalu. I also wish to thank and acknowledge with profound appreciation the outgoing President and the continued assistance and support given by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the specialized organizations and their respective heads and staff. We are particularly grateful for our membership in the United Nations following a successful sixty-seventh session.

The new Government of Tuvalu, of which I am honoured to be Deputy Prime Minister, was elected two months ago. Just last week, the Government, in cooperation with development partners, launched a road map committing to mutual partnerships that will deliver and make a difference for the people of Tuvalu. The road map focuses on improving the delivery of vital basic services, strengthening good governance and enhancing local capacity to address Tuvalu's unique vulnerabilities and respond effectively to the impacts of climate change.

It is visionary and timely to focus our debate on the theme of "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage" as we approach the end of a journey called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We are now ready to chart a new path, which we are calling the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 agenda. And as we do every fall, we have gathered to reaffirm our spirit for and commitment to a renewed multilateralism and genuine collective action and to reflect, assess, address and plan for how to realize the Charter's principles of peace, justice, human rights, social progress and equal opportunity for all.

However, our global efforts cannot be fully universal until the United Nations pragmatically recognizes the international contribution that the Republic of China on Taiwan has made and the responsibility it has undertaken to achieve the noble goals of the United Nations, as well as the MDGs and SDGs, thus improving the standards of living of millions all over the world. The Republic

of China's significant international participation in United Nations specialized agencies, including in the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNICEF, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Maritime Organization and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, is critical as we collectively advance towards the post-MDG era and enter the era of the sustainable development goals.

Tuvalu also fully supports the lifting of the embargo against Cuba. That will allow the Republic of Cuba to further consolidate and enhance its cooperation with small island developing States (SIDS) like Tuvalu.

Looking back at our MDG journey, we have come across a myriad of crises and challenges, both natural and man-made. We know where we have come from, we know our capacities and constraints in facing those crises and challenges, and we know the direction we are heading in. We give great attention to how to address the many persistent and ongoing issues in their entirety and in their many forms, as we approach the finish line for the MDGs.

As we make the transition to the SDG stage and the post-2015 agenda, we take heed of the intrinsic lessons from the MDGs. First, the United Nations continues to be a beacon of hope and, through strategic advocacy and awareness campaigns, the Organization brings the real issues and current events into the consciousness of both the public and the membership in order to propel action and redress. Secondly, partnership is key to the success of this truly universal Organization. Working together cooperatively delivers much more that we can make happen on our own. Cooperation and collaboration with communities, businesses, think tanks, churches, philanthropists, regional groupings and not least each United Nations Member, reaffirms a true and sustainable union that should constitute the way forward for the SDGs.

The United Nations Charter should be mirrored in our national goals and priorities. Our vision for the new SDGs and post-2015 agenda must reflect a membership that is striving for the same goals — a world that embodies peace, not conflicts and terrorism; hope, not despair; opportunities, jobs and prospects for a decent life, not unemployment and welfare dependence; security and freedom, not insecurity and totalitarianism; equality, not autocracy; unity, not divisiveness; good governance and leadership, not tyranny; sufficiency,

not poverty; progress, not setbacks and regression; and empowerment, not constraint.

Let me reflect on Tuvalu's performance with respect to the MDGs as the deadline 2015 draws near. I am pleased to report that Tuvalu has made significant progress towards the achievement of its MDGs, despite the impact of the various global financial and economic crises on its small, vulnerable economy. In the 2012 MDG progress report, Tuvalu was assessed as being on track with respect to four of the MDGs: primary education, child mortality, maternal health and global partnership; as having the potential to achieve three MDG targets: gender equality, combating HIV/AIDS, and environmental sustainability; and as being unlikely to achieve the MDG on poverty.

The attainment of the MDG on poverty is a formidable challenge for the fourth-smallest country in the world. Tuvalu is poorly endowed in terms of natural resources and has almost no productive capacity. Tuvalu is highly dependent on aid, leasing gratuities and rental incomes derived from its national assets — air, sea and its domain — and remittances. We will continue to seek the invaluable support and cooperation of the United Nations and the donor community in our pursuit of attaining the MDG on poverty as we approach 2015.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women and youth is pursued at all levels of decision-making. In 2012, Tuvalu adopted a family protection bill that aims at safeguarding our women and girls against sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence and rape. The bill has facilitated access to justice and improved the provision of services to women and girls who have been subject to discrimination and violence, whether in the public or the private sphere.

Tuvalu is also fully committed to the strategic implementation of the outcomes of the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. As we approach the International Year of Small Island Developing States, in 2014, and the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Apia, Samoa, we urge the United Nations to ensure that SIDS status and SIDS-specific recognition are truly sanctioned in the Organization's bureaucracy. We have seen enough General Assembly resolutions that address SIDS issues in a vague and abstract way, and yet the entire United Nations

development agenda includes no specific treatment of SIDS. The 2014 SIDS Conference must be decisive on establishing special windows for partnerships on SIDS that are designed to ensure not only their sustainable development but also their long-term security and survival.

Tuvalu appreciates the decision of the Economic and Social Council to defer consideration of Tuvalu's graduation from the least developed country (LDC) category under the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020. That said, however, Tuvalu humbly submits that while the threshold criteria of LDC graduation — the human development index, per capita gross national income and the economic vulnerability index — are well established, it would simply be irrational and irresponsible if application of any two of the three criteria was the only measure of consideration for graduation. Given Tuvalu's extreme vulnerability as a SIDS, we believe that our failure to achieve a satisfactory EVI level carries more weight for us in considering our possible graduation from the LDC list.

Climate change and sea-level rise have had dire consequences for Tuvalu's situation. Our survival and security, and our children's future livelihood, have been seriously compromised by the international community's inaction on climate change. The fifth assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*, has further confirmed to the world the stark predictions for SIDS like Tuvalu in the wake of climate change and sea-level rise. The challenge we put to the Assembly is, What else are we waiting for? What is the relevance of talking about post-MDGs and SDGs when the world continues to fail in its duty and obligations to urgently reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and provide genuine adaptation? Ensuring Tuvalu's long-term security means saving the whole world.

Climate change is no longer an environmental or political issue. It is a borderless security issue for humankind. Everyone must act to urgently reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and provide adaptation. Among the papers distributed to the Assembly is the 2013 Pacific Islands Forum Communiqué, which contains the Majuro Declaration for Climate Leadership, which Tuvalu strongly supports. Through the Majuro Declaration, the Pacific island leaders commit their full responsibility and leadership to making their own

contribution, however minuscule, to global efforts to cut greenhouse-gas emissions. If we SIDS in the Pacific can do it, surely others can, too.

The world must save Tuvalu and the SIDS in order to save the whole planet. We urge perseverance, with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol as the primary international and intergovernmental instruments for negotiating the global response to climate change. We call on all parties to work diligently to reach a legally binding framework for curbing greenhouse-gas emissions at the upcoming nineteenth session of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, in Warsaw. The framework should also include mechanisms dealing with climate-change-related loss, damages and insurance for SIDS, and should provide adequate and accessible financing for adaptation support to SIDS such as Tuvalu. Tuvalu also applauds and fully supports the leadership of the Secretary-General and his commitment to hosting a climate change summit next year.

For Tuvalu, the climate change issue is predominantly linked to the oceans. For a nation surrounded by seas, an ocean SDG is pertinent, for obvious reasons. Seventy per cent of the planet's surface is covered by oceans, which are the cornerstone of Earth's life support system. The uncontrolled and increasing carbonization of our oceans and their biodiversity are genuine issues of concern and must be urgently addressed. At the same time, radioactive spillovers of land-based nuclear wastes into the oceans, especially those that have followed recent incidents, must be dealt with properly and prevented from happening again. Here, the principle that the polluter pays should be the basis for efforts to clean, mitigate and prevent contamination of the oceans.

Tuvalu is currently heavily dependent on imported fuel and petroleum products for electricity generation and transportation requirements. That will continue in both the short and medium term. Many recommendations for alternative energy sources and technologies, whether solar, wind or wave, have been proposed but not fully implemented. Our energy sector has set itself the challenge of becoming 100 per cent renewable by 2020. We appreciate the support of the many donors we have had for alternative renewable sources of energy, assistance with formulating energy policy and promoting efficient energy sources. Science and technological capacity in Tuvalu also remain

underdeveloped, and we need relevant and simple technologies that can be made readily available and priced effectively, especially for LDCs and SIDS. The facilitative role of the United Nations as a repository of such technologies and practices within the Organization's networks and websites will prove highly beneficial.

Finally, as we approach the end of the MDGs and embrace the SDGs, we must pay attention to the nations with special needs, the poorest and most vulnerable, in making every effort to meet the MDGs and achieve a smooth transition to the SDGs. The scale of the challenges can be addressed only by reforming ourselves — the United Nations and each Member country. Delivering on the future we need and on our sustainable goals, delivering more and delivering better, will require increasing doses of great effort and discipline, perseverance and courage, tolerance and harmonious coexistence, multilateralism and interdependence on the part of us, the peoples of the United Nations.

In a couple of days, Tuvalu will celebrate its thirty-fifth year of independence. Can we tell our children and grandchildren a story of continued survival on our God-given peaceful islands? Or do we have to tell them that the world, under the United Nations, that noble body, can no longer save their future because of climate change and sea-level rise? As with great pride we celebrate the continuing vibrancy of democracy and the rule of law, and our political independence in Tuvalu, we also appeal to the world. Please save Tuvalu from climate change. Let the world save Tuvalu in order to save itself.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Edward Nalbandyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia.

Mr. Nalbandyan (Armenia) (*spoke in French*): I would like to join previous speakers in congratulating Mr. John William Ashe on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session and to thank the outgoing President, Mr. Vuk Jeremić.

During the past two decades, the international community has made great strides towards the development of a cohesive approach aimed at addressing the political, social and economic challenges that the international community is facing today. We need to analyse our commitments, keeping in mind the difficulties that we have encountered while

implementing the Millennium Development Goals. The world economic and financial crises are partially responsible for our straying from the charted path. However, they brought to light some of the underlying issues that had either been overlooked or underestimated and which turned out to be important for the overall success.

We are all aware that, in the context of interdependence and the growing interconnectedness of the world economy, no country can achieve the Millennium Development Goals in isolation. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development enriched our understanding of the ways of achieving the overall progress towards the political, social and economic development.

Armenia welcomes the inclusion of “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage” as the main theme of our deliberations in the current session.

(*spoke in English*)

Despite the fact that most of us share the understanding that the elimination of violence and terror is essential for building peaceful, sustainable and prosperous societies, peace seems to remain an elusive phenomenon in many parts of the world.

Armenia remains alarmed by the worsening of the humanitarian situation in Syria. The number of refugees Armenia continues to receive already exceeds 10,000, but tens of thousands of Syrian-Armenians remain in Syria, a country that had become their second home after the genocide of 1915, and they are struggling for their survival in unbearable conditions together with their fellow Syrians.

Armenia welcomes the unanimous adoption yesterday of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013), based on the agreement reached in Geneva between Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and United States Secretary of State Kerry. The resolution could lead to the elimination of chemical weapons and the exclusion of their use in Syria and pave the way for a political solution of the Syrian crisis, putting an end to the suffering of the Syrian people.

It is our strong belief that there is no alternative to the peaceful solution of conflicts. The resolution of conflicts requires political will and determination. Three months ago, on 18 June the Presidents of the three co-Chair countries of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

(OSCE) — Russia, United States and France — made a new statement on Nagorno Karabakh in the framework of the Group of Eight Summit in Enniskillen.

In Armenia, we welcomed that statement and affirmed that, like the co-Chairs, we continued to believe that the elements outlined in the statements of the Heads of State of the co-Chair countries over the past five years can form the basis for reaching a fair and lasting settlement of the conflict. We share the position of the co-Chair countries that those elements should be seen as an integrated whole and that any attempt to select some elements over others would make it impossible to achieve a solution. We absolutely agree that peoples should be prepared for peace, not war. Unfortunately, to date the Azerbaijani leadership has been doing just the opposite, increasing warmongering and anti-Armenian hate speech on a daily basis, even using the lofty rostrum of the United Nations for its purposes.

We absolutely agree with the Heads of the three co-Chair countries — which are also three permanent members of the Security Council — that the use of force will not resolve the conflict and that only a negotiated settlement can lead to peace and stability. However, through its unprecedented accumulation of offensive weaponry at a massive scale, Azerbaijan seriously endangers regional and international security, despite its membership in the Security Council.

Unlike Azerbaijan, Armenia has on several occasions reiterated its commitment to the principles of international law and, in response to the Enniskillen appeal of the Presidents of the United States, the Russian Federation and France, once again reaffirmed that commitment, particularly with respect to the non-use of force or the threat of force, equal rights and the self-determination of peoples and territorial integrity.

Azerbaijan keeps misinterpreting the 1993 resolutions of the Security Council — resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993) — the core requirement of which was the immediate cessation of all hostilities and hostile acts and the establishment of a durable ceasefire. Azerbaijan has not only failed to comply with the latter requirement, but further intensified its aggression and the military operations against Nagorno Karabakh and Armenia using mercenaries closely linked to notorious terrorist organizations. It is not surprising that since the ceasefire agreement was signed in 1994, the mediators,

the three permanent members of the Security Council, have never made another reference to those resolutions.

Azerbaijan is acting as if the international community shared its approach and as if it shared the approach of the international community. In reality, Azerbaijan continuously rejects all proposals of the internationally mandated OSCE Minsk Group co-Chair countries. Baku has rejected all versions of the Basic Principles of the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict proposed by the co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group, including those presented at the Kazan, Sochi, Astrakhan and Saint Petersburg summits. Baku refuses not only the Basic Principles, but also the confidence-building measures proposed by the co-Chairs on consolidation of the ceasefire, withdrawal of the snipers from the line of contact and the establishment of a mechanism for investigating ceasefire violations. Azerbaijan not only obstructs confidence-building measures, but also periodically organizes provocations on the line of contact with Nagorno Karabakh and on the border with Armenia, which has resulted in new casualties.

At the previous session of the General Assembly (see A/67/PV.19), I spoke about the Azerbaijani leadership's release and glorification of an axe-murderer named Ramil Safarov, which was strongly condemned by the entire international community and by the human rights commissions of the United Nations and other international organizations. Even today, more than a year after Safarov's release, the Azerbaijani leadership continues to declare that what they did is just and right and dares to criticize the stance of the international community. That clearly demonstrates the deepening gap between the Azerbaijani leadership and the international community in terms of perceptions of what is good and what is bad.

Most recently, Azerbaijani authorities at the national level have ostracized the eminent Azerbaijani writer Akram Aylisli for publishing a novel in which he talks about the pogroms against Armenians in Baku, Sumgait and other parts of Azerbaijan. Aylisli's books were publicly burned, and the writer had to leave the country after receiving death threats.

Just last week the Azerbaijani leadership once again came up with new threats against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh and made claims to Armenian territories, including its nearly 3,000-year-old capital city, Yerevan. Notwithstanding Azerbaijan's destructive

stance, Armenia will continue to make efforts towards the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict exclusively through peaceful means and on the basis of the purposes and principles and norms set forth in the United Nations Charter and the provisions of the statements made by the Presidents of the three co-Chair countries' at L'Aquila, Muskoka, Deauville, Los Cabos and Enniskillen.

In March, the Human Rights Council adopted by consensus a resolution initiated by Armenia and co-sponsored by over 60 countries on the prevention of genocide. The recognition, condemnation and prevention of genocide remain a priority for Armenia, and we will take the necessary actions to prevent new occurrences of the crime of genocide, while keeping the issue of responsibility for crimes against humanity and the denial thereof high on its agenda. As the nation that survived the first genocide of the twentieth century, Armenia unequivocally welcomes the clear position adopted by the States Members of the United Nations that precludes any possibility of immunity or pardon for perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

In May 2013, Armenia assumed the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, a regional organization that is a key partner of the United Nations in our shared global quest to advance the principles of fundamental freedoms, the defence and promotion of human rights and the continuous efforts for peace and security.

Cooperation between the two organizations is also well established in the fight against racism, xenophobia, hate speech and intolerance. Those issues are also among the priorities established during Armenia's chairmanship, elaborated in response to the challenges that Member States of both the United Nations and the Council of Europe are facing today.

Armenia is committed to strengthening the institutional capacities of the United Nations. In that regard, we support the United Nations reform process and are ready to contribute to it. We believe that the reforms provide an opportunity to enhance the role of the Organization in addressing the crucial issues facing the world.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Teguedi, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Mauritania.

Mr. Teguedi (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am particularly pleased to present our warmest

congratulations to the President on the occasion of his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. I am convinced that he will spare no effort to strengthen the gains made and to firmly establish international peace and security, so as to create an international system in which all of mankind enjoys well-being, stability and progress. The President's experience and political skills in heading his country's Mission for over a decade are also factors that make him a natural leader during this session.

I should also like to praise the efforts of his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, and commend him for his interest in the problems of the African continent and his efforts to strengthen the principle of dialogue as an effective tool for consultation and the role of the rule of law and good governance.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his unflagging efforts in the service of international peace and security and his focus on climate change issues and the fight against famine and deadly diseases, as well as on realizing the Millennium Development Goals.

Last June, in the important speech that the President delivered to the General Assembly on the occasion of his election to preside over the sixty-eighth session (see A/67/PV.87), he outlined his ambitious programme of action, which takes into account the participation of women, youth and civil society in the post-2015 development agenda, the role of South-South cooperation, the role of human rights and the rule of law, and the role of information technology and communication in the proposed development agenda. Those are important topics, and we thank him for including them.

Over the past two decades — in step with the *Human Development Report* — some developing countries have experienced substantial economic change. However, the majority of developing countries, especially the least developed ones, remain very far from achieving the Millennium Development Goals. On the threshold of 2015, it behoves us today to implement plans and programmes that take into consideration the failures of the past and the challenges of the future and to effectively prepare the post-2015 development agenda.

In that regard, we call upon the wealthy countries of the world to live up to their promises regarding the financing of development programmes in those developing countries that have such pressing needs.

We also call upon those countries to implement an appropriate policy, under the supervision of the United Nations specialized agencies and in cooperation with the international financial institutions, that will be based primarily on the following: support for health and education systems; debt forgiveness; the transfer of the necessary technology; the improvement of North-South trade; the removal of customs duties on exports from the developing countries, especially the least developed countries, to the markets of the North; the promotion of South-South cooperation, which will probably strengthen economic cooperation between group members; the establishment of new international mechanisms that will be charged with overseeing regional complementarity, strengthening South-South relations, as underscored in the aforementioned *Human Development Report*, which will facilitate the sharing of know-how, lessons learned and technology transfer between those countries.

Under the leadership of the President of the Republic, Mr. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, our Government is working to improve the standard of living of our citizens, despite our limited resources. In order to attain that objective, the Government has pursued a rigorous educational policy, based on compulsory and widespread primary education and the strengthening of a modern secondary education with free higher education in several different fields. Basic schooling is now available in almost all of our villages and cities. That was made possible thanks to the Government policy of limiting anarchic urbanization by merging numerous villages.

With regard to secondary education, all the departments throughout the country now have middle schools and many have high schools. That has allowed the children of people living in remote villages to continue their secondary schooling. High schools reserved for the most promising students were also established to take advantage of their talents and steer them towards specializations that meet the needs of the labour market. Higher education took a large qualitative step forward. A university campus has just been completed in Nouakchott. An Islamic studies university has been opened in the interior of the country, as well as four specialized schools of higher education, including the School of Mines, the Polytechnic, the School of Agricultural Training and Public Works. The Faculty of Medicine has been strengthened and endowed with the means necessary to cover the shortfall in medical

personnel in our country, in addition to the creation of four medical schools to train nurses and senior technicians.

Health, which goes in line with education, is a major challenge for developing countries and the African continent in particular. Given that, our Government has allocated an important percentage of its budget for that vital sector and has created national programmes to fight against such deadly diseases as AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. In that connection, we have created four new fully equipped hospitals in various parts of the country, in addition to 70 primary-care clinics. We must also note the construction of a specialized oncology hospital, which is considered to be among the most sophisticated in the region. The health-care sector also works closely with United Nations specialized agencies in organizing ongoing vaccination campaigns for children under 5 years of age.

As with most developing countries, our country depends on imports of basic goods from the global market, which weighs heavily on our balance sheets, especially since the prices of such products are subject to fluctuations in the world market. Aware of that, our Government has pursued an economic and financial policy that would alleviate the effects generated from outside. Our agricultural sector has therefore been able, thanks to the policy, to fulfil 60 per cent of the country's rice needs and 37 per cent of its need for other grains. Wheat crops, which were recently introduced, have begun to produce.

In that context, a sugar-cane cultivation project was launched to make sugar available locally. Generally, our Government has worked tirelessly in all sectors to ensure that its citizens can live in dignity. A free-trade zone has been created in Nouadhibou — the economic capital of the country and the third-largest city in population — which will transform the region into an important economic centre benefiting the country and the region as a whole.

In order to strengthen good governance and the fight against corruption, the Inspector General and the Court of Auditors have been revitalized since President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz took office. Significant funds in some sectors have been poorly managed, but have been reimbursed to the State. Civil servants have been made accountable for the poor allocation of certain resources. Agreements were reached to end the no-bid contract system. The lack of competitive bidding

has undermined equity among the various economic drivers of national and international markets.

Transparency now prevails in the recruitment of civil servants — thanks to competitive examinations — fostering equality among men and women and providing hope to young people. Merit-based candidate selection is now possible, leading to an end to nepotism and favouritism.

The Government's austerity policy, including its reduced administrative budget and increased investment budget, has contributed to the self-financing of the majority of the country's development projects. The policy has also led to reduced unemployment, which now hovers around 10 per cent. The policies have also contributed to an increased growth rate, which should attain, according to current forecasts, more than 6 per cent by the end of the year. We have also been preparing for municipal and legislative elections slated for the end of the year. That will strengthen good governance and allow our citizens to participate in the process of defining the country's future, and setting political and economic priorities for our country.

Our foreign policy is solidly based on a concern for strengthening good-neighbourly relations and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. We will work with our Maghreb region — Arab and African — with a sense of duty towards international relations and issues so as to disseminate a culture of peace, encourage dialogue and the resort to wisdom, and facilitate the role of diplomacy as a means of resolving conflicts and avoiding or ending war.

President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, who has not wavered in exerting his utmost efforts, as the Head of the African Union Peace and Security Council, to find solutions to certain conflicts in the African continent, including in Côte d'Ivoire, Libya and Mali. He has played a very important role, through his presence at subregional and international summits, focusing on peace and security around the world.

For a number of years, the African Sahel region has been subjected to all types of cross-border organized crime, including drug trafficking, arms trafficking, illegal immigration and kidnapping. We reiterate our call to the international community to support the States of the region in tackling those dangers, which have recently threatened the very existence of a States Members of the United Nations. That clearly shows

that the States of the Sahel cannot tackle the scourge on their own.

Based on its sense of duty, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, which has stood by Mali since the beginning of the crisis, quickly opened its borders to our Malian brothers and sisters who were seeking refuge in our territory. We have provided and continue to provide shelter for those individuals. Our capital, Nouakchott, over many months hosted a series of negotiations between the Malian provisional authorities and the Azawad groups, which led to the signing of the Ougadougou accords, thus facilitating the preparations for the presidential elections. We take this opportunity to express our sincere congratulations to the people of the sister nation of Mali and the hope that the changes will lead to a new era of well-being, security and progress.

Our country strongly condemns the horrific terrorist attack on the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, which cost the lives of dozens of individuals.

For more than two years, certain countries of the Arab region have experienced instability owing to the so-called Arab Spring. Our country, respectful of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, expresses its full solidarity with the peoples of those countries.

With deep concern and worry, we are following the most recent developments in the Syrian Arab Republic. We invite all stakeholders to refrain from violence and any escalation of violence and, instead, to follow the logic of dialogue, aimed at finding a peaceful solution so as to spare the brotherly Syrian people from suffering and tragedy. At the same time, with respect to the preservation, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Syrian territory, it is our hope that the mission of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on the Syrian crisis, will achieve success. It is our firm hope that a swift solution can be found that will bring an end to the bloodshed, destruction of infrastructure and economic devastation in sisterly Syria.

We hope that the people of Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Tunisia can quickly conclude their transition periods and build democratic institutions that will guarantee the rights and dignity of their citizens in an atmosphere of well-being and prosperity.

Our country pays close attention to the situation in Western Sahara. We reaffirm our support for the

endeavours of the Secretary-General and his personal envoy in their search for a definitive, lasting, fair and comprehensive solution that is acceptable to both parties. Such a solution would bolster peace and security in the region and facilitate the building of a prosperous Arab Maghreb that is in step with the legitimate aspirations of its people.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is considered a source of hostility and a threat to peace and security in a vital and critical region of the world. It remains so in spite of the legal framework and general conditions for the settlement of that dispute that have been established over the years by a series of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Those foundations were recently further backed by the Arab Peace Initiative based on the land-for-peace principle. In spite of all of that, the conflict continues, as it has done for too long.

We welcome resolution 67/19, of 29 November 2012, whereby the General Assembly granted Palestine the status of non-Member observer State in the United Nations. We hope that that resolution will mark the beginning of a new era that will see justice done for the Palestinian people and their rights restored through the establishment of their independent and sovereign State along the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That would put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, which dates back to the inception of our Organization.

Based on the need to ensure justice, credibility and equity in the relations between the two parties to that conflict, and out of respect for the relevant resolutions and decisions under international law, the international community should live up to its historic responsibilities with regard to Palestine. We reiterate our condemnation of the ongoing blockade against the Gaza Strip, and we condemn the massacres perpetrated by the Israeli war machine against Palestinian civilians and the destruction of their facilities. We welcome efforts, most recently by the United States Administration, seeking the resumption of negotiations between the two parties. We hope that those efforts will contribute to the realization of the Palestinian people's simplest right: the establishment of their independent State.

The commitments made by the international community through the United Nations will go unrealized if the people of the world are unable to fulfil their potential for development, especially in developing countries, to live lives of dignity and freedom, and to

enjoy justice and equality — the very lofty principles for which our Organization was created. These are the only guarantees of our success.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Aurelia Frick, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Education and Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Frick (Liechtenstein): At the outset, let me convey the sincere condolences of the people and the Government of Liechtenstein to all those affected by the abhorrent terrorist attack in Kenya. Our thoughts are with the victims and their families.

For the second year in a row, the Assembly is meeting under the shadow of the crisis in Syria. It is the challenge of our time. No other situation in the recent past has so dramatically tested the United Nations ability to respond. And none has so starkly illustrated the limitations and the weaknesses of our multilateral system. Thousands of people have been killed in a brutal war, many of them women and children, and many of them victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Regional stability has been eroded. Millions of people are depending on humanitarian assistance, which is often impossible to deliver. Humanitarian access to those most in need, including the sick and the wounded, is being systematically denied owing to cynical political calculations. The humanitarian agencies have become a pawn in that perverted game.

Sadly, it took a particularly outrageous act to generate action in the Security Council: the use of chemical weapons, with hundreds of victims, including countless children. We are encouraged to see that the Council has decided to ensure the destruction of all chemical weapons in Syria. That should also provide new momentum to ensure that all remaining States join the Chemical Weapons Convention. Indeed, it should be a step towards the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction worldwide.

The use of chemical weapons in Syria has marked a watershed in the conflict. Nevertheless, that issue must not divert our attention away from the core problem: the fighting in Syria continues unabated, with blatant disregard for the civilian population and international humanitarian law. Weapons and ammunition cross the borders more easily than humanitarian assistance.

The recent breakthrough on the issue of chemical weapons shows that political progress is possible.

Hopefully, that will create the momentum for the Council to finally live up to its responsibility: to end the supply of weapons, pressure the parties to the conflict to accept a ceasefire, work towards a political solution and prepare the ground for accountability for past crimes. There may be different views on who used chemical weapons in Syria, but everyone agrees that that use constitutes a crime against humanity and a war crime that must not go unpunished. It must therefore be put before a court of law, together with the countless other crimes committed, for an independent and impartial investigation.

Syria is our biggest collective failure with regard to accountability in recent history. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has been operational for more than a decade now. During that time, we have not witnessed any other situation in which crimes have been committed so systematically, on such a scale and for such a long time without any adequate response from the international community.

It is well documented that crimes have been and continue to be committed by all sides. That is precisely the type of crisis for which we established the ICC, and it is precisely the type of situation that led us to give the Security Council the competence to refer situations to the Court. In its recent resolution 2118 (2013), the Council made a limited statement on accountability. More determined and more concrete action must follow. A referral to the ICC will ultimately also contribute to a viable political future for the country, create accountability for those crimes, provide redress for the victims and establish the truth.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court has been the most significant development in international law for decades. Only the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty earlier this year has come even close in terms of significance. With 122 States parties, the Court has attracted a strong following. But the emergence of an effective international judicial mechanism also poses challenges. We have mandated the Court to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes under international law. And we have asked it to focus on those perpetrators who bear the greatest responsibility. Therefore, it cannot be surprising to anyone that the Court is dealing with individuals in leadership positions. We are satisfied that the Court follows the evidence, and that it does not shy away from investigating and prosecuting those in powerful

positions. It is therefore implementing its mandate and not politicizing the work it does.

Recent events in Syria have reminded us of the importance of the amendments to the Rome Statute adopted in Kampala in 2010. We added provisions that criminalize the use of poisonous and other gases, whether they are used in international or in internal armed conflict. It is troubling that those provisions have become relevant so quickly. But the biggest steps forward are amendments to crimes of aggression. They complement the prohibition of the illegal use of force enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. The most serious forms of the illegal use of force by one State against another will become a punishable offence before the ICC. The Court will thereby help enforce the core principle of the rule of law at the international level. With ratifications by Andorra, Cyprus, Slovenia and Uruguay earlier this week, we have come a significant step closer to our common goal, namely, the activation of the Court's policy over crimes of aggression in 2017. Liechtenstein was the first country to ratify the amendments, and we will continue to assist in the ratification process.

Liechtenstein firmly believes in the responsibility to protect populations from crimes of atrocity. Clearly, we have much work left to do in order to put that norm into practice. Our inability to respond to the crisis in Syria demonstrates a crucial weakness in the system: the use of the veto, or its threat, in a manner incompatible with the purposes of the United Nations. That can make the Security Council irrelevant when it is most urgently needed. During this general debate, the President of France suggested a common code of conduct for Permanent Members of the Security Council (see A/68/PV.5). We strongly agree with that proposal. All five permanent members should be able to give the world one public commitment, that is, that they will not use their veto to block action aimed at ending or preventing crimes of atrocity. That would be crucial to enhancing the Council's effectiveness and credibility. Unfortunately, we have not yet reached the point where we are able to bring the composition of the Security Council in line with the geopolitical realities of the twenty-first century. But the Council is also struggling to adjust its working methods to new challenges in order to better include the perspective of non-members in its decisions, which is a crucial ingredient for effective leadership. We will therefore continue our efforts to

promote accountability and transparency in the work of the Council.

The rule of law and accountability have made steady progress in the work of the United Nations. Nevertheless, that progress remains abstract for countless individuals who are vulnerable to atrocities. Sexual violence in conflict has become a rampant phenomenon, with women and girls at particular risk of becoming victims. The ICC has made the fight against that scourge a priority. Most important, though, we must do our part as States. Liechtenstein fully supports the United Kingdom's initiative to take greater action to end sexual violence during conflict. The fight against sexual violence must also play a central role in the larger context of the women, peace and security agenda. All of that requires stronger emphasis on the need to empower women. Many of our stated goals, from sustainable development to lasting peace, require the full participation of women. Otherwise, they are simply not attainable. In that regard, I am grateful for the leadership of the Secretary-General. We should all rally behind his call to make the twenty-first century the century for women.

The upcoming negotiations on the post-2015 agenda will be a crucial test of our ability to tackle challenges that will define the lives of future generations. We look forward to the leadership of the President of the General Assembly in that process. It is of course too early to offer a final assessment of the Millennium Development Goals. But we know that important unfinished business will be carried over into the sustainable development goals. Those new goals must be much more than just an extension of past efforts. They must aim at eradicating poverty and hunger once and for all, and finally ensure full equality between men and women. They must therefore be firmly rooted in human rights, respect for the rule of law and principles of good governance. The sustainable development goals will ensure sustainability only if they approach development in a holistic way. Most important, once we have agreed on our new goals, we need to become more serious in our commitment to achieving them. Let us therefore develop and apply an effective monitoring mechanism to show the world that we are indeed serious.

The post-2015 process will also be decisive in moving the General Assembly back to the centre of multilateral policy-making. Only the "G-193" provides the legitimacy and universality required for decisions

of global impact and for setting standards that apply to all. This is our General Assembly. Let us use it.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abubaker Al-Qirbi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Government of National Reconciliation of the Republic of Yemen.

Mr. Al-Qirbi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset to extend sincere my congratulations to Ambassador John Ashe, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. We are confident that he will ably guide the work of the Assembly during this session. I also extend my thanks and gratitude to Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the Assembly at the previous session, for his efforts. We wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his wise leadership of the Organization and for his interest in the developments taking place in the world and in my country.

It is a felicitous coincidence that the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly coincides with the celebrations in my country in honour of the September and October revolutions. Allow me, from this important international rostrum, to congratulate the great and valiant people of Yemen on this important occasion and to commend the country and people of Yemen for their resilience and their sacrifices in emancipating themselves from the yoke of colonization, injustice, oppression and despotism.

I also wish to congratulate the people of Yemen for wisely and patiently forging ahead on the path of change and modernization for more than 50 years and for their determination to rid themselves of all the remnants of the past. I commend them on their stewardship of the historic political change, chief among them the implementation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) initiative, with the support of international and regional communities. From this rostrum, I wish to commend my country's youth for its leadership throughout the transition process in building institutions, enhancing and promoting freedom and democracy, and building a new Yemen where justice, liberty and good governance prevail.

The values of justice, freedom and equality, respect for human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security are the main pillars and principles on which the United Nations was established. Because of our firm belief in those values and principles, we have always sought to implement and promote United

Nations instruments and to support peaceful coexistence among nations. Perhaps the lofty and noble purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and all its instruments served as inspiration in the political settlement and the comprehensive national dialogue that we have been pursuing for more than six months.

Those purposes and principles are also reflected in two aspects of the current situation. First is our desire for coexistence and consensus, our rejection of violence and our preference for the language of dialogue and logic and reason. The second aspect is the fact that Yemen is considered a unique model that should be followed, given the tremendous change being witnessed in our region. The acute crisis that befell Yemen in 2011 reflected internal understanding and tolerance and a desire for coordination with regional and international partners.

In that context, we wish to reiterate our thanks and appreciation to all those who stood by the people of Yemen and by the political settlement embodied in the Gulf initiative, chief among them the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud; the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the GCC Secretary General, Mr. Abdul Latif bin Rashid Al Zayani. I also extend my thanks to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and to Security Council members for visiting Yemen on two occasions.

As my country is a unique model among the countries in which the Arab Spring is unfolding, those visits have enhanced the new approach, which is based on the GCC initiative and Security Council resolutions on Yemen. We thank the five permanent members of the Security Council for their unified vision with regard to Yemen, which made it possible for us to forge ahead with the political process and crown it with success. We also extend our appreciation to the League of Arab States, the European Union, Germany and all the relevant international organizations and institutions, as well as to the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Yemen, Mr. Jamal Benomar, for his efforts to achieve reconciliation between the parties in Yemen.

As the Assembly is aware, my country has made great strides in the implementation of the GCC initiative and its mechanisms. We are now turning to the second phase, that of concluding the work of the comprehensive National Dialogue and forging ahead with our plan to shape our future. The results of this endeavour will lay the foundations for the establishment of a new, modern

Yemen where democracy, the peaceful transfer of power, the promotion of freedom, justice, partnership, equality and equal opportunities for all citizens prevail. Those foundations will enhance the authority of the State, the rule of law, security, stability and the unity of Yemen.

We are also forging ahead with strengthening security and stability in our country and restructuring the military and security institutions, so as to bolster their main national task — to be loyal to the State rather than to parties or individuals. We are certain that our brethren and our friends will assist us in our new endeavour, namely, the drafting of the new constitution and the holding of a referendum on it, as well as in our preparations for the next presidential and parliamentary elections.

The achievements being made and that will be made, in the ongoing political process depend heavily on the support of the international community and on enhanced partnership and cooperation between the international community and Yemen, especially as there are internal and external parties that continue to attack the will of the Yemeni people. Those parties are making every effort to obstruct the achievement of political settlements and to target all the factors of stability and the foundations of development in my country. Such acts require the appropriate international measures so as to deter and punish all those who are trying to defeat this unique model in the region.

There are a multitude of factors at play, particularly the increasing unemployment rate, growing levels of poverty, and poor social services in general. All those factors exacerbate instability and create a fertile environment for the actions of extremist groups such as Al-Qaida. However, eliminating them effectively requires all kinds of logistical, financial and technical support through practical programmes and plans that do address not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of those phenomena.

We need the international community's support in implementing our national counter-terrorism strategy. That is why the fulfilment of pledges by donor countries and the Friends of Yemen must be accelerated, particularly since the Government of Yemen has been working in partnership with donors to earmark and allocate all those funds to various development areas.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank all our donors, especially those who have already made good

on their pledges and financial commitments to Yemen. That is particularly important in view of the fact that Yemen, owing to its geographic location, social composition and economic status, has been plagued by various problems and challenges. They include the activities of Al-Qaida and of cross-border organized crime and national and international criminal groups trafficking in drugs, weapons and people, as well as the piracy off Yemen's coasts. Addressing all those problems requires international cooperation for the security of the country and the region as a whole.

We would also like to bring up the issue of refugees in Yemen, especially from the Horn of Africa. We have been hosting more one million of them, with all the economic, social and security difficulties that such a situation entails. We are therefore calling on the international community and relevant organizations to help us to deal with the issue and mitigate its negative impact on Yemen. We must find new ways and means to help the Government care for the refugees and help them to return to their homes, especially since those countries have lately seen their stability restored to some degree.

Conflicts and bloody events, especially in the Middle East, are contrary to the lofty goals of the United Nations, which is why the international community must revisit the structure and working methods of the Organization and make the reforms necessary to enable it to effectively discharge its responsibilities for the maintenance of international peace and security and to revitalize its role. In that regard, we should mention the despair and frustration of many Arab and Muslim nations over the failure to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine, arrive at a just solution to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict and put a stop to all the occupying Power's oppressive measures and practices and attempts to Judaize the holy city of Jerusalem, expand settlement activities, detain Palestinian citizens and excavate illegally around the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

We also wish to denounce the use of chemical weapons, especially in Syria, by any party. We call on all the parties in the Syrian conflict to stop the bloodshed, agree to a dialogue and to work towards a political settlement and reconciliation and reconstruction. We call on the international and regional parties concerned to intensify their efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement of the crisis. A "Geneva II" conference should be convened as soon as possible in order to put an end to the violence, killings and bloodshed in Syria. Recent events have demonstrated the challenges facing the United Nations in this area, particularly regarding the disagreement between permanent members of the Security Council, which was a pretext for certain groups to opt for unilateral action outside the international legitimacy represented by the United Nations. The Council needs thorough reform for it to be able to carry out its primary task, which is the maintenance of international peace and security and the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Concerning the brotherly country of Somalia and our support for it, we call on the international community to continue to stand by it in order to enable it to overcome its long legacy of conflict and suffering.

Finally, I would like to thank the President and the Secretary-General once again.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.