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Official Records

President: Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. John Baird, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada.

Mr. Baird (Canada): As we gather near Ground Zero, site of the World Trade Center mass murder, I wish first to honour the victims of terrorism. I honour all victims everywhere, including those killed and wounded at the Westgate Shopping Mall in Nairobi.

(*spoke in French*)

Tragically, we lost two Canadians in Nairobi, including one of our diplomats. There is no more fitting venue to honour the life of Annemarie Desloges and her service than right here at the United Nations. The crime of terror is an assault on all people. In its wake, the human family is one — united in pain, mourning and our resolve that we will never allow evil to triumph.

(*spoke in English*)

At this moment of grief, the oneness of humankind is the theme of my remarks today.

Allow me to begin with an observation drawn from the Canadian experience. The province of Newfoundland and Labrador was the last province to join Canada, but

it is the site of the earliest known European settlement in the New World. L'Anse aux Meadows is more than 1,000 years old. We consider the province's capital city, St. John's, to be the oldest English settlement in North America, dating back to 1497.

The early Newfoundland settlements are the subject of significant archeological activity. Among the artifacts commonly found is a three-handled drinking mug known as a *tyg*. The three handles are designed for sharing. During the seventeenth century, it was common to share eating and drinking utensils. Further research reveals that the *tyg* is not unique to Canadian and English history. On the contrary, cups with three or more handles are common to many of the world's cultures. Indeed, nearly three millennia ago, Homer wrote in the *Iliad* of a multi-handled mug. The *tyg* and its many counterparts around the world are tangible reminders not just of the fact that eating and drinking are social activities, but that, as long as human beings have inhabited this planet, sustenance and the necessities of life have been community endeavours. Human beings share out of necessity. We cooperate to survive. We form communities because that is our natural state. As Cicero observed, we were born to unite with our fellow men and to join in community with the human race.

Animated by the same spirit of community, the Charter of the United Nations declares that our goals include to live together, to be neighbours and to unite. The very first words of the Charter of the United Nations make clear that the Organization is a body of, by and for human beings. It begins, "We the peoples of the United Nations" — not "We the countries" or

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“We the Governments” or “We the political leaders”, but “We the peoples”. That is an important reminder of why and on whose behalf we are all here today.

At the United Nations, Canada targets its efforts on securing tangible results for the human family. It is much more important to consider what the United Nations is achieving than how the United Nations arranges its affairs. Canada’s Government does not seek to have our values or our principled foreign policy validated by elites who would rather go along to get along. The billions who are hungry, or lack access to clean water, or are displaced, or cannot read and write do not care how many members sit on the Security Council. But they do need to know that their brothers and sisters in humankind will walk with them through the darkness.

(spoke in French)

Peace, prosperity and freedom are the conditions that have been sought by human communities from the beginning of recorded time: to live in peace, to live in prosperity, to live in freedom.

(spoke in English)

Of those priorities peace is the foremost objective of the United Nations. It is no surprise that the Charter of the United Nations mentions the word peace four dozen times. Sadly, peace the word is easier to locate than peace the condition. Since the moment the Organization was created, not a day has passed without the human family being pained by war somewhere on the planet. Almost always, the suffering is felt by the most vulnerable among us. Far too often, that involves women and violence.

In the context of war, rape and serious sexual violence are war crimes. I have met girls who were victims of that very war crime, and their stories are absolutely horrific. The war criminals involved must be identified, pursued, prosecuted and punished. Earlier this year, Canada and other Group of Eight nations agreed to treat sexual violence in conflict as a violation of the Geneva Conventions. I applaud the United Kingdom and Foreign Secretary William Hague for their work in this very important area. But he would be the first to acknowledge that the fight to eradicate this crime has been led by women, including the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Ms. Zainab Hawa Bangura.

Tragically every year, millions of girls, some as young as nine years old, are forced into marriage. Since I began my remarks today, 100 children have been forced into marriage at a rate of 1,100 per hour, or more than 26,000 per day. The effects of early forced marriage are documented and beyond dispute. Early forced marriage harms health, halts education, destroys opportunity and enslaves women in a life of poverty. A young woman once recounted her wedding date. She remembered, “It was the day I left school”. No country is immune from this scourge.

(spoke in French)

This is a global problem — a problem for humankind. Forced marriage is rape — an act of violence against women. Early forced marriage is child rape — an act of violence against young girls. The practice is abhorrent and indefensible. We condemn it, even though some might prefer that we kept quiet. The discomfort of the public is of small concern, particularly in the context of a crime that calls to heaven for justice.

(spoke in English)

If the United Nations does not act to protect young girls, who will?

Another way to protect the vulnerable is to improve the health of mothers, newborns and children so that we can reduce the number of deaths. I would like to say how proud I am of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper for having led a global effort — the Muskoka Initiative — to reduce maternal and infant mortality and to improve the health of mothers and children in the world’s poorest countries. That is about half of the world’s population, and all of its potential.

While those efforts, to eradicate sexual violence in conflict, to eliminate early forced marriage and to improve maternal and newborn health are essential, we must do more than react to crises. We must invest in opportunities for women and young girls. We must ensure that women participate fully in all parts of our society and in all the countries of the United Nations. That will help us build a stronger, more secure, more prosperous and more peaceful world. It is in every nation’s self-interest to ensure every young girl realizes her full potential. And it is from the perspective of the human family, one family, that we must address other threats to peace and security.

Among the most urgent crises remains the violence in Syria. Canada’s position is clear: we support the

Syrian people, the innocent people caught up in this senseless violence and those who show great courage in working on their behalf. We will never support a brutal and illegitimate regime that has unleashed weapons of mass destruction on its own people. Nor will we tolerate extremism and terrorism as alternatives to Al-Assad's tyranny.

The people of Canada have been generous in helping those most in need. When success is achieved, I believe that it is important to recognize it. The near-impossible work of the World Food Programme must be applauded, and Canada has responded by being the second-largest single-country donor in the world. Its work in Syria is paramount and has not gone unnoticed. I also commend the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in providing assistance to the refugees fleeing that terrible conflict, as well as the generosity of Syria's neighbours in providing safe haven.

Canada joins the entire world in seeking a political resolution to the conflict. Canada supports a peaceful, democratic and pluralistic Syria that protects the rights of all communities. But let us not confuse a peaceful, negotiated outcome with equivocation or moral uncertainty. There can be no moral ambiguity about the use of chemical weapons, particularly against civilians.

Today, 30 September, is a dark reminder of the price of accommodation with evil. It is the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Munich Agreement, by which Czechoslovakia's freedom was sacrificed to appease the Nazi regime. The appeasers claimed they had won peace in our time. In fact, their abandoning of principle was a calamity for the world. Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor who was imprisoned at Auschwitz, has been even blunter:

“Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere. When human lives are endangered, when human dignity is in jeopardy, national borders and sensitivities become irrelevant.”

Just as we are not neutral or silent on the crimes being committed against the Syrian people, neither is Canada neutral on Israel's right to exist and to defend itself. There can be no bargaining over Israel's existence. While dialogue is a virtue, there can be no virtuous discussion with anyone wedded to Israel's destruction. Today, the Jewish people are masters of their own fate,

like most other nations, in their sovereign Jewish State. And like all other nations, Israel has the right to defend itself, by itself.

Canada fundamentally believes peace is achievable and that Palestinians and Israelis and their neighbours can live side by side in peace and security. We, like many nations, wish to see a prosperous Palestinian State living in peace with its Jewish neighbour. That is why, although at times we have fundamental differences on how statehood is achieved, Canada is providing significant assistance to build the institutions that are vital to the establishment of a viable future State. In the West Bank, Canada is contributing greatly to economic, security and justice initiatives.

Recent developments in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are indeed encouraging. I want to salute the leadership and courage of the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian Authority's President. I commend United States Secretary of State John Kerry for his personal leadership in this area. We must all commit ourselves to this cause, united by the prospect of peace.

I look forward to the day when Israeli and Palestinian children can live side by side in peace and security in a Jewish and in a Palestinian State.

Dialogue is important, yes. But our dialogue must be a prelude to action, and action must mean achieving results. Action must mean making a difference. If we take the recent statements coming from the regime in Iran, some observers see encouraging signs, but sound bites do not remove threats to global security. Kind words, a smile and a charm offensive are not a substitute for real action. We will welcome and acknowledge reform, if and when it comes. By the following test we will know when genuine reform has occurred: has there been real, measurable, material improvement in the lives of the Iranian people and in the security of the world? Not yet. We will judge the regime on the basis of its actions and results.

The five permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany have had five rounds of formal negotiations with Iran in the past two years. While everyone says the meetings have been productive, the fact remains we have not seen any change in Iran's actions. Next year, nothing would make Canada more pleased than to see a change in Iran's nuclear ambitions, a change to its terrible human rights record and an end

to its material support for terrorism, including for Hizbullah.

Now is the time for the global community to maintain tough sanctions against Iran so that the country takes a different path on its nuclear programme. The Iranian people want peace, and they are suffering great hardship because of their Government. Canada wants the Iranian people to be able to access a life of freedom and prosperity for themselves.

How do we as a human family achieve and maintain prosperity? We do so through free trade among open societies operating under transparent, consistent and fair rules. Canada continues to diversify its markets because it is a trading nation. We are aggressively pursuing free-trade agreements with other nations. Bounded by three oceans, with the second-largest land mass in the world, Canada is literally open to the world. We are both deepening existing economic relationships and building new ones. Whether with China, which is now Canada's second-largest trading partner, or the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, where Canadian trade and investment ties are dramatically increasing, or the Pacific Alliance, which provides new and exciting opportunities, or the European Union, where we are negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement, Canada and Canadians are supporting market liberalization. In the process, ordinary lives are becoming enriched and entire societies stronger.

But the quest for prosperity must never come at the expense of our commitment to freedom. Prosperity is inextricably linked to peace. After all, those who lack security usually lack the means to provide for themselves and their families. With economic opportunity, a fruit vendor in Tunisia may not have felt compelled to end his life seeking the dignity to provide for his own family. A young man in Afghanistan may never feel compelled to join terrorist elements simply to raise his children and ensure that their lives are better than the one he lived.

I will always remember the 7-year old girl that I met at Zaatari refugee camp, in Jordan. Her parents had made the difficult decision to leave their home and to seek refuge in another country, braving hardship because they were motivated, like all parents, by the desire to keep their family safe. I asked the young girl how she was doing. With tears in her eyes, she said simply, "I do not like it here. I want to go home." It was absolutely heartwrenching. And millions of people are in the same tragic position around the world — millions

of members of the human family who cannot even begin to contemplate prosperity until a more basic need, their need for security, is addressed.

The global family will never achieve the prosperity that is our full potential unless we address the peace and security concerns that constrain human opportunity. Everyone has an interest in contributing to the solution, because peace and prosperity ultimately ensure the freedom of the individual. That is why we need the people of these United Nations gathered here to promote that freedom: freedom from oppression, freedom from discrimination, freedom to worship, to think, to speak, to love, to believe — freedom to be.

Human freedom can be exercised and, sadly, limited in far too many ways. Religious persecution continues in too many places. Since we gathered here last year, the world has witnessed bombings of mosques in Iraq and Pakistan and Catholic churches in Tanzania; attacks against Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim places of worship in Burma and Bangladesh; the bloody persecution of Christians in Syria; attacks on Coptic Christian churches in Egypt; attacks on a mosque and on a Catholic church in Sri Lanka; the detention of Sri Lankan Muslim leader Azad Sally; the murders of Catholic worshippers in Nigeria; and the Iranian regime's ongoing persecution of the Baha'i.

Canada this year opened an Office of Religious Freedom. Its mandate is to promote freedom of religion and belief as a foreign policy priority, and to combat the enslavement into fear by those who seek to intimidate and undermine the right to worship freely in peace and in harmony. We reject the pernicious notion that human dignity can be sliced up, compartmentalized or compromised. In a pluralistic society, it is impossible to protect some human rights and freedoms while infringing others. All freedoms are rooted in the inherent dignity of human beings.

Whether the issue is religious freedom, sexual freedom, political freedom or any other freedom, some people ask: What business is it of ours? What interest do we have in events outside our borders? Our business is a shared humanity. Our interest is the dignity of humankind. Many assaults on human dignity have common roots. I refer to neo-fascist ideology masquerading in different forms, and the threat that it poses to individual freedom.

I spoke earlier of the anniversary of the Munich Agreement. What the signatories claimed as a triumph

of practical politics was in fact a craven capitulation that betrayed human dignity and bankrupted the peace it purported to secure. It was wrong then to underestimate and to appease fascism, just as it is now to underestimate its modern incarnation. Extremism that subjugates human dignity and crushes individual freedom beneath rigid ideology must be opposed for what it is.

One year ago, the world lost the great Somali poet known as Gaarriye. Although his pen has been silenced, the inspiring words remain. He wrote: “And tell them this: our purpose is peace; our password ‘freedom’; our aim, equality; our way, the way of light.” In other words, peace, prosperity and freedom — three universal human priorities. Like the three handles of a mug from which we all drink, they are three values that all humankind shares.

As I close, I cannot help but reflect on the three young girls, and my heart breaks for them: the child bride who said, “It was the day I left school”; the young girl who was a victim of rape and sexual violence; the refugee who said, “I just want to go home”. We are not here to achieve results for Governments or political leaders. We are here to protect and defend those three girls and 7 billion other members of the human family. Let us remember that as we embark on discussions to shape a new global agenda, focusing on those most in need.

I am confident that everyone here feels the overwhelming honour and privilege it is to serve our people. It is not without great challenge and responsibility, but we all must stand up and deliver on that unique mandate for the people, for it is the people who expect nothing less.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

Shaikh Khalid Bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure at the outset to congratulate Mr. Ashe on his election to preside over the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session and to pay tribute to his friendly country, Antigua and Barbuda. I am confident that his vast diplomatic experience, with which I am personally familiar, and thorough knowledge of international affairs will guarantee the smooth conduct and success of our work at this session.

I express my gratitude and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, for his skilful and judicious management of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly. I would like also to strongly commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his tireless efforts to strengthen the United Nations and uphold its principles despite formidable difficulties and increasing challenges. We pledge our full support to him in his endeavours to enhance the role of the Organization and its peacebuilding capacities in the face of such major challenges.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to the people and the friendly Government of Pakistan for the loss of hundreds of lives as a result of the earthquake that hit south-western Pakistan. We pray for their souls and extend our sympathy to their families. We condemn the terrorist act that targeted a commercial centre in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi, and deeply regret the scores of innocent victims who lost their lives as a result of that cowardly act.

The Kingdom of Bahrain firmly believes that it is imperative to link peace to development. That concept has been acknowledged in and by all United Nations bodies for decades, and must now be enhanced and implemented at all levels. That is why the Kingdom of Bahrain is working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, as a top priority of its development programme.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/68/1) presents us with an accurate and concrete portrait of global problems in all their complexity. Those problems require effective solutions, particularly as we approach the 2015 deadline. In our view, therefore, the President’s choice for the theme of this session, “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage”, is apt and well considered, calling as it does for a collective effort to attain the goals we seek, based on the recommendations contained in the report of the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*, in order to ensure sustainable development. It also suggests the creation of a monitoring mechanism, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, to follow up on all recommendations made by relevant conferences on issues related to sustainable development, for the benefit of future generations.

The Kingdom of Bahrain is located in the Arabian Gulf, a region of vital strategic importance that has been a crossroads of world civilizations since time immemorial. The countries of the region are experiencing one of the most prosperous eras in their history, building a society based on justice and development in every dimension — political, economic, social and cultural. As successive United Nations Development Programme annual reports have reflected, the region ranks high on the indices of human development. In that regard, we reaffirm our keen desire to continue making steady progress in development for the benefit of the peoples of our region, harnessing the formidable progress that has been made in information and communication technologies, as well as in dealing with issues pertaining to security, environment, natural resources and population.

As a vital part of the world, our region seeks to consolidate a new concept of regional security that emphasizes the region's geopolitical situation and considers security in relation to humanitarian needs, food and water. It also considers security in the context of existing coalitions that link the region to friendly countries through strategic and historic agreements that emphasize human, food and water security and that are designed to reinforce stability, enhance dialogue and promote a culture of peace, friendship and mutual respect.

We in the Kingdom of Bahrain and the other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have designated three important strategic pillars that guide our interaction with one another and help us to make progress, build healthy and sustainable relations with our neighbours, engage with the world at large and respond to new developments and challenges. Those pillars are axes for the world politics of today on a planet characterized by globalization and fruitful cooperation between its nations. In our view, therefore, the first pillar is regional partnership in the field of security, among ourselves and with our world partners. We in the GCC system work together to preserve our shared stability and security within a framework of coordination, cooperation and complementarity that results in the unity we seek. Our partnerships extend across the Arab and Islamic world. Here in the United Nations we continue to pursue such partnerships in the cause of maintaining world peace and security. We find political and economic solutions to many global problems within a multilateral cooperative framework

that encompasses other strategic partnerships through dialogue with political Powers and economic groups such as the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, the Russian Federation, China, Japan, India and the member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, with a view to playing an active role in consolidating the principles of international cooperation and friendly relations between nations and peoples.

In that context, our principal goal is to spare humankind the scourges of war, conflict and disasters. We therefore call for the establishment in the Middle East, including the Arabian Gulf region, of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and for compliance with the criteria and safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency, especially those related to nuclear safety. In that regard, we support the efforts of the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany to work with the Islamic Republic of Iran to reach a swift settlement of the issue of the Iranian nuclear programme issue, in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, while guaranteeing the right of all States to enjoy the fruits of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. We reiterate the importance of convening an international conference on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, in the Middle East, originally proposed for 2012, in accordance with the resolution adopted at the May 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Consistent with the principles and purposes we all endeavour to uphold in the context of our cooperation with the United Nations in order to improve stability in sensitive regions, we reaffirm our utter rejection of terrorism, extremism and violence in all their manifestations and forms, irrespective of their reasons, motives, justifications or sources. We also condemn all terrorist acts that threaten regional peace and stability, and noted the need to add groups such as the Lebanese Hizbullah to the list of international terrorist organizations, in view of their criminal acts aimed at terrorizing peaceful civilians and creating instability and chaos.

We are committed to seeking peace, cooperation and security for our countries, within the framework of both international and regional structures and organizations by cooperating with our allies from other friendly

countries to ensure freedom of maritime navigation in the Arabian Gulf and to protect commercial vessels from piracy off the coast of Somalia and the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Aden. We also contribute to peacekeeping and stabilization efforts in Afghanistan.

We stand by the sisterly Arab Republic of Egypt and support its efforts to achieve stability and security, rightfully defend its vital interests, implement a road map that can lead it to safety and propose clear steps to meet the aspirations of the Egyptian people and restore Egypt's leading role in the Middle East.

We also reiterate our principled position of unwavering support for and solidarity with the sisterly Kingdom of Morocco regarding its territorial integrity and a settlement of the Western Sahara problem, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The second of our three strategic pillars encompasses support for the principles of good-neighbourliness, non-intervention in the internal affairs of others, abiding by the provisions of international law and its instruments and peaceful coexistence. We are also eager to take advantage of opportunities to put those principles into practice, in responding to the challenges we face and transforming them into opportunities to protect the region from tensions, threats and instability.

The first of those challenges is the important task of putting an end to Iranian intervention in the internal affairs of the countries of the region and to its occupation of the three Emirates islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa. We ask that the repeated calls of the sisterly United Arab Emirates for a just solution to that question be heeded, either through serious direct negotiations between the two countries or by referral to the International Court of Justice for arbitration, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law. In the face of that challenge, we look forward to new, clear and positive statements and initiatives from the Islamic Republic of Iran that can help to end the tensions and instability in the region and contribute to confidence-building, cooperation and the establishment of friendly relations based on good-neighbourliness and mutual interests.

The second challenge concerns the Palestinian question, and the need to arrive at a just, permanent and comprehensive solution that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. That challenge has led to an important opportunity, the Arab Peace Initiative,

launched by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, and endorsed at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002. We still believe that that initiative presents an important opportunity to secure peace, security and a bright future for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples on the basis of coexistence, cooperation and good neighbourliness between the Arab States and Israel.

We look forward to overcoming wars and animosity. For centuries Arabs, Muslims, Christians and Jews lived side by side in the region and forged their common history in a framework of coexistence and tolerance based on mutual respect for each other's beliefs, culture and religion. The Arab Peace Initiative stipulates that the Palestinian people must enjoy all the full and legitimate rights enjoyed by other peoples of the world. It reaches out to the Israeli people with guarantees of security designed to reassure them against any threat or danger to their existence. In that respect, we fully support President Mahmoud Abbas in his sincere endeavours to achieve the aspirations of his people. He is one of the best leaders ever born in the land of Palestine and deserves our support in each of his steps toward the attainment of the desired peace.

Today, we reaffirm our support for the tireless and sincere efforts of United States Secretary of State John Kerry to relaunch the peace process between Israel and Palestine in order to reach a permanent solution on the basis of international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the two-State solution, the creation of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and any agreed swaps of territory between the two parties. We look forward to seeing an end to the oppression of Palestinians, the lifting of the Gaza blockade and to a halt in the building of settlements. We welcome the correct stance of the European Union whereby it refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of Israeli settlements built on Palestinian territory and suspends all financial dealings with such settlements.

The third pillar is the need to attain the aspirations of our peoples. Foremost among these are the need to raise living standards, to bring about peace and stability, and to ensure respect for human rights through pluralism, democracy and the participation of all in a continued dialogue that takes into account the cultural values of a society and the levels of political, economic, social and cultural development of its peoples.

Throughout the modern history and for over two centuries, the Kingdom of Bahrain has been eager to interact with its people and to engage in a dialogue with them based on full transparency and commitment. Ever since His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al-Khalifa assumed the leadership of the country, the Kingdom has pursued a steadfast policy of laying the foundations of a modern, independent, sovereign State based on sustainability, competitiveness, justice and a commitment to constitutional and legislative reforms. Such reforms have encompassed every aspect of political, economic, social and cultural life, as well as human rights and an enhanced role for women in building a society faithful to its values, culture, accomplishments and heritage.

The King's achievements are attributable to good governance and to his support for intellectual, political and organizational efforts to create democratic institutions that give everyone a chance to use their talents and creativity as active citizens of the contemporary world. That has made our country immune to the sectarian tensions and conflicts witnessed in many other countries of the region, notwithstanding the acts of violence perpetrated by some extremist and terrorist groups targeting security officers, residents and expatriates in their quest to spread terror and discord and to sabotage the national economy and development efforts. Such acts are being dealt with according to the law and justice system in a manner that protects the rights of all.

Convinced that Bahraini citizens have a role to play in building and developing their society, we seek to cooperate closely with national and international civil society and human rights organizations in an ongoing dialogue based on an exchange of experiences and opinions and in a spirit of cooperation, not confrontation. We are all parties to the same cause in which we all believe — support and respect for and protection of human rights. In that context, the Kingdom of Bahrain has achieved concrete results in the field of enhancing human rights, notably through the establishment of a commission for prisoners and detainees, a national fund to compensate those affected by events, and a general secretariat for grievances within the Ministry of Interior.

In that spirit, a historic initiative proposed the creation of an Arab human rights court that was endorsed at the meeting of the League of Arab States held in Qatar in March in response to the aspirations of

the Arab peoples. This initiative represents a qualitative stride for the region and conforms to the rule of law and similar practices in other parts of the world. For the first time in modern Arab history, we will have a court to establish a solid foundation for the protection of human rights in the Arab world.

Our national fund will compensate those affected by events, and the general secretariat will address grievances within the Ministry of Interior operating as an autonomous body within the framework of national laws and professional policing standards, as stipulated in the police code of conduct.

In response to the aspirations of the Arab peoples, the GCC countries have spared no effort to achieve peace and security and to restore stability in some Arab countries facing serious challenges of late. In that respect, in Yemen a GCC initiative led to the national consensus dialogue towards a peaceful settlement of the crisis, in line with the aspirations and expectations of the brotherly Yemeni people to achieve security and stability in their land.

Eager to see stability restored in the Syrian Arab Republic, and cognizant of the right of the Syrian people to choose their own political system, we support the current diplomatic steps towards destroying the Syrian chemical arsenal and the agreement reached in Geneva between the United States and the Russian Federation. We welcome Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) of 27 September, which calls on all parties concerned to take serious and concrete steps to address the Syrian crisis and its repercussions, particularly paragraphs 16 and 17 related to the transitional period and the implementation of the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/523, annex).

All of these efforts should be complemented by an integrated political process so as to meet the aspirations of the Syrian people to democracy and political pluralism. We call on the United Nations and the international community to shoulder their responsibilities by taking the appropriate deterrent measures to halt the serious violations of human rights to which the Syrian people have been subject, and to put an end to the crimes of genocide being perpetrated with all kinds of lethal weapons, which have claimed more than 100,000 martyrs, injured many more, and created millions of refugees and internally displaced persons.

I will not speak at further length, but I would like to assure the Assembly that the Kingdom of Bahrain,

out of a sense of international responsibility and in all honesty and sincerity, wishes to play an active role in promoting international cooperation and strategic partnerships with the international community. Bahrain looks forward to a better and brighter tomorrow in which individual dignity and fundamental freedoms are a reality, and an individual's just and legitimate rights are protected. Bahrain rejects conflicts and wars and seeks to maintain friendly relations with all countries of the world within the framework of respect for national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, as stipulated by the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Al-Moualem (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate Mr. Ashe, the President of the General Assembly, and his friendly country, Antigua and Barbuda, on his election as President at the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I wish him every success in conducting our work through his major and neutral role as President of the Assembly, like that of his predecessor, who avoided engaging the presidency in special political agendas.

Last year when I addressed the Assembly (see A/67/PV.19), we were compelled to address many events that had ravaged our country and our world. We were full of hope that the scene would change for the better this year. Unfortunately, the situation remains the same, and in some parts of the world has even deteriorated. Many countries continue to face political, economic and financial crises that exceed their ability to tackle them on their own. While the international community looked forward to effective international efforts to overcome those crises, today we bear witness to exacerbated and intensified problems.

That exacerbation is due to the hegemony and dominion that thwart peoples' capabilities. Such domination has escalated in a way that blatantly contradicts the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the norms of international law. Instead of settling regional and international conflicts by peaceful means, some well-known countries continue to pursue aggressive policies against certain nations. Political hypocrisy allows them to intervene in the domestic affairs of States under the pretext of humanitarian

intervention or the responsibility to protect. When such aggressive policies do not prove beneficial for the countries subjected, including my own country, Syria, those well-known States reveal their true beliefs and threaten blatant military aggression outside the mandates of the Security Council and certainly well beyond any international consensus.

Those same countries impose immoral, illegal and unilaterally coercive economic measures. In addition, they maintain paranoid policies aimed at spreading sedition and turmoil within pluralistic, harmonious national communities that had previously lived for hundreds of years in harmony, unity and understanding. Worst of all, those countries have launched major, destructive wars under the pretext of combating terrorism, even as they support terrorism in my country, in contravention of all United Nations resolutions and all human and moral values.

I ask the same question I posed last year: Is the international consensus on combating terrorism a serious commitment undertaken by States Member of the Organization, or is it mere rhetoric, written down but not put into effect by certain countries?

What is happening in my country has become clear to everyone. Yet some countries do not want to recognize that Al-Qaida, the most dangerous terrorist organization in the world, and its many offshoots — including Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the Islamic Brigade and many others — are fighting in Syria. While scenes of murder, manslaughter and even the eating of human hearts were seen on television screens worldwide, that did not affect the conscience of those who chose to turn a blind eye. In my country, the heads of innocent civilians have been grilled because they violated some extremist ideology and held views that deviate from those of Al-Qaida. In my country, murderers have dismembered human bodies while the victims were still alive and sent their limbs to their families because those citizens were defending a unified and secular Syria.

In Syria — as in those countries that daily violate basic human rights to life, livelihood and their own religious beliefs and political affiliations — any Syrian citizen who does not belong to that obscurantist *takfiri* ideology is doomed to be killed or maimed or to witness female relatives taken as captives on the basis of perverted concepts of religion that have nothing to do with Islam.

There is no civil war in Syria. It is a war against terror, which does not recognize values, justice or equality and disregards all human rights and laws. Therefore, confronting terrorism in my country requires the international community to act in accordance with the relevant resolutions on counter-terrorism, particularly Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). It must take all necessary and immediate measures to compel those countries that are known to finance, arm, train and provide safe haven and passage to terrorists from different countries to stop doing so.

The city of New York and its people have witnessed the devastations of terrorism. They were burned by the fires of extremists and suffered bloodshed, just as we are suffering now in Syria. How can countries hit by the same terrorism that we now suffer in Syria claim to be fighting terrorism throughout the world while supporting it in my country? Claims of the existence of moderate militants and extremist militants have become a bad and senseless joke. Terrorism means only terrorism. It cannot be classified as moderate terrorism and extremist terrorism. What should we call those who kidnap children in order to sell their body organs outside the country? How should we describe those who recruit children and prevent them from going to school and instead train them to shoot and kill? How would one describe those who spread perverted fatwas concerning sexual or incest-related jihad?

We were the ones targeted by poisonous gases in Khan al-Assal. We asked for an investigative mission and demanded that its mandate include the ability to determine who had used chemical weapons. However, the United States of America and its friends the United Kingdom and France prevented that and insisted that the mission be limited to deciding whether or not chemical weapons had been used. In Syria, we waited five months for the mission to come. When it arrived, it was withdrawn before the completion of its task as certain States had begun to beat the drums of war against Syria.

My country has accepted the praiseworthy initiative launched by Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation. By acceding to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Syria has proved its commitment against the use of such weapons. Syria also calls on the international community to shoulder its responsibility against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. Syria is known for fulfilling its obligations and commitments. Therefore, I assure the

Assembly of Syria's commitment to fully implementing the provisions of the Convention and to cooperating with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons as a State party to the Convention.

One challenge that we all still face is not knowing whether those who are supplying terrorists with such weapons will abide by their legal commitments, since the terrorists who used poisonous gas in my country received chemical agents from countries of the region and the West that are well known to all of us. They are the ones using poisonous gas on our military and innocent civilians alike.

Ending aggressive policies towards Syria is the first appropriate step on the road to a solution in my country. In the light of the continuing support being given to terrorism, whether in the form of arms, funding or training, any political solution will be misleading and a mere illusion. Syria has repeatedly stated that it is open to a political solution to its crisis. It is now up to those who claim to support a political solution for Syria to halt all practices and policies hostile to Syria and head to Geneva without preconditions.

On the basis of their national right to self-determination, the Syrian people have the exclusive authority to choose their leadership, their representatives, their future and a political system that will accommodate every sector of Syrian society, including those who have been deceived and beguiled onto the wrong path. We in Syria place no bets on any party but the Syrian people, all of whom are determined to reject all foreign interference in their domestic affairs and to defeat the advocates of sectarianism, extremism and terrorism. In my country, State policies are firmly tied to the aspirations of the people. Ballot boxes for free and fair elections remain the only way for the Syrian people to determine their own future, free from the pressures of terrorism and foreign control.

There remain those who do not want a political solution and always resort to aggression, either directly or through their agents on the ground. That is what is happening in Syria. As I mentioned, Syria is committed to a political solution, but that does not mean allowing terrorists to attack innocent civilians. It does not mean watching our mosques and churches be destroyed, as has happened in Homs and Aleppo and is happening now in the town of Malula, the only place in the world whose people still speak the language of Jesus Christ. What is happening to the churches and mosques is also

affecting the entire historical and cultural heritage of Syria and humankind.

Do those representing the Member States in the Assembly know that terrorists from more than 83 countries are engaged in killing our people and our army in the name of global *takfiri* jihad? Furthermore, are some Member States entitled to demand that the Syrian State ignore its constitutional responsibilities to protect its citizens and preserve its unity, sovereignty and independence? The war on terror is not only Syria's war. One day, those terrorists will return to their countries, and then no country in the world will be safe from that terrorism that recognizes no borders or geography.

The events in Syria have created humanitarian needs that continue to grow in several key sectors. The immoral, inhumane and unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union have worsened Syrian citizens' living conditions at a time when my Government is working with the United Nations and international organizations within the framework of a response plan to meet the basic needs of citizens, particularly those who have been forced to leave their homes. It should be noted that many of our people have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries in great numbers owing to the activities of armed terrorist groups in border areas. Regrettably, in some of those countries displaced Syrians have been put in military training camps and places resembling detention centres.

From this rostrum, I appeal to Syrian citizens to return to their towns and villages, where the State will guarantee their safe return and dignified livelihood, far from the inhumane conditions in such camps. I assure the Assembly of our readiness to make every effort to deliver aid from international organizations to all Syrian citizens without discrimination, wherever they are, in compliance with resolution 46/182, while respecting Syria's sovereignty and independence.

The developments in my country should not make us lose sight of Palestine and the Syrian Golan. The Syrian Arab Republic affirms its natural right to full sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan up to the line of 4 June 1967, and emphasizes its rejection of all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to change its natural demographic and geographic features in clear violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981).

Syria also reaffirms its support for the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their rights of return and of self-determination, and to establish an independent State on their land, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Now that Syria has acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, my country renews its call on the international community to work to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. In that regard, we would remind the international community of Syria's initiative, taken at the end of its non-permanent membership of the Security Council in 2003, and call on the Security Council to adopt it.

Syria stresses that establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East will be unachievable without the accession of Israel, the only nuclear Power in the region, to all treaties banning such weapons, and without its agreement to put its nuclear facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. At the same time, we emphasize the right of all countries to acquire and develop nuclear technology for peaceful purposes, in accordance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In that regard, Syria condemns the fact that the United States and Israel continue to block the holding of the international conference on establishing a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East that was scheduled to take place in 2012.

My country calls on the United States, the countries of the European Union and others to refrain from taking immoral unilateral economic measures that contravene the rules of international law and the principles of free trade. We therefore call for the lifting of the blockade that has been imposed by the United States on Cuba for decades. We also renew our call for lifting and ending all unilateral coercive measures imposed on Syria and the peoples of countries such as Venezuela, Belarus, Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

We hope that the United Nations will lead the peoples of the world towards a better future, so that they may achieve their aspirations for prosperity, development and food self-sufficiency, free from all forms of tension, confrontation and war, thus fulfilling the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which upholds the sovereignty and equality

of all the rights and duties of all Member States. In that regard, my country welcomes the efforts of the United States and Iran to bridge the gap of mistrust between the two countries, and hopes that this will be reflected constructively and positively in the stability of international relations.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan.

Mr. Meredov (Turkmenistan) (*spoke in Russian*): At the outset, allow me to express our sincere gratitude for the honour of addressing the General Assembly from this rostrum. I bring greetings from His Excellency Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, who wishes the General Assembly the best of luck at this session. I congratulate Mr. John William Ashe on his election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session and wish him all the best in fulfilling his forthcoming tasks. I would also like to thank Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-seventh session, for his skill and effectiveness in that post.

Turkmenistan considers this session to be an important phase in the process of consolidating the efforts of the international community to strengthen universal peace, stability and security by adopting meaningful decisions on sustainable development and to counter emerging challenges and threats. We believe that strict adherence to the principles and norms of the Charter of the United Nations is the main prerequisite for ensuring long-term peace and strategic stability.

In that belief, Turkmenistan adheres to a steady and resolute policy of peace, good-neighbourliness and the active promotion of peacebuilding processes. As a matter of principle, we reject the use of military force as a tool of foreign policy and international relations. Our country is convinced that solutions based on the use of force are doomed to fail. They neither eliminate the causes of conflicts nor create conditions for adequate responses to the many issues that arise from military action. Therefore, at the heart of Turkmenistan's policies is the will to resolve any situation by peaceful, political and diplomatic ways and means, which it considers to be the main legitimate resources available within the United Nations. This approach is based on our common goal to establish a world without conflict.

At the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, Turkmenistan's President launched an initiative aimed at the adoption of a United Nations declaration on prioritizing political and diplomatic ways and means for the resolution of international challenges. Today, the elaboration of such a document has become a top priority. Turkmenistan therefore reaffirms its firm desire to engage in a meaningful discussion on this initiative with all interested Member States. We are convinced that the adoption of such a declaration would help to expand and strengthen the legal basis for the work of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other United Nations entities dealing with issues relating to world peace, stability and security.

The challenging processes unfolding in today's world call for a responsible, thoughtful, effective and efficient approach on the part of the United Nations. That is also linked directly to the important challenges of disarmament. By playing an active role in the multilateral dialogue on disarmament issues, my Government is demonstrating its firm commitment to complying with the core international norms regulating the disarmament process and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction through practical action. Following this course of action and taking into consideration the need to energize the discussion and meaningful consideration of disarmament issues, Turkmenistan proposes the convening in 2014 of a high-level international meeting on disarmament issues. We are prepared to create all the necessary conditions and to provide the appropriate infrastructure for this meeting in our capital city.

Nowadays, problems related to strengthening peace and stability and to ensuring the stability of countries and nations are among the most important topics in global politics. Their resolution will depend primarily on the establishment and effective legal and organizational operationalization of international political cooperation. In this context, we advise the General Assembly at this session to embark on the consideration of issues relating to the improvement of various forms of multilateral interaction that could serve as a political platform for finding mutually acceptable decisions on urgent regional and international policy matters.

It should be noted in that regard that the United Nations fulfils its purpose. For example, the establishment of United Nations preventive diplomacy centres in various regions of the world has become a

highly effective form of joint work to strengthen security, prevent conflicts and eliminate their underlying causes. It is well known that the first such centre, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, based in Ashgabat, opened in December 2007. In our view, the experience of creating new mechanisms and institutions aimed at forming a system of international interaction at the global and regional levels must and should be replicated by States Members of the United Nations.

Taking into account the need to enhance the effectiveness of inter-State contact at the regional level, Turkmenistan has launched a forum of peace and cooperation, aimed at establishing a standing mechanism for political dialogue in Central Asia. We believe that the forum will contribute to the elaboration of consensus-based approaches to finding solutions to the most important issues relating to the present and future development of Central Asia and its neighbouring regions. Moreover, the forum could become the basis for the establishment of a consultative council of the Heads of State of Central Asia. We are convinced that the development of new formats for political interaction among States within the region, coupled with the effective functioning of United Nations regional structures, will provide a reliable foundation and stability for the entire architecture of inter-State relations in Central Asia.

To a great extent, attaining the goals of comprehensive and universal security will depend on ensuring security in the sphere of energy. Furthermore, the achievement of that goal is one of the most important components of a stable world economy and serves to protect it against distortions and disruptions. In that connection, the development of an international mechanism that provides for a set of guarantees for the global energy supply is a task of paramount importance. It is also necessary to underscore the importance of the joint work and coordinated efforts of all Member States aimed at developing and adopting consolidated approaches to the solution of energy security issues.

The establishment by the United Nations of a new universal international legal tool kit is a key element of that process. It should, in our view, consist of the following three major elements: a multilateral United Nations document providing the legal basis for relations in the area of the global supply of energy resources; a corresponding United Nations structure that would ensure the implementation of the provisions

of the aforementioned document; and an international database designed for the collection and analysis of data on the implementation of international obligations assumed by the participating States.

It is common knowledge that on 17 May 2013 the General Assembly adopted by consensus resolution 67/263, submitted on the initiative of Turkmenistan's President, entitled "Reliable and stable transit of energy and its role in ensuring sustainable development and international cooperation". The importance of that document lies primarily in the fact that it forms the basis for a global energy partnership that takes into account the interests of producer States, transit States and States that are consumers of energy resources.

In accordance with the letter and the spirit of that resolution, our country proposes to Member States the establishment, during the current session of the Assembly, of an international group of experts for the development of a new mechanism for energy security. To that end, the Government of Turkmenistan proposes to convene an international meeting of experts on that topic in 2014. We are ready to engage in close cooperation with all Member States and the United Nations Secretariat with a view to organizing and holding such a forum.

Currently the resolution of issues of security and sustainable development depends largely on the level of international cooperation in the important areas of transport and communications. The geo-economic potential of new transport and transit routes in the world is enormously significant. Such routes involve vast spaces and enormous human resources and attract considerable investments. All of that creates opportunities to transform the transport sector into one of the most important factors in sustainable development.

Turkmenistan is convinced that the twenty-first-century transportation architecture provides the framework for a breakthrough in integration, in joining the common efforts of regions and in the pooling of resources and industrial and human potential. It is our firm conviction that the future belongs to such a combined system of transport communication, involving major international and regional maritime, road, railroad and air hubs, their optimal integration and the use of their specific advantages.

The practical implementation of that idea became the subject of a high-level event on modality,

interconnectivity and the post-2015 development programme, which was held in New York on 26 September. It was organized by the Government of Turkmenistan and the International Road Transport Union. The event focused on the search for effective solutions relating to the establishment of modern, diversified and safe transport infrastructure throughout the world.

We consider it necessary to continue the multilateral dialogue on transport issues that was initiated during the current session of the General Assembly. In that connection, Turkmenistan would like to submit a proposal to host in 2014 in Ashgabat an international conference on the role of transport and transit corridors in ensuring international cooperation, stability and sustainable development.

With regard to the achievement of the sustainable development goals, we believe that the greatest attention should be focused on promoting the economic interests of States, while maintaining an appropriate ecological balance and preventing harm to the environment. That, in turn, implies the use of cutting-edge environmental technologies and the development of innovative solutions for the preservation of nature. Preserving the significant environmental component of the global economic space has therefore become an integral part of its effectiveness.

We highly value the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General, as well as the successive actions of the international community at the United Nations Climate Change Conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun and during the seventeenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Durban, which have gradually laid the foundations for the development of comprehensive decisions at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

We look forward to the continuation of a constructive international dialogue on that topic during the sixty-eighth session of the Assembly. We are convinced that it is necessary to combine our efforts in that area at the international, regional and national levels, and to effectively coordinate the efforts of States with those of the United Nations.

Taking into account the numerous aspects of the climate change issue, Turkmenistan wishes to state at the current session of the General Assembly that it stands ready to make its contribution to the strengthening of the

role of multilateral international mechanisms aimed at preventing the negative consequences of global climate change. In particular, we refer to the need for enhancing the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In that connection, we are prepared to host in Turkmenistan the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in 2014.

Furthermore, our country would like to launch an initiative aimed at the establishment of a specialized entity, a subregional centre on technologies relating to climate change in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea basin. We believe that such an entity would help the countries of our regions to substantially strengthen their interaction in the sphere of environmental security and would contribute to the effective coordination of interregional efforts in that field.

The challenges confronting the community of nations in the area of security and sustainable development cannot be resolved unless we find a solution to the humanitarian issues at the international level. In particular, we are referring to the serious global problem of the fate of refugees and stateless persons. As a permanent member of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Turkmenistan has accumulated valuable experience in resolving the issues facing people who were forced to leave their home countries. Together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we propose that all interested parties become familiar with Turkmenistan's practical work in granting citizenship to refugees and stateless persons.

In that connection, it would be advisable to work jointly with United Nations humanitarian agencies to develop an appropriate social programme. Moreover, taking into account the outcomes of the International Ministerial Conference of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Refugees in the Muslim World, held in Ashgabat in May 2012, we consider it necessary to develop long-term solutions to such issues, on the basis of generally recognized norms of international law. With a view to discussing those issues, we are ready to host in Turkmenistan in 2014 a high-level event in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Today, as Member States actively discuss the role and place of the United Nations in international

relations, Turkmenistan declares that constructive and multilateral cooperation with the United Nations is the top priority of its foreign policy strategy. In that connection, we believe that it is precisely the United Nations that is the main and universal international Organization, which adopts decisions concerning the most important issues of global development and comprehensive peace and security. Since its inception, the United Nations has demonstrated its role as the foundation of the entire system of international stability, through mechanisms to ensure justice and to resolve the most complex international problems.

Similarly, we share the opinion of the Organization today that the issue of providing it with fresh impetus is increasingly relevant, in view of the rapidly changing realities of the modern world. Therefore, Turkmenistan supports a strengthened and expanded role for the United Nations at the global level.

We are firmly convinced that international law and the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations — based on peace, equal rights and respect for nations, their rights and sovereignty — must remain the foundation of the world order in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Yousef Bin Al-Alawi Bin Abdulla, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman.

Mr. Abdulla (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure, at the outset, to extend my warmest congratulations to the President and his friendly country, Antigua and Barbuda, on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. We wish him every success in his endeavour and assure him that the Sultanate of Oman stands ready to cooperate with him and all delegations and Member States to achieve the desired objectives.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, of the friendly Republic of Serbia, for the outstanding manner in which he conducted the work of the previous session, as well as to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for all his efforts to enhance the role of the Organization and develop its operational mechanisms to respond to current challenges and recent developments and ensure optimal future preparedness.

The numerous achievements and successes of the United Nations since its establishment, in 1945,

have contributed positively to increased security and stability in the world. However, the rapid developments witnessed today, including steady population growth, rising global demand for energy and natural resources and tremendous advances in communications and new technologies, have given rise to numerous difficulties. Joint efforts and greater cooperation among Governments are required to address them and find appropriate solutions. Such action requires that the Organization and its various organs be empowered to strengthen their capacity to respond to global demands and developments, with a sharp focus on vital and urgent issues.

Modernization, development and change constitute the norms of life. However, they must go hand in hand with increased security and stability, which should be based on cooperation among all nations and should be aimed at achieving sustainable development goals.

The recent events in various countries in the Middle East resulted from genuine reactions to the socioeconomic hardships faced by the peoples of the region and to diminished institutional capacities to respond fully to their needs and demands. Despite the loss of lives and property in those countries, current efforts are aimed at stability and restoring the economy, and as such deserve our support.

My country welcomes the consensus achieved in the Security Council on the issue of chemical weapons in Syria and the unanimous adoption of resolution 2118 (2013). The “Geneva II” conference is of critical importance in facilitating negotiations between the Syrian Government and the opposition forces. We believe that the goal should be a ceasefire and the formation of a transitional authority with the necessary power to overcome the enormous difficulties resulting from a war that has been ongoing for approximately three years.

The international community should prepare to provide support and humanitarian assistance to displaced Syrians and to all those affected by that abhorrent war. My country confirms its continued assistance to aid the displaced Syrians and expresses its readiness to contribute to international humanitarian aid inside Syrian territory.

We welcome the positive developments taking place in Somalia thanks to the efforts of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to rebuild the Somali State. It is our hope that our brothers in the Federal Republic

of Somalia will be able to implement the political and economic reform programme that has gained the support of the international community.

Among the important international issues that have yet to be resolved is the Palestinian question, which is considered the cornerstone of any possible peace in the Middle East. Despite the efforts made and the agreements concluded through direct negotiations between successive Israeli Governments and the Palestine Liberation Organization, no settlement has yet been reached. In that regard, my country supports the efforts of President Barack Obama and his Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, as they represent an opportunity for all the peoples of the region to establish peace. That would lead to economic and social development and revive the hope for peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the region — all of which would ensure a positive contribution by the Middle East to global civilization.

My country continues to support the initiatives aimed at transforming the Middle East into a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, as it is fully aware of the effects of those weapons on the security and stability of States, regions and the entire world.

With our emphasis on the right of States to benefit from the peaceful use of nuclear energy, it is worth mentioning that the current dispute will not be resolved through coercive policies and practices, such as sanctions and other tough measures. Because those measures are limited, their effectiveness is weakened. Rather, creative diplomacy can help all States to benefit from nuclear power for peaceful purposes.

On the other hand, we hope that the international community, particularly the depositary countries of the NPT, will be able to persuade other Middle Eastern States to become parties to the Treaty and to subject their nuclear facilities to the comprehensive system of safeguards that exists under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. That would contribute to achieving the universality of the Treaty and would make the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. That goal deserves the support of all countries, especially the major Powers.

We express our regret at the non-convening of the international conference on the Middle East mandated by the decision of the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty

Review Conference, owing to the fact that some parties did not support its convening. That reflects a lack of understanding of the conditions, objectives and aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East region.

In the light of our commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, we would like to announce that we have attained the Goals and all their indicators. In fact, we recently announced that we had been 100 per cent successful in achieving Goals 4 and 5.

With regard to protection of the environment and natural conservation, since the dawn of the renaissance led by His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, my country, in line with the national strategy to protect the environment, has consistently integrated environmental issues into its plans and development goals, with a view to achieving a balance between the aims of sustainable development and the preservation of the environment.

My country has also sought to share its interests in the environment and natural conservation with the international community. We have participated in many regional and international conferences on the environment, including the eighteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Qatar in December 2012. We look forward to participating in the nineteenth session, to be held in Warsaw in November.

The right to science and knowledge should be enjoyed by all humankind, and the great evolution in the use and application of modern technology has become an essential tool in our daily lives, thanks to scientific and intellectual creativity. Consequently, my country has sought to keep up with advances to meet our current needs. To that end, we have established many centres and councils that encourage research and development, including the Scientific Research Council, the Industrial Innovation Centre, the National Centre for Enterprises and Commercial Activities, and the Oasis of Knowledge. We also have a Middle East Desalination Research Centre.

My country continues to develop the main guidelines for a national strategy of research and development and scientific knowledge. We are also trying to familiarize ourselves with modern technology and to encourage Omani youth to take part in different science — and technology-based professions. In that context, we welcome future constructive cooperation,

investment and partnerships with all other centres, universities, institutions and specialized industries in both the public and the private sectors and at the national, regional and international levels. We also want to take advantage of Oman's geographical position as a main gateway and bridge to knowledge and creativity in regional and international markets.

In conclusion, we wish the President every success at this session, and we hope that it concludes with a realistic and renewed vision — an inspired vision and one that also imparts new momentum for our times, a vision that reflects the aspirations of every generation and every people and makes every effort to achieve them.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland.

Mr. Sveinsson (Iceland): Once again, we have witnessed outrageous acts of terrorism against innocent people, most recently in Kenya, Iraq and Pakistan. Our thoughts go out to the victims and their families. It is the primary responsibility of all Governments to protect their citizens. A few weeks ago, the world witnessed the use of chemical weapons in Syria. It is hard to find words strong enough to express our condemnation. International law has been violated, war crimes committed and globally shared values have been shattered. Those responsible must be held accountable and should answer to the International Criminal Court.

The devastation inflicted on the Syrian people must end. A country is in ruins. Innocent lives are lost every day, more than 6 million people are displaced and stability in the region is threatened. The Syrian Government has not lived up to its responsibility towards its own citizens. It has retaliated with unabated violence instead of choosing a path of reform, reconciliation and improved rights for its people. The crisis calls for firm action to be taken by the international community. Syria must comply with its international obligations, and all parties to the conflict must respect humanitarian and human rights law. We welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 2118 (2013) and call on the Council to ensure that Syria fully meets its commitments. The Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) must also be honoured and a "Geneva II" conference convened urgently. The tragedy in Syria has once again underscored the fundamental importance of international law and order.

Some of the greatest achievements of the United Nations are in the field of international law. Within these walls, the history of international relations continues to be written and brave new steps to be taken. The latest accomplishment is the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty. Iceland is proud to have been the first State to ratify this landmark treaty. We call on all States — in particular arms exporters — to do so as well, so that it enters into force without delay.

In the year 2000, world leaders gathered in this city and made a historic decision by adopting the Millennium Declaration. Since then, the Millennium Development Goals have served us well. For almost 15 years, they have influenced and guided the development priorities of nations and organizations. They have increased awareness of heartbreaking poverty and inspired new policymaking. The Millennium Development Goals are indeed central to Iceland's development policy, and my Government is firmly committed to shouldering our responsibility in a globalized world. As new goals are defined, the focus should remain on eliminating poverty, achieving gender equality, improving health and providing education for girls and boys.

The pressure on our ecosystem calls for urgent action to combat pollution and land degradation, as well as a balanced consideration of conservation and the utilization of natural resources. It is a challenge to ensure food security when land and water resources are threatened. Our duty is to share experiences and know-how to restore land and improve land management — to change deserts into blooming fields.

Furthermore, climate change and disasters such as the one in Fukushima have taught us that a real energy transformation is needed. Safe, clean and renewable energy is the way of the future. Iceland has undergone a true energy revolution. Today, almost all of our electricity and heating needs are met with renewable energy. That success story is a source of a productive partnership between Iceland and the United Nations, and now also the World Bank.

Our world is wealthy. That wealth is not only preserved in the minerals of the Earth, the power of the rivers and the rich living marine resources. Our greatest wealth is people — the knowledge, the experiences, the constant journey of the human mind to explore and invent new solutions.

Iceland makes use of those assets in its development cooperation. We are proud to offer the world our

expertise where it can make a real difference — for the development of geothermal energy, sustainable fisheries management, the restoration of fertile land and the promotion of gender equality. More than 2,500 experts from all parts of the world have benefited from the activities of the four United Nations university training programmes in Iceland since the first one was established 35 years ago. Iceland will focus on those same four topics in the post-2015 process. Let me emphasize that the process must be conducted in a true democratic spirit. It must be inclusive and allow for all Member States to participate.

As I glance around the Assembly Hall, I am inspired by the history and success of the Organization, which represents the immense diversity and talent of humankind, and inspired by the potential for future positive action that the rich fabric of representatives from all Member States represents. But success should not blind our vision or cloud our judgement. The flaws of the Security Council have been sadly exposed in the case of Syria. Furthermore, the lack of organizational reform undermines the credibility of the United Nations.

Much work remains undone in many areas. As long as people are mistreated for their views, race or religion, or even cast as outlaws for their sexual orientation or gender identity, human rights obligations are not honoured. We are alarmed that recent legislation in some countries is violating the fundamental principles of equality and the freedom of expression. The responsibility to change that and to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights rests with us politicians. By speaking from this rostrum, each and every one of us pledges to uphold those common values of the United Nations.

The promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women is another urgent task. In 2015, we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing. We call on all Member States to renew efforts to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Iceland has been advocating for celebrating the anniversary through a 12-month campaign, focusing on each of the 12 themes of Beijing. We note that UN Women is planning its strategy along those lines.

A prominent element in the Beijing Declaration is the importance of the active engagement of women for democratic development. The women of the Arab world have given that objective a powerful new meaning in

the past three years. Women assumed their rightful place and have called on their leaders to show real leadership. They call for respect for human rights and the equal treatment of women and men. They call for the freedom to express their views and to determine their own future through democratic processes.

The President took the Chair.

It is regrettable that developments in the region have been overshadowed by political discord and continued violence. We deplore the loss of lives and condemn all violence. We also call on the Governments in the region to demonstrate their commitment to democracy with concrete actions.

The developments in the Middle East cannot be separated from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As United States President Obama said, the Palestinian people have a right to live with security and dignity in their own sovereign State. Israel's security depends upon the realization of a Palestinian State, and stability will be served only through a two-State solution and a secure Israel. We welcome the renewed peace talks between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine and applaud United States Secretary Kerry for his commitment in that regard. We must respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination as well as Israel's right to exist in peace with its neighbours. But time is running out.

The continuing settlement activities, in violation of international law, threaten to make the two-State solution impossible. Therefore, the Government of Israel must end all settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. We denounce the oppressive policies of Hamas and condemn the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza. We also call upon Israel to end the blockade of the territory.

Respect for international law is fundamental for relations between States. If differences arise, we should always seek agreements through consultations, negotiations or other means for peaceful resolution. The principle of the rule of law, which is among the founding principles of the United Nations, is vital to us all — big nations and small.

One international agreement that Iceland holds in high regard is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It was a great achievement when that important Convention was adopted 30 years ago, and it has proved its relevance by the test of time. The

Law of the Sea Convention demonstrates how the international order can best work and prescribes how differences should be settled through peaceful means. The Convention provides a basis for sound resource management. However, meeting that objective is difficult for many States. The international community should do much more to support developing countries to better conserve and utilize their resources and reform their management policies. As a steadfast advocate of the Convention, Iceland is firmly committed to its provisions. We protest in the strongest terms when stakeholders resort to threats of coercive measures when differences arise.

Icelanders know better than anyone that the health of the ocean and its resources must be preserved. It is fundamental for our existence and livelihood. The conservation, sound management and sustainable use of natural resources are principles that we follow strictly in our policies. We are sincere and serious in living up to the responsibility that comes with safeguarding the riches of the Earth. For the same reason, the eight Arctic States have developed productive regional cooperation. As the world witnesses the rapid changes in the Arctic, we who live in that corner of the world know how urgent it is to act and plan for the future. The delicate environment must be protected, economic opportunities developed and the needs of the people who live in the Arctic respected.

As caretakers of the Arctic, we take our global duty very seriously. It was therefore a great pleasure and an honour for me to host the Secretary-General in Iceland last summer. During his visit, I demonstrated to him how the global impact of climate change melts the glaciers in the north. Following our trip to the central highlands, the Secretary-General observed that we had not only seen the ice disappear, we had also heard the most powerful sound of ice melting away.

During his stay, the Secretary-General gave us Icelanders an insight into the work of the United Nations — how, every single day, the United Nations is making a difference in the lives of countless people around the world, helping refugees, providing humanitarian assistance and saving the lives of children. The United Nations is a force for good in the world. Together we can make a real difference; united we protect the environment, preserve peace and save lives. The more united we are, the better the world will become.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Wilfred Erlington, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize.

Mr. Erlington (Belize): I am once again privileged to address the General Assembly on behalf of my country, Belize.

It is with great delight that I congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. You are a testament to all the peoples of the Caribbean and the world of the height to which each of us can aspire when industry and character are fused into one. Rest assured, Mr. President, of the unqualified support of Belize throughout your term in office. I also take this opportunity to thank your predecessor for his service as President of the Assembly at its sixty-seventh session.

It is in the quest for the attainment of the two ideals of peaceful conflict resolution and the enhancement of the lives of all peoples that leaders of Member States make this annual pilgrimage in September to address the General Assembly. Belize commends the United Nations and its visionary leadership over the years for its unflinching efforts in discharging the core functions of the Organization.

The promulgation of the Millennium Development Goals, in 2000, resulted in all countries working together, for the first time in human history, to address and rectify the gaps in their development agenda to reduce poverty. It was a signal event and a major breakthrough for the United Nations development agenda. It gave hope for the provision of huge amounts of desperately and genuinely needed aid, the transfer of technology and other development assistance from affluent nations, financial institutions and philanthropists to nations mired in poverty. That was undoubtedly good news. It was reminiscent of the Marshall Plan, which rescued Germany and Japan from abject ruin after the Second World War and catapulted them to heights of affluence they had never experienced before.

By the end of the 1990s, most countries were in dire straits. According to former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, more than 60 per cent of the world subsisted on \$2 or less per day, while more than 1 billion people were living on less than \$1 per day. Illiteracy was nearly at 1 billion people. Eight hundred million people were chronically hungry — one in seven people on Earth — including 200 million children. And 1.3 billion people lacked even the most basic health-

care, sanitation and education services. Today, 13 years later, as the Millennium Development Goals are being implemented, the scorecard reveals that, while a small minority of countries are showing commendable success in attaining the Millennium Development Goals, the vast majority of nations are still mired in poverty, with scant or no signs of development.

We note with disappointment that rich countries have not even been able to bring themselves to honour their commitment to contribute 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product as official domestic assistance to poor countries. The resources being provided by international and other financial institutions and by private donors fall far short of what is needed by poor countries to attain those laudable, and indeed basic, Goals. It is evident that, for some inexplicable reason, developed countries have abandoned Goal 8 — developing a global partnership for development. In the absence of the cooperation of developed countries, the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals by poor countries will remain an illusion.

Poor countries possess neither the requisite leadership cadres, the financial, human and technical resources, the infrastructure, the necessary levels of investment and trade nor the institutions to bring about levels of development that are capable of generating the wealth needed to underwrite the expenses associated with the attainment and, most important, the sustainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Perhaps even worse, far too many countries have no realistic prospects for achieving such capacity within the foreseeable future. Despite that, Belize remains committed to the attainment of the Goals, which we are pursuing assiduously.

Given our experience with the Millennium Development Goals, it is, in our view, eminently fitting that you, Mr. President, should have kept the spotlight on the post-2015 development agenda for the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly. In that connection, the theme “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage” is very apt indeed. The Millennium Development Goals must remain a work in progress. The post-2015 development agenda must be informed by our experiences with the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, a careful analysis must be undertaken to ascertain why our rich development partners have failed to live up to their obligations under the partnership to provide the promised development aid and expertise to poor development partners. And new mechanisms must

be devised to ensure that the post-2015 development agenda does not suffer a similar fate.

As we embark upon setting the stage for the post-2015 development agenda, Belize has recognized and identified four underpinning points: that the post-2015 agenda must be global; that it should integrate the outcomes of major summits into a cohesive action-oriented agenda that can be implemented, building upon successes and improving lessons learned; that the necessary resources must be sourced and committed to underwrite the new partnership for development; and that it must be guided by our core values of conflict prevention and poverty eradication.

Belize endorses the intergovernmental processes for the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. Our domestic priorities, which complement the global agenda, are contained in the document *Horizon 2030*, which articulates our development framework. Sector-specific documents emanating from *Horizon 2030* inform our national development agenda in areas such as security, energy, gender, education and health.

Topping the list of our domestic priorities at this time is the resolution of the Guatemalan claim, which poses an existential threat to our nation and requires urgent resolution if the peoples of our two countries and our region are to continue to enjoy the peaceful coexistence that has characterized our relationship thus far. When I addressed the Assembly last September (see A/67/PV.20), I was pleased to report that our two States had agreed to submit to the citizens of our respective countries, in a simultaneous referendum to be held on 6 October 2013, six days from today, the question of whether it was the will of our respective constituencies that the Guatemalan claim be submitted to the International Court of Justice for a final resolution. Regretfully, however, last April, Guatemala gave official notice to both Belize and the Organization of American States that the Guatemalan Government had decided not to proceed with the referendum and was proposing that it be postponed sine die. Not unexpectedly, that decision was not well received in Belize.

The Guatemalan claim is a constant source of anxiety for our citizens as well as for investors in our country. Furthermore, both our territorial and maritime border regions have been suffering from depredations and environmental degradation as a consequence of the wanton and sustained illegal activities of Guatemalan

campesinos, fishermen and criminal elements engaged in narco-trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, illegal panning for gold, the extraction of xaté and other exotic plants and animals, the illegal felling of timber and the pillaging of our ancient Mayan ruins. The felling of timber in our rainforests is contributing to the denuding of our mountains, which results in violent flooding in the rainy season and the transfer of topsoil, sand and silt into the sea. Those soils are then ultimately deposited on our pristine barrier reef, choking and destroying its fragile ecosystems and compromising the health of the entire reef and the marine ecological system that thrives there.

Additionally, the increasing trespassing by Guatemalans into our country has given rise to more frequent violent encounters between Guatemalans and members of the Belize Defence Force, resulting in fatalities in some instances. Those incidents put a heavy strain on the relations between our country and Guatemala and the peace of our region as a whole.

While Belize appreciates that the activities of the Guatemalans in our border regions are the direct result of poverty and failed development in their own country, we are concerned by the fact that such activities create the conditions for conflict. There are some 65 Guatemalan villages along the 141-mile-long Belize-Guatemala border. The villagers there are largely indigent and unemployed. Absent higher employment and increased security patrols on both sides of the border, the incursions of Guatemalans will not, in our view, abate, but will only get worse.

Belize is resolved to do everything in its power to protect its citizens and territorial integrity, but our efforts alone will not be sufficient to put an end to the forays of Guatemalans into our country. Input from the international community will be vital in assisting with the development of income-generating enterprises in the border regions to ameliorate the poverty there, which is what compels Guatemalans to trespass in those regions.

Border conflicts are dangerous by nature. In his memoir, *Interventions: A Life in War and Peace*, former Secretary-General Kofi Annan wrote:

“[Conflicts] suck in their neighbours, send thousands of refugees spilling into other countries, create havens for armed groups and terrorists, and they cause the spread of criminal networks and cross-border lawlessness, including piracy. In

short, conflicts ... are inherent generators of global insecurity, the causes of which need to be addressed by wealthy and poor States alike.”

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Organization of American States and the group of friends who support the efforts of Belize and Guatemala to resolve the Guatemalan claim peaceably and, in the interim, to ensure that peace is maintained between our two countries.

Climate change is another existential threat, looming not only over Belize but over all nations of the world, large and small. In our view, it is urgent that the international community arrive at consensus as to the imminence and magnitude of the threat posed to humankind by climate change, as well as on the way forward in dealing successfully with that perilous phenomenon. That is another threat that can be successfully dealt with only by the United Nations. Combating the threat will necessitate huge expenditures, the deployment of cutting-edge technology and, most likely, the cessation of the use of fossil fuels.

Developing countries such as Belize will need both technical and financial assistance from the international community and international financial institutions to adapt to the changes being brought about by climate change and to mitigate the deleterious effects thereof.

Belize has established a national climate-change committee to coordinate our Government's interventions in all areas relating to climate change. We are also establishing a new climate-change policy and strategy that provides for the scaling up of mitigation and adaptation efforts at all levels. We applaud the Secretary-General for his decision to convene a high-level meeting on climate change in the near future.

The security of its citizens is a paramount obligation of every Government. The Belize Government takes that responsibility seriously. However, the threats to the security of our citizens are so numerous in today's globalized world that no single country has the capacity to tackle the issue on its own. Consequently, Belize works actively with our multilateral and bilateral partners in funding the necessary resources, technical assistance and training in our quest to secure our citizenry. We are party to the Central American Security Strategy, which is dedicated to combating the activities of national, regional and transnational criminals. We also collaborate closely with security and law enforcement

authorities in our region, including Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and Mexico.

We are very pleased with the adoption, earlier this year, of the Arms Trade Treaty and we will, in due course, ratify it. We have also enacted a whole raft of legislation to strengthen our crime-fighting capabilities.

The Belize Government invests as much as 26 per cent of its annual budgeted expenditure on the education sector. We believe that education is one of the quickest ways to lift our people out of poverty. Also, one half of our population is below the age of 25 and approximately 37 per cent is below the age of 18. They will all need world-class education and skills training if they are to be able to compete successfully in global markets. At this time, Belize is not able to provide education and training at that level locally and cooperates with its international partners for the provision, in large measure, of such education.

Non-communicable diseases and disabilities are impacting the countries in the Caribbean region very negatively. In our own country, the incidence of cancers, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, chronic lung diseases, hypertension and strokes is reaching epidemic proportions. Empirical data reveal that in low- and middle-income countries, non-communicable-disease-related impairments account for 65.5 per cent of persons living with disabilities. It is therefore urgent that the United Nations work to address the afflictions that are blighting the lives of untold numbers of our citizens.

At the most recent meeting of the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community, a historic decision was taken that the Community should pursue all the necessary steps to recover reparations for the descendants of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade from the nations that participated in and benefited from that trade. Belize urges the United Nations to lend its support to that initiative, which seeks to address, at least in part, the unspeakable evil perpetrated by the European nations that participated in the trade.

Earlier this year, Belize successfully rescheduled its debt obligations with its commercial bondholders, an exercise that enabled us to avoid the spectre of sovereign default. Despite that restructuring, however, Belize's capacity to finance its development programmes is still challenged, and it continues to rely on cooperation with its bilateral and multilateral partners to achieve its development goals. In that

regard, Belize would like to express its gratitude to the United Nations and its related agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Pan American Health Organization, which work tirelessly to support the implementation of our national development objectives. We also wish to thank the many nations that are currently partnering with us in development.

Belize would like to enlist the support of the United Nations in helping to persuade the international financial organizations that per capita gross domestic product is not in itself an accurate measure of a nation's wealth or stage of development, particularly in the case of heavily indebted middle-income countries like ours. Such a method of assessment would disqualify those countries, including my own, from eligibility for badly needed concessionary financing, and that eventuality could well lead to reversals of their hard-won gains.

The Government of Belize is committed to a rights-based approach to the development of our country and people. To that end, we have embraced the international human rights regime and are making our best efforts to enable inclusive growth. In that regard, we are pleased to inform the Assembly that the Government of Belize has, in consultation with its stakeholder partners at the national level, submitted the report for its second universal periodic review for consideration by the Human Rights Council at its seventeenth session, in October.

I would like to inform the Assembly that we, too, condemn the cowardly terrorist act that took place recently in Kenya.

Earlier I referred to my country's position on the post-2015 development agenda — that the agenda must be inclusive if we are to achieve meaningful development. We need to ensure that all our countries are allowed to participate in a meaningful manner, and that includes the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan. We cannot deny the significant advances they have been able to make in such a short time, or their contributions in support of global goals and commitments, especially in the area of development cooperation. Their experience can teach us about advancing our own development.

Every year the Assembly votes to lift the economic embargo on Cuba. We continue to support that call.

Belize also continues to call for an urgent and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The situation in the Middle East troubles us. As responsible citizens of the world, we condemn the use of chemical weapons and welcome the framework agreement — led by Russia and the United States of America and supported by the Security Council — that we hope will lead to the removal of all chemical and biological weapons from Syria. We also call on other nations to abide by the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

As we approach the end of an era and look towards the post-2015 development process, our Government, policymakers, planners and all levels of society will be challenged to focus on what we want and what we can achieve together. We must commit to a process of ensuring that we adopt goals and objectives that reflect global priorities and are adapted to our national contexts. Our agenda must be reflective of the world's most pressing problems, which include, but are not limited to, environmental sustainability, inequality, growth with equity and social inclusion.

We are confident that under your guidance, Mr. President, that process will be an inclusive, accessible and transparent one.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Saad-Eddine El Othmani, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. El Othmani (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first like to congratulate you warmly, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, and to renew our support for and highlight the efforts that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made at every level to enable our Organization to fulfil its role and responsibilities in dealing with the challenges of today's world.

We commend your choice of theme for our debate, Sir, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage", which is very relevant and enables us to exchange views. From this rostrum, we pay tribute to the Secretary-General's tireless efforts to integrate the Millennium Development Goals into the Organization's strategic objectives. We hope that our deliberations will help to strengthen international consensus on

pursuing the complete and integrated fulfilment of our commitments and on formulating a road map with clear directions and specific goals for the post-2015 period.

Morocco, while itself a stable country, is part of the Sahel-Sahara region, which is highly unstable — hence the importance for the Kingdom of Morocco of the situation in the brotherly country of Mali and the dangerous challenges it has been dealing with recently. We congratulate our Malian and African brothers and the international community on the success of the recent elections there and the progress Mali has made in achieving stability. The international community should continue to support it at every level. The visit of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to Mali to participate in the investiture ceremony for the new President of Mali afforded an excellent opportunity for Morocco to renew its wholehearted commitment to supporting Mali's security, unity, stability and development. In his speech, King Mohammed said that the solutions to other security crises demonstrated that the crisis in Mali required an approach that went beyond mere security. That is why we support a three-pronged approach. The first dimension would be educational and ideological and would aim at spreading a culture of moderation and centrism and instituting a dialogue between the two peoples and their States, leading to the launching of cooperation in Islamic affairs and the training of 500 mosque imams to be sent to Mali.

The second dimension would consist of development, with emphasis on bringing developing countries together, particularly countries stricken by drought and poverty, among other problems and crises, and empowering their people, as well as strengthening their capacity to achieve progress and development. That is why we have launched development programmes in coordination with Mali and other countries in the region.

The third key thrust would be the humanitarian dimension. Security crises provoke unspeakable suffering for individuals and countries. Mali has seen tens of thousands of refugees leave the country and go to neighbouring countries, which is why it is important that there be a coordinated regional approach. In Bamako, the capital of Mali, we established a country hospital to relieve the suffering of the people in that area.

With respect to the Great Lakes region, the Kingdom of Morocco welcomes the signing of the Peace, Security

and Cooperation Framework Agreement, which will greatly facilitate the real settlement of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has gone on for too long. We hope that all parties will respect the Framework Agreement and that they will honour their commitments and pledges and support the international community's efforts to establish a peace process, while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Those challenges are part of various crises that we see occurring in the Sahel and Saharan regions. The Secretary-General has deployed many efforts along those lines. We are pleased with the high-level dialogue on the Sahel that he organized on the margins of the General Assembly for the second consecutive year, as well as the visit he hopes to make to the region, accompanied by a representative of the World Bank. We hope that the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel will be finalized. Once again, Morocco reiterates that it will participate in all efforts to protect the countries of the Sahel and the Sahara in order to strengthen stability, security and development in the region.

Morocco reaffirms once more the need to set up initiatives for the Atlantic coast States, given their security, political, economic and social interrelationship and the challenges that obtain. We believe that stability and security in the region go beyond regional frameworks. We are therefore talking about a Sahel-Moroccan space for the purpose of maintaining stability in the region.

We condemn the recent terrorist attacks in Kenya. We would ask the international community for greater efforts to bolster security and stability in that region.

The second issue that concerns us and the rest of the international community is Syria. In that respect, we commend the international community and the Security Council for adopting resolution 2118 (2013), on the Syrian chemical weapons programme, and the announcement of the date of 15 November for the holding of the "Geneva II" Middle East peace conference in order to stop the violence in Syria and reach a political solution through dialogue that would maintain the territorial integrity of Syria and the stability of its neighbours. In that regard, I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the League itself, its member States

and Joint Special Envoy Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi for the joint efforts they have made during this period with regard to the shedding of Syrian blood, the agreeing on a resolution and the reaching of a solution prior to Geneva II, with a view to putting an end to the crisis in Syria.

We would like to reaffirm once again the importance of the humanitarian aspect of the crisis. There are 2 million refugees and tens of thousands of displaced persons, and thousands have been killed or wounded. This is the degree of suffering that the international community is called upon to reduce. The Kingdom of Morocco and its King have paid particular attention to the humanitarian dimension, which is why we established a rural hospital in Jordan a year and a half ago to provide health services to our Syrian brothers.

It is well known that Morocco has been involved in the establishment of a Maghreb Union. Now is the time for coming together regionally, not for isolation. It is the time for cooperation and openness, not for unilateralism. Therefore, we are reactivating the Maghreb Union project in order to fulfil the hopes of the peoples of the five Maghreb countries and to help them to achieve stability, prosperity and sustainable development. His Majesty the King has called for a promising and ambitious Maghreb Union, and the Secretary-General has made a similar appeal. The Maghreb Union would implement peace and stability by taking a number of initiatives, including a joint mediation initiative undertaken with neighbourly Spain, pursuant to the appeal by the General Assembly in favour of mediation. The Kingdom of Morocco answered the call by launching the initiative and establishing partnership agreements between Moroccan and Spanish mediation centres to provide training and invite the participation of other countries in the region. The initiative was launched in a spirit of rapprochement, dialogue and cooperation and to promote mediation, which is important not only to stop conflicts when they have broken out but also to prevent them from occurring in the first place.

The Kingdom of Morocco's decision to protect human rights is irreversible. It is part of a comprehensive strategy and relies on an approach that favours the participation and advancement of people and the protection of their dignity within the framework of a development-focused democratic model. Morocco has therefore launched a number of projects and workshops, as well as major reforms, and made tremendous

progress in broadening the sphere of individual and collective rights and freedoms, of preserving human dignity and of strengthening the protection of the rights of its citizens, especially the rights of women, children and persons with special needs.

In its amended 2011 Constitution, the Kingdom of Morocco dedicated a chapter to respect for human rights as they are recognized internationally. Morocco has always desired to preserve a balance between its international and national commitments and priorities. As a founding member of the Human Rights Council, Morocco has participated effectively and constructively in the formulation and implementation of the institutional texts of the Council, in particular the universal periodic review. When it was decided to take another look at the rules and mechanisms in 2011, Morocco was given the task of conducting the negotiations on them. At the same time, the Kingdom of Morocco enjoyed positive cooperation with the various institutions and mechanisms and interacted with their recommendations, in particular the universal period review, treaties and special measures, whose assessments Morocco continues to welcome, facilitate and answer with its observations. Morocco hopes to gain the Assembly's support for its candidacy for the Human Rights Council for the period 2014-2016, in order to further contribute to strengthening the role of the Council and to ensure the effectiveness necessary for its operation.

In that connection, we have recently launched an initiative relating to immigration, especially illegal migration. Morocco wished to establish other mechanisms for refugees in connection with how we address the issue and rights of immigration, especially illegal migration, and asylum. A few days ago, a new statute on immigration was enacted and the right to asylum, so as to give new rights and documents to political refugees. All of this is a very important development for our country.

I would like also to touch on the key issue of the territorial integrity of Morocco and the issue of the Moroccan Sahara. For several years now our authorities have followed the diligent efforts of the Secretary-General and the Security Council to resolve the Sahara issue. Morocco complies with all Security Council resolutions and has acted in good faith with respect to those resolutions and to the efforts of the Secretary-General. The most recent resolutions called for a new round of negotiations among the parties so as to

achieve a sustainable political solution accepted by all. Morocco therefore launched an initiative on autonomy, a practical and moderate solution that enjoyed the support of many countries friends of Morocco as well as of several regional organizations. Unfortunately, however, the other parties involved, committed to their 30-year stance and proposals, did not allow progress to be made in the political process. I reiterate that Morocco is committed to working effectively and in good faith with the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy in all their efforts and with the Security Council in order to implement the successive resolutions adopted by the Security Council.

Finally, on behalf of the Kingdom of Morocco, I wish to say that with the approach of the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Organization, we reaffirm our sincere commitment to its principles and to the active mobilization of our efforts so as to update, empower and strengthen it, given that it is the unique and optimal framework for meeting current and future challenges.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Osman Mohammed Saleh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea.

Mr. Saleh (Eritrea): Let me first join previous speakers in expressing my delegation's deepest sympathies and condolences to the families of the victims and to the people and the Government of Kenya on the terrorist attack at Westgate Mall in Nairobi.

It is almost two generations now since Eritrea first begun to lodge petitions for justice with this body. Sadly, in all of those instances, the Assembly has persisted in ignoring Eritrea's pleas, shuttering its doors as a "closed monastery". Those setbacks notwithstanding, Eritrea remains firmly convinced that the promotion of peoples' rights and interests and mutual respect among the community of nations will remain precarious without an international body that upholds the supremacy of international law and justice. As such, our choice, like those of other peoples, has been and remains the funnelling of efforts towards expediting the reform of the United Nations.

To focus exclusively on the harm done to the people and State of Eritrea may convey the false impression of an aberration in an otherwise effective and well-functioning United Nations. As it is, the particularity of our case only amplifies the wider backdrop of a United Nations debilitated by chronic weaknesses

and shortcomings. In any event, my message today will focus primarily on the urgency of reforming the United Nations and redressing the injustices committed against the people of Eritrea as well as other peoples of the world.

The negative experiences during the first 50 years of the existence of the United Nations and the paralysis and constraints under which the United Nations had to operate in the context of the realities of the Cold War in a bipolar world accentuated the need for structural reform of the United Nations at that time. In Eritrea's case, our inalienable right to independence was trampled at the onset of the Cold War, since the country was perceived as a mere pawn in the overriding strategic rivalry of both super-Powers. Our liberation struggle was likewise suppressed by both super-Powers in an alternating fashion because of the same strategic considerations and shifting alliances.

Yesterday's history is too fresh in our minds to induce in us any nostalgia for the Cold War. Our call for reform of the United Nations is thus not influenced by some innate preference for the return of the old, bipolar configuration to replace the prevailing unipolar world order. The fact is that the United Nations should have undergone incremental reform and revitalization during the 50 years of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War was certainly the most auspicious moment for undertaking that belated task.

Indeed, it is now clear in retrospect that had such reforms occurred then, the wars and destruction that have unfolded in the past 20 years could have been avoided. However, the major Powers that controlled the General Assembly and the various institutions and agencies of the United Nations, through partial hegemony, felt after 1991 that they were better positioned to secure and consolidate their total domination of the United Nations. They blocked any reform of the United Nations, and so that historic opportunity for international peace and justice to prevail was lost.

In the past 20 years, we have witnessed excessive control over global resources and the creation of spheres of influence, which has triggered international instability; the use of force and coercion as primary instruments for controlling global resources while preventing and denying others the opportunity to acquire comparable military capabilities and technology; and the deployment of international financial institutions, including the World Bank and the International

Monetary Fund, in order to control the global economy, leading to an intractable global financial crisis with lethal ramifications for the majority of the peoples of the world. We have also witnessed the misuse of the mass media and cultural centres in order to create false images and to promote decadent value systems, intimidate peoples and demonize any dissent; and the employment of various subterfuges in order to control, directly or indirectly, all international, continental, regional, governmental and non-governmental bodies. Those manifestations of the current world order can be corroborated, beyond abstract analysis, by numerous specific cases and evidence related to particular events, places and time. That is precisely why the twenty-first century requires a revitalized United Nations that transcends a bipolar or unipolar world order, and that is firmly rooted in the supremacy of, and respect for, international law and justice.

As I have intimated, Eritrea, like other African States that were formed during the colonial scramble, should have attained its sovereign independence during the process of decolonization that transpired in the aftermath of the Second World War. The inalienable national rights of the Eritrean people were, however, compromised to serve the strategic interests of the United States, which had emerged as a triumphant Power. Eritrea was therefore doomed to colonial rule by proxy. The people of Eritrea had to endure colonial suppression for almost 40 years under successive regimes, which were propped up, alternately, by the United States for the first 23 years and by the former Soviet Union for the subsequent 17 years. The Eritrean people had to wage their liberation struggle under those conditions, which exacted heavy sacrifices from them to achieve their independence in 1991. That historical truth, coupled with other similar phenomena, illustrates the perils of a world order that is driven by the rivalry of domineering super-Powers, and highlights the need and urgency for an effective United Nations.

The Eritrean people were neither compensated for the transgressions meted out to them nor given respite in the subsequent years. As they embarked on the arduous task of rebuilding their war-torn country, they again became pawns in the broader Horn of Africa/Middle East chessboard of domination and influence and have suffered unjust and distorted policies for the past 20 years. In that respect, border conflicts that do not have political and legal justifications and that were never raised prior to the independence of

Eritrea in 1991 were subtly fomented to ensnare Eritrea in a spiral of crises.

Although the Boundary Commission had rendered its final and binding decision in 2002, the spurious border conflict that erupted under the Badme rubric continued to simmer for 11 years due to obstructive violations by the United States Administration. The Eritrean people were also subjected to a sustained human trafficking campaign and illicit measures aimed at undermining economic growth and development, as well as diplomatic and propaganda campaigns of demonization.

Going even further, United States officials imposed unlawful sanctions against Eritrea in 2009 through the Security Council. Four years on, they insist on maintaining the sanctions, despite the lack of any evidence or justification, by relying on the widely discredited reports of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.

Beyond Eritrea, the same approaches and policies have exacerbated crises and further undermined stability, development and cooperation in Somalia and other parts of the Horn of Africa. Despite that massive hostility and in the face of tremendous odds, the people and Government of Eritrea have remained steadfast, prioritized development efforts and the improvement of citizens' lives, and have worked persistently to make their modest contribution to regional peace and stability, including by fighting terrorism and piracy. Their achievements, given the difficulties they faced, have been remarkable, even though they fall far short of their aspirations.

Looking forward, the people and the Government of Eritrea are prepared to link hands with regional and international partners, including the United Nations, and to work for the betterment of their country for peace, stability and regional integration in the Horn of Africa and a fairer and more just world.

The transgressions that have been perpetrated against the people of Eritrea and other peoples in the past 20 years speak to the persistence of an unfair and unjust global order and the absence of a strong and representative United Nations. And yet, the telltale signs of the advent of a new, promising era are discernible. In that context, I add the voice of the Eritrean people to other voices in the world to urge the General Assembly to keep the flicker of hope alive in its current session and to adopt timely resolutions aimed at a fundamental

reform of the United Nations. The fact is that the Assembly has legal, moral and historical obligations and responsibilities entrusted to it by the peoples of the world that it cannot shrug off.

In conclusion, I urge the United Nations to adopt practical resolutions that are commensurate with its legal, political and moral responsibilities in order to, first, uphold the rule of law; secondly, bring to an end the invasion of our sovereign territories; thirdly, lift the unlawful and harmful sanctions against Eritrea; fourthly, terminate interventions that jeopardize the peace and stability of the peoples of the Horn of Africa; and, fifthly, deter all acts that breed crises, loss of life and destruction.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Samuel Santos López, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Nicaragua.

Mr. Santos López (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people and Government of Nicaragua, Comrade President Daniel Ortega Saavedra and Comrade Rosario Murillo, I want to begin by paying tribute to the Commander of the revolution of our America and the Caribbean, leader of the free men and women of the world, Hugo Chávez Frías, who has left us a legacy of strength, hope and certainty of victory in defending the inalienable rights of humankind, such as sovereignty, justice, freedom, democracy, solidarity and peace.

On behalf of the people and the Government of reconciliation and national unity of Nicaragua, led by Comrade Daniel Ortega Saavedra, I congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. We are pleased that a representative of a brother country and member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, Petrocaribe and the Community of Latin America and the Caribbean States will guide us in the activities of this important organ so that our efforts may contribute to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which must be implemented by the Organization.

The United Nations continues to require profound reform that cannot be delayed any longer. The position of some permanent members of the Security Council on the issue can no longer be an insurmountable obstacle. We continue to support the proposed reinvention of the United Nations proposed by our colleague Father Miguel

d'Escoto Brockmann. The power of the Organization must rest completely with the General Assembly.

The economic and financial situation imposed by global capitalism continues to rapidly dismantle the welfare State in developed countries and seriously affects developing countries. Now more than ever, it becomes essential to establish a new global economic model that is sustainable, based on justice, solidarity, complementarity and committed to the defence of the Earth and the environment.

International democracy cannot exist without respect for international law. Nicaragua continues to demonstrate with reliable facts its adherence to international law and its respect for the principle of resolving our differences through dialogue, negotiation and recourse to international bodies such as the International Court of Justice to settle territorial and other types of disputes.

We welcome the central theme selected by you, Mr. President, for the Assembly's sixty-eighth session, namely, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". It is important, therefore, that we agree to launch an intergovernmental process for that new phase.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, we are deepening our political, economic, social and cultural integration process, all the while respecting our diversity and building unity. Our Community of Latin American and Caribbean States has been achieving a shared vision of social development, education, health, the environment, energy and financing, among other sectors. It is now preparing to work collectively on cooperation, nuclear disarmament, fighting corruption, agriculture, science and technology.

In the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and in Petrocaribe, Nicaragua has found a model of integration to overcome poverty, hunger and inequality, while strengthening the Central American Integration System, the Mesoamerican Integration and Development Project and its economic and commercial relations with the international community and its organizations.

In this difficult context, Nicaragua continues to make progress. We have opted for a development model that produces results. Despite the difficulties and limitations, the Millennium Development Goals in Nicaragua are being realized in a tangible manner that demonstrates our Government's respect and promotion

of the human rights of its citizens and its deep ethical commitment to the common good.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations has recognized our country's remarkable progress to ensure the food security of our citizens and to reduce the prevalence of undernourishment.

Our Government guarantees the right to universal primary education. Major programmes are under way — the "battle for ninth grade", the intercultural bilingual education programme, the inclusive education programme and the comprehensive school nutrition programme.

UN Women ranks Nicaragua among the leading countries in the world with the highest percentage of women in the executive, legislative and judicial branches. Today 42 per cent of the deputies in the National Assembly are women. Women hold 54 per cent of positions in the executive branch, 60 per cent in the judicial branch and 50 per cent in municipal councils. We established a Ministry of Women to promote gender equality and to empower women, while our laws ensure that women enjoy human rights.

Nicaragua received the Americas Award of the International Training Centre for Local Actors/Authorities (CIFAL) Atlanta and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research for achieving its goals in reducing maternal mortality and in recognition of the national strategy called Maternal Homes. In 2006 the national maternal mortality rate was 92.8 per 100,000 live births. In 2012 the rate was nearly half that, reduced to 50.9, and we continue fighting to reduce it further.

We continue our efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. Preventive measures are being disseminated and supportive care is provided to patients. In 2012 Nicaragua received recognition from the Pan American Health Organization for its contribution to the community vigilance programme against malaria. Campaigns are being developed to curb dengue fever, leptospirosis and influenza. We have successfully carried out the campaign "Live clean, live healthy, live a good life, live well", which aims to clean and beautify communities, provide preventive health measures against epidemics and pandemics as well as to maintain a harmonious and respectful relationship with one another and with the environment.

All of those projects are made possible by the enormous efforts of our people, who have made a social, economic and political model of dialogue, alliances and consensus, recognized by all. Our people's inexhaustible capacity for hope and essential relationship with the Christian, socialist and solidarity model that we have built together, in which all sectors of the country participate, has meant that our people continue to move ahead while promoting peace, serenity and the full exercise of their rights.

Our defence of peace and international security remains unwavering. Similarly, we continue to fight against drug trafficking and the various manifestations of transnational organized crime. Our retaining-wall strategy produces positive results. We are committed at the regional level to implementing the Central American Security Strategy. It is urgent that the international community give more support through additional financial resources to the efforts and investment the Central American countries are making against those scourges. Despite its limitations, Nicaragua invests considerable resources from its budget to ensure an optimal environment for public safety. Its successes are internationally recognized, and Nicaragua is seen as one of the safest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

We are committed to the struggles of other peoples for their full independence and sovereignty. Therefore, we demand once again the immediate and unconditional termination of the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed against Cuba by the United States of America and the immediate and unconditional release of the Cuban patriots imprisoned in that country. The United States must also stop its arbitrary and capricious inclusion of that brother country in its unilateral list of State sponsors of terrorism.

We reiterate our full support for the legitimate rights of the Argentine Republic in the sovereignty dispute relating to the question of the Malvinas Islands.

We recognize and welcome the progress in the political process of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and reject international campaigns aimed at weakening it.

We condemn, once again, the arbitrary conduct of the Government of the United States in preventing the aircraft of our colleague, Nicolás Maduro Moros, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, from flying through Puerto Rico's airspace. We condemn

that act, as well as the refusal of the United States to grant visas to our Venezuelan brothers so that they could attend this General Assembly plenary.

We reiterate our support for the brotherly people of Puerto Rico in their struggle for self-determination, independence and social justice. Puerto Rico is one of the last colonial enclaves in our continent. Its brave people deserve our full support and solidarity in order to take their place within the United Nations and in our Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, thereby eliminating colonial situations from the region. We express our solidarity with comrade Oscar López Rivera and demand that he be freed immediately.

We express the hope that the peace process in Colombia will come to fruition, bringing peace and social progress to the people of that country.

We support the efforts being made to achieve lasting solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Nicaragua continues to support a negotiated solution to the bloody conflict in Syria. The proposal of the Russian Federation to put an end to the war has received broad international support, including from countries that are members of the Security Council with the right of veto.

We reiterate our commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination and their legitimate right to establish their own State. We consider the resumption of talks between Palestine and Israel to be a step in the right direction. The talks must be accompanied by the suspension of the construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We reiterate our solidarity with the struggle of the Polisario Front and the Sahrawi people, which this year marks its fortieth anniversary.

We welcome the fiftieth anniversary of the African Union under the banner of pan-Africanism and the African renaissance.

Furthermore, Nicaragua continues to support the just aspirations of the Republic of China on Taiwan for greater participation in the various bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations.

Much has been said and heard in recent days about the Grand Canal of Nicaragua. With that project, our Government intends to take advantage of the unprecedented transformation in global maritime trade

that has taken place in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Maritime trade is expected to continue to grow, particularly between Asia and the Americas, and our project is designed to complement the Panama Canal expansion. We are planning a canal for peace, for the development of all peoples, constructed with a sense of responsibility as a world heritage site — a canal open to international investment in a reliable and transparent fashion, a canal that is the fulfilment of the dreams of the General of Free Men, Augusto C. Sandino, and of the people of Nicaragua, for their greater progress.

Climate change continues to be a grave problem. “Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected”, states the Earth Charter. In that statement lies the essence of our vision and our duty — to save Earth’s vitality and ourselves as the human race.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Alva Romanus Baptiste, Minister for External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of Saint Lucia.

Mr. Baptiste (Saint Lucia): I address the General Assembly today with a sense of deep humility — humility in the wake of the great architects of world peace who have stood here before me — and pride. In that regard, I will utilize my maiden address to this body to pay homage to those who fostered the birth and initial dynamics of the United Nations. I therefore find it more than appropriate to utilize the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations as a ready compass with which to set my course as I navigate the issues that occupy the forefront of our attention.

Before indicating my own country’s perspectives on present trends, let me take the opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, a representative of a Member State from my own Caribbean region, on your election to serve as President of the General Assembly. It is a clear acknowledgement by members of the General Assembly that all States, large or small, have a deep and broad interest in how international relations are evolving and a legitimate contribution to make towards resolving the problems that are having a negative impact on us.

At this juncture, permit me to commence my navigation. The first principle of the Charter reads as follows:

“To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace”.

Our world vibrates with dynamic political changes, some welcome, and some threatening to the interests of small States and therefore unwelcome. Like other Member States, we prefer the peaceful resolution of disputes, and therefore welcome the developments in the Middle East, specifically in relation to Syria, where the option of a peaceful and negotiated resolution has taken precedence over the option of war. It is important that in such matters we not get caught up in the emotions of the moment. We must be cerebral in our approach, because emotion is no substitute for intelligence, nor rigidity for prudence. We do not underestimate the difficulties inherent in the resolution of issues and disputes between nations in the Middle East. But we stand for the right to self-determination as a basic principle of any people’s existence, and hope that in other parts of the region the long-standing claims to entitlement on the part of the people of Palestine will continue to be pursued, primarily through persistent negotiation as against any inclination to the threat of violence and war. We are fortunate to have the United Nations as a framework within which we can always proceed to negotiate with patience and persistence until agreement and/or compromise is reached.

The second principle of the Charter of the United Nations is to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of the equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace. Saint Lucia, as a small State in a hemisphere of both small and large States, emphasizes the use of diplomacy as a prime instrument for the pursuit of normalized relations. We note the increasing mutual involvement of the peoples on both sides of the China Strait and express the hope that that will lead to normal relations beneficial to all the peoples of the world. In that regard, we welcome the response of the membership of the International Civil Aviation Organization to embrace the participation of the Republic of China on Taiwan in

aspects of its proceedings. That can be an appropriate model for the further engagement of Taiwan in the activities of international organizations, thus permitting that country to play its role more effectively in global development.

In the same context, the Government of Saint Lucia reiterates its support for the inclusion of Cuba in all regional and hemispheric organizations that it wishes to join. We support the removal of what can clearly be seen as forced exclusions, which are surely no longer permissible under the new rules and regimes of balanced diplomacy. As is evident, the exclusion of Cuba from normal and complete intercourse remains an open wound in the heart of our hemisphere. It is unnecessary and needs to be ended. Saint Lucia therefore emphasizes its support for persistent international efforts towards the removal of the unconscionable embargo that inhibits Cuba's legitimate efforts at economic growth and full hemispheric cooperation.

The third principle of the Charter is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for everyone without distinction to race, sex, language or religion. That is in consonance with the theme chosen for this year's general debate, namely, "The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage". Over a decade ago, when the world was entering the twenty-first century, the United Nations took the lead in setting the international development agenda. At that time, we made a loud and clear declaration of war against extreme poverty and hunger, illiteracy, gender inequality, child mortality, poor maternal health care, HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental degradation, as well as against the forces that seek to fragment our global partnership for development.

Our declaration was appropriately entitled the Millennium Declaration, and the goals contained therein were time-bound and target-driven. Today, less than two years before the 2015 deadline arrives, we find ourselves facing new, and increasingly critical, development challenges. Youth unemployment has reached crisis proportions globally, and high debt levels have threatened the solvency and stability of small States. Climate change and the increasing ferocity of natural and man-made disasters are threatening the environmental sustainability, and even the very existence, of small island developing States (SIDS).

Global interdependence demands that the strong help the weak, so that everyone can get strong. Therefore, the setting of the post-2015 development agenda is a watershed moment in global history, and all countries must participate meaningfully in the process. The rich must resist the temptation to retreat inward, as that can idle the global economic engine. The post-2015 development agenda must be driven by common aspirations, shared goals and a unified vision of a secure and stable world that we can proudly bequeath to our children.

Saint Lucia and several other States have already embarked upon and completed post-2015 consultations, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). At least 20 such national consultations have been conducted across the world, and they have provided invaluable inputs for the post-2015 agenda. They emphasize that Saint Lucia and other SIDS have serious vulnerabilities that seem to have escaped the gross domestic product-focused eyes of some of our development partners. The post-2015 agenda must therefore address, in a very real sense, the issues of concern to SIDS, such as the rise in sea level, non-communicable diseases, and the assessment of loss and damage caused by natural and man-made disasters and the funding needed for recovery. We are also concerned about the causes of climate change, particularly our over-dependence on fossil fuels, and its destructive impact on the debt profiles of our small and vulnerable economies.

In that regard, we want to arrest the adverse consequences of climate change before they cripple us, and we want to accelerate the transition to renewable energy using clean, green technology. In May 2012, our region hosted the Conference on Achieving Sustainable Energy for All in Small Island Developing States in Barbados and, together with UNDP and other international partners, we resolved to set targets for increasing the renewable component of our energy mix. Moreover, a month ago in Barbados, at the third interregional preparatory meeting for the third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in Apia, Samoa, in 2014, SIDS reaffirmed their commitment and renewed calls for the world to pay attention to their special vulnerabilities.

That is in keeping with the fourth principle of the Charter of the United Nations, which asserts that the Organization is to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of the common

ends mentioned earlier. In that regard, we recognize a number of United Nations initiatives.

First, we note that the outcome document of the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals requested the Secretary-General to initiate thinking on a post-2015 development agenda and to include recommendations in his annual report on efforts to accelerate progress on achieving the MDGs.

Secondly, we recognize that the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development has initiated an inclusive intergovernmental process for preparing a set of sustainable development goals.

Thirdly, we note that the work of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing, on which Saint Lucia is represented, has proceeded in a positive fashion. That work includes initiatives of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) region aimed at applying policies to address the effects of the global recession and of new trends and rules that negate our effective participation in international trade. Such initiatives are promoted by our regional institutions, such as the Caribbean Development Bank, whose President recently highlighted the need for new urgency in implementing policies to help the Bank's member States to emerge from the effects of the global recession.

Fourthly, we take special cognizance of the special event just held and convened by you, Mr. President, to follow up on efforts to achieve the MDGs. We concur with the recommendations that propose a framework for countries like mine to come up with an evolving response to the new international environment that recognizes how urgent it is that developed countries fulfil their official development aid commitments, and how critical the MDGs are for meeting the basic needs of people in developing countries.

It is vital that all such initiatives on the part of the global community include arrangements such as an adaptation fund that can enhance the ability of small island developing States to begin constructing facilities that can protect our countries from sea-level rise and natural disasters. Do we lie supine on our backs and hug the elusive phantom of hope? No. Given the turbulent and unpredictable world situation that we small States face, we have been compelled to reassess, restructure and reformulate domestic and foreign policy postures to enable us to realistically readjust our economic and

political strategies and reshape our external relations along more contemporary and multidimensional lines. In that regard, Saint Lucia has been making a special effort in the area of regional and international outreach. Within our hemisphere, we have witnessed the establishment and active engagement of both the Union of South American Nations and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and Saint Lucia, like other Caribbean Community States, has actively engaged with them where eligible.

It is in that spirit that we have also joined the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, so as to broaden our activities in the hemisphere and ensure that we take full advantage of efforts to advance our country's economic growth, reduce the economic inequalities that result from our small size and ensure our full participation in the regional and global decision-making that inevitably affects us.

As I speak of a better balance of global relations and the evolution of emergent political principles and practices, Saint Lucia joins with other CARICOM colleagues in drawing attention to a decision of the CARICOM Heads of State, taken at their thirty-fourth regular meeting, in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in July. That decision mandates our Governments to collectively seek reparations, on behalf of our citizens and countries, for the period of exploitation experienced during the transatlantic slave trade. Our Governments have therefore initially agreed to the establishment of a Caribbean reparations commission that will prepare the relevant documentation and strategies for pursuing the practical achievement of that goal, with a central focus of righting the wrongs of the past and elevating the status of our people. In that regard, we will continue to conduct a process of diplomatic outreach, not only within our own hemisphere and the States of the African continent, the geographic location of our ancestors, but also within the wider United Nations family.

I would like to reiterate the importance for small States like Saint Lucia of deliberate and sustained efforts to resolve disputes peacefully. We support strengthening the institutional arrangements of the United Nations in order to help it better fulfil its mandate. As the Assembly is aware, CARICOM has been actively engaged in developments relating to reform of the Security Council. It is an issue that Saint Lucia's Permanent Representative has been directly involved in, particularly the question of expanding both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the

Council and thereby giving that body's decision-making greater legitimacy. We look forward to further progress on the matter.

For my part, I can only echo the words of the great Russian writer Nikolai Ostrovsky, who said,

“Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life and all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the liberation of mankind”.

It is to that aim that my country and I devote every moment of our time.

As I conclude, Mr. President, I thank you and extend to you Saint Lucia's best wishes and support for your successful tenure of office as you pursue the tasks of the coming year, some visible and some undoubtedly not yet foreseen. Saint Lucia's hope is that as we navigate uncharted waters, we continually refer to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, to which I have referred, in order to ensure that our great Organization remains on course, as together, with mutual purpose and mutual aid, we make a new period in history.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.