

Speeches

Millenium Summit

Mr. President,

In the thirty-four years since our Independence we have striven for nothing less than to define our identity out of the crucible of a history which encompasses the darkest episode in human relations.

We in Barbados and the Caribbean are, in truth, the people of this Millennium. We did not exist in the First Millennium. Those who inhabited our islands then were extinguished by the desolation of early colonialism. Their lives remain a mystery to us, decipherable only through a few pieces of stone and remnants of folklore. The present people of the Caribbean are the New People of the New World.

We identify ourselves at the cusp of two millennia as a sovereign nation whose level of prosperity, education and well-being have been attained at high cost. We have not come to this point in our development easily or by chance, supported in every aspect by preferences and special dispensations, as some would have you believe. We come to this place and time, Mr. President, through endeavour and sacrifice.

Our expectation when we became a member of this organisation was that we would become part of an assemblage that would protect our territorial integrity, support our sovereignty and assist us in our quest to realise the full potential of our citizens. Membership in the United Nations, the original and largest of experiments in Multilateralism, was both practical and symbolic for us.

Barbados has a perspective on Multilateralism that is inherently positive. We understand it as interdependence in the management and sustainable development of our planet and our peoples. We know it as offering the opportunity for collaborative decision-making based on shared information and we believe in its precepts of mutual respect and mutual benefit.

It would seem, however, that these tenets are no longer held to be sacred by all of us. Debate continues on the worthiness of Multilateralism as a natural evolutionary development in the relationship between countries. The United Nations is at the heart of this argument. There is no denying that faith in the UN to deliver on its myriad mandates is too often in doubt. Lack of trust in the system has led to apathy among the majority. This has given rise to a disquieting tendency to flout the moral authority of the United Nations, endanger its agents for peace and development and undermine its credibility and effectiveness as global arbiter and guardian of human progress. Barbados' experience with Multilateralism has been diverse and pervasive. We are inheritors of membership in the Commonwealth of Nations. Our relations with Africa and the Pacific have been conducted largely within the unique forum of the ACP. In our own hemisphere we have become an integral part of the Summit of the Americas process. And of course, the fraternity and interdependence between our countries in the Caribbean Community needs no amplification.

In the midst of all our positive perceptions however, there is growing anxiety and unease. We have noticed a tendency by the large and mighty members of the world community to exploit the very laudable precepts of the United Nations to maintain an unjust status quo or to impose unpalatable conditionalities on peaceful co-existence.

The list of issues that are undermining Barbados' position in that hard-won niche we have carved for ourselves continues to grow. The efforts of the OECD to direct our tax regimes and that organisation's blacklisting of the offshore financial centres of small economies is a case in point. So too is the severe pressure within the FTAA for liberalisation of financial markets, as is the refusal of those culpable to accept responsibility for massive environmental degradation and to put real

resources in place to redress that damage.

True equity and true reciprocity need an equitable balancing of every aspect of multilateral transaction.

Barbados came to the United Nations with clean hands and a clear conscience. We had no differences with our neighbours that were reconcilable only by war, we had no designs on our neighbours' territory and no ambitions to dictate to others the way in which they should, within the parameters of the United Nations Charter, manage their affairs and determine their destinies. We remain a small peace-loving nation guided on our course by the lodestar of democratic principles, parliamentary governance and respect for the human rights of our citizens. Our ambition remains to safeguard and build on what we have so far earned and to have, in the global scheme of things, more than just a vote.

We wish, Mr. President, for the United Nations to assume responsibility for integrating into the world multilateral system the small states of this planet who expect and indeed have a right to be an active and effective part of the processes of global governance. To fail to act now would deny us a future of prosperity and fulfilled human potential. We are not expected to complete this task, Mr. President, but neither are we at liberty to abstain from it.
Thank You.