

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, Colleague Ministers, Heads of Delegations, Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you greetings from the Government and people of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.

I wish from the outset to congratulate you Mr. President on your election as Chair of this 72nd Session, and to assure you of my delegation's full support as you carry out your duties.

Permit me as well to extend congratulations to His Excellency Peter Thompson, President of the 71st Session of the General Assembly. President Thompson ably steered the deliberations of many pressing matters during this past year. As a representative of Fiji, he proved once again that Small Island Nations continue to make significant contributions to matters of global relevance.

I also extend a warm welcome to Secretary General Guterres as he assumes leadership of this august body. Your Excellency has come to the helm at a critical time in our collective history and we are confident that your competence, coupled with your political and diplomatic experience will enable you to chart the course of this organization towards a sustainable and peaceful future for all. Be assured, Your Excellency of my Government's fullest support and commitment.

My Delegation also expresses appreciation to former Secretary General Ban Ki Moon for his sterling service and wishes him well in his future endeavours.

Mr. President, the world has gathered here in New York at this 72nd General Assembly under the theme: "Focusing on People: Striving for Peace and a Decent Life for All on a Sustainable Planet".

The theme is comprehensive, yet simple; concise, yet inclusive, and it encompasses pivotal and pertinent areas for international reflection at this critical juncture in our history.

Sustainable Planet

Mr. President, permit me to begin where the theme ends: Sustainable Planet.

I choose to do so, Mr. President, because of the experience I, and members of our Caribbean civilization had immediately prior to leaving our countries to attend this General Assembly.

In the space of two weeks we braced ourselves for three hurricanes, Irma, Jose and Maria. Two of these, Irma and Maria, descended on our region as Category 5 hurricanes and in the case of Irma the most powerful storm in recorded history in the Atlantic. I pause to reflect that the hurricane season for 2017 is not yet over and the Caribbean will face similar threats each and every year.

In the aftermath we were faced with the tragic destruction of life, property and infrastructure in Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, St Bartholemy, St Martin, Sint Maarten, the British Virgin Islands, the US Virgin Islands, Cuba, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Guadeloupe and Dominica. Irma then made landfall in Florida in the United States where, like Hurricane Harvey before it in Texas and Louisiana, damage and destruction was caused to millions of people.

Mr. President I have highlighted the various countries and territories that suffered the most devastation but my own beloved country of St Kitts and Nevis was not without injury. We too saw damage to our power grid, our roads, our agriculture and fisheries sector and the homes of our people. Indeed on September 19th the day when we should have been celebrating our 34th anniversary of Independence as a Nation, St Kitts and Nevis was locked down under assault from Hurricane Maria.

Mr. President, the carnage in a wide swath of the Caribbean is unimaginable. Lives have been lost; homes and infrastructure destroyed; economies reduced to tatters; years of development wiped out; and in the case of Barbuda an entire island evacuated and rendered uninhabited and uninhabitable for the first time in 300 years.

It is worthy of note, Mr. President, that the carnage caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria took but a few days. In just a few days and in many countries a mere few hours, the world had front row seats to the most horrific destruction ever seen in our beloved Caribbean region.

We have in this very Chamber heard the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda speak solemnly to the utter destruction of Barbuda. We have only today, stood in anguished silence, as the Prime Minister of Dominica recounted the near total destruction of his beautiful country and the tragic loss of life. Their first hand accounts, Mr. President, would move even the coldest hearts to tears.

We today extend our deep condolences to our brothers and sisters and continue to keep them in our prayers. But even as we do so Mr. President, we also remember victims of the two horrific earthquakes in Mexico and those in Japan and New Zealand. Our thoughts and prayers are also with these countries.

Mr. President, the time has now come for the world to treat these phenomena not as natural disasters but as the man made disasters that they are. The science is irrefutable. Our oceans continue to get warmer due to our continued abuse of our Planet Earth. Warmer oceans feed and create horrific storms such as Irma and Maria. Now more than ever we bear witness to the compelling need to support the call for reduction in green

house gas emissions and all other actions and behaviours that aggravate the effects of climate change.

Mr President, climate change for us in the Caribbean is not a matter for academic rumination. The humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Caribbean in the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria is stark testimony that climate change is not only real but poses an existential threat to our people, our countries and our civilization.

The world has deliberated and negotiated. We have made commitments and signed multiple agreements, most recently the Paris Agreement. But the time for more urgent, concrete, tangible and collective action is now.

Mr. President it is the most cruel irony of our times that those of us in the Caribbean least responsible for climate change are the ones most disastrously affected by it. We are not major polluters but we bear the brunt of the effects of such pollution. In every sense Mr. President small vulnerable States like Antigua and Barbuda and Dominica and St Kitts and Nevis continue to be asked, by the world, to cash a cheque we did not write.

In order to attain a sustainable planet, those most responsible for climate change through their green house gas emissions and other environmentally harmful practices must shoulder the responsibility of arresting and ameliorating the consequences. We cannot continue to abuse our Planet and expect to remain unscathed. The people of St Kitts and Nevis calls upon the global community to pledge itself to pursuing renewable energy with greater alacrity. We must invest in better and stronger homes and buildings. We must grow our economies to allow us greater financial resilience and flexibility. The people of St Kitts and Nevis and of our Caribbean deserve and demand the same fundamental right to life and the security of our way of life as others anywhere else. I ask the global community to lend their collective voices so that together we can create a glorious symphony for change. That change which ensures a sustainable planet for all.

In this regard, I call on the community of Nations to mobilize the necessary resources to ensure the speedy reconstruction of those countries devastated by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Mr. President, my delegation condemns unreservedly the sterile analysis of GDP per capita which has been used by international agencies to tell our small island developing States that we are now middle and high income countries and therefore locked out of accessing developmental assistance or affordable financing. Mr. President, it is a travesty and a tragedy for the world community to witness such destruction caused by forces entirely outside the control of Caribbean Nations and then refuse to allow those Nations access to the necessary resources to rebuild. There has to be a more sensible and just model which takes into account the special vulnerability of small island States. St Kitts and Nevis joins others in demanding that a vulnerability index be developed as part of the matrix for accessing developmental assistance. We of the Caribbean already caught in the debt trap cannot after each disaster be forced to borrow commercially at high interest rates to rebuild destroyed lives. This is and must be a moral imperative for us all in the

wake of the destruction seen in the Caribbean.

And rebuild we must Mr. President. Countries such as Dominica have no safe zones or other geographic areas to which populations can be relocated. A hurricane of the scale of Irma and Maria devastates entire countries. We of the Caribbean are a proud and resilient people. The world must not stand by and allow the evils of climate change to force Caribbean people to become climate refugees. We must rebuild and we require the community of Nations to partner with us in this rebuilding effort.

In the fight against the disastrous effects of climate change allow me to congratulate the work of many international agencies and organizations as well as non governmental actors. My country is especially heartened with the work being undertaken by the Commonwealth and its leadership.

Focusing on People

Mr. President it follows, that if we are to achieve a sustainable planet, it requires an “all hands on deck” approach. From the onset, there must be buy in from all stakeholders. No one should be left out and therefore it calls for inclusiveness, unity and appreciating the input and contributions that all can make to achieving the world we want.

This brings me to the first part of our theme: Focusing on People.

There can be no debate that our people are our primary resource. It is no marvel therefore that Governments allocate a large percentage of their budgets to develop their human capital and expend great effort to ensure that they meet the basic needs of their populace. Governments which fail to provide for their people, and who ill-treat, abuse, and oppress their people must be rightly ostracized by the international community.

Mr. President, our world comprises all kinds of people, but I wish to highlight the youth, that sector of all our populations on whom the global community must increase its focus.

I commend the United Nations on its unflinching efforts to draw attention to our youth. Indeed, it was over two decades ago, that the UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Youth constitute 18 percent of the global population. Youth and children together account for nearly 40 percent of the world's population. The youth, Mr. President are not just our future. They are our present. Globally, Governments must do all they can to provide institutions and opportunities for learning and development; create employment as well as to prepare and to steer the youth towards entrepreneurial endeavours.

But Governments cannot do it alone. We therefore use this forum to call upon the business community as well as non-Government agencies and actors provide our youth with viable options and opportunities for gainful employment and social-economic advancement.

Mr. President we cannot speak of attaining the Sustainable Development Goals without a focus on our youths.

Striving for Peace

Mr. President, a vital element of a sustainable planet is peace. It behoves us all, Nations great and small to work towards the achievement of this essential universal value.

Regrettably, Mr. President, while in some countries their citizens are forced to engage in a daily struggle

for survival braving the scorching sun and bitter cold to labour for less than US\$1 per day, other countries are expending billions of dollars on developing weapons of war and mass destruction. Whilst some governments are allocating large sums to secure a future for their women and youth, others are investing in the tools of war. Whilst the budgets alone of some Governments will be inadequate to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, others are using multiple times these budgets on developing nuclear warheads.

Mr. President, in order to attain a sustainable planet, our priorities must be synchronized, harmonized and synergized. Our goal must be preservation and conservation not only of our natural resources, but also of our human resources.

My delegation condemns unreservedly the actions, which have led to heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula and calls on all countries to respect and honour their solemn commitments under international law. We condemn all actions that encourage violence and disrupt peace. There can be no place in today's world for war and violence. We therefore join the international community in demanding diplomacy and dialogue instead of sabre rattling and war mongering.

St Kitts and Nevis stands proudly with our Caribbean and Latin American neighbours as a Zone of Peace and exhorts all members of the community of nations to expend every effort to create and promote peace.

Decent Life for All

Mr. President, the theme makes a clarion call, not only to strive for peace, but also for a Decent Life for All. No boy, no girl, no man, no woman should be left behind. We must work together to reduce poverty and hunger, promote justice and equality, and ensure our people have access to healthcare and economic opportunity. In this global effort we must be inclusive and each and every country must be allowed to play its part. No one Nation can do it alone. Human suffering anywhere is human suffering everywhere. We must build partnerships and ensure the contribution of all the populations of this our Planet Earth. All must be allowed to sit at the table of brotherhood and contribute to finding lasting solutions to the problems we face.

In this regard, we call on the international community yet again to look at our dear friend Taiwan. This modern country of 23 million people; a country that has had tremendous successes in technology, agriculture, health, and renewable energy. A country which is a

model of peace and security. St Kitts and Nevis has experienced first hand the benefits of partnership with Taiwan. There is much that they can offer and we lose collectively when we seek to isolate and prevent our fellow Nations from having a seat at the international table. St Kitts and Nevis continues its unwavering support for the Government and People of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to be included in the United Nations and other international agencies. There is much we can learn from Taiwan and we can no longer afford to ignore the voices of their 23 million people.

In equal measure we call yet again for the lifting of the over 50 year embargo against our Caribbean sister Cuba. Mr. President the Cuban people are a noble people who have demonstrated their resilience despite insurmountable odds. Their leadership in health and humanitarian assistance to Africa the Caribbean and Latin America is well known. Their people ask only to be given a fair chance to live their lives in dignity and in peace.

Conclusion

In closing Mr. President, I acknowledge that the task ahead of navigating the many complex issues of the international community will not be easy. We however remain a firm believer in collective strength and of collective effort. This journey to a sustainable planet and future for all is attainable.

Throughout history we have achieved more together than we have achieved alone. Whether we are small islands, land locked, mountain, desert, or ice capped States; whether we are superpowers or powerless we are all better, and the United Nations becomes a better organization, when we work together.

Alone we can do little but together we can achieve much.

The challenges we face globally from climate change to refugees to war and violence require urgent action now. The world does not have the luxury of time. We have talked. We have debated. We have postulated and hypothesized. We have studied and analyzed. We must now act.

In this regard Mr. President I can find no more elegant prose than that of American Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr:

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the force urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action".

Thank you Mr. President.

