



United Nations

Sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly

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H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

Acceptance speech upon his election as President

New York, 14 June 2013

Today I stand before the General Assembly in the tradition of my sixty-seven distinguished predecessors, and I am deeply humbled and indeed honoured. I am also grateful for the trust and support that the Assembly has placed in me by electing me, by acclamation, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

The distance between my country's seat and this podium is merely thirty-six steps, yet the journey began many moons ago. Many other Members, in addition to my own Government, have graciously supported me, including my colleagues from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, the Caribbean Community and last, but not least, those from my own regional group, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States. Without them, I would not be standing here.

To each and every member of the General Assembly, I simply say "thank you". As I have done on so many occasions in the past, I will continue to count on each member's goodwill and willingness to work with me to find acceptable solutions in the year ahead.

Sixty-eight years ago, the Organization was founded in the wake of a terrible tragedy. Its Charter echoed a global longing for peace and cooperation. Since then, a steady stream of changes has reshaped our world, some positive, some negative, and some whose scope and magnitude are still evolving. I would posit that none among them has been more fundamental, more relentless and more far-reaching than the relationship between us, human beings, and the planet we inhabit. That reality affects each one of us.

A mere 18 months from now, the United Nations will launch its agenda for articulating the relationship between humankind and our physical environment.

That agenda must be wholly universal. It must, in my view, be a development agenda that is rele-

vant to all people and all societies, and it must bring about global transformation for everyone, with shared but differentiated responsibilities.

Implementing such an agenda will be a complex task—politically, socially, economically, environmentally, culturally and technically. Arguably, it may be the boldest and most ambitious project that the United Nations has ever had to accomplish, and we, the General Assembly, will need to be equally bold, ambitious and collaborative if we are to rise to the task we are about to undertake and ensure its completion.

The undertaking is enormous, but we, the General Assembly, must find the courage to deliver on it. We have a shared commitment to work towards a collective goal and we are all accountable for our actions. We in the United Nations have been cautioned many times over that failure is not an option. But this time let us show the world that we are not resigned to failure and that we can be both bold and decisive in our actions.

As we consider our new agenda, let me highlight a few points. Above all, we must draw on the experiences—the lessons learned—from the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, both in terms of results achieved and opportunities missed. We must also reflect on the new and emerging development challenges, with attention to two main goals, namely, overcoming poverty and insecurity and ensuring sustainable development.

Both time-bound global goals and national-level targets with measurable indicators will need to be developed. New and revised partnerships and bold political leadership at all levels are paramount. We must skilfully integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability, and we must balance the practical with the aspirational. Finally, our commitment to a world of opportunity, equity, freedom, dignity and peace—the principles of the Millennium Declaration of 2000 (resolution 55/2)—should not just be reaffirmed; they must also be re-energized.

Our agenda, which is formally known as the post-2015 development Agenda, must represent a significant evolution in the thinking of the international community, and it must envision an inter-dependent, planetary community regardless of development levels.

The time has come for the General Assembly—the supreme, deliberative organ of the United Nations—to exercise its collective responsibility and begin as soon as possible the process of finalizing the one shared, sustainable development agenda. To say it more clearly, development in general, and sustainable development in particular, is the work of the General Assembly. Very simply put, it is our reason for being.

During the upcoming sixty-eighth session, many of the outcomes of the Rio de Janeiro United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, as we just heard from the President [of the sixty-seventh session], are expected to come to fruition. We are expected to provide the requisite leadership and clarity for the process. I sincerely believe we have a duty to deliver on our responsibilities in an open, inclusive and transparent manner.

I therefore declare the theme of the sixty-eighth session, as well as that of the annual general debate of the General Assembly, to be “The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Setting the Stage!”. We all know that simply identifying a theme is largely symbolic and not an end in itself. Having done so, however, we must now take the next crucial, perhaps even arduous, steps to tease out the theme, enhance its relevance, create engagement opportunities for Member States, transform challenges into opportunities and strengthen our collective unity of purpose and commitment. Let us forge ahead with dogged determination and be steadfast. The theme is not a mere slogan. It should be operationalized and lead to concrete action for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

With that in mind, I will convene a number of related events towards fulfilling that objective. Working closely with the Secretary-General and his team and the relevant United Nations funds, programmes and offices, including, but not limited to, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, UN-Women, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the recently established Office for South-South Cooperation, my team and I will host high-level events on the follow-

ing three topics: the contributions of women, the young and civil society to the post-2015 development agenda; human rights and the rule of law in the post-2015 development agenda; and the contributions of South-South and triangular cooperation and information and communication technologies for development to the post-2015 development agenda.

In addition to those high-level events, my team and I will work closely with Member States to convene three thematic debates. Each debate will be geared towards the further elaboration of the chosen theme. We will seek to provide results-oriented outcomes on the following issues: the role of partnerships; ensuring stable and peaceful societies; and water, sanitation and sustainable energy in the post-2015 development agenda.

In the course of the long lead-up to today, I have been deeply touched by all the advice from colleagues about what to highlight during the sixty-eighth session—also known as lobbying. To no one’s surprise, in an Assembly as diverse as ours, ideas often differ. Nonetheless, I have identified the following common elements: the need for an open, transparent and collaborative presidency; greater involvement by the established organs of the General Assembly; and reinvigoration of the reform agenda of the General Assembly.

First, in response to the almost universal call for an open, transparent and collaborative presidency, let me provide a very clear answer: yes. My team and I pledge to be open and fully transparent, and we welcome the Assembly’s input for the work of the sixty-eighth session. However, let me be equally clear on another point. Whenever and wherever true leadership is required, whenever deadlocks must be broken and processes advanced, I will do my utmost to be resolute, fair, even-handed and unequivocal. On that the General Assembly has my personal assurance.

Second, beyond any shadow of a doubt, there is a need for greater involvement by the various organs of our institution in its work. Therefore, to ensure increased cooperation, coordination and exchange of information, it is my intention to hold regular meetings with the Secretary-General and senior members of his team and to continue the practice of holding periodic informal briefings, during which he briefs us on his priorities, travels and most recent activities, including his participation in international meetings and events organized outside the United Nations. In my meetings

with the Presidents of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, as well as the Chairs of subsidiary bodies, I will introduce periodic informal briefings by each to update the General Assembly on the work of those principal organs. Last but not least, I will also hold regular meetings with the General Committee. That will enable the Committee to assess the ongoing progress in the work of the sixty-eighth session so that we may receive its counsel on how best to further our work. To that end, my team and I will work closely with the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management and his team to ensure a smooth and productive sixty-eighth session.

Third, with regard to reinvigorating the reform of the General Assembly, let me say that our relevance as an institution depends upon it. Any organization that cannot evolve or adapt to changing circumstances is at risk—any organization. Our time at the United Nations is a privileged time. The hopes and dreams of millions for a conflict-free world rest on us. We cannot afford to be indifferent or immune to the changing world around us. We cannot stand idly by as millions struggle, or merely settle for surviving, when there should be opportunities for all to thrive. Put another way, the United Nations must reform or it will become inconsequential.

A critical component of that reform is to revitalize the General Assembly and its work programme. What exactly does that mean? It means enhancing its role and authority and increasing its effective-

ness and efficiency. Of course reform is needed in all the principal organs of the United Nations, including the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that I will strive to reinvigorate, advance and, yes, against incredible—and some would say impossible odds—conclude discussions on the reform of these organs. That is a top priority, and I call on each and every one of you in the General Assembly to join me in making it a reality.

Finally, we must also be cognizant of the evolving challenges the use cyberspace poses. To that end, I intend to work with Member States on identifying ways in which the Assembly can, and should, address emerging cyberissues.

As the Assembly may know, I was born on a small island in the Caribbean. However, I take to heart the often-repeated maxim that no man is an island. I fully recognize that, given the task of my position, I will need to rely—indeed depend—on all members if I am to perform my duties effectively. As a start, I have assembled a team of highly capable, experienced professionals, most of whom are drawn from among the General Assembly's midst and represent the rich diversity that is our United Nations. This is only the beginning. But what I really need is for each and every Member State and individual to play a role in making the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly productive and results-oriented, since in reality we are all on the same team. I therefore welcome everyone on board.



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