



Mr. President,

On behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend congratulations on your election to the Presidency of the 59<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We are confident that your experience and diplomatic skills will enable you to discharge fully, the weighty responsibilities of your office.

Permit me to convey to your predecessor, the Honourable Julian Hunte, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, our deep appreciation of his efforts towards revitalization of the General Assembly.

I wish also to convey to our esteemed Secretary General His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, the full support of the Government and People of Trinidad and Tobago, as he continues the global initiatives of the United Nations towards making the world better and safer for all humanity.

Mr. President, today Trinidad and Tobago is celebrating its 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a Republic. Over our 42 years as an Independent country we have made significant strides in the development of our nation.

We have maintained a strong tradition of democratic governance through an increasingly inclusive and multi-party political system; by respecting fully, the constitutionally entrenched and internationally recognized, fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual; and by ensuring strict adherence to the rule of law.

We have sought to increasingly diversify our economic base. Through consistent and sound macro-economic policies, together with prudent management and use of our resources, we have sustained more than a decade of positive economic growth, which last year was in the order of 13.2%.

Our country has made significant strides in advancing the capabilities of our people through universal access to primary and secondary education. We have gone further through our state-sponsored pre-school programme which targets universal early childhood education by 2010, and by fully opening the gateway to tertiary education, through support for every student, enhanced funding for deserving ones, and our recently established University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our archipelagic Republic, populated by 1.3 million people of African, Indian, European, Chinese, and Middle Eastern and mixed ancestries, constitutes a veritable microcosm of the people of the world.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago has demonstrated remarkable strength and resilience in the face of a global environment characterized by rapid economic, social and other changes; this has mobilized us to embark on a bold new vision in the pursuit of our developmental agenda. In this respect, our Government and people are currently engaged in a highly participatory consultative process aimed at formulating a National Strategic Development Plan to guide Trinidad and Tobago towards becoming a developed nation by the year 2020 or earlier.

It is called Vision 2020, and its agenda includes human capital development; the evolution of a technologically driven, knowledge-based society; the development of a highly productive and globally competitive economy; and, by the year 2020, the provision for all our citizens of a standard of living comparable to that enjoyed in developed countries.

Mr. President, our achievements stand indisputably in testimony to what a small independent nation such as ours can do in this regard. There is an instructive link between two of the features that today define and distinguish our country among others in the region. One is our oil and natural gas resources, the foundation and mainstay of our economy; the other, the steelpan, our creation derived from heating and tuning the top of discarded oil drums.

The steelpan is one of the most important musical instruments invented during the last century. We are proud to have created it, and equally so of its growing international recognition and popularity, which is an apt reflection of the phenomenal ingenuity of the people of developing countries.

The same holds true in respect of achievements in our energy sector. Mr. President, at just over 130,000 barrels of oil per day, Trinidad and Tobago's production is not significant by international standards. Our natural gas production, however, stands at 2.9 billion cu.ft/day and this has propelled my country to become today the world's largest exporter of methanol and of ammonia. We are currently supplying 80% of the United

and European markets, a population literacy level of over 90%, and a sound work ethic, as well as a good communications infrastructure, continue to make Trinidad and Tobago one of the largest per capita recipients of foreign direct investment in the hemisphere. Indeed last year we were the second largest recipient after Canada.

As with other countries we have our fair share of challenges. For example, our strategic location less than nine miles off the South American coast and to the south of the Caribbean island chain, together with our excellent air and sea transport links to major North Atlantic cities renders Trinidad and Tobago highly vulnerable to the trade in illegal drugs and firearms. Combating narco-trafficking, drug-related crimes and the spread of HIV/AIDS are among our greatest challenges, but the Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains resolute in its determination to eradicate these scourges. We continue to implement the measures necessary to fight them and are confident that we shall win the battle.

Mr. President, our developmental agenda is not centered solely on the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It is part and parcel of a pan-Caribbean agenda to which we are

sensitivity, one facilitating more beneficial integration of developing countries into the world economy.

In this regard Mr. President as sanguine as we are about the future of Trinidad and Tobago, I must on this occasion rise in the interest of the beleaguered nations of the Caribbean.

Mr. President, how often have small independent states preached from this very mountaintop of the need for multilateral trading arrangements which take into account the inherent vulnerabilities of small island developing states, and consequently need to be accorded special and differential treatment? Noticeable, is the reluctance of some partner countries to respond accordingly, so that there continues to be negative consequences, especially for the small economies of the Caribbean.

Trinidad and Tobago therefore stands resolute with our developing country partners in calling for what must be conceived of as the application of a social conscience within the management of globalization and its processes.

As capital importing economies, the developing countries of the Caribbean are only too well aware, sometimes painfully so, of the implications of capital shortage for the generation of employment, and the provision of housing, education and health care of our citizens. And perhaps I speak even of the yet unborn.

The same holds for Grenada and several other Caribbean states whose misfortune it was to have been called upon by "Ivan, the Terrible."

Mr. President on September 8th, Hurricane Ivan descended on Grenada. In less than two hours it had completely destroyed the economy and infrastructure and ravaged Grenada beyond description. Ninety percent of the buildings on the island were damaged. A primarily agricultural economy, dependent also on tourism, all of Grenada's acreages of crops disappeared with the strong wind. CARICOM leaders were recently advised by a Grenada representative that today Grenada has no GDP.

Before Grenada, Hurricane Ivan, with varying extents of disruption and destruction, visited Tobago and Barbados. After Grenada, it proceeded to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, Cuba, Bahamas and Southern United States. Everywhere there was considerable damage. But Grenada and the Cayman islands were hardest hit. Before Ivan, there was Charley and Frances. After Ivan came Jeanne with death and destruction in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

A number of CARICOM countries are now saddled with the immense challenge of restoring themselves to normalcy.

Mr. President, permit me to ask, to what extent have these climate changes been influenced by incursions into space from planet earth, or for that matter by ecological imbalances caused by the process of industrialization?

In the aftermath of the devastation visited on Grenada, CARICOM countries have been rallying to the assistance of the island, and must be applauded for their massive outpouring of humanitarian aid that continues to flow to Grenada. In this regard, Mr. President, permit me to recognize and applaud the most appropriate response of the Secretary General.

Trinidad and Tobago pledges its support to our beleaguered Caribbean neighbours and we have committed ourselves through direct financial and other levels of assistance. But what Grenada and Haiti require is well beyond the region's capacity to deliver. I urge the wider international community and donor agencies to respond adequately and to play their part. Help is needed and needed now!

The catastrophic events of the present hurricane season bring into sharper focus yet another dimension of the vulnerability of Caribbean countries. The January 2005 International Meeting in Mauritius to Review the implementation of the Barbados Plan of Action must seek to comprehensively address the new and emerging threats to the sustainable development of small island developing states. And may I here state that a whole new set of security issues have now arisen in the Caribbean as a result of these developments and the International Community might wish to take note.

Mr. President, the answer to so many of our problems lies in multilateralism, if approached the right way.

Belief in and respect for multilateralism led to Trinidad and Tobago's respect for all major global and regional fora. We are today active participants in the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, which, when realized, will stretch from Alaska in the North to Tierra del Fuego in the South; creating a market of over 800 million consumers and generating tremendous opportunity for economic and social development.

Our region's commitment to this hemispheric integration process has led Trinidad and Tobago and its CARICOM partners to offer our Capital City, Port-of-Spain, as the ideal location for the seat of the proposed permanent secretariat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

Unanimous regional support for this CARICOM bid would demonstrate hemispheric solidarity with one of its smaller members and give true meaning to the principle of the sovereign equality of all States. It will further decentralize the headquartering of major international and regional organizations, and enable a small island developing state to place its resources at the service of the hemispheric community. Accordingly, we look forward to receiving the support of all our neighbours in this hemisphere.

Meanwhile we remain pleased with the progress of certain multilateral initiatives; one of which is the New African Partnership for Development, which I urge CARICOM and African countries to support by exploring possibilities for the development of investment, trade, tourism and regular transport routes between our region and the African continent.

We also consider the establishment of the International Criminal Court to be a major achievement and urge partner countries to uphold the integrity of the Rome Statute establishing it. The commission of war crimes, genocide and other such crimes against humanity has been facilitated by a global culture of impunity. The people of the world would be safe only if for the perpetrators of such crime know that punishment is inescapable.

Trinidad and Tobago condemns all forms and manifestations of terrorism, wherever and by whomsoever committed. We are already a party to the principal international legal instruments against terrorism, and parliamentary action will shortly be taken by the Government to enact legislation enabling us to honour obligations regarding the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

Mr. President, as the international community continues to confront the many threats to the survival of mankind, the world's political leadership must reaffirm unequivocally, its commitment to the United Nations so that it can continue its role in fighting injustice, inequality, inequity and intolerance worldwide through resolute and speedy action in respect of its commitment to the ideal on which it was founded.

Trinidad and Tobago is of the view that the issue of UN Reform takes on an even more urgent character as the institution approaches the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its founding in 1945.

We therefore look forward to discussion of the Secretary General's recommendations based on the terms of reference of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, and chaired by former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun.

In conclusion, Mr. President I wish to propose that on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2005 (UN Day) a special commemorative session of the General Assembly be held in San Francisco, where our Charter was signed, to re-affirm our commitment to the lofty ideals enunciated some 50 years ago, and which are still valid today.

I thank you Mr. President.