

Address by

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Fifth/Former President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (2013-2018)

at ICDAY's Virtual Event in Support of the 75th United Nations Day

Shaping our Future Together with Conscience-Driven Global Conversation and Cooperation

24 October, 2020

The United Nations (UN) 75th anniversary presents an opportunity to bring forth a new world order, through collaborative discussion and conscience-driven action, more so in the midst of a global pandemic, mandating us all to realign our priorities, rebuild our economies and protect humanity, in a world desperate for change and inclusivity, for inspiring leadership, for solutions and for us all to achieve the Seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in real terms, so that no one will be left behind. The UN 75th anniversary celebration must not be a talk shop but an international call to arms for genuine and just, human and economic development.

The Federation of World Peace and Love (FOWPAL) must therefore be commended for hosting this particular forum, to not only celebrate United Nations Day but to also offer a platform where technocrats and world leaders are given the opportunity to proffer ideas and solutions for our global afflictions, some generated by the Covid-19 Pandemic. Additionally, what is required is leadership that adheres to the voice of conscience as the moral road map to do what is just and right always.

As a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), I am very aware of the peculiar challenges we face. Linear approaches to development has limited applicability. SIDS face diverse social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities that all stymie the developmental process. These include but are not limited to small domestic markets, difficulties in profiting from globalisation and trade liberalisation, reliance on external and remote markets with limited opportunities for the private sector, the high costs of provision of energy, infrastructure, transport and communication and the ravages of Climate Change. The

economies of SIDS thrive on tourism, buttressed by our rich historical tapestry, our cultural diversity, natural wonders and excellent climate. The Covid-19 pandemic has been ruthless to the economies of the Caribbean Region. The Director of the Division on International Trade and Commodities, Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in 2019, ***“The COVID-19 pandemic has shattered the economic progress many SIDS have made in recent years and far surpasses the impact of the 2008 financial crisis.”*** SIDS therefore must be placed on the front burner of the United Nations Agenda in a sustainable and mutually rewarding manner.

One initiative to be considered is SIDS’ genuine inclusivity at G7 Summits and meetings so that the core, developed countries in this grouping can be made to understand our peculiar challenges. President Emmanuel Macron has shown the way when he hosted the G7 summit in Biarritz in August 2019 by inviting non-member countries like Australia, Chile, Egypt, India, Iran, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, and Spain. The G7 countries together represent 58% of the global net wealth (\$317 trillion) and more than 46% of global GDP. Interestingly enough, G7 countries’ largesse has a genesis in the exploitation of the resources of SIDS when viewed in a historical context. The United Nations must therefore advocate that SIDS deserve parity, equity and justice at the table of global economics. The UN, as a matter of urgency and given international concerns for justice, ought to address and advance issues of reparation for slavery in all its permutations and existing ‘systemic discrimination’ before the General Assembly, expeditiously.

The fear and trepidation that come with Covid-19 have been used by governments and institutions all over the world to engage in adverse economics that benefit the few and the privileged to the disadvantage of many. The international search for a vaccine has become a dog fight for potential profits. We cannot be seen sniping at each other’s heels in the face of a common enemy. In 2020 and beyond, the UN must effectively play a more aggressive role in mediating the collaborative effort and research for the cure. UN organizations must operate beyond universal suspicion in their perfunctory duties remaining fiercely independent of government and institutions and persons with money and influence. Leadership in all sectors must be responsible and transparent. As Secretary General Antonio Guterres warned us in a

riveting statement on 15 October, 2020 on **Corruption in the Context of Covid-19**, ***“The response to the virus is creating new opportunities to exploit weak oversight and inadequate transparency, diverting funds away from people in their hour of need.”***

World peace and security are often threatened by profligate crime in our individual countries and small arms are the weapons of choice. There is therefore a need for United Nations oversight and encouragement to enforce commitments under the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons (UNPOA). Leaders need to examine their conscience and seek to address very frontally and robustly, the scourge that gun violence is having on societies.

The United Nations must continue to advocate for Ocean Governance and consequent oversight of spatial areas, connectivity to the ocean’s sustainable needs and its regenerative possibilities. In protecting our oceans and addressing the egregious acts of impunity against the environment, I wish to propose once more, that world leaders and citizens advocate for and support the establishment of an **International Environmental Court (IEC)**, without prejudice to the mandates of existing institutions.

There have been stellar moments in the bonnet of the United Nations. Between 1950 and 2020, the UN, its officials, its organizations and agencies, persons working at the UN as diplomats and international civil servants have been awarded the Nobel Peace prize on some 16 occasions, telling proof of the great work being done. On 9 October, some two weeks ago, the World Food Programme was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize ***“For its efforts to combat hunger, for its contribution to bettering conditions for peace in conflict- affected areas and for acting as a driving force in efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war and conflict”.***

Having been a former UN Prosecutor, I fondly recall the outpouring of widespread emotion of us UN staff members at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) office, Den Haag, Holland, the day in 2001 it was announced, that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and our organization, the United Nations, were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. As a former UN Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and former International Criminal Court

(ICC) Judge, I can personally attest to the phenomenal committed and passionate work, grounded in great personal sacrifice, of those officers working in the UN and its agencies, many risking and even losing their lives in those zones of conflict in seeking to carry out the mandate of the UN Charter. On this the 75th United Nations Day, we must remember them in our prayers, we must remember them now. Let us for ten seconds reflect on and celebrate those valiant souls, those UN officers, who have died doing UN work, and who have given selflessly their very all, to save mankind in more ways than one.

[Ten second observance]

We cannot and must not forget the support and sacrifice of the family members of UN staff for their unstinting support and sacrifice during the last 75 years and we are forever indebted to them.

Today more than ever, we are in need of healthy lives and a healthy world. Nations have been wasted and ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic in a way never imagined. This, against the backdrop of a world in an environmental crisis, where mankind has not been kind to Mother Nature. We have brought ourselves to the brink, by our apathy, indifference and callous actions yet there is belief and hope that we can not only survive, we can overcome. The basis of this belief and hope lies in the United Nations, an Institution that has been in existence for 75 years, which despite multifaceted challenges including lack of resources, has been the principal organ in the vanguard of creating a better and greater world for all. Within a space of forty years, there were two world wars and during these 75 years of the existence of the United Nations, there have been none. There have been zones of conflict that have resulted in the great loss of life and the abject destruction of countries through said conflicts but none so great, to have resulted in the world going to war. The United Nations continue to be the engine room of salvation and the principal proponent of peace where through its several organizations and agencies and the valiant efforts of its workers, the UN as a body, has been able to make the difference, forging and facilitating peace, order and the rule of law for nations and regions in conflict and especially defending human rights for all without exception.

I thank you.