



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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**PRIME MINISTER**

**OF**

**THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**DURING THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE**

**74TH SESSION OF THE**

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President,

It is indeed a distinct honour to address, for the first time, this august Assembly of States, entrusted with the responsibility of charting the way forward on the wide array of issues that impact our collective development. On behalf of the Government and people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend sincere congratulations to you on your election as President of the 74<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We look forward to the excellence you will demonstrate and thank you for the steady hand of leadership you bring to this high office.

Allow me to extend also, our gratitude to your predecessor, Her Excellency María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador, who served with great distinction as the first female from the Latin America and Caribbean region, to be elected President of the General Assembly.

Mr President,

As we approach the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations, a challenging road lies ahead, unless we collectively do what is necessary to alter the current trajectory of global events. We continue to note with alarm, the number of persons living in poverty, the innumerable threats posed by the effects of unmitigated climate change and the continued exclusion of the most vulnerable in our societies with respect to access to education, social protection and healthcare.

Mr President,

Migration, violent extremism, the scourge of terrorism, the threat of violent conflict and the spread of communicable diseases, such as the recent resurgence of the Ebola virus and measles, are pressing challenges that transcend the borders of individual countries.

We have witnessed extreme flooding, droughts, coral bleaching, rising sea levels, heat waves and devastating hurricanes with increasing strength and frequency in many parts of the world. And, in this regard, it was with profound sadness that we witnessed, just a few weeks ago, the horrific destruction of our CARICOM neighbour, by Hurricane Dorian, which sat on the small islands of the Bahamas for almost thirty hours. I join with other speakers in offering our deepest condolences to the Government and People of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas on the loss of life and extensive destruction of properties and livelihoods as a result of this unprecedented weather event. Trinidad and Tobago stands in solidarity and strong support of our brothers and sisters in The Bahamas.

As a family of nations, the challenges we face require us to place emphasis on multilateral approaches, rather than unilateral ones. We should be strengthening our partnerships through mutual respect and cooperation. This approach would allow us to regain some ground in reversing the current patterns of growing inequality and insecurity, and transform current circumstances to the benefit all of humanity.

It is against this backdrop that I welcome the opportunity to share the perspectives of Trinidad and Tobago, on the appropriately selected theme of this General Debate, namely: **“Galvanizing multilateral efforts for poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion.”**

Mr. President,

In Trinidad and Tobago, since 1956, our citizens have been central to our development and, in fact, our people remain our greatest assets. We must create a society in which all basic needs are met, and each individual is valued and given the opportunity to participate and to

contribute. This means that we must ensure food security and eradicate poverty, inequality, discrimination, disease and address the lack of access to health care, as well as substandard and inhumane living conditions. We must build a society that shares the principles and cultural norms of trust, goodwill, honesty, respect, tolerance, integrity, civic pride, social justice and community spirit. Accordingly, Trinidad and Tobago has adopted an integrated National Poverty Reduction Strategy that is collaborative, sustainable and meaningful for all stakeholders involved.

Mr. President,

The consolidation of our economic stability and capacity to remain effectively integrated into the global financial and trade architecture remains a priority for my Government, as we continue the search for measures to strengthen our fiscal resilience through diversification. Our national development ambitions should be buttressed by an enabling international economic environment through international trade, development cooperation, business activity and finance.

We are well aware that financial services play an important role as a contributor to economic growth and international trade and investment. It is in this context that we express grave concern regarding the unilateral insertion of some CARICOM Member States including Trinidad and Tobago on the list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions by a number of our international partners. The label of 'non-cooperative tax jurisdictions' has the potential to inflict irreparable damage to the reputations and economies of small island developing states like ours. Trinidad and Tobago, therefore, calls upon our international partners to adopt a more collaborative, just and fair approach in addressing this issue.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago also remains deeply concerned about the progressive decline in correspondent banking services by international banks. This is particularly problematic for CARICOM Member States, as it threatens our financial stability, impedes our efforts to alleviate poverty and limits our achievements in respect of socio-economic growth and development. Further, the withdrawal of correspondent banking services undermines the region's efforts to consolidate a global partnership that will achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Trinidad and Tobago joins with other CARICOM Members in calling for international banks to engage collaboratively with affected Member States to restore mutually acceptable financial relationships.

We welcome the observation by Secretary-General Guterres at the CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting in July of this year, that eligibility for Official Development Assistance and other forms of concessional financing should include vulnerability criteria.

Trinidad and Tobago, therefore, takes this opportunity to reiterate its call for the international community and international financial and development institutions to consider the formulation of new multidimensional parameters in determining access to concessional financing. We continue to endorse the view that the United Nations Development System should be driven by a multidimensional approach to development assistance, which is more appropriately suited to each country's specific needs and national priorities.

Mr. President,

We remain troubled that, even as we approach the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women, girls and persons with disabilities in many parts of the world are unable to enjoy basic human rights and freedoms. In our effort to combat this challenge, Trinidad and Tobago reaffirms

its commitment to the delivery of improved healthcare, the continued enhancement of the educational system, and increased accessibility and support to persons with disabilities.

Women and girls must also be equal partners in our collaborative efforts to build peaceful and sustainable societies and to promote and protect human rights. The promotion of gender equity and equality is essential in this regard. It is equally important to consolidate an integrated social protection system that improves living conditions and creates opportunities for women and girls to achieve their full potential.

Mr. President,

We have no doubt that climate change presents a very real threat that jeopardises our pursuit of sustainable development. In the circumstances, my Government is moving towards the employment of a multi-pronged approach towards adaptation and mitigation of the negative impacts of climate change.

Trinidad and Tobago recognises that climate change adversely affects all countries, regardless of how much they each contribute to global emissions. In this respect, I wish to reiterate my Government's unwavering commitment to addressing these adverse impacts associated with climate change, through a combination of collaborative approaches, improved partnerships and networking with stakeholders, in order to meet our international obligations, in alignment with our national laws, policies and priorities.

Mr. President,

For us in Trinidad and Tobago, the marine environment and its resources remain critically important to the livelihood of our people, our cultural and social identity, as well as our sustainable

development ambitions. Trinidad and Tobago therefore remains hopeful that the adoption of an international legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction would be a reality in the not too distant future. We maintain that this agreement would establish a platform for both the achievement of sustainable development and the protection of the common heritage of mankind for this and future generations.

Mr. President,

The foreign policy of Trinidad and Tobago is guided by the tenets of respect for the sovereignty and sovereign equality of all states, non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states and respect and adherence to international law and to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. As a small island developing state, we remain fervent in our conviction that, despite existing in a world where these well-established principles of multilateralism are under threat, our right to be heard ought not to be diminished or dismissed.

Mr. President,

For us in the Caribbean region, our sustainable growth and development hinge on the maintenance of peace and security. It is in this context, that I turn to the situation facing our closest neighbour Venezuela which is located only seven miles off the coast of Trinidad. Earlier this year, Venezuela became the epicentre of a global standoff that saw the threat of the use of force by external forces against that country. As this worrisome development continued to escalate, Trinidad and Tobago joined with fellow CARICOM Member States to push for an urgent de-escalation of tensions and to build a platform for dialogue and negotiations for a peaceful resolution to the situation.

Arising out of CARICOM's non-interventionist stance and 'diplomacy of peace', the Prime Ministers of Barbados, Saint Kitts and Nevis and myself, as mandated by CARICOM, met with Secretary General Guterres, the Permanent Representatives of several influential Member States, as well as other stakeholders, to underscore our concerns about the volatility of the Venezuelan situation, the safety of the citizens of Venezuela and the stability of our region.

Mr President,

We remain resolute in our conviction that, for our region to remain a **Zone of Peace**, dialogue is critical and indispensable. As such, Trinidad and Tobago remains in full support of the Montevideo Mechanism and any other suitable initiatives that seek to bring about a peaceful resolution through meaningful and constructive dialogue. In this regard, I make special mention of the Norwegian Government, and I applaud its efforts thus far in bringing both sides to the negotiating table, most recently, in Barbados. We recognise that, in order to achieve meaningful progress, the negotiation process requires time and patience, and all parties must engage in good faith. We therefore urge external forces not to further engage in unilateral intrusions, which could potentially undermine the negotiations and ultimately cause further hardship for the Venezuelan people. The objective of the international community should be to ensure that both parties are allowed to arrive at conditions for progress in Venezuela, with the ultimate aim of achieving political stability, peace and economic well-being. The Norwegian/ CARICOM/ Montevideo Mechanism initiatives are indeed worthy of support towards this end.

We are saddened by the recent withdrawal of a party from this sane and sober initiative but we trust that this development is temporary because only Venezuelans can properly take ownership of their situation, and we of this body can only help them along the path to security and economic stability.



Mr. President,

For us in Trinidad and Tobago, our sustainable development would be difficult to attain without the management of irregular migration. Trinidad and Tobago has not been unaffected by the influx of migrants from Venezuela. To manage this situation, my Government implemented a Migrant Registration Framework (MRF) system for both documented and undocumented persons who entered the country. The aim of the Framework is to safeguard the human rights and humanitarian needs of Venezuelan nationals within our borders, while safe-guarding national interests, such as national security. Those who were registered were granted approval to work for one year, in the first instance. It should be noted that this registration process afforded those persons the opportunity to be self-funded through employment during their stay in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President,

As a responsible member of this family of nations, the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago recognise our duty to assist our neighbours in their time of distress. We are undertaking to do so for just over 16,000 of our neighbours from Venezuela despite our small size and very limited resources,

Experience has shown that there are both opportunities and challenges with respect to migration. Our policy is rooted in the human attributes of respect and dignity, and ensuring that empathy shines through as a beacon to the destitute.

Mr President,

These challenges are magnified for countries like Trinidad and Tobago with limited resources and other capacity constraints.

We have noted with concern that criminal activity has moved from random acts of criminality to criminal networks, the activities of which are being carried out in an organized, highly sophisticated and technological global environment. It is Trinidad and Tobago's experience, and that of the Caribbean Community as a whole, that these compounded challenges represent a threat to our socio-economic well-being, the rule of law and our peace and security

Mr. President,

While it is important to treat with violent extremism from a security perspective, the threat and effect of this phenomenon should be neither overlooked nor dismissed. The global threat of young people being lured by extremist groups remains a major concern.

In this regard, Trinidad and Tobago reaffirms its commitment to joining the international community in building an alliance for a strategic, collective security architecture that addresses the conditions that give rise to violent extremism. This framework, Mr. President, ideally ought to be buttressed by a robust international legal system that allows all people to live freely and in dignity, with equal protection before the law and without fear of persecution or xenophobia.

Mr. President,

History has taught us that the maintenance of international peace and security cannot be separated from sustainable development. In this regard, we maintain that the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed against Cuba, a Caribbean nation, which has been in place for almost six decades, undermines the country's potential to achieve sustainable development and economic growth. Trinidad and Tobago maintains further that the imposition of unilateral coercive measures against Cuba under the Helms-Burton Act, is inconsistent with

international law and the Charter of the United Nations. Trinidad and Tobago thus reiterates its call for the unconditional lifting of the economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago strongly supports the mandate of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is to help put an end to impunity for perpetrators of the most heinous crimes of concern to the international community, as well as to contribute to the prevention of such crimes. As a country that advocated for the establishment of the International Criminal Court through the pioneering work of the late Arthur N. R. Robinson, former Prime Minister and President of Trinidad and Tobago, we remain resolute in our commitment to support the mandate of the ICC. Despite its detractors and other challenges, the ICC continues to be a ray of hope to all victims of the crimes within its jurisdiction who are seeking justice. For this reason, we continue to encourage those countries that have not yet submitted to the jurisdiction of the Court to do so, sooner rather than later, so that it can aptly fulfil its mandate, with completeness, as a universal court.

Mr. President,

Trinidad and Tobago maintains that the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons constitutes a crime against humanity and a violation of international law, including international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations. Lamentably, we have witnessed within recent times the elimination of restraints on nuclear weapons at both the bilateral and the multilateral levels.

Trinidad and Tobago, as part of the Caribbean Community, in 2017, participated in the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading towards their Total Elimination and welcomed the adoption of the historic

Treaty to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons. In this regard, I am proud to announce that yesterday September 26, Trinidad and Tobago signed and deposited its Instrument of Ratification for the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Mr. President,

The reform of the Security Council continues to be an area where CARICOM remains actively engaged in its advocacy for early and comprehensive reform. We look forward to the Intergovernmental Negotiations (IGN) on Security Council Reform in this 74<sup>th</sup> session, building on the work done during the 73<sup>rd</sup> session. We therefore reiterate our call for all Member States to work collaboratively and in the spirit of compromise, to reform the Security Council in a manner that would effectively address its functioning and credibility of the Security Council, making it more relevant to the United Nations and better equipped to fulfil its mandate in today's context.

As CARICOM, one of our positions for the reform of the Security Council has been advocacy for guaranteed representation and inclusion of small island developing states (SIDS) through a dedicated seat to be rotated among SIDS across all regions. While we remain hopeful that such a proposal would eventually find favour among Member States, at this moment, it is with great pride that we congratulate our sister CARICOM nation Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which earlier this year became the smallest nation ever to secure a seat on the Security Council. This historic achievement has convincingly demonstrated that our small islands remain indomitable as we continue to make noteworthy contributions in all spheres. At this juncture, I would like to assure this General Assembly of Trinidad and Tobago's continued dedication to the maintenance of international peace and security, which is evidenced in our candidature for membership on the Security Council for the period 2027-2028, for what could be the second time in our nation's history.

Mr. President,

As the United Nations stands on the threshold of celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Trinidad and Tobago is pleased to recommit itself to the principles and purposes enshrined in the UN Charter. As Member States of the United Nations, we need to recalibrate our efforts towards ensuring that our Organization is effective, relevant and fit for purpose and that no one is left behind. I am confident that we possess the inherent desire, the will and the impetus to achieve these goals.

Mr President, I thank you.