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Sixty-eighth session

14th plenary meeting
Thursday, 26 September 2013, 6 p.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Deng (South Sudan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6.15 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (continued)

General debate

Address by His Excellency Mr. Elio di Rupo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium.

Mr. Elio di Rupo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Elio di Rupo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Di Rupo (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): It was in my country, in Ypres, during the First World War, that chemical weapons were used in a conflict for the first time. We can all recall the dreadful suffering of thousands of those soldiers. Almost 100 years later, that same suffering is being inflicted on thousands of Syrians. Despite the international Geneva Protocol of 1925, the history of the world — a shared history — is repeated, from Ypres to Damascus.

This is the second year that I have addressed the General Assembly from this rostrum. In one year, so

many hopes have been raised and fulfilled but, at the same time, so many additional war crimes have been committed. A year ago, I spoke of 30,000 Syrian deaths. Today there are 120,000. And that conflict is not the only one. While we are talking here, atrocities continue in various parts of the world.

All of us here must show as much courage as the men and women who are fighting in the streets for their freedom and dignity. Within the United Nations, we have everything we need to act, while those who are fighting often have nothing but their courage to live on. If a veto must be cast, it should be a veto on tyrants and their crimes.

No one can end a famine or stop a tyrant alone. Peace is a shared responsibility. That is why there is no alternative to multilateralism and politics, if we seek to improve the lot of humankind. That is what motivates Belgium's commitment, which is political, financial and at times even military, as the fifteenth most significant contributor to the United Nations.

My country is also of the view that among our responsibilities we have the responsibility to protect — that is to say, the responsibility to prevent and fight the particularly atrocious crimes of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Belgium fully supports the actions of the United Nations in that regard. In 2014, we will organize an international conference in Brussels on the prevention of genocide.

When we work together, we achieve results. Mali is proof of that. But let us not forget that nothing is ever

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settled forever. For it to last, peace must be continuously nourished. I would like to commend in particular the recent efforts of the international community in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The population of the north-east of the country has for years suffered massacres, mass rapes, the forced recruitment of soldiers, including of child soldiers, pillage and forced displacement. Just yesterday, witnesses told me of martyred children. That is shameful.

The efforts of the Secretary-General and the Security Council to strengthen the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are bearing fruit. The Intervention Brigade is playing an active role in protecting the population. The Addis Ababa Framework offers a genuine possibility for the stabilization of the entire region. However, let us make no mistake: agreement at Kampala is essential for the process to be successful. Pragmatic solutions must also be found — without, however, accepting general amnesty or allowing for impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Belgium stands ready to contribute to such solutions. The territorial integrity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must also be respected. All external interference must cease. Belgium urges the Congolese authorities to implement the structural reforms needed in the army and the police, so as to re-establish the rule of law throughout the national territory and to guarantee the prosperity of the Congolese people.

Going to war, building walls and curtailing rights is always easier than building bridges and keeping the peace. It is easier to build walls than to organize a democratic system or build hospitals and schools. In our contemporary globalized world, conflicts can be resolved only by political solutions. That is why Belgium supports the efforts of Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, Joint Special Representative of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, as he seeks to bring the parties to the negotiating table. In that regard, I welcome the American-Russian initiative to hold the “Geneva II” conference.

It is not death that metes out justice; it is respect for the law. It is the law that organizes human societies, protects the weak and prevents violence. Law is essential because a world without rules — whether in terms of civil interactions, trade or finance — leaves humankind face to face with its worst enemy: itself.

Respect for the law is a foundation of the life we share. Laws must be respected, including in situations of conflict. I am referring in particular to humanitarian law, so that victims can receive assistance and care.

Belgium has echoed and tirelessly backed the calls from humanitarian agencies for the obstacles to their activities to be lifted. We demand that access to health care be improved on the ground everywhere, including in Syria. All parties must respect international humanitarian law. My country participates actively in efforts to provide assistance to populations that have been victims of fighting. The onset of winter and the sharp rise in the number of victims, refugees and displaced persons mean that the international community must step up its efforts further still.

The law must also stop impunity. Peace cannot ever be built on amnesty for the worst crimes, or turning a blind eye thereto. Together with 56 other States, Belgium has called for the situation in Syria to be referred to the International Criminal Court. The work of the Court is contributing to bringing about an era of responsibility. All States should cooperate with the Court.

The law must also make it possible to bring dictatorships and oppression to an end. In 2010, all those who defend democracy welcomed the advent of the Arab Spring. I am not one of those who today have turned their backs on that hope. Let us not forget all of the women and men in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and elsewhere who wish to live in peace. We must support them and promote the holding of free elections. We should encourage them to draft constitutions that guarantee fundamental rights, justice and equality. We should also recall that winning an election or exercising authority following elections does not give someone the right to oppress minorities. True democracy means respecting and protecting minorities.

The law must guarantee individual freedoms. Freedom means, for example, the right of young women to study and to choose their partners for themselves or to remain single. Freedom also means the rights of women to move in public as they please. Freedom also means the right to practice one’s religion or to practice none at all. Freedom also means the right of heterosexual and homosexual couples to walk hand in hand in the street or in other public spaces. I am proud that Belgium guarantees those fundamental freedoms. I am also proud that my country promotes efforts to spread such freedoms everywhere in the world.

While I am speaking of continuing our efforts and making them lasting, I would like to mention the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. It is absolutely vital that we seize the opportunity afforded by our American friends. A solution must be arrived at now, based on the coexistence of two States, with the State of Israel and an independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. We have also made it very clear that we are against colonization. In that context, Belgium is ready to host a conference in Brussels aimed at ensuring that private economic partners provide support for the peace process. We believe that there can be no economic plan, however, unless there is a political plan with a concrete timetable.

Peace and security also depend on harmonious prosperity, whose benefits must be shared equitably around the globe and among its citizens. According to scientists, the world's ecological footprint now exceeds the world's capacity for regeneration by about 50 per cent. That situation is untenable and affects everything on the planet.

I welcome the United Nations initiative to convene Heads of State and Government here in New York for a forum on sustainable development. It is here that less developed and developed countries can solve the huge challenge of sustainable development together. Every country has problems that are either shared or complementary and interconnected. By that I mean extreme poverty, desertification, the exodus for ecological reasons of millions of people, the exhaustion of natural resources and climatic warming.

Despite the progress that has been made, much remains to be done to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Hunger, poverty and unequal access to education and health care are intolerable injustices. We must continue to mobilize to fight them. That is why Belgium asks that the efforts made under the rubric of post-2015 development be merged with the goals of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in a single negotiation framework within the United Nations. That single framework should bring together the economic, social and environmental aspects that are becoming facts of life for all of us.

I would like to touch on one final subject, that is, espionage and cybercrime. Our colleague President Dilma Rousseff asked a true question for today (see A/68/PV.5). Is it permissible to ignore privacy laws in the name of security and the fight against terrorism,

two areas that are basic for all peoples? I support the call by the President of Brazil for protecting the private lives of citizens everywhere, in particular on the Internet. She proposed the establishment of a multilateral framework designed to effectively ensure the protection of data online. The Internet must not become an invisible battleground. It should remain an instrument of freedom and development for all, a place where all can communicate in peace and security.

In 2014, along with other nations, Belgium will solemnly commemorate the centenary of the First World War. We will do it out of duty to the memory of the young men from more than 50 countries who came to die on the battlefields of my country in order to liberate us. They were not even 20 years old. We will also commemorate the war's centenary in order to teach young people of today, so that they too can become militants for peace.

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Elio di Rupo, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Belgium, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Laurent Salvador Lamothe, Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooptation of the Republic of Haiti

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooptation of the Republic of Haiti.

Mr. Laurent Salvador Lamothe, Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooptation of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Laurent Salvador Lamothe, Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooptation of the Republic of Haiti, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Lamothe (Haiti) (spoke in French): I would first like to express my warm and fraternal gratitude to the President of the Republic of Haiti, His Excellency Mr. Michel Joseph Martelly, for the trust he has placed in me and, above all, for his courage and unwavering determination to build a new Haiti. I would also like to congratulate Mr. John Ashe, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda, for his election to the

presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, as well as to salute Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

I am proud to speak in this forum of modern global history, one that has witnessed so many great leaders discussing their vision for a world that is more just and a humankind that is more enlightened and balanced.

It has been 13 years since the States Members of the Organization, buoyed by the basic values of freedom and equality, met to launch a new world order for development when they adopted the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2). It has been a strong period for the United Nations, which continues to stand out through its efforts to call on the peoples of the world to unite to overcome the challenges linked to poverty and social exclusion.

I speak on behalf of Haiti when I voice our pleasure at the increasing vitality of the Organization, which over the years has succeeded in preserving the ideals of peace and solidarity. My country has always sought, with the United Nations, to provide a better future to generations to come. We have done so enthusiastically, because over the past two centuries, Haiti — the land of Toussaint Louverture, Alexandre Pétion, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe — has never missed the great historic events. It is up to all of us to preserve this vital tool for the future of humankind.

The theme of the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly is “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage”. This is the ideal opportunity for Haiti to present to the entire world an initial assessment of the work carried out by the Government, work which largely meets the aims of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and which allows us to see a burgeoning new Haiti.

Before presenting those achievements to the Assembly, it is important to recall the situation that Haiti found itself in when President Michel Martelly was sworn in. In January 2010, Haiti was in a particularly critical situation, especially because of the devastating, large-scale earthquake. The natural disasters following the earthquake exacerbated the already very difficult problems. Despite daily difficulties, Haiti is now resolutely and definitively on the path of progress. Our country is gradually recovering from the natural disasters it experienced and today is facing the future with confidence. We have adopted effective measures

and policies that are focused on a strategic long-term development plan.

The aims underlying our Government’s action go hand in hand with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. However, the development under way cannot take place without a deep-seated reform of the public administration and good political governance. That is why the rule of law is one of our priorities.

In that regard, we have made great strides in 28 months. A Supreme Council of the Judiciary has been put in place to ensure the independence of judges and of all the justices appointed to the Court of Cassation. The professionalism of the Haitian National Police enables us today to provide and guarantee security and to create a climate conducive to investment, which is necessary to combat extreme poverty. The performance of our police force has meant that Haiti is now ranked as one of the safest countries in the Caribbean.

Next year will mark the tenth anniversary of the military and police presence of the United Nations in Haiti. The Haitian Government welcomes the implementation of the plan for the gradual withdrawal of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, which is now possible thanks to the considerable progress achieved in the area of security.

The implementation of the constitutional mechanisms envisaged in the context of the rule of law is an ongoing priority for the Government. We have managed to create a climate conducive to political stability and to the expression of ideas and democratic values. The Haitian press enjoys full freedom, and members of the political opposition exercise their rights without restrictions.

I would also like to mention the commitment and work of the Government in consolidating the rule of law and ensuring the sustainability of democratic institutions. To that end, the Government continues to give its full support to the transitional college of the Permanent Electoral Council to ensure that legislative and local elections take place as soon as possible. Despite its lack of resources, the Haitian Government has already allocated significant funds to the electoral body. The President of the Republic of Haiti is personally involved in initiating a dialogue with stakeholders and political parties and is encouraging them to participate in the upcoming elections in order to respect the process of democratic change, as it is essential to the rule of law.

With regard to education, more than 1.2 million Haitian children have benefited from the free education programme put in place by the Government. We have achieved that in particular by establishing a universal, free and compulsory education programme. That is a major achievement for Haiti, and one that is in keeping with one of the most important Millennium Development Goals: the achievement of universal primary education by 2015. The Government is aware that this achievement does not resolve the challenge of providing access to quality schooling for everyone. That is a new objective that we are determined to achieve. Moreover, an ambitious programme to combat illiteracy is under way. It will impact more than 250,000 people in 2014.

With regard to combating hunger and extreme poverty — another Millennium Development Goal — despite the serious social inequality in Haiti, the Government has made considerable efforts to avoid a humanitarian crisis. To achieve its goals in the fight against extreme poverty, the Government has invested more than \$150 million in social assistance and protection programmes, which is a first for our country. The programmes are aimed at helping the most vulnerable.

Since 2012, three ministries have been established to strengthen public policies for the elimination of extreme poverty. The Government is pursuing a national food-security policy that includes a series of 15 measures that are expected to yield results in the short, medium and long terms. In the short term, the objective is, first, to stabilize the price of basic consumer goods and, secondly, to provide assistance to those living in extreme poverty. In the medium and long terms, the objective is to increase national production and to reduce our food dependence. We have also introduced a social innovation that is unprecedented in the history of our country by initiating a series of social programmes for the most vulnerable groups under the theme “Help the poor”. After one year of operation, those programmes are now reaching more than 1 million Haitian people living in extreme poverty: thousands of mothers, students, older persons, disabled people and victims of natural disasters.

Finally, along the same lines, I would like it to be noted that of the 1.5 million earthquake refugees who were living in tents in subhuman conditions, more than 1.25 million have now been rehoused.

In the twenty-first century, people are still starving in Haiti. That is unacceptable and intolerable. As Nelson Mandela said, “overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity, it is an act of justice.” For President Martelly and myself, combatting extreme poverty is a commitment that we make to history.

In terms of health care, there are considerable challenges to be met in Haiti. The prevalence of certain diseases, the high rates of infant mortality and the shortcomings in health-care infrastructure have deprived millions of Haitians of good-quality health services. That situation was exacerbated by the earthquake in 2010. Furthermore, in October 2010, there was a very serious outbreak of cholera in Haiti, for which the Haitian people continue to pay a heavy price in human lives.

Given the catastrophic consequences of that scourge — more than 8,000 dead and 650,000 people infected — the Haitian Government is proposing that a significant amount of the new global fund to combat cholera be earmarked exclusively for the eradication of the disease in Haiti. While we continue to believe that the United Nations has some moral responsibility with regard to the outbreak of the epidemic, it is nonetheless true that the Organization has already supported some of the Government’s efforts to combat the disease. However, those efforts are far from enough. We would therefore like to propose the establishment of a joint commission, including members of the Haitian Government and representatives of the United Nations, to consider ways and means to definitively eradicate the disease in Haiti.

In the face of those major public health challenges, the Haitian Government has not stood idly by. Working with our national and international partners and public health experts, we have managed to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS. In terms of treating AIDS today, Haiti has moved from a prevalence rate of 5.5 in 2000 to 2.2 today, with a projected 1.5 for 2015. Such results are a just reward for the years of effort that have made Haiti a model universally recognized in international scientific and academic circles. But we will not stop there. Much remains to be done in terms of prevention and treatment. We very much hope that we can definitively halt the spread of AIDS and make treatment more affordable. In Haiti, the public health network and the provision of health care are largely insufficient. New efforts in terms of prevention must be made.

The question of the environment is of major concern to the Haitian Government, because the vegetation cover over a very large area has disappeared. In order to raise awareness among people about the need to replant that vegetation, large-scale programmes have been set up, and others are being drawn up, with the aim of meeting the challenges of replanting, reforestation, providing drinking water and sanitation and protecting ecosystems — all of which have been neglected for far too long. Without appropriate protection of the environment, there will be no sustainable development; no food security is possible for a growing population, nor can there be a decline in poverty and misery.

As set forth in the noble Millennium Development Goal on the topic, the Haitian Government, aware of the need for gender equality, has made significant efforts to ensure equality between Haitian men and women. While Haitian society has always accorded an important role to women, the Government has undertaken significant initiatives to enable women to have access to highly responsible positions in public administration. Thirty-five per cent of the Cabinet is made up of women, and they have important portfolios. Much remains to be done to ensure the full emancipation of Haitian women, particularly among the most vulnerable populations. In our country, women deserve better access to education and health-care services.

I conclude by asking the Assembly to observe more closely the new Haiti that has been emerging over the past two years despite its day-to-day problems and the extremely difficult legacy, of which we are all aware. That Haiti is one where more girls and boys go to school, where new international-class hotels are opening up their doors every day, breathing new life into our tourism, where the economy is growing at the rate of 4.6 per cent, where inflation has been stabilized at 6.7 per cent, where for the first time foreign direct investment has increased by more than 19 per cent annually, where a fierce fight against smuggling and corruption is being carried out and where today the lowest rate of homicide in the Caribbean is seen. The new Haiti is modernizing the old Haiti little by little and is adopting courageous reforms. The new Haiti is increasingly focusing on constructive dialogue with the country's social partners — the press, political parties and the private sector. That Haiti has the courage to invest in the worst-off and the poorest, despite a degree of misunderstanding and some criticism.

A new Haiti is emerging. More than ever before, Haiti feels that it is taking its place in the great family of the United Nations and in the international community, without which many of the achievements of the past three years would not have been possible.

We are doing a great deal with very little. If the international community had fully met its commitments — amounting to \$10 billion — made at the 31 March 2010 meeting, the results would be even better, and the suffering of the Haitian people would be less harsh. Today, we are still far from our goal, because only a part of those commitments have been honoured.

Based on its desire for transparency and efficiency and to avoid duplication of effort on the part of non-governmental organizations, the Government has stepped up its leadership role and set up a mechanism — the National Coordination Framework for External Development Aid in Haiti — to take over the management of international assistance.

Haiti is once again present on the regional scene. This year alone our country has hosted three major regional summits, including those of CARICOM, the Ministers of the Association of Caribbean States, and Petrocaribe. During those meetings, there were also discussions on the best regional strategies to combat hunger, abject poverty and exclusion, topics that are in line with the Millennium Development Goals.

Finally, the Haiti of which I speak is the one that Haitian men and women are working tirelessly to forge each and every day. The results are coming; progress is already palpable. Our country is no longer on the front pages of the international press owing to repeated coups d'état, social turmoil, insecurity and instability. Our country is henceforth stable and secure, thanks in particular to the tremendous efforts of the Haitian National Police, with the support of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

Work on infrastructure and on the reconstruction of public buildings destroyed by the earthquake has begun. The country offers excellent investment opportunities in all sectors. Haiti today is on the right track, moving towards a new era of social and economic progress and respect for human rights. We are acting specifically to achieve progress towards a Haiti that is more solidarity-based and more prosperous — a Haiti that the entire world will want to visit to see its extraordinary sights. Long live Haiti!

The Acting President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooperation of the Republic of Haiti for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Laurent Salvador Lamothe, Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and External Cooperation of the Republic of Haiti, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand

The Acting President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Mr. John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, and inviting him to address the Assembly.

Mr. Key (New Zealand): Greetings! Let me begin by congratulating President Ashe on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly. He is taking the reins at an important time. We wish him every success, and he has New Zealand's support.

The recent events in Kenya, Iraq and Pakistan show how troubled the world can be. We commiserate with the Governments and peoples of those countries and extend our deepest sympathies to those who lost family and friends in those tragic incidents.

For most of us, born after the Second World War, the United Nations has been at the centre of our conception of how the world organizes itself. But the reality of the United Nations can be quite challenging. It is the one place where the countries of the world meet, talk and try to find solutions to global and regional issues.

Sadly, some of those discussions can become so arcane that they are sometimes quite removed from the issues they claim to be addressing. That is a concern in particular for small States, to which the Organization is so vitally important.

Even more sadly, the United Nations has too often failed to provide solutions to the problems the world expects it to resolve. The gap between aspiration and delivery is all too apparent, as the situation in Syria has again so brutally reminded us. But any failures of this institution are less failures of the Organization

than they are failures on our part, as its Member States, and on the part of those who have the responsibility of leading those States.

There would be no dreadful humanitarian situation in Syria if Syria's leaders had upheld the commitments made to the international community and to the Syrian people when Syria joined the Organization and ratified the human rights covenants.

The Organization would not also have been a powerless bystander to the Syrian tragedy for over two years if the lack of agreement among the Security Council's permanent members had not shielded the Al-Assad regime, thereby reconfirming the fears of New Zealand and others that had opposed the veto at the original San Francisco Conference, in 1945.

New Zealand is pleased that the Security Council has at last met on the situation in Syria. The Secretary-General has advised the Council and the General Assembly that the United Nations Mission has now confirmed, unequivocally and objectively, that chemical weapons have been used in Syria. The report (see A/67/997) found clear and convincing evidence that surface-to-surface rockets containing the nerve agent Sarin were used on 21 August.

The information in the report also makes it very clear that those rockets must have been fired by the Syrian regime. As the Secretary-General has said, these are war crimes, and those responsible must be brought to account.

Those that try to cast doubt on the report's conclusions make themselves look foolish and do a disservice to the United Nations.

It is imperative now that the Council act. It must adopt a resolution that responds to the use of chemical weapons. It must find a means to hold those responsible to account and establish an effective mechanism for the destruction of those weapons in line with the proposal developed by the United States and Russia. The resolution must also provide for the protection of the civilian population.

While Syria necessarily commands our attention, I also want to spend some time on some more positive developments for both the Organization and its Member States. I want to begin with my own country, New Zealand, whose emergence as a fully independent State has proceeded in parallel with the development of the United Nations.

New Zealand was present at the founding in San Francisco. We take pride in the fact that we were able to influence the drafting of the Charter, particularly the section on the Trusteeship Council, which paved the way for a number of States to become full Members of the Organization.

New Zealand has come a long way since the Charter was adopted. Then, we were emerging from our status as a dominion of the United Kingdom. Today we proudly assert ourselves as a small but independent and diverse country that has a wide network of friends and trading relationships in all the major regions and markets of the world. We value our traditional relationships with Australia and the Pacific, and in Europe and North America as we build new links with partners in Asia, the rest of the Americas and the Caribbean, and Africa.

Building and sustaining political and commercial links across the regions of the world is no small matter for a country like New Zealand. We are surrounded by the Pacific Ocean and located over three hours' flying time from our nearest neighbour, Australia, in one of the least populated parts of the world. We share with our Pacific island neighbours the challenges of distance and isolation, and of having to hold our own against much larger countries whose economies of scale and proximity to markets give them a considerable competitive advantage. These factors have reinforced New Zealand's approach to the United Nations and to the other international organizations that have shaped the post-Second World War environment.

We have a strong preference for a rules-based, multilateralist approach, whether in the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the World Bank. We know that rules and standards set internationally provide us the greatest certainty and the greatest protection. We draw strength from global agreements and from the collective commitment they represent.

That is why we attach such importance to the completion of the Doha Round. While New Zealand continues to actively negotiate bilateral and regional trade agreements, we acknowledge that free trade agreements often leave least developed countries on the sidelines. The benefit of the WTO, as with the United Nations, is that the rules negotiated there apply across the globe, irrespective of a country's size or wealth.

Our preference for international rules reflects New Zealand's national approach to governance. We have

a robust and transparent system of Government and sound financial institutions that have helped us ride out the worst effects of the global financial crisis. That was despite the significant economic and social challenges we faced after the destructive earthquake that struck Christchurch, our second largest city, in 2011.

As we work to restore the built environment in Christchurch, New Zealanders are also conscious of our dependence on and our responsibility towards the natural environment. In policy terms, climate change has been a challenge for New Zealand and for the international community more broadly, but New Zealanders know we must play our part, and we have taken action. We have introduced an extensive emissions-trading scheme. We are investing in the Global Research Alliance to find new ways to manage agricultural greenhouse gases, and we have committed to reducing emissions to 5 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

We made that commitment under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change rather than the Kyoto Protocol. We did that because, while the Kyoto Protocol once seemed to provide a path forward, things have changed. The Protocol now covers only a small percentage of global emissions. We need a single legal framework that commits all major emitters.

While climate change is an important issue, it pales in comparison to the problems faced by many Member States. One of the most intractable is that of Israel and Palestine. As long as that problem is left unresolved, there can be no assured peace in the Middle East and no security for the wider region. There can be no resolution without the Israeli and Palestinian peoples both being assured of viable homelands within secure borders. New Zealand pays tribute to the tenacity of United States Secretary of State Kerry and to the courage of President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu in agreeing to resume the Middle East peace process.

In our own region, we have celebrated the successful conclusion of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste and the transition of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands from a military to a police-led operation. We look forward with intense interest and cautious hope to the reinstatement of democracy in Fiji. We acknowledge the positive developments there, including with regard to election preparations and voter registration. The countries of the Pacific, including New Zealand, want and need Fiji to be successful, democratic and well-governed.

Mr. Errázuriz (Chile), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Earlier this year, New Zealand withdrew the bulk of its forces from Afghanistan, following the closure of the New Zealand-led provincial reconstruction team in Bamian province, which provided security and helped bring about a significant improvement in governance and development. Schools and hospitals were rebuilt and health centres re-opened. Mortality rates for children under 5 were halved. Maternal deaths are now a quarter of the Taliban-era levels. Girls now make up half the number of primary-school-age children. New Zealand expertise also helped substantially improve agricultural yields through the implementation of modern farming techniques. We are building the largest solar energy system in Afghanistan, which will bring a renewable source of electricity to much of Bamian township. That was a big commitment by a small country situated far away. It also came at a considerable cost: 10 of our servicemen and women lost their lives while on duty there. Even so, we are proud of what we achieved in partnership with the people of Bamian and hope that those gains can be sustained in the years ahead.

In Africa we see a continent where many countries have faced real challenges. However, as the President of Nigeria reminded us earlier this week (see A/68/PV.5), the new story of Africa is the growing number of countries in the region that are enjoying the benefits of good governance, sound economic growth and development, driving positive change throughout the continent. All of that is good news for Africa and for the world. New Zealand will do what it can to help with targeted assistance in areas where we have real expertise to offer, namely, in the fields of agriculture, renewable energy and good governance. New Zealand also recognizes and supports the critical roles of the African Union and Africa's subregional bodies in ensuring Africa's security and future prosperity.

New Zealand recognizes the importance to Africa, the Caribbean and our own region of the Arms Trade Treaty, adopted in April and signed by New Zealand and many others on 3 June. The Treaty should curb the flows of small arms and other weapons, especially to conflict regions, and help arrest the deaths and human misery that they cause.

I want to also applaud the progress made in implementing the Millennium Development Goals, while at the same time acknowledging the fact that much work remains to be done. We now need to work

together on a post-2015 development agenda focused on creating economic opportunities and the eradication of poverty.

Many of the same issues will be addressed at the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, which Samoa is to host in 2014. New Zealand is pleased to be a major supporter of that important United Nations effort and, with the rest of the Pacific, looks forward to welcoming the world to our region.

We need to remind ourselves that sound governance arrangements and transparency of process are also vital virtues for international organizations, including the United Nations. By any objective assessment, the Organization has not been equipped with the structures and rules it needs to operate as it should. Yet there has been deep resistance to efforts to make things better. That needs to change. The rationale for United Nations reform is clear. Membership has quadrupled since 1945, yet over the same period its key organs — particularly the Security Council — have become hostage to their own traditions and to the interests of the most powerful.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, we could blame the Cold War when the Security Council did not act. That does not wash today. The problems are more systemic and relate both to the composition and the formal and informal processes of the Council. We now seem to have a practice whereby the permanent members not only can block Council actions through the use of the veto, but also appear to have privileged access to information and can stop the Council from meeting if it does not suit their collective purposes. Such behaviour damages the reputation and credibility of the wider Organization and must be challenged. Such issues are not necessarily matters of Charter reform, which we know is difficult, but have to do with the effective functioning of the Organization — an issue in which we all have a stake.

New Zealand is not advocating revolution, but we are asserting that the Council can and must do better in the way it conducts its business. That is the approach New Zealand will bring to the Security Council if we are elected next October. If successful, it will be 21 years since New Zealand last served on the Council — a long time ago, but not so long that we have forgotten the lessons learned during our last term. At the top of that list is the imperative that members have to be engaged; they must listen to the concerns of others and have a view and a voice if they are to be relevant. There is no point in joining the Council simply to make up the

numbers. Sometimes there is a need to speak up and shine a light on what is going on, or not going on, even when that may be inconvenient to others. That applies whether the issue was Rwanda, Somalia, Yemen or Yugoslavia in 1993-94, or is the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sudan or Syria in 2013 to 2014.

My hope is that when Member States make their decision on whom to vote for in October 2014, they will look at New Zealand's record and know that we will be a credible, positive influence on the Security Council and a voice for the interests of the wider Organization.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of New Zealand for the statement he has just made.

Mr. John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), over which Cuba currently has the honour to preside. I reiterate our satisfaction at the election of Ambassador John Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda as President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session. I also reiterate our willingness to cooperate with him for the success of this session. It is an honour for CELAC to see a representative from one of its member States, in particular a Caribbean nation, preside over this preeminent body of the United Nations.

Over the coming weeks, I will also speak to the Assembly about the heroic struggles of Cuba, its resistance and triumphs, the immense efforts of its people, its fidelity to principles, its revolutionary transformations and the perfection of Cuban socialism.

As the first genuinely Latin American and Caribbean organization that includes all of the countries in the region, CELAC was founded with the purpose of making progress in the political, economic, social and cultural unity and integration of our America, so as to reclaim the dream of our liberators of a nation of republics that, with its almost 600 million inhabitants, its resources and its enormous human and economic potential, can decide autonomously its own destiny.

The countries of our region share the conviction that the political, economic, social and cultural unity and integration of Latin America and the Caribbean constitute not only a fundamental aspiration of our peoples, but also a prerequisite for us to successfully tackle the challenges we face as a region. However, everything that has been achieved so far and the path CELAC has chosen underscore the need for our region to have a space of its own to consolidate and project the Latin American and Caribbean identity based on its shared principles and values and on the ideals of unity and democracy for our peoples. It should also reaffirm our commitment to building a more just, equitable and harmonious international order based on respect for international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and to upholding the sovereignty and the right of each State to build its own political system, free from threat, aggression or unilateral coercive measures and in an environment of peace, stability, justice, democracy and respect for human rights.

Our Community is based on unrestricted respect for international law, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the prohibition of the use and threat of use of force; on respect for the self-determination, sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and on non-interference in their internal affairs; on the protection and promotion of all human rights, the rule of law, at both the national and the international levels, and democracy; and on our aim to work together for collective prosperity so as to eradicate discrimination, inequality, marginalization, human rights violations and transgressions of the rule of law.

We reaffirm our region's commitment to international peace and security. We commit to strengthening the climate of peace that prevails in Latin America and the Caribbean and to consolidating a zone of peace that encompasses our region as a whole, whereby disputes between nations are resolved peaceably through dialogue and negotiation or other means, in perfect harmony with international law.

At the recent High-level Meeting on Nuclear Disarmament (A/68/PV.11), CELAC reiterated its profound concern at the threat posed to humankind by the continued existence of nuclear weapons and their possible use or threat of use, and the urgent need to make progress towards the priority objective of nuclear disarmament and achieve the total and absolute elimination of nuclear weapons. In addition, CELAC member countries presented for the first time a joint

initiative to the Human Rights Council on the right to peace, which we hope will lead to a declaration on that right for adoption by the General Assembly.

CELAC has expressed its support in the strongest terms for the legitimate rights of Argentina in the dispute over the sovereignty of the Malvinas Islands. The continuing position of our region is that the United Kingdom should agree to reopen negotiations with a view to finding a peaceful and definitive solution to that dispute as soon as possible.

Our Community reiterates its support for the dialogue under way between the Government of Colombia and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, which seeks to end the internal conflict that has affected the political, social and economic development of that sister nation for more than 50 years. We hope that that initiative will succeed in reaching an agreement in the interests of the Colombian people.

We would also like to underscore the Latin American and Caribbean character of Puerto Rico and, by taking note of the resolutions on Puerto Rico adopted by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee, to emphasize that that issue is a matter of interest to CELAC.

We reiterate our absolute condemnation of terrorism and reaffirm our commitment to fighting it in all its forms and manifestations, in keeping with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. However, at the same time, we strongly reject the unilateral and illegitimate assessments, lists and certifications made by some developed countries that affect countries of our region, in particular those referring to terrorism, drug trafficking, human trafficking and other similar phenomena.

In recent days, as the situation in Syria has deteriorated, CELAC has reiterated its vocation for peace and its observance of the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and in international law, including international humanitarian law. It has urged the creation of the conditions necessary for moving towards a negotiated political solution to the Syrian conflict, which has claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people.

Similarly, CELAC is working to identify independent concepts and mechanisms for cooperation, urging the international community to continue to contribute to the reconstruction and sustainable development of our sister Republic of Haiti, in

accordance with the fundamental priorities and needs defined by the Haitian Government and in full respect for its authority and sovereignty and the principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of countries.

We have defended the sovereignty of the region, including that over our own natural resources, and we have expressed our solidarity with States members of CELAC in the face of harmful acts that violate international law, such as that of 2 July, which threatened the dignity and rights of the President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Mr. Evo Morales Ayma, as he returned to La Paz from a visit to a number of European countries.

Taking into account the diverse processes that have shaped Latin American and Caribbean identity, the Community has also emphasized its intention to become a space that protects the rights to live, thrive and coexist enjoyed by all cultures, races and ethnic groups of the region, as well as the multicultural nature of our peoples and the plurinational character of some of our countries, especially among native communities that are promoting and recreating their historical memory, ancestral knowledge and their experience.

Almost seven months after he passed away, CELAC today pays a well-deserved tribute to one of its founding members, President Hugo Chávez Frías, who presided over the founding summit of the Community with his vision and mastery. Similarly, CELAC expressed its satisfaction over the election of Pope Francis as the first High Pontiff of the Catholic Church from the Latin American and Caribbean region.

The global espionage against CELAC member countries violates human rights, the right to privacy, the right of citizens to be informed, and the principles of State sovereignty and international law. It has become a source of concern, and we have taken due note of the statements made in various forums by Heads of States and Government and other leaders of Latin American and Caribbean countries who have condemned and rejected the use of such practices.

The member States of CELAC are proud of their shared work in consolidating our regional sovereignty so that the Latin America and Caribbean region can occupy its rightful place in the world and renounce its status as the most unequal region on Earth. In pursuing these objectives, we have decided to offer the most vulnerable countries of the region our cooperation and solidarity and to draw attention to the special vulnerabilities

of the countries of the Caribbean Community, given their status as small island developing States, which limits their efforts towards sustainable development, especially in light of the significant impact of natural disasters and the negative effects of climate change.

With regard to the indispensable reform of the international system, we have renewed our countries' commitment to multilateralism, the comprehensive reform of the United Nations system, and the democratization of international decision-making forums, in particular the Security Council. We shall act accordingly on issues of equal importance, among them the process of formulating the post-2015 development agenda, which is the theme of this general debate and to which all CELAC member countries attach great importance.

The members of CELAC know that there can be no lasting peace without development and without combating poverty, hunger and inequality. We are aware of the challenges that the current international economic and financial crisis poses to the future of our region and our legitimate aspirations to social inclusion, equitable growth with sustainable development, and integration. We therefore emphasize the importance for the post-2015 development agenda to consist of voluntary, universal, clear and quantifiable goals that can be adapted to distinct national realities, with the purpose of eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development. This new framework should be inclusive and transparent on official development assistance, prompt the developed countries to honour their commitments, and encourage South-South and triangular cooperation on cross-cutting issues through the participation of all sectors of society.

With regard to climate change, we welcome the formal adoption of the second phase of commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, despite a lack of political will on the part of a number of developed nations that vetoed agreements on new, additional and predictable resources and on mechanisms for the effective transfer of technologies to developing countries. We will continue to work together to cope with this scourge that affects humankind as a whole today.

There are many difficulties, but the important thing is that the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean have come to the conclusion that the time has come for the region, as José Martí said, to walk in close ranks, like silver in the roots of the Andes. That is why we created CELAC.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ramtane Lamamra, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria.

Mr. Lamamra (Algeria) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like first of all to warmly congratulate Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, and his predecessor Mr. Vuk Jeremić on their excellent work. I would also like to commend our Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the steady enhancement of the role and status of the United Nations under his leadership.

The designation of the post-2015 development agenda as the central theme not only of this general debate but also for this entire session is a timely reminder of the role of the United Nations in promoting peace and prosperity throughout the world, for the benefit of all humankind. Indeed, more than ever before, we need the visionary role of the United Nations in order to face up to the ills besetting humankind. The growing challenges arising from our increased interdependence are exacerbated by a multidimensional crisis that adversely affects our economies and governance and has disastrous social and humanitarian consequences. The only worthy response to the upheaval and dangers of our day is a determined quest for peace, justice and solidarity, in order to build with confidence that better future that we must bequeath to future generations.

Consideration of the post-2015 agenda warrants a serious relaunching of the debate on development issues, particularly in terms of the elimination of poverty, a phenomenon that continues not only to affect the dignity of millions of human beings but also to threaten their lives. The international community should be primarily concerned at the lack of significant progress in its fight against poverty.

Overcoming poverty is a long-standing endeavour that requires appropriate public policies coupled with effective international cooperation and consistent productive flows of investment, as well as greater complementarity between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, with a view to exploiting synergies in the context of the peace-security-development triad. That means that new objectives for 2030 must be part of a global integral approach that reflects the disparities among regions, an improvement of the balance between urban and rural development, the strengthening of the capacities of poor people, good governance, the fight against corruption and the

protection of the environment. In fact, it is a question of reaching an ambitious global agreement for the promotion of sustainable development containing commitments stemming from the principle of shared but differentiated responsibility, in particular for the mobilization of the financing needed for capacity-building and the transfer of know-how and technology.

Under its 2010-2014 five-year plan, Algeria is implementing a human development strategy that sets forth ambitious policies to promote social justice and balanced regional preparations, within a framework of strict resource management, where the education, health, housing and infrastructure sectors continue to be given priority, backed by investment in economic growth. Those extensive efforts are naturally supported at the international level by multifaceted assistance to countries affected by crises and natural disasters and by the effective integration of debt relief for the poorest countries in Africa and other parts of the world.

At the same time, Algeria is projecting its own development in the context of the historic coherence of the great Arab Maghreb Union project that the peoples of the region aspire to profoundly. That overall initiative came from the agenda of the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, and is aimed at making all Algerian men and women free from fear and need.

The celebration this year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Organization of African Unity-African Union under the theme of "African Renaissance" is an important milestone in the rise of our continent on the stage of history, giving us grounds for hope and ambition, as well as promises of African solutions for the problems of Africa, with the assistance of the rest of the international community. Algeria is participating in that shared destiny of the African peoples, and we welcome and are gratified by the progress made towards the recovery and economic development of the continent and the considerable rates of growth that have been recorded. We are also gratified at Africa's steady progress towards conflict prevention and settlement.

We also welcome the achievements of good governance, human rights and pluralist democracy. Algeria is particularly delighted at the liberation of the regions in the north of Mali from the claws of terrorist and criminal groups as well as the restoration of the constitutional order in this fraternal country with the clear success of the presidential elections.

Algeria, which remains the target of international terrorism — as we were reminded by the violent terrorist attack carried out against the Tiguentourine gas complex early this year — is making an effective contribution to the joint efforts to promote collective security in the Sahelo-Saharan region as well as in the rest of Africa and beyond. Whether it is a question of Somalia, Darfur, relations between the Sudan and South Sudan, the Great Lakes region, the Central African Republic or efforts to restore constitutional order in a number of brotherly countries, Algeria is harmoniously blending its voice and efforts with those of the African Union.

Algeria, which is resolutely committed to the right of peoples to self-determination, supports the intensification of the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Mr. Christopher Ross, to prevail on the two parties to the conflict — the Kingdom of Morocco and the Polisario Front — to agree in negotiations on the lifting of all obstacles, so that the people of Western Sahara can freely determine their own future.

Algeria is naturally supportive of the Arab peoples, who are experiencing difficult transitions and are confronting multiple challenges in a particularly delicate phase of democratic and socioeconomic transformation. We encourage the promotion of political solutions to governance crises as well as the management by consensus of these critical transitional periods. Clearly, military solutions are neither possible nor desirable in the context of the polarization of societies and the exacerbation of partisan interests and dissent.

Algeria reaffirms its rejection of the threat or use of weapons of mass destruction. In that regard, we categorically condemn the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian conflict, regardless of who the perpetrators were or the circumstances. In welcoming the initiative of the Russian Federation and the Russian-American agreement as well as the adherence of Syria to the Chemical Weapons Convention, Algeria calls for the creation of political momentum towards the holding of the Geneva II conference and the attainment of a political solution among the parties in Syria. We reiterate our encouragement and support for Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi as he leads those praiseworthy peace efforts.

In a Middle East mired in dangers and crises, a just settlement of the question of Palestine remains at the

heart of any serious effort to stabilize the region. While welcoming the efforts of the United States, which led to a resumption of negotiations, Algeria expresses the hope that the international community can redouble its efforts for the rapid establishment of an internationally recognized Palestinian State within the borders of June 1967, with Al-Quds as its capital.

The legitimacy of the United Nations must be strengthened and its role enhanced, and to that end its reform must not be unduly delayed. We must ensure that the General Assembly remains participatory in nature and must increase the economic, social, humanitarian and environmental functions of the programmes, entities and agencies of the United Nations system. We must also agree on a democratic reform of the Security Council that covers its working methods and its composition and ensures equitable representation, taking into particular account the African States' Ezulwini Consensus.

The United Nations must be heeded when, from within the democratic framework of the General Assembly, it issues statements of strong positions that reflect the universal conscience, whether it is a question of strengthening the foundations of international humanitarian law and protecting civilians or specific situations, such as the long overdue lifting of the economic blockade that has been imposed on Cuba for decades now and the current one imposed on the Gaza Strip. The will of the international community that is so often reiterated here must prevail.

Algeria is working within the organizations and groups to which it belongs and with its other partners towards the elimination of the many obstacles to building peaceful, well-balanced and just international relations. We are nurturing the virtues of dialogue, and we place our hopes in the Alliance of Civilization and mutual respect among religions. Algeria is deeply dedicated to the heritage of the values shared by all humankind, beginning with the sacred nature, value and dignity of human beings and the promotion and protection of all human rights.

It is this commitment that inspires Algeria's candidature for a seat on the Human Rights Council for the 2014-2016 period. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and Algeria, moved by a high sense of responsibility, would like to dedicate itself to improving the effectiveness of the Council, strengthening the universal and interdependent nature of human rights

and mobilizing the international community in this lofty collective endeavour.

As a member of the Council, Algeria will share its experience in human rights and in the rights of peoples. We will endeavour to improve our own performance by, inter alia, adapting our national legislation and harmonizing it with the relevant international treaties and promoting the inclusion of all segments of society, including women, who now comprise 31 per cent of the deputies elected to the People's National Assembly last year. All of these factors make Algeria a good candidate for the Human Rights Council and have won it the support of the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union.

Almost 40 years ago, in 1974, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who was at that time Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria and President of the General Assembly at its twenty-ninth session, made significant history here by putting an end to the usurpation of the people of South Africa's representation by the apartheid regime and by welcoming to this Hall for the first time the Palestine Liberation Organization, thus opening up two significant paths towards peace. Since then, prodigious advances in science and technology, which have increased the power of humankind over nature, and changes in the very fabric of the international community have only increased the expectations of our peoples, for whom the United Nations remains the best refuge. May God inspire us to work in the best interests of our countries and our peoples.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Samura M.W. Kamara, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Kamara (Sierra Leone): I bring you sincere greetings and very best wishes from His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. President Koroma regrets that he is unable to participate in the general debate of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session due to unavoidable circumstances. He has, however, instructed me, as his Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, to deliver to the Assembly this message of goodwill:

"I congratulate Ambassador Ashe most warmly on his election to direct the affairs of the Assembly during this session and assure him of my country's support and cooperation during his

tenure. Let me avail myself of this opportunity to also express the appreciation of my delegation to his predecessor, Mr. Vuk Jeremić of Serbia, for his able leadership in directing the work of the General Assembly during the past session. I wish him well in his future endeavours. Let me also express sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his constructive and fruitful leadership of the Organization. Sierra Leone will continue to support the progressive implementation of his five-year Global Action Agenda.

“Over the past two decades, global peace, security and the economic environment have evidently been radically transformed, to the point where neither the problems nor their solutions are simple. The international security situation has become more complex. Regional hotspot issues keep flaring up, and turbulence continues in many parts of the world, in particular Asia and Africa. Human trafficking, in addition to other non-traditional security issues such as climate change, nuclear safety, energy, food and maritime security and financing for development are becoming more significant.

“The use of chemical weapons in conflict poses a renewed global security threat. There is therefore a need for increased multilateral and collective engagement and responses to those complex challenges.

“As we all are aware, the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is only two years away. While we take stock of what have been achieved and the challenges that continue to confront us, we should, in keeping with the principles set out in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development outcome document, entitled ‘The future we want’ (resolution 66/288, annex), embark upon designing a post-2015 development goals agenda in which the specific needs and challenges of every Member States are recognized. There is no doubt that failure to capture those specific needs and commitments would compromise the credibility of such an agenda.

“We also note that important progress has been made in many areas, such as reducing poverty globally, improving access to primary education for all children, reducing child and maternal mortality, increasing access to HIV treatment and reducing

slum populations, to name a few. However, this has not been uniform, as inequalities among many populations are on the rise, particularly in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where food insecurity and malnutrition are still prevalent. While access to health and education may be expanding for us, the quality of those services in many regions remains a serious challenge.

“That is why the theme of this session, ‘The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage’, is timely and appropriate. We are moving into the phase of mapping out another development framework that is expected to formulate universal goals and responsibilities encompassing the economic, social and environmental spheres. The post-2015 development agenda should have at its core the urgent need to address the causes and consequences of conflict, violence and disasters. These are universal issues of great concern to the global community. Resolving and preventing conflict and violence, creating jobs, providing further incentives for foreign direct investment, broadening human and financial resources, ensuring gender equality and promoting human rights and the rule of law are not only fundamental to human progress; they are integral to sustainable development.

“Sierra Leone welcomes the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty earlier this year. This is a significant and historic achievement in our collective efforts in pursuit of a safer and more secure world. We therefore hope that the illegal transfer of conventional weapons to the wrong hands — a major source of the escalation of conflicts in the developing world, particularly in Africa — can now be largely regulated and minimized.

“In that regard, we remain committed to supporting international instruments aimed at establishing peace and security in the world and an economic order that is beneficial to the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, as well as to nations big and small.

“In recent years, and despite being under post-conflict rebuilding, Sierra Leone’s contribution to the United Nations peacekeeping efforts demonstrates our strong commitment to the purpose and principles of global peace and stability. We stand ready to increase our profile in the

peacekeeping landscape so as to ensure the success of peacekeeping operations. To that end, we will continue to actively engage in all new initiatives for reform of the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

“We applaud and acknowledge the human resources and financial support that the United Nations family and other development partners continue to provide, especially towards the successful conduct of our 17 November 2012 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections, all of which were held in one day, for the very first time. Those elections were widely considered to be a critical benchmark for us, signalling our preparedness to move into a more developmental phase of peacebuilding. It should come as little or no surprise that they were widely acclaimed to be peaceful, free, fair and transparent by the international community. Their successful conduct clearly demonstrates the level that Sierra Leone’s democratic process has attained, an experience we are willing to share with other countries in our subregion and beyond.

“Today, Sierra Leone is on the threshold of transformation in its engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission as well as in its socioeconomic development. With support from the Commission and the Peacebuilding Support Office as well as other international and local development partners, Sierra Leone continues to make significant gains in the areas of good governance, human rights, gender equality and the fight against corruption and transnational organized crime. A number of international treaties have been ratified and national legislations enacted to address these challenges, which have the potential to undermine ongoing peacebuilding and peace-consolidation efforts.

“Sierra Leone’s vision for transformative and inclusive socioeconomic development was initially encapsulated in my Government’s poverty-reduction strategy, articulated in the ‘Agenda for Change’ that we rolled out in my first term of office. These have been encouraging achievements and with residual challenges as well. In my current, second term, we are poised to build on those successes with renewed determination.

“With a sustained commitment to provide improved standards of living for our people and

to raise the country to middle-income status, we have rolled those residual challenges over to our successor development programme, the ‘Agenda for Prosperity’, which I launched in July this year. This is Sierra Leone’s road map to our post-2015 development agenda. It aims to build a sustainable future for all Sierra Leoneans, requiring sound macroeconomic management and fiscal policies for a society with strong institutions to facilitate good governance, the social, economic and political empowerment of women and young people, the required social support for the disadvantaged, increased transparency and accountability, and justice for all.

“In taking up this huge challenge, Sierra Leone will continue to welcome the strong partnership that exists with the various United Nations agencies and other international development partners for the achievement of a well-planned, seamless transition to a more developmental phase of peacebuilding and for scaling up support to Sierra Leone’s political and economic priorities, as outlined in our ‘Agenda for Prosperity’. Sierra Leone, a nation with good credentials as a post-conflict country, is a deserving candidate for continued international support.

“Sierra Leone continues to uphold its national heritage of interreligious tolerance and peaceful coexistence, as well as the principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. In that regard, we remain focused on, and committed to, our reporting obligations to international treaty bodies.

“In line with the relevant provisions of the Disability Act 2011, we have established a National Commission for Persons with Disability. The current and first Chairman and Chief Commissioner is a person with impaired vision. We have also enacted the Sexual Offences Act 2012 to address the specific issue of sexual violence against women and girls. Sierra Leone will continue to collaborate with the United Nations and other interested partners in promoting the enactment of the Gender Equality Bill so as to enhance women’s participation in the decision-making process.

“We commend the support of the United Nations and international partners for the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, whereby it has made meaningful contributions to the

advancement of the rule of law at both the national and international levels. With our continued support, the Special Court is expected to complete its mandate by the end of this year.

“We are pleased to note that the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entered into force in May 2013. Sierra Leone pledges its continued support to the work of the Human Rights Council and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as we strive together to maintain universally accepted standards of human rights and democratic governance.

“It is in that context that we have also embarked upon a constitutional review process to address major socioeconomic and political issues. A constitutional review committee has been established with a broad spectrum of membership, drawn from all political parties, civil society, women, youth, disabled persons and even the diaspora. The process will be inclusive and guided by a critical analysis in a broad national debate, with the aim of strengthening democratic institutions and promoting national unity. We expect the committee to submit a draft review within two years.

“As the coordinator of the African Union committee of 10 Heads of State on Security Council reforms, let me once again emphasize the need for urgent reform of the Council. The role of the United Nations should be strengthened, not weakened. The need for equitable geographical representation, with all the privileges of membership in the Security Council, cannot be overemphasized. Africa will therefore continue to work closely with the relevant stakeholders and Member States, particularly other non-permanent members of the Council, for an early and decisive reform of that organ.

“Let me therefore reiterate that Africa’s participation in the ongoing intergovernmental negotiations is firmly rooted in our steadfast commitment to the African common position articulated in the Ezulwini Consensus and Sirte Declaration on the reform of the United Nations.

“The Millennium Development Goals remain a very lofty agenda in the history of our collective efforts for global socioeconomic development, although their full achievement has been thwarted by a multitude of factors. The year 2015 is a

critical one for the United Nations as it marks the Organization’s seventieth anniversary. It is also the target date for the MDGs and the tenth year since the World Summit was held in 2005.

“We are expected to agree on a post-2015 development framework. It is imperative that we follow a pragmatic approach with renewed vigour and commitment to providing our people with a future that guarantees justice, peace and security, accountable and democratic governance, a transparent and equitable distribution of wealth, a safe and sustainable environment and health and education for all. Those are all essential elements in setting the stage for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

“Let me join the family of the United Nations in expressing our condolences and solidarity with the people of Kenya, Pakistan and Nigeria for the irreparable loss of valuable lives during the recent terrorist attacks. Our thoughts and prayers are strongly and firmly with the families of the deceased.”

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Laurent Kavakure, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Burundi.

Mr. Kavakure (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): On this special occasion, when I have the honour to speak to various delegations that have come from the four corners of the world to participate in the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, I would like, on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, President of the Republic of Burundi, and on behalf of my delegation, to express our congratulations to His Excellency Mr. John Ashe on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session.

To Mr. Vuk Jeremić, his predecessor, we wish to say how much his work as President at the sixty-seventh session was very much appreciated in my country, and we take this opportunity to relay to him our sincere congratulations for having very ably presided over that session.

It is also our great pleasure to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon for his excellent achievements in a difficult and often turbulent international sociopolitical and economic context. Our best wishes and our continued support will accompany him throughout his second term in office, so that he can

continue with the same momentum the work started in all priority areas on the United Nations agenda and in particular, that of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the central concern of the current session.

It is for us an opportune moment to take the floor to address the Assembly to talk about the situation in my country, on the one hand, and to mention some current issues that are presently of concern to the international community, on the other hand.

With regard to my country, my statement will focus on the political and economic situation and on our progress regarding the Millennium Development Goals, for which we are called upon to establish new benchmarks.

In the political area, we are preparing to hold general elections in 2015. As we have always said, including during our previous elections, we have promised to the people of Burundi and the international community to hold transparent, free and peaceful elections. Burundi is seeking to set up a truth and reconciliation commission soon, as was provided for in the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation, in order to shed light on the massive human rights violations after our independence and to create a more stable and democratic society.

With regard to socioeconomic concerns, in December 2012 Burundi adopted a strategic policy instrument entitled "Vision Burundi 2025", which sets out what Burundi will look like in 2025. Its main pillars are the goals to promote strong leadership at all levels of the State apparatus, to provide good living conditions for the population, to rely on an educated population that enjoys good health, to promote accelerated and double-digit economic growth and to make the most of regional integration so as to increase and diversify the economy of Burundi. Other goals include putting in place an aggressive demographic policy aimed at limiting the population growth rate to 2 per cent in 2025 and gradually restoring social cohesion and giving pride of place back to the fundamental cultural values that have always characterized Burundian society. One could also cite the goals of setting up a village and urbanization policy aimed at significantly increasing the urbanization rate to 40 per cent, as well as creating synergies among the various development stakeholders and promoting a good context for dialogue and consultation with respect to planning for development financing and implementing Vision Burundi.

Along those same lines, Burundi has also adopted a second policy instrument, the Strategic Framework for Growth to Combat Poverty 2012-2016, launched in February 2012. Its goals are the consolidation of peace, security and the rule of law, managing population growth, increasing agricultural production and marketing, improved efficiency in public spending, a dynamic and efficient private sector, a sufficient increase in energy production, and strengthening development capacity.

Since the central theme of this debate pertains to the post-2015 development agenda, it is appropriate for my delegation to review Burundi's socioeconomic achievements. As the Assembly is aware, the Millennium Development Goals are the promise that we made to the poorest and most vulnerable people of the world. The MDGs have managed to place human beings at the heart of the development agenda. I should now like to turn to the status of the implementation of MDGs in my country, which I will review one by one.

With regard to MDG 1, on the eradication of extreme poverty, we have seen relatively good progress since 2006. Even so, we must note that, although generally the rate of poverty has steadily decreased from 81 per cent in 1998 and to 67 per cent in 2006, it is nonetheless unlikely that Burundi will reach its target.

With respect to MDG 2, achieving universal primary education, many improvements have been noted in terms of the net enrolment rate in primary school education in Burundi, which rose from 52 per cent in 1990 to 96 per cent in 2010. That occurred as a result of policy measures, in particular the presidential measure taken in 2005 regarding free schooling, and because the restoration of peace has enabled even children beyond school age to be enrolled in school. It is therefore possible that the second MDG will be achieved in 2015.

Concerning MDG 3, on gender equality and the empowerment of women, there is near parity of girls and boys in primary school, but disparities have increased in secondary school. In higher education, the ratio of girls to boys has improved. In State institutions, we have seen an increase in the number of women in Parliament, with 43 per cent in the National Assembly and 50 per cent in the Senate. Those figures far exceed the stipulation in the 2005 Constitution, which established a quota of 30 per cent for women in political institutions.

With respect to the MDG 4 target of reducing the under-five mortality rate, that rate has decreased by 35 per cent, going from 88 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1990 to 57 per 1,000 in 2010. Despite that progress, we are still far from the hoped-for 13.5 per cent, which was our aim in order to achieve the target of reducing by two thirds the under-five mortality rate. The relative improvement is due to more people going to health-care facilities, because we have made health care free for children under 5.

With regard to MDG 5, on improving maternal health, the target is to reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality rate by 2015. The mortality ratio has undergone a downward trend since 1990. It decreased at a rate of 30 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births per year, amounting to a reduction of 54.5 per cent between 1990 and 2010.

As to MDG 6, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, a survey conducted in 2010 shows that the HIV prevalence is estimated at 1.4 per cent in the population aged 15 to 49 years, while among women ages 15 to 24 years old it is 0.8 per cent, as compared with 3.5 per cent in 2007. Nonetheless, we see a downward trend of HIV prevalence among women ages 15 to 24, according to the sentinel surveillance system. With regard to the status of HIV orphans, the available data show that the number of deaths has gone from 12,000 per year in 2004 to fewer than 6,000 per year in 2011. That is a decrease of approximately 50 per cent.

With regard to MDG 7, ensuring environmental sustainability, in Burundi the percentage has gone from 70 per cent to 72.5 per cent in 20 years. Data show that the proportion of the population using an improved sanitation system remained stagnant, at around 46 per cent, between 1990 and 2010.

In terms of MDG 8, on a global partnership for development, Burundi does its utmost to mobilize domestic resources and external support — estimated at \$75 billion — in order to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

Concerning Burundi's position vis-à-vis the post-2015 agenda, it is evident from national consultations with all segments of the population that a post-2015 development agenda should focus on the following areas: governance, inequality, conflict and fragility; economic growth and employment; energy, water and a sustainable environment; access to basic social services; and food security.

Substantial progress has been made with respect to the strategic framework for peacebuilding, and a third phase of the programme is currently being developed by the Government, in conjunction with the United Nations Office in Burundi and the parent office in New York. In view of the notable progress that has already been made since our country was first placed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission, Burundi considers that it is now time for it to withdraw gradually from that agenda in order to make way for other countries whose need is currently greater.

At the same time, my Government has expressed the wish to see the United Nations Office in Burundi convert in February 2014 to a Burundi country team office. That would enable Burundi to work in close collaboration with the United Nations team and with other partners to meet the socioeconomic challenges with which it is currently faced.

Having summarized my Government's achievements, I shall now talk about Burundi's role regionally and internationally.

With regard to its international role, Burundi was one of the first two countries to take the courageous decision to participate in the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), where it has served since 2007. I should emphasize that Burundi is proud of the progress towards normalization in Somalia, but we call upon all the partners to strengthen the operational capacity of AMISOM so that it may complete its mission.

Burundi is also participating in peacekeeping operations in Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti and the Sudan. Soon, it will be participating in Mali and the Central African Republic. The recent election of Mr. Boubacar Keita as the country's President is undoubtedly a decisive step in re-establishing the principles of democracy that governed the country in the past. That is the right path towards normalization. In our view, those successful elections are an important step in terms of Mali's recovery. A Burundian contingent is ready to be deployed in that country.

With regard to the security situation in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi aligns itself with other members of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and partners such as the African Union and the United Nations to ensure peace in that country. In that regard, we reaffirm our commitment through the terms of the agreement of 15 December 2006 and the relevant

protocols of the ICGLR, as well as statements and decisions made by Heads of State and Government of member States in Addis Abeba and Kampala. At the regional level, we reaffirm our commitment, under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed in Addis Ababa on 24 February.

With regard to the very unstable situation in the Central African Republic, Burundi, as a member of the Economic Community of Central African States, is ready to work with other nations to deploy a military contingent there in order to participate in re-establishing peace.

Concerning the situation in Egypt, Burundi hopes that the Egyptian people find a swift way out of the crisis. With our African Union and United Nations partners, we are prepared to ensure that the Arab Republic of Egypt and its people revive their democratic institutions.

With regard to Syria, Burundi believes that the international community must do all it can to help all parties reach a ceasefire in order to settle their differences peaceably.

With regard to the conflict in the Middle East, Burundi reiterates its support for a negotiated solution that leads to two States living side by side in peace and mutual respect, in line with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Terrorism in its various forms has become a source of daily concern. Not even a week goes by without an act of terrorism being carried out somewhere in the world. Barbaric acts strike indiscriminately, affecting innocent people who have had the misfortune of finding themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Government of Burundi would like to take this opportunity to condemn, in the firmest way possible, the cowardly and arbitrary terrorist attack at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi. That heinous act has plunged into mourning not only Kenya, but the entire international community, given the different nationalities of the victims. We would like to convey to our brothers the people of Kenya and to their Government our sincere condolences and to reassure them of our friendship and solidarity. Burundi reiterates its full support for the United Nations Global Counter-terrorism Strategy, adopted by Member States in 2006.

With regard to the International Criminal Court, Burundi would like to express its full solidarity with the people of Kenya, who have just democratically elected their leaders. Burundi would like the Court to review how it functions so that it can benefit Member States of the international community as a whole. Burundi calls for a review of the Rome Statute at the next meeting of States parties, which is to take place from 20 to 28 November. In the meantime, it is important that the peace and reconciliation processes on our continent be strengthened rather than weakened.

Burundi welcomes the ministerial meeting to be held by the African Union on the sidelines of the sixty-eight session of the General Assembly on 27 September, as well as the announcement that a summit of Heads of State will be held on 11 and 12 October in Addis Ababa.

We have renewed the commitment of the Government of Burundi to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to ensure peace and security. We would like to conclude our statement by reiterating Burundi's commitment to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations.

My Government hopes that cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union can be strengthened in terms of tackling issues related to African countries in accordance with the letter and spirit of the founding documents of those two institutions.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. José Meade Kuribreña, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mexico.

Mr. Meade Kuribreña (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of President Enrique Peña Nieto, it is an honour for me to address the plenary of this Organization, a symbol of universal values and of the best causes of humankind.

On behalf of the people and Government of Mexico, I thank the international community for the generous expressions of solidarity and support following the weather-related events in my country. They contribute to the work of the Government and to the fraternal participation of civil society in providing assistance to those affected.

Over the past two weeks, Mexico has suffered the unprecedented simultaneous arrival of two hurricanes, Ingrid and Manuel, one on the Pacific coast and the other on the Atlantic coast. Over the past few decades, Mexico has worked hard to bolster its capability to

prevent and respond to natural disasters. However, the increased vulnerability we face in the world underscores the need and urgency for action. That is why we welcome the Secretary-General's decision to convene a summit in September 2014 to address the impact of climate change. Mexico will participate enthusiastically and will continue to contribute to the implementation of the agreements reached in 2010 at Cancún.

I join in the international community's unanimous condemnation of the unspeakable attacks against civilians in Nairobi. Mexico expresses its solidarity to the Government and people of Kenya, as well as our condolences to relatives of the victims. Such unfortunate acts constitute an affront to peace and clearly demonstrate the need for us to remain vigilant in the fight against terrorism. We also join those who have expressed their condolences to the Government and people of Pakistan following the recent earthquake.

My country believes in multilateralism and reiterates its unflinching commitment to the Organization. We support the diplomatic initiatives aimed at finding a peaceful political solution to the crisis in Syria, in particular the agreement reached by the United States and Russia on eliminating chemical weapons in that country.

The prohibition of the use or threat of use of chemical weapons is absolute. The events of 21 August outside Damascus are unacceptable. The dismantling and destruction of the Syrian arsenals, under the auspices of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the Security Council, must be immediate and unconditional. There can be no room for dilatory tactics or blackmail. Mexico supports the convening of the "Geneva II" international conference on Syria as soon as possible, with the goal of achieving lasting peace there.

The challenges we face today compel us to seek a Security Council that is truly representative of the international community, without positions of privilege reserved for a few; a Council that is transparent and accountable; and a Council that acknowledges that a veto does not work in situations involving genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mexico believes that disarmament should continue to be one of the key goals of the United Nations. In keeping with my country's longstanding contributions to the cause of disarmament, in February 2014 in

Nayarit, on Mexico's Pacific coast, we will host the second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.

Human security is also affected by the irresponsible use of, and illicit trafficking in, conventional weapons. Mexico therefore welcomes the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty. Demonstrating great vision, the Mexican Senate has approved the Treaty, and I deposited our instrument of ratification yesterday. We will comply with it immediately, even before its entry into force worldwide. Mexico calls on all States to ratify the Treaty, which is a testament to the Organization's ability to achieve common solutions to shared challenges. I also hope that the United Nations will show the same willingness to take on the fight against sexual violence as a weapon in conflict situations.

Mexico is also acting responsibly in dealing with the global drug problem. Like Chile, Colombia and others, Mexico believes we should evaluate internationally agreed policies in the search for more effective responses based on a focus on health and a framework of respect for human rights and from a perspective of damage control. The goal must be the well-being of society in all its aspects.

Along with Costa Rica, Paraguay and others, we believe we should give priority to prevention so as to reduce the impact on health and, in particular, the violence associated with drug problems. Similarly, it would be helpful to strengthen international cooperation so as to reduce the illegal flows of arms and money that fuel criminal networks.

Along with Guatemala and others, we believe the new global strategy should be based on an open and inclusive debate leading up to the special session of the General Assembly scheduled for 2016. We welcome the Antigua Declaration issued at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States as a first step in the right direction towards the 2016 special session.

The fight against organized crime must always respect the rule of law and human rights. When there is a risk or merely a possibility that the right to privacy of any citizen might be infringed by any Government, we have demanded that it be investigated and the parties responsible held accountable. In Mexico, the protection of personal data is a human right guaranteed by the Constitution.

Mexico believes firmly in free trade and in building mechanisms that promote the free circulation

of people, goods and capital. That is why we and Chile, Colombia and Peru formed the Pacific Alliance, which is organized in a spirit of openness and plurality, as the heterogeneity of its members with observer status reflects. Our only goal is for the Pacific Alliance to be an inclusive, useful tool for the promotion of prosperity for the citizens of our nations. That is also the spirit behind our work this year in the Association of Caribbean States.

During this session of the Assembly we will begin the process of evaluating our achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and outlining a road map for the post-2015 agenda. The success of the Millennium Development Goals is rooted in focusing the actions of the international community on clear and ambitious targets. Despite that, it is important to acknowledge that painful inequality and a lack of participation and access to development still persist among the most vulnerable groups in highly industrialized countries, as well as developing ones. Poverty, inequality and social exclusion exacerbate conflicts and help to undermine the rule of law. The development agenda must be based on a commitment to inclusion. Policies that bring together mechanisms promoting development and openness to innovation, coupled with political determination on the part of the international community, will enable us to advance towards a world with opportunities for all.

Inclusion should be a central premise in the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, thus ensuring not only a narrowing of the poverty and inequality gaps but also active participation by society's most vulnerable groups. That is why we will convene a meeting in Mexico to promote a global perspective on inclusion, in which Governments, civil society and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes will participate with the aim of defining the parameters of inclusion and its impact on development policies, so we can establish minimum thresholds for inclusion to which every human being is entitled. In that context, we acknowledge the high-level events being held within the framework of this session of the General Assembly — on persons with disabilities and on international migration and development. Full observance of the rights of such groups is an essential component of the post-2015 development agenda.

Mexico is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation that is proud of its 68 indigenous peoples. That is why we attach such importance to the World Conference on

Indigenous Peoples, to be held in 2014, for which great event we will host a preparatory meeting.

Our experience shows that to achieve the goal of inclusion, we must consider every dimension of poverty — lack of income and financial inclusion, nutrition, health, education, housing and basic services. Both through our national crusade against hunger and as a member of the Group of 20, Mexico has sought to place such deficiencies at the centre of the debate. The innovative feature of our national crusade against hunger lies in its focus on a multidimensional measurement of poverty and in the fact that it seeks to overcome the deficiencies thus measured in order to arrive at sustainable and structural ways of mitigating the conditions that lead to hunger.

In the spirit of moving Mexico forward, we are undertaking transformative reforms for increasing access to quality education, telecommunication, the financial system and social security. Strengthening international support will be crucial to implementing the post-2015 development agenda. We must meet the international commitments on financing for development agreed on under the Monterrey Consensus and achieve coordinated, transparent cooperation with clear goals. That is why Mexico will host the first High-level Meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation next year. Central to the agenda for that forum will be the mobilization of domestic resources for development. Mexico therefore agrees with all measures that help prevent the erosion of our tax base and its migration to jurisdictions with low or no taxes.

Today the world is coming closer together, because we have a greater global awareness. We are all affected by the suffering and challenges of other nations, wherever we are. Let us capitalize on that awareness in order to include those who are excluded and to extend a hand to those who have not had our opportunities. Let us do what is necessary to make our world a place where greater equality is a reality.

President Enrique Peña Nieto wishes to leave no doubt as to his and Mexico's commitment to a peaceful world, a world in which the best causes of humankind make headway, an inclusive world in which inequalities are reduced and extreme poverty is eradicated and a world in which economic growth produces prosperity for all. From this rostrum, Mexico declares its firmly held belief in its global responsibilities.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Nassirou Bako Arifari, Minister for Foreign Affairs, African Integration, la Francophonie and Beninese Abroad of Benin.

Mr. Nassirou Bako Arifari (Benin) (*spoke in French*): As he is not personally able to participate in this general debate, the President of the Republic of Benin, Mr. Boni Yayi, has asked me to represent him.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate the President on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session and, through him, to honour his country, Antigua and Barbuda, for that success, which demonstrates the trust that it enjoys within the international community. I would also like to congratulate the outgoing President, His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić, who demonstrated great leadership in fulfilling his very busy term of office. I would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his efforts at the head of the world Organization, in particular since January 2012, as part of the implementation of his programme “The future we want” (resolution 66/288, annex).

Benin fully supports the implementation of that programme, which focuses on issues that are fully consistent with the views and priorities of the Governments of the least developed countries (LDCs), in particular those of my Government with regard to governance matters, namely, sustainable development and preventing conflicts, disasters and violations of human rights, as well as ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in the management of public affairs.

Two years from the 2015 deadline established for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we can see that major efforts have been made by States to achieve the Goals. Assessments conducted at different levels have shown that least developed countries are falling far behind in implementing the Goals, in spite of the significant progress that has been made.

Nevertheless, it is a fact that achieving the Goals has become a top priority of my Government’s work and mobilizes a significant share of available resources. We should therefore welcome the campaign started in April to commence the countdown of the last 1,000 days leading up to the 31 December 2015 deadline.

We have reason to hope that the new dynamic and the new life that has been breathed into efforts of

the international community will enable significant improvement in the performance of least developed countries. Benin has taken that opportunity to develop a road map that includes a stopwatch for the last 1,000 days in order to speed up the achievement of the Goals by 2015. My country is one of 16 African countries deemed able to achieve at least five of the eight MDGs by that date.

I would like to commend the leadership of the United Nations and its relevant bodies, as well as other partner agencies, in mobilizing energies to assist States in achieving the Goals. It is important to fully include in the post-2015 development agenda those MDGs that have not been achieved on time and give them top priority in order to ensure there is continuity with the new normative framework established by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro and the demands that will result from the goals currently being developed. In that regard, the main theme for the general debate of the sixty-eighth session — “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage” — is quite timely and perfectly in line with the consultations that have taken place at various levels to develop that agenda.

Thanks to the meticulous clarification of issues and challenges by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, appointed by the Secretary General to present recommendations to him, we have a galvanizing vision and appropriate materials to build a unique, coherent programme regarding all those points, and pragmatic enough to ensure that everybody on the planet is placed on a sustainable development path so everyone can have access to shared a prosperity that leaves no country or person aside.

The post-2015 development agenda must be universal in nature. It must also be broken down into specific measures targeting reforms and corrective measures needed to re-establish any balances that have been upset or threatened. From that standpoint, it is of crucial importance that the situations of greatest current concern to the international community should enjoy particular attention, as stipulated in principle 6 of the 1992 Rio Declaration. We should therefore strongly support what is stated in the Secretary-General’s report entitled “A life of dignity for all” (A/68/202), that the needs of the least developed and most vulnerable countries should form the basis for defining the goals of the programme.

It is a welcome fact that the situation in those countries has already been the subject of significant thinking, with key action programmes that cover periods that go far beyond 2015. In that regard, the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 is and should be perceived as an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda. Its main aim is to ensure the transition of half of the 49 least developed countries to a higher-income level by 2020.

Against that backdrop, Benin is quite clear about its responsibility as the head of the global coordination bureau for the LDCs. We intend to propose the holding of an international conference on the theme “New partnerships for developing the productive capacities of LDCs in the context of the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action”, to be held in Cotonou in April 2014. That effort already enjoys strong support from the United Nations and some development partners from diverse cooperation frameworks, whether they are North-South, South-South or according to other types of triangular partnerships. I appeal for goodwill to help make that voluntary initiative a decisive turning point in terms of mobilizing the necessary resources to help least developed countries make the leap to industrialization based on their competitive advantages. That route offers LDCs a possibility for creating decent jobs so they can make the most of their demographic advantages and turn that into a factor for stability and prosperity.

We must enhance the role of quality, relevant and transformative education at the heart of the social, economic and development agendas — an education system focused on the real needs of society and the modern world. In that regard, I welcome the establishment by the Secretary-General of the Global Education First initiative, which is a platform for leading an open debate on the aims of education in the current context and to prepare children for living active, productive and personally enriching lives. That is a prerequisite for meeting the challenge of social inclusion of young people.

Benin has been honoured to participate actively since February in the work of the group of Member States championing the initiative. I urge the international community to support that noble project, which is a guarantee of adequate, inclusive training for youth. I call on all countries to join the Initiative in order to

contribute to the collective thinking and its efficient implementation.

At Rio de Janeiro we affirmed the inextricable link that exists among the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. However, that vision will not materialize if we set aside the existing relationship among peace, security and development. We should invest more in guaranteeing peace and security as an essential factor for sustainable development. At a time when we are thinking about the broad outlines of the post-2015 development agenda, we should also forge a consensus on the path to follow and the means to strengthen the bases of international law pursuant to respect for the essential principles of the Charter of United Nations, to which all States Member of the Organization have freely acceded.

We must constantly strive to bolster the ramparts of peace; without them, any development will be in vain, in the light of the destruction that comes from conflicts triggered by their violation. I would take as an example the atrocities that we see, sometimes at a frightening level, such as what occurred in Syria with the use of banned chemical weapons, which we condemn in the firmest possible terms.

We must reinforce the clout of the international regulatory regimes and make progress in the area of disarmament, whose paralysis carries great risk for humankind. In that regard, too, we welcome the conclusion of the Arms Trade Treaty.

We must better harness the mechanisms for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention. The partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations is a valuable tool for building a more integrated and solidarity-based world. That solidarity must be clearly displayed against the rise of a violent extremism that is increasingly dangerous when it takes root in our societies by associating itself with transnational organized crime networks.

All those all equally pressing challenges that the international community needs to address. We would benefit from adopting a preventive and proactive, as well as healing, approach in order to improve the health of our planet and constantly expand the vital space necessary for ensuring that humans flourish, if we really want to ensure the universal access to peace and shared prosperity that we all so sorely want.

The very encouraging way in which the crisis in Mali was managed is to the credit of the partnership between the United Nations and regional organizations. It proved what the international community can achieve if it uses its levers of our collective security system in time. Benin has been honoured to take an active part, alongside other African countries, in the noble mission of rebuilding the State in Mali.

The election of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita is the start of a new era where Mali is returning to the family of free nations struggling to bring happiness to their peoples. In that connection, the policies adopted in the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel must be decisively implemented in order to transform challenges into opportunities for growth and progress for the peoples of the region for the certain benefit of international peace and security.

We must also commend the efforts undertaken to stabilize the countries of the Great Lakes region, especially the Democratic People's Republic of the Congo, as well as Somalia, where the African Union has shown its ability to restore and rebuild peace, with, of course, the support of the United Nations. The case of the Central African Republic gives us pause, as it requires a commitment from the international community commensurate with seriousness of the current challenges.

The resurgence of piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea has had an enormous impact on the economies of the countries of the Atlantic coast and in the hinterlands. The initiatives undertaken with the support of the United Nations and the backing offered by our bilateral partners have enabled us to set up information-sharing centres pursuant to resolutions 2018 (2011) and 2039 (2012) of the Security Council. That was the aim of the joint summit on maritime security of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the Commission of the Gulf of Guinea that took place in Yaoundé on 24 and 25 June. That followed the meeting of Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers of ECOWAS, ECCAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission that took place in Cotonou on 18 and 19 March. After Yaoundé, there was the Malabo summit of the Heads of State of the Gulf of Guinea Commission held on 9 July, which took the historic decision to open the Gulf of Guinea Commission to all States in the area

of the Gulf of Guinea, which gives the arrangements an inclusive technical consultation framework.

Strengthening regional cooperation means that we need to set up an international support mechanism to improve cost-sharing in order to guarantee lasting results. It is important for the Security Council to adopt a new resolution to that effect.

More than ever, the United Nations must stand firm in its role as the best forum for a fruitful multilateralism, where different initiatives come together to give the necessary impetus for more inclusive and less unjust global governance that finds comprehensive, lasting solutions to crises of every stripe that trouble the world with disastrous repercussions on human security and human rights.

The delays in the establishment of a Palestinian State with all the attributes of an independent and sovereign State, including full membership in the United Nations, living side by side with the State of Israel within secure borders and with full international guarantees is still a subject of concern. In that regard, Benin welcomes the efforts of the Obama Administration that have led to the renewal of dialogue between the Palestinians and Israelis.

Along the same lines, the paralysis in the United Nations with respect to different political and military crises shows how urgent it is to reform the international system, in particular the Security Council. Achieving that reform would be real proof of the commitment of the United Nations to inclusive and less polemic management of the great problems of today.

The Government of Benin is firmly committed to the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights, which it considers to be the third pillar of the United Nations system. They are considerations that govern our participation in the work of the Human Rights Council, where we strive to promote a correlation between the behaviour of States and the international obligations they have undertaken through a mutual open dialogue and mutually enriching cooperation as the most effective way for developing and protecting universally recognized human rights and the fight against impunity.

Governments must undertake to create more cohesion between stakeholders and to ensure understanding and consensus on essential matters and avoid internal divisions that undermine the State

while negative forces are constantly striving to wreak havoc. My Government is committed to strengthening the principles of democracy and the implementation of effective local development policies. My Government remains convinced that promoting, developing and shoring up democracy, far from being a luxury, is a vital and unavoidable necessity for all African States.

That is why Benin is striving each day to find the ways and means to strengthen and streamline its political system so as to permanently anchor it in universal values. I remain convinced that democracy can be

viable and useful for the people only if it contributes to development, to promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of citizens, to strengthening social justice and to maintaining peace and international security.

In conclusion, I would like to express the compassion of the people of Benin to the brotherly people of Kenya for the tragedy they have experienced following the recent terrorist attack. The same compassion goes out to all those people in the world who are suffering from intolerance and its attendant violence.

The meeting rose at 9.10 p.m.