



ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR. JOHN W. ASHE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON BEHALF OF THE HONOURABLE WINSTON BALDWIN SPENCER, PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF 77 FOR 2008 AT THE HANDOVER CEREMONY OF THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE GROUP OF 77 (New York, 23 January 2009)

Honourable Minister of International Cooperation of the Republic of the Sudan,
Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Mme. Deputy Secretary-General,
Mr. Associate Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme,
Mr. Executive Secretary of the Group of 77
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

1– I deeply regret that I am unable to be present with you in person for this important handing over ceremony.

2– A year ago, Antigua and Barbuda had the honour and the privilege of taking over the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 for 2008. We accepted this enormous responsibility with pride and conviction, aware of the challenges and obstacles that developing countries face in their struggle to advance social and economic progress and justice for their populations in a manner consistent with sustainable development. We were buoyed and embolden by your many pledges of support, cooperation and solidarity.

3– 2008 emerged as arguably the most challenging year for development in the forty-four year history of our Group. We battled our way in an international environment beset by the deepest and broadest financial and economic crisis in three quarters of a century; the reality of our climate changing at an unprecedented rate; a global food crisis; a global energy crisis and an overall crisis of confidence in international and even national institutions and systems. There was an almost concerted effort to avoid providing resources to strengthen the development pillar of the international system even as development partners made clear that they expect developing countries, as a group, to provide the resources and trade and investment opportunities for their own development.

4– The Group of 77 and China developed and maintained coordinated positions which advanced substantially the interests of developing countries in all the various processes. I wish to draw particular attention to the year-long processes of preparing and negotiating the Review Conference on Financing for Development which was held in Doha, Qatar, on 29 November to 2 December 2008 and the advancement of the Bali Action Plan on Climate Change which culminated in Poznan, Poland on 1 to 12 December 2008. These negotiations were in uncharted waters; in a hostile international environment and in a situation of severe pressure on members of the Group given often conflicting national interests. **The Group held together.** The Doha Declaration and the conclusions out of Poznan, whilst not all that the Group had hoped for and certainly not commensurate with the challenges, are outcomes from which the Group can take much satisfaction. We were able to keep the challenge of development centre stage. I wish to commend

the Group.

5– In addition, our Group continued to tackle a number of multilateral issues including UN reform, economic and social development, sustainable development, implementation of commitments and actions to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as well as the Internationally Agreed Developed Goals among others. We continued to stress the fundamental importance of a central role for developing countries in any international discussions and policy-making impacting development.

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6– On UN reform and more broadly the reform of the international system, we expressed our strong support for the United Nations and to all collective efforts aiming at enhancing its ability to fully implement its mandates and to ensure the effective delivery of all its programmes, in particular in the social and economic development field. More fundamentally, the Group has championed the case for the United Nations to be given the central role, as its Charter and universal membership require, in coordinating international action to address the current financial and economic crises and the more fundamental structural weaknesses in the global economic and financial governance and management system. The Group achieved a significant decision in the Doha Declaration for the President of the General Assembly to convene a Conference, at the highest level, on the current financial and economic crisis and its impact on development. In terms of the internal organizational reform, there was the adoption of the statute of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal and the adoption of new rules for the contracting of UN staff as well as a movement to strengthen the Development Pillar. These were important time-bound issues of deep relevance to the functioning of the Secretariat and the delivery of development support.

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7– During the General Assembly's thematic debate on the MDGs, we continued to highlight our concerns about the insufficient resources to tackle emerging as well as longstanding issues to development. We stressed the fact that achieving the MDGs on time represents a fundamental test of the global partnership for development. It is a test of the political will of developed countries to address the imbalances and inequities in the international system and that the contribution that developed countries make through fair trade, development assistance, debt relief and access to essential technology will be decisive in reaching the MDGs by the year 2015.

8– In the High-level Meeting on the New Partnership for Africa's Development held on 22 September 2008, we urged the international community to refocus global efforts on the special needs of Africa which constitute a challenge to the entire international community. In the same manner, we took advantage of every opportunity to call on the international community to address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries, the Land-Locked Developing countries as well as the Small Islands Developing Countries. The needs of these special groups of countries include establishing the conditions for sustainable development by ensuring peace and security, and increasing investment in the keys sectors of transport, systems and infrastructure, health, education, and science and technology, and making resources available to facilitate new small and micro-businesses. We have been consistently calling on the international community to simply focus on implementing commitments already made to these special groups of countries.

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9– Many of the more daunting challenges we confronted and held ground, are however not fully behind us. We refer, in particular to the fundamental structural weaknesses in the global economic and financial governance system; the current global financial and economic crisis where, as stated earlier, we have secured a decision for an early conference at the highest level to assess its impact on our development; climate change where we have held back the push to renege on critical longstanding commitments, to shift responsibilities and to delay negotiations on the needed actions; development, where we have refused to allow the substitution of new and emerging issues for longstanding development challenges such as those embodied in the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals and have secured continued commitment to the achievement of the 0.7% of the gross national income of developed countries to development activities in developing countries by 2015 and the small increase in the resources for the development pillar in the United Nations; and finally the understandings reached with respect to Sustainable Development in the review year.

All the above issues will re-emerge in 2009 as the year in which to finalize negotiation or move into implementation. There will be a tendency to seek to roll-back. The Group will need to remain vigilant.

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10– In assuming the Chairmanship of the Group, I recognized the determination of developing countries to contribute to each others development through South-South Cooperation. I gave the assurance to the Group that Antigua and Barbuda would use its chairmanship to ensure the continued strengthening of South-South Cooperation. The importance of South-South Cooperation became even more obvious during the course of the year, as the development partners revealed their emerging approach to development. Fortunately the Group had begun to prepare itself and was able to move ahead with some key developments during the year. The Group:

(i) completed in St. John's Antigua and Barbuda, in April 2008, the initiative begun by Jamaica in 2005, and continued by South Africa and Pakistan, to elaborate a Development Platform for the South. The Platform was launched at the 12th Session of the Inter-Governmental Follow-up and Coordination Committee for Economic Cooperation among Developing Countries (IFCC-XII) held in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, in June 2008. This Platform envisages South-South cooperation as a development agenda based on premises, conditions and objectives that are specific to the historic and political context of developing countries and to their needs and expectations;

(ii) continued to build on the Programme of South-South Cooperation which was first agreed in Havana, Cuba in 2000;

(iii) finalized the Agreement on the Establishment of the South Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance; and

(iv) continued at the institutional level to strengthen the relationships among various institutions supporting the countries of the South including the coordination between the Non-aligned Movement and the Group of 77 and China through the Joint Coordinating Committee (JCC) for the formulation and promotion of common strategies on relevant issues in particular the reform of the UN system. We forged a strong partnership involving in particular the Group of 77 and China, the Group of 24 and the South Centre especially in respect of international financial and economic

issues; and also with the other Chapters of the G77, with research institutions of the South and with Southern NGOs.

11– I wish also to draw to your attention the successful outcome of the Ninth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP-9) held in Bonn in May 2008, in particular the adoption of a decision for the elaboration of a multiyear plan of action on South-South cooperation. In response to this decision, an expert meeting on South-South cooperation on Biodiversity for Development was held in Montreal from 6 to 7 November 2008, and elaborated a draft framework of the multiyear plan of action.

12– Finally, in regard to South-South cooperation, the UN High-level Meeting scheduled to be held later this year will provide a good opportunity not only to re-enforce collaboration within the South but also between the South and North including the United Nations system which needs to fashion new mechanisms for facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation.

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13– I should also indicate that the G77 and China was able to participate and advance its interest in a range of activities within and outside the UN system during the year. This included participation in thematic debates by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council on issues such as Africa's development, the Food crisis, the Energy crisis and the Millennium Development Goals; HIV/AIDS; The 9th Conference of the Parties to the Conventional on Biodiversity; the 13th Conference of the parties to the Convention on Climate Change and the Fourth Meeting of the Parties on the Kyoto Protocol.

14– I would like to stress that this broad based participation and any success we might have had was due significantly to the support, cooperation and solidarity which members of the Group extended to Antigua and Barbuda. I wish to thank each and every Member whole-heartedly.

15– I am also pleased to report the positive outcome of the situation regarding the space accommodation for the Group's office at the UN Headquarters which was successfully taken up by our Group in the context of General Assembly decision 63/549. The ruling of the General Assembly spells out, once and for all, the arrangement under which the Group occupies the office space allocated to it at the United Nations Headquarters.

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16– On behalf of the Government of Antigua and Barbuda, I would like to express our profound gratitude for the unwavering support we received from all the G-77 delegations. Our job would have been impossible without your valuable support. We will always be indebted to you, in particular to all those who took on challenging negotiating and coordination assignments and those who gave us their professional and political counsel to advance in the appropriate direction.

17– Antigua and Barbuda benefited from the support of a number of institutions and entities within and outside of the United Nations system, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNDP and its Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, the various Departments of the UN Secretariat particularly DESA which provided valuable support in the FfD preparatory process, as well as the G-77 Chapters, regional organizations and UN specialized agencies and bodies such as FAO, UNIDO, UNEP, UNCTAD, IFAD and other organizations based in G-77 Chapters.

18– I must express deep appreciation for the work and support by the G-77 Secretariat headed by Executive Secretary Mr. Mourad Ahmia. It is a small but dedicated team which is totally committed and devoted to our cause. I trust that our Secretariat will offer the new Chair the same support and cooperation that we had the privilege of receiving.

19– In conclusion, Antigua and Barbuda reiterates its great confidence in handing over the mantle of Chairmanship of the Group of 77 to you Honourable Minister of International Cooperation of the Republic of Sudan. We know that with you and Ambassador Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohamad, Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Sudan to the United Nations the future of our Group is in secure and experienced hands. I must advise you that the challenges in 2009 will be even more daunting than those faced by Antigua and Barbuda. I therefore assure you of the fullest support, cooperation and solidarity of Antigua and Barbuda and urge all other members to extend to you even greater cooperation, support and solidarity than that which they so generously gave to Antigua and Barbuda.

20– It was our privilege to serve our Group. We hope that we went some way to meeting your just expectations and have contributed to strengthening the solidarity and partnership of the Group.

Thank you.