



STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. BALDWIN SPENCER, PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE HANDOVER OF THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA (New York, 11 January 2008)

His Excellency Mr. Munir Akram, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Pakistan;
His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General;
Excellencies, Distinguished Representatives;
Mr. Kemal Dervis, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme;

1. Antigua and Barbuda is honoured to assume the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 and China. The task, though challenging, is a most worthy one and we are humbled by the opportunity given to serve the countries of the South in such an important manner. It is indeed a privilege and a profound honour to serve the largest grouping of countries in the United Nations. I accept this Chairmanship as a demonstration of my country's commitment to the ideals and principles of the Group, to cooperation and multilateralism and to the advancement of development for all.

2. The importance of this Group to structured international dialogue and to each and every country that makes up its membership cannot be overstated. This is particularly so as the international community seeks to deal with the challenges of advancing social and economic progress and justice for all in a manner consistent with sustainable development. As we continue to be united by a common cause for greater progress in the major fields of social and economic development, the Group will need to make best use of the many opportunities on the packed international agenda for 2008. To do this we will have to preserve the unity and solidarity which has served us so well for so many years, while improving our own level of cooperation.

3. Antigua and Barbuda is most thankful to our fellow members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) for their valuable support and endorsement, as well as to the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC). We thank the general membership of the Group of 77 and China for the opportunity to serve the group in such an illustrious capacity, and for the confidence shown in us being able to rise to the challenge.

4. We take this opportunity to say a special thank-you to Pakistan, immediate-past Chair, for their stellar stewardship of the group for 2007, and for the close cooperation with our delegation here in New York as we prepared for the Chairmanship. Ambassador Akram and his team here in New York have worked tirelessly in service to the Group. Under Pakistan's leadership, as well as that of recent past Chairs South Africa and Jamaica, the Group has remained a most formidable negotiating bloc in the United Nations, safeguarding the interests of developing countries and continuing the struggle to achieve a more just and equitable international economic order.

5. We should also at this juncture recognize the vital role of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation. The support they have given to past Chairs as well as to my delegation as we prepared for the Chairmanship, and to the cause of advancing South-South Cooperation in general, is invaluable. We look forward to such support for 2008. We simply would not be able to get the job done without the support of the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen;

6. In 1967 when the Charter of Algiers was drawn up many of the countries that today are members of the Group did not exist as sovereign states then. Many of us were not politically nor economically empowered. In the intervening decades much has changed. The Group's membership has grown and diversified, and the development agenda has expanded significantly. The challenges faced by developing countries multiplied as the processes of globalization intensified. Today the Group remains seized with a plethora of issues all vital for achieving lasting economic prosperity and sustainable development. The need to ensure that development remains paramount on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly, as the most universal and legitimate multilateral organ, remains vital, even more so today.

7. It should not go unnoticed that Antigua and Barbuda is a very small island state - a micro state in the terminology of some - and is perhaps one of the smallest to assume the Chairmanship of the Group. For a small country like us to be able to serve the membership of the Group in such a vital position is testimony of the import the Group accords to all members, regardless of size. This should give added confidence to the other small states in the Group - whether they are in Africa, Central of South America, Asia or the Pacific.

8. In this regard we consider that one of the most important assets of the group is its diversity. Though this may at times challenge us, I am firmly of the view that it is one of our greatest strengths. We must embrace and use positively the diversity of the Group. Our history shows that we have never been challenged by our diversity such that the greater common interest did not prevail. We intend to continue this tradition, and to build on it by using our diversity as a source of strength when negotiating with our partners to secure greater successes for the Group as a whole.

9. In the face of such diversity it is important to note that among members of the Group our similarities as developing countries are greater than our differences. As we move forward into 2008, we should emphasize and build on those similarities rather than focus on our differences.

10. In September when I addressed the UN General Assembly, I spoke of the role that small states can play in the multilateral arena, despite our size and perceived lack of power. As I said then, in a truly multilateral arena small states can and should play a crucial role by being the voices of reason and pragmatism that often leads to successful outcomes.

11. Talent, ability and good intentions are found in all countries, large and small. For many, our strength comes from the unity of purpose we share within this Group; the solidarity we maintain on issues of great importance to countries of the South; and the ability to use our numbers to bolster our negotiating position vis-à-vis the developed countries.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen;

12. In 2008 the Group will continue to tackle a number of multilateral matters, including - UN reform issues; economic and social development issues such as climate change, sustainable development and trade; implementation of commitments and actions necessary to achieve the MDGs and other internationally agreed development goals; financing for development, among others.

13. The challenges are numerous. Greater progress is required in closing the implementation gap on commitments and actions necessary to achieve the MDGs and IADGs and on securing adequate and effective levels of financing for development. Moreover, we are challenged with keeping development a top priority on the United Nations agenda, and challenged even further with keeping the international development agenda firmly anchored within the national priorities of the

developing countries, in which the overwhelming majority of the world's poor people live.

14. In terms of opportunities, we look towards the outcomes of key multilateral sessions such as UNCTAD 12 in the first half of 2008, the Financing for Development Meeting in the latter half, as well as the rolling out of the road-map on Climate-Change decided in Bali. These and other events will combine to keep us fully engaged in 2008.

15. In approaching these events and challenges it will be vital that the international community places emphasis squarely on keeping economic and social development on the forefront of the UN's agenda, particularly the economic and social development of the most vulnerable countries, including countries in Africa, Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Land-locked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small-island Developing States (SIDS). We should intensify our efforts towards bring international attention and action to bear on reversing trends that will see the further marginalization of such groups of countries.

16. We are also tasked with the continuation of joint efforts towards social and economic development, peace and security, by, among other things, ensuring internal cohesion, unity and solidarity, and to use the formidable influence of the Group of 77 and China to advance progress on the development agenda. To this end, we have a dynamic set of working methods which have proved fruitful in the past. We hope to carry this tradition along, and in particular to place high importance on working expeditiously to reach agreement among the Group so that more time can be devoted to strategizing and negotiating with our partners.

17. To accomplish this, we will also strengthen our cooperation with the Non Aligned Movement, currently Chaired by Cuba, through the established mechanism of the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC), in order to reinforce our representation on all issues of common interest and concern. In this context we are committed also to continuing the process of the Development Platform of the South, as mandated by the Second South Summit.

18. Additionally, I am mindful that developing countries are determined to contribute to one another's development, and so we will endeavour throughout our Chairmanship to strengthen South-South Cooperation while engaging developed countries, in accordance with the guidance and mandate provided by all members of the Group of 77.

Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen;

19. For the year 2008 we will continue to safeguard the interest of the Group by consolidating and protecting well-established group positions vital to our collective interests. We will also be required to formulate group positions based on evolving interests and to reach broad-based agreement on matters as they emerge, and in key negotiating outcome sessions.

20. In conclusion I would like to again thank the members of the Group of 77 and China for the many expressions of support. We look forward to, and welcome the cooperation of, all members of the Group in 2008. I would also like to say a special thank you to the Executive Secretary of the G77 Secretariat and his team for their valuable support, and we certainly look forward to working with them throughout the year.