



**STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY H.E. AMBASSADOR PETER THOMSON, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FIJI TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND CHAIRMAN OF THE GROUP OF 77, AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO PAY TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF HIS EXCELLENCY HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS, LATE PRESIDENT OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA (New York, 13 March 2013)**

Mr. President,

1. On behalf of the Group of 77 and China, I come before you and the General Assembly to express profound condolences to the Government and People of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at this time of mourning for the passing away of President Hugo Chavez Frias.
2. President Chavez was the embodiment of the devoted leader, who pursued a courageously principled path until the very end. He spoke for the multitudes of underprivileged people, those in Venezuela and around the world who were most in need of the strong voice of a champion. His focus on providing basic services and maintaining policies that worked in favour of the poorest of society, pre-dated the world's articulation of the need to eradicate poverty as the first of its Millennium Development Goals.
3. Deeds followed words, and under his leadership Venezuela moved up seven points in the human development index of the United Nations; while a report by UN Habitat in 2012 highlighted that Venezuela had the lowest rate of income inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean.
4. Mr. President, these are achievements of a leader who understood and acted upon the needs of his people. He was known as a leader who was not afraid to undertake the major changes needed to achieve his goals of greater inclusion of the marginalised, through the use of national resources for the provision of education, housing and health care.
5. President Chavez translated these national priorities, which were shaped by his personal life experience of growing up in poverty, to the international arena. He challenged laissez-faire attitudes of the international system, and reminded us that real progress can only be sustainable if benefits of development accrue equitably to all citizens, rather than just to elites.
6. And so, President Chavez stood firm in his commitment to the principles of respect for sovereignty, and equality of the rights of all States to make decisions in the best interests of their peoples. He believed we must work together as equal states and it was this cooperative spirit that underpinned many of his efforts to achieve regional cooperation and integration in the Latin American and Caribbean region. President Chavez's commitment to the cause of development of the South, his contribution to South-South solidarity and his legacy of struggle for equity in this world will serve as a milestone to be long remembered.
7. His moral values for social justice and struggle for the cause of development for a better world will certainly serve as a source of inspiration for our Group. His legacy of giving effective leadership to the South during his chairmanship of the G-77 in 2002, and his role in fostering solidarity among developing countries, as well as his erstwhile promotion of South-South cooperation, will be a source of enduring pride for our Group.

8. The world has indeed lost a visionary leader who challenged us all in our thinking, and encouraged us to focus our work on the most pressing issues facing our generation. May the vision of President Chavez continue to guide our work, and spur us on as we continue to confront the many challenges before us.

9. In sending our condolences to the Government and the People of Venezuela and to the bereaved family of the late President, in these difficult times, we are assured they will take forward his legacy and rise to achieve the potential that President Chavez saw for his people and his great country.

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

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