



Guatemala

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STATEMENT BY

H.E. Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GUATEMALA

GENERAL DEBATE

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***Statement by H. E. Mr. Oscar Berger Perdomo,
President of Guatemala, at the 59th Session
of the United Nations General Assembly***

(New York, 22 September 2003)

I

Mr. President,

I wish to begin by expressing our appreciation to H. E. Mr. Julian Hunte, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Saint Lucia, for his exceptional leadership at the preceding regular session of the General Assembly, which he conducted so ably.

At the same time I wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. The delegation of Guatemala will, needless to say, provide you with any support that is necessary or useful.

I would also like to commend our Secretary-General, H. E. Mr. Kofi Annan, for the skill with which he has carried out his functions. For this he deserves our respect and appreciation. We reiterate our readiness to support him and our solidarity with his efforts.

II

Mr. President,

My country is at a crucial moment in its history. It faces the challenge of living up to the expectations that had been aroused by the end of the internal armed conflict. Ever since last January, when I assumed office, all of our people have been giving renewed expression to their frustrated hopes.

My plan of government is predicated on the peace agreements and defines their implementation as a commitment of the whole nation. As President of Guatemala, I endorse fully the principle that a firm and lasting peace should be founded on participatory socio-economic development, aimed at achieving the common good and responding to the needs of all the people, particularly those still living in extreme poverty.

Ever since my first day in office, I have made a point of listening to the voice of every citizen. This has enabled me to identify the limitations that the Guatemalan State must overcome if it is to deal adequately with a multitude of legitimate social demands and expectations.

The actions my government intends to take in the period 2004-2008 are oriented towards four areas:

- Social investment,
- Conditions of production,
- Environmental sustainability, and
- Security for all.

This policy is being carried out within the framework of three principles: solidarity and inclusiveness, decentralization and participation, and transparency of public action.

These areas of action and principles coincide fully with the millennium goals.

III

Mr. President,

From the successes that have been achieved as a result of the new way of governing I would like to single out the following:

Reduction of troop strength by 43% and the initiation of a programme for the conversion and professionalization of the armed forces. This programme is consistent with the function the armed forces are to perform in times of peace. It has included, at the international level, greater participation by the Guatemalan army in United Nations peace operations. The work it is doing in Haiti is an example of this.

- **Directing public expenditure, as a priority matter, towards education, health, security and infrastructure.**
- **The fight against common crime, juvenile gangs and organized crime, with special emphasis on combating drug trafficking, terrorism, smuggling, money laundering, human trafficking and unlawful trafficking in arms, all of which are a huge challenge that cannot be met without the support of the international community.**

An all out fight against corruption and the creation of a mechanism to ensure transparency in public procurement. For the first time in the history of our country charges of corruption are being investigated, leading to the prosecution of suspects.

- **We have adopted a series of measures for the design and implementation of the fiscal pact. Sustained efforts are being made to fulfill the goal set in the peace agreements with respect to taxation, within the framework of the objectives for economic growth adopted by my government.**

- We have established, as a matter of priority for the new government, a *national front* against hunger. A policy has been agreed to by consensus with civil society in the area of food and nutritional security

- We have consolidated responsible macro-economic management, a requirement that had to be met in order to promote competitiveness, productive investment and the well-being of all Guatemalans. In this context we have launched a programme for economic reactivation named *Vamos Guatemala* (Let's Go Guatemala).

- We have taken firm measures to eliminate extreme poverty and curtail social exclusion, fully respecting, at the same time, our diversity, inasmuch as Guatemala is essentially a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual country.

- My Government is committed to the full observance of human rights. For it is convinced that each and every Guatemalan should enjoy the basic rights and freedoms and that the right to development should be fulfilled. Guatemala will accordingly pursue a policy of cooperation with international bodies that promote and protect human rights.

IV

Mr. President,

The foreign policy of my Government is consistent with its national interests, guided as it is by the principles of ensuring a better insertion of Guatemala in the globalized world of today and the strengthening of multilateralism as well as regional integration.

My colleagues, the presidents of the other Central American countries, and I have imparted greater dynamism to our integration process. This year we took the decisions required to bring to fruition a customs union between El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

My government has proposed a new era in its relationship with Belize. A final, just, equitable and honourable settlement of the territorial dispute between the two countries should proceed simultaneously with a constructive effort to resolve the socioeconomic problems afflicting their peoples. This is why my government is promoting productive joint projects, a trade agreement, more flexible modalities of transit of persons, goods and services, full observance of human rights and the conclusion of agreements for mutual legal assistance, all of which will contribute to the progress of our peoples and the security of the region.

The Central American countries have just completed the trade negotiations that were being carried on with the United States. Last May, at the Guadalajara summit, an announcement was made regarding the beginning of the process that

pursues an association agreement between Central America and the European Union, that is to include a free trade agreement.

In a matter of days we shall be signing a trade agreement with Colombia. We wish, moreover, to conclude free trade agreements with Taiwan, MERCOSUR, the Andean Group and CARICOM.

Another priority of the present Government is to look after the Guatemalan emigrants, whom we are duly supporting in their endeavours to solve their problems and enjoy full respect for their fundamental rights. We are in touch with the receiving countries, particularly the United States of America, in order to regularize the situation of these people, who make a substantial contribution to the development of their communities.

V

Mr. President,

All the efforts Guatemala is making to overcome poverty and bring about the socioeconomic development of our people necessarily depend on the progress being made in multilateral trade negotiations.

Guatemala makes an appeal to the international community to fulfill the long-standing commitments calling for the elimination of all measures and practices that distort markets, for the liberalization of trade in our products, and, more generally, for measures enabling a country like Guatemala, which has strived to open its economy, to obtain better opportunities of access to markets for its export products.

VI

Mr. President,

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala, which, after ten years of fruitful work, is coming to the end of its mandate. MINUGUA has left behind a significant legacy in our country.

VII

Mr. President,

I would like to turn now to our agenda at this session.

We are convinced of the need to adapt the Organization to the new challenges, threats and changes that humanity faces. We trust that 2005 will offer us an opportunity to react to them in a responsible manner.

One of the issues that will no doubt take on the greatest significance is the reform of the Security Council. Our position thereon has been evolving, which reflects the imperative need to make this organ more representative, transparent and effective.

