

Statement by Ambassador Sir Ronald Sanders, Head of Delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, at the 52nd Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, in Lima, Peru on 6th October 2022

As we meet at this 52nd Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organisation of American States, the OAS is financially broke.

We are trying to run an Organization that costs \$118 million on an unrealistic Budget of \$81 million.

The result is that the Secretariat of the Organization is unable to carry out a mountain of mandates from a hill of meagre financial resources.

Sadly, because of this, the staff of the Organization live in uncertainty.

Many are seeking better security elsewhere, and there is an exodus of talent, as skilled people flee to seek refuge in destinations with better prospects.

It is little wonder that the peoples of our countries do not see the benefits of the OAS and, therefore, place little or no value in it.

Member states with the financial capacity to pay, withhold their due contributions, and others seek incentives to pay on time what they agreed to pay, and have an obligation to meet.

The Organization is still booking as receivable income, contributions from countries that have severed their ties from it, in fictional transactions that claim these monies, running into tens of millions of dollars, are somehow payable.

This is an artifice not to serve the interests of the organization but to serve the political ambitions of a few.

If the OAS was a public company, its auditors would have declared it bankrupt.

The Organization is also structurally broken.

The OAS is hardly known by the peoples of our states.

And, collectively, we do not seem to know if we are an organisation of 35 states or of 34 or even of 33.

The OAS has a Charter and rules of procedure that were produced in the days before cellular phones and the internet, before the world became a neighbourhood, and before interconnectivity between nations occurs in the fraction of a section.

Yet its ancient Charter and rules of procedure have remained the guide of an Organization, operating in the modern world with unprecedented challenges.

The result is that the Organization moves at the slow crawl of a turtle when it should be moving at the pace of Jamaica's Usain Bolt, responsive to needs of people at every level.

That is why a General Assembly can impose a violation of the Charter by 19 votes including a disputed representative but cannot change it by 19 votes of fully qualified and accredited representatives as happened this morning in relation to the violation of OAS Charter in 2018 with regard to the wrongful seating of the nominee of the Venezuelan National Assembly of 2017.

The Organization has an obligation to respond to the needs of its peoples because its member governments have promised to do so.

That is the compact between governments and people which this Organization was established to fulfil.

But there is a gap between what governments promised and what is being delivered.

And, let it be clear that the failure to bridge that gap is not the fault of the Secretariat and its largely capable staff.

It is the fault of Governments that do not provide the resources; it is the fault of an antiquated Charter; and it the fault of anachronistic rules which urgently need reform.

Until Governments meaningfully address these fundamental and chronic weaknesses, this Organization's future is not sustainable.

Therefore, Governments must resolve to address these problems, and commit to provide the resources to give the OAS the vibrance, relevance and importance that it should have.

Not for the first time, Antigua and Barbuda urges the establishment of a group of Eminent persons from across our hemisphere to produce a report and recommendations on what must happen to recreate the OAS to serve the needs of our Hemisphere, and the needs of our Hemisphere in the World.

Mr Chairman, there are critical issues that confront all our nations collectively.

They are issues that none of us can fully satisfy individually, but we can all meet collectively. Those issues include:

The impact of Climate Change from which none of our nations can escape.

The maintenance and preservation of the international legal order which is the basis for peace and prosperity across the world. In this regard, we all have an obligation to stand up against any nation that violates the global legal order, as Russia has done in Ukraine, creating world economic turmoil and instability that looks set to worsen. That is why Antigua and Barbuda contributed actively to the resolutions and declarations that sought to tell President Putin that this war must end, and end now.

The innocent and smallest of our nations have been burdened the most - trapped in an international financial system that ignores our needs,

Health issues also confront us all. COVID-19 is not the last pandemic the world will endure.

This hemisphere needs to be ready for the next one.

And ready – not with nationalistic protectionism but in multi-nation collaboration. There should never again be vaccine hoarding by the rich and deprivation for the poor. The mantra of none is safe, until all are safe will continue to be true in the future as it was as we all trembled in fear at COVID-19. Let us not forget that fear. We must remember that fear to guide our actions in the future.

Addressing economic inequalities is also a common challenge for which there can only be a common solution. Development and economic advancement must be a goal for all in our hemisphere, for which all in our hemisphere should work diligently in our collective interest.

Human rights and human freedom must also remain a fundamental objective of this OAS, but we must devise early warning mechanisms, with implementation machinery, to address violations before they become so persistent and pervasive, that there are empty chairs and lowered flags at our meetings. It is not sufficient to want to punish, we must also be ready to reward, to provide timely resources and help to maintain freedom.

In this regard, my delegation makes it clear that Haiti cannot be left by itself to deal with rampaging, armed gangs who kidnap, terrorize and enrich themselves, defying all laws and tearing down institutions.

The gangs in Haiti must be brought under control without any further delay. The countries, in this Assembly, with the resources to help should do so, and the Haitian authorities must provide them with the guarantees, including a commitment to ending corruption and preserving human rights, that are prerequisites to providing help.

The alternative is the creation of a criminal state in our midst, and a base for criminal activity in our neighbourhood.

The Haitian people do not want this.

They are the victims.

This OAS has an obligation to help and help now.

Mr Chairman, our member states must recognise and uphold the principles of the UN Charter and the fundamental principles of the OAS Charter.

We cannot not condemn Russia - right, though that is - for violating the Charter of the UN, when some of our members violate the OAS Charter in pursuit of their national objectives, thereby tarnishing the credibility, authority, and integrity of this Organization.

Mr Chairman, the OAS can be an influence for good, a force for peace and prosperity and an instrument for democracy and development, but only if we reform it, respect it and resource it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.