

*Statement by Ambassador Sir Ronald Sanders, Head of Delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, at the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States, in Washington, DC on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023*

Mr. Chairman

At last year's General Assembly, I started my national statement with five words:

“the OAS is financially broke”.

It is disheartening to note, this year, that the financial challenges still persist, hindering the Organization's ability to effectively carry out the mandates that, we the member states, have assigned to it.

The OAS should stand as the shining symbol of our countries collective work in the promotion of democracy, human rights, multidimensional security, and integral development

However, the lack of adequate financial resources has dimmed this organization's light, making it a shadow of the vibrant force it could and should be.

The projected 2024 Program Budget offers little resolution to its dire situation.

We will attempt to sustain with \$91 million, an Organization that needs at least \$120 million to perform optimally.

How could that be right?

This imbalance has resulted in a significant backlog of mandates, as the Secretariat struggles to meet its obligations with limited financial resources.

Naturally, this has created an atmosphere of uncertainty for the Organization's staff, leading to a steady exodus of talented individuals seeking greater security and better prospects elsewhere.

Mr. Chairman, Antigua and Barbuda is keenly aware of the financial challenges that confront all Member States, including ourselves.

But here's the reality.

Among many international organizations to which our Member States belong, the OAS has the least costs for subscription.

Yet, our member states pay their compulsory dues on time to other more expensive organizations, but not to this one.

How could that be right?

Remarkably, if any member state never paid one cent to the Organization, it could continue to speak, vote and even chair the Permanent Council or a General Assembly.

There is nothing in the rules to prohibit it.

How could that be right?

The Audit Committee has officially warned all of us that, “For over a decade, the in-year budget is dramatically insufficient to meet the programmatic and administrative requirements of the OAS.”

But no action has been taken.

For 7 consecutive years the Audit Committee has recommended that the prompt payments discount be discontinued.

That too has gone unheeded.

For 9 consecutive years the Audit Committee has recommended that the Permanent Council consider penalties for non-timely payments.

That has also been resisted.

How could that be right?

Mr. Chairman, this organization still includes in its books of account, contributions from countries that have severed ties and are not paying one cent in dues.

This accounting fiction misrepresents and distorts the organization's true financial situation, simply because a few countries want to maintain the myth of membership by Cuba and Venezuela as member states,

Yet, the only purpose that this empty seat serves is as a convenient place for my briefcase.

And the only way that we can change this farcical situation is if we secure a two-thirds majority of 24 votes.

And why 24?

Because we are forced to calculate the two thirds majority, not on the basis of our actual 33 member states (soon to be 32) but on the myth of 35 members.

Effectively, Cuba and Venezuela are exercising an unwanted veto over voting in this Organisation.

How could that be right?

Mr. Chairman, there have been several attempts to sacrifice the Development Pillar to remedy the financial shortfalls of the OAS.

This practice must stop.

Antigua and Barbuda reminds all Member States that the Development pillar of our Organization is of equal importance in shaping the future of our nations.

By continuing to uphold this pillar strongly, we can continue to harness the collective strength of the Americas and tackle common challenges such as pandemics, transnational crime, smuggling of weapons, trafficking in persons, and the conditions that cause irregular migration and refugees, that not one of our countries can manage alone.

Mr. Chairman, moving beyond the internal challenges of the OAS, it is crucial to acknowledge the critical issues that confront all our nations collectively.

Climate change poses an undeniable threat to our hemisphere, and we must collectively work to mitigate its impacts.

The regions of the Caribbean and Central America are especially vulnerable.

Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, droughts and coastal erosion endanger economies, cultures, and the lives of our people.

It is imperative that we take immediate and decisive action to address climate change, supporting adaptation measures and sustainable development or the consequence will be more refugees, more irregular migration, and in some cases the extinction of societies.

The OAS – as our leading political organization – has an important role to play as an agency for advocacy, for creating international partnerships, and for building hemispheric cooperation, but it must be given the resources to do so.

Mr. Chairman, the protection of human rights and freedom must also continue to be a fundamental purpose of the OAS.

That is why it is right that we should send a clear message to all governments everywhere in the Americas that there is no freedom greater than human freedom, and the air within our hemisphere must always be too pure to suffer the stench of repression and oppression.

It is also right that we, in this Organisation, should condemn any nation that violates the principles, set out in the Charter of the United Nations and in international law, by grave acts of aggression against other states.

In the world of the bully where might is right, it is usually the small that are the first victims, but they are never the last.

Emboldened, mostly by the silence of others, the bully extends bullying until none are spared.

That is why it is right that this General Assembly should not be silent in the face of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Ukraine today; many of us could be Ukraine tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman, I end by asking if not the OAS, then what?

If we believe that the OAS is relevant and necessary to addresses the urgent needs for for justice, for peace, and for prosperity, then it is right that we, the member states must provide the financial resources to make it valued by our peoples and valuable to all of them. Thank you.