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Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Representatives:

I welcome the opportunity to address this opening meeting of the Committee on the Peaceful uses of Outer Space, the General Assembly's only Committee charged exclusively with issues concerning the peaceful uses of outer space.

Let me thank you, Ambassador Raimundo González, outgoing Chair of the Committee, and Dr. Adigun Ade Abiodun and members of the Committee for inviting me to participate. Let me also congratulate you, Dr Abiodun, on your election as Chairman of the Committee. I wish you every success in providing leadership for the Committee's work over the next two years.

This Committee has a unique and vital responsibility for highlighting the role that space science and technology can play, in assisting the United Nations in achieving its economic and social development goals. In this context, the Committee has critical and challenging work before it this session, as is evident from the detailed presentation made by Mr. Abiodun.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Representatives:

Socio-economic development, we know, is an essential cornerstone of the United Nations Charter, which should underpin other ideals enshrined in the Charter, including the maintenance of international peace and security. In fact, my own conviction that the United Nations must actively pursue a progressive development agenda accounts for the inclusion of development high on the list of priorities I set for my Presidency of the Fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

This Committee meets at a time when the General Assembly is seeking to bring its development agenda more sharply into focus, in response to the views expressed by the generality of its membership. The General Assembly recently decided, in its resolution 58/291, that a High-level Plenary would be convened at the level of Heads of State and Government early in the Assembly's 2005 Session, the sixtieth anniversary of the United Nations. The High Level Plenary would assess the progress made on the path to economic and social development agreed in the outcomes of more than a decade of United Nations summits and conferences, including the 2000 Millennium Declaration.



What is particularly significant about these summits and conferences, which commenced with the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is



My own country, St Lucia, falls within the scope of the work of the centres for Latin America and the Caribbean region. These centres, together with the centres for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, help develop and strengthen the skills and knowledge of university educators, and research and application scientists in the areas of space science and technology. As such, the centres make a contribution to sustainable development for the countries and for the regions.

The growing role that space-based solutions are playing in mitigating the catastrophic effects of natural disasters is also becoming increasingly evident. Meteorological satellites are used to provide early warning of severe weather, enabling vulnerable areas to be evacuated before the onset of a storm; remote sensing satellites, together with navigation and positioning satellites, can help rescue workers track survivors; and communication satellites can connect areas affected by disasters to the outside world, to enhance rescue efforts.

The value of space-based solutions is clear, when we consider that natural disasters constitute one of the most critical challenges to sustainable development. Hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides and other natural disasters can, in a matter of minutes, wipe out and reverse years of progressive development. The loss of lives in natural disasters is tragic, and many can be rendered homeless, helpless and destitute.

Only last week, in our Caribbean region, the Dominican Republic and Haiti suffered grave devastation from heavy rains and severe floods, in which more than one thousand lives were lost. It follows, therefore, that the reduction and mitigation of natural disasters is, as it should be, among the United Nations priorities, and a particular issue for the General Assembly.

Indeed, the issue of natural disasters is among the list of priorities I have set for the Presidency of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly. I have made known my strong support for United Nations and international efforts in this area, including the World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be convened in Kobe, Japan in January 2005.

The practical contribution the Committee is making through its promotion of the use of space technology for managing natural disasters has been noted. The Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee and Action Team on Disaster Management are, in my view, undertaking work of the nature required to enhance the capacity of countries, particularly developing countries and regions to deal with natural disasters through the use of space technology. The series of workshops, seminars and symposia conducted within the framework of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications, should also make a distinct contribution towards efforts for mitigating natural disasters.

I believe that the Committee has made a good decision, in determining that its report on the UNISPACE III+5 review should consider how synergies between implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III and the implementation of the commitments made in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and outcome documents of the World Summits for Sustainable Development and on the Information Society might be reinforced and strengthened.



Such an approach fosters cooperation and consensus in addressing development objectives, and meeting internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

This Committee has also taken, I note, a pragmatic and sound approach to the implementation the process for agreed courses of action in the area of space applications and technology. This approach might be instructive to other bodies of the General Assembly addressing the matter of integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of the outcomes of major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic and social fields.

Such an approach, I am confident, ensures that the Committee conducts its business in the most effective and efficient manner, including the work of this its Forty-seventh Session. In so doing, it advances an important goal of the Charter, "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples."

I commend the Committee for its continuing commitment and initiatives to ensure that the exploration and peaceful uses of outer space benefit all countries, and particularly the countries of the developing world. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.