



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

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**UN Day Message to United Nations Association
of Westchester County**

Members of the United Nations Association,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I regret that I cannot be here with you in person today, particularly because I too am a resident of the lovely county of Westchester, but I am grateful for the opportunity to address you through this message.

Your gathering today commemorates two anniversaries: the 68th Anniversary of the United Nations and the 70th Anniversary of the United Nations Association of the United States. These two anniversaries tell me that our two organizations – and the ideals upon which they were founded – continue to be important fixtures in the world and have stood the test of time. The importance of your organization as an advocate in promoting the work, goals and values of the UN in this country cannot be underestimated. Through tireless advocacy and education efforts, you help the American public better understand the purpose of the UN and what it seeks to accomplish. I know I can speak on behalf of many in the UN system when I say we are grateful for your friendship and support.

As supporters of the United Nations, I am sure many of you know, the United Nations was founded in the wake of the horrors and sorrows of World War I and II, compelling founding Member States to create a global organisation that might one day lead to a different kind of world – one founded upon peace, human rights and prosperity for all. Sixty-eight years have now passed, many more countries have joined this community of nations and given the nature and scale of global challenges, we can safely say the United Nations is needed more than ever. As the world grapples with deadly conflicts and other incidents of violence, environmental degradation, inequality and persistent challenges in meeting development goals, the UN provides a unique forum for all Member States to discuss the matters that most concern the world's people and to work towards common solutions. Given the current global social, financial and environmental challenges, the UN's current work on a new development agenda is one of the most critical initiatives undertaken by the organization in its history. The new agenda must ensure that member-

states fulfil their shared responsibility to people and planet, while also ensuring that all persons have an opportunity to live in peace, dignity and with justice,

Over the years, our concerted efforts have led to great successes, in which we can all take pride: since 1990, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty has declined by half; over 2 billion people have access to improved sources of drinking water; child mortality for children under 5 has dropped by more than 40%; and impressive gains have been made in the fight against HIV and AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. We can also proudly note the recent adoption of a historic treaty regulating the trade of arms.

Yet, with one billion people still living on less than \$1.25 a day, and a number of persisting or emerging development challenges, much more needs to be done. Many at the United Nations are keeping track of the days left to the deadline to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). We now have less than 800 days and we need to fulfil our promises and demonstrate that we can turn our words into concrete actions that make a real difference in people's lives. Furthermore, as we begin setting the stage for the post-2015 agenda, we must pick up where the MDGs left off and overhaul our approach to both people and planet to create a universal and shared development agenda, which leaves no one behind.

The reality is that as local politicians, city planners and citizens, you are grappling with many of the issues with which the UN is dealing at the international level. Changing demographics and trends in urbanisation will result in the majority of the world's people living in cities, places like Mount Vernon and wider Westchester. Development planning of the future on the micro-scale often mirrors the challenges and imperatives of planning at the macro-level. Some of these issues include balancing private needs and public rights; creating prosperity while protecting the planet; protecting greenspaces while maximising the use of land and physical spaces; creating jobs and fostering productive livelihoods; building social spaces where people of multiple ethnicities and backgrounds can live harmoniously and contribute to their societies; and providing increased housing and transport, cheaper energy supplies, public goods and services while simultaneously

shrinking our ecological footprint. These are issues that concern both you and the UN equally and they impact both the local and international landscape.

On this dual track of both accelerating progress towards the MDGs and defining our new development agenda, let us take a moment to recall the ideals and values the founding members enshrined in our Charter. Let the inspiration that led to the founding of this family of nations guide us and inspire us in this new chapter of our shared history. And let us pay tribute to the values we share with you, in this City of Mt. Vernon with residents from 98 different countries - diversity, tolerance, respect and unity of the human family.

I wish you joyful celebrations.

Thank you.