General Assembly Elects Dennis Francis of Trinidad and Tobago President of Seventy-Eighth Session, Selects Main Committee Bureaus

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The General Assembly today elected by acclamation Dennis Francis (Trinidad and Tobago) to serve as President of its seventy-eighth session, after which its six Main Committees elected their respective Bureaus.

In thanking Member States as well as his Government, people, staff and family, Mr. Francis said:  “My heart is truly full, even as I remain keenly aware that being called to serve as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations constitutes a weighty responsibility.”  Education — a great liberator which lifts people up the socioeconomic ladder and strengthens society in the process — brought him to the United Nations, he pointed out, stressing that his career’s experiences would have never seen the light of day had it not been for his parents and had he not benefited from an enlightened Government policy which democratized education.

In that vein, when the international community postpones or neglects to offer its support to the millions who lack access to quality education, is it not consigning them to an intergenerational cycle of poverty, degradation and misery, he asked.  To save those children and young people from near certain defeat, the world must afford them, through education, the option of choice and the capacity to self-actualize for their benefit and that of their communities.  This, he insisted, is a compelling argument for an all-out effort to re-energize action to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Conscious of the Office’s sensitivity and weighty duties, he then pledged to discharge those responsibilities with transparency, accountability, vigour and dedication.  He also promised to prioritize meaningful dialogue to ensure the clarity of priorities and the strengthening of common purpose in the interest of coherence. “It is my hope to bring forward, with your help and support, a renewed atmosphere of conciliation, cooperation and shared commitment in addressing the many challenges and seizing every opportunity — however nascent — before the General Assembly,” he said, calling for Member States’ fulsome and good faith engagement as they accelerate action towards sustainable development for all.

Congratulating the President-elect, Assembly President Csaba Kőrösi (Hungary) stressed that Mr. Francis’ vision for the seventy-eighth session — “Peace, Prosperity, Progress and Sustainability” — offers a comprehensive view of the Assembly’s work as it rebuilds trusts, tackles climate change and strives to get the Sustainable Development Goals back on track.  With Mr. Francis’ extensive experience — including as Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations — and unique perspective from a small island developing State, the Assembly will be in capable hands during the next session, he said.

However, much work remains to be done in the nearly 100 days left until the transition, he emphasized, underlining that the cascading crises which shepherded the start of his tenure still require solution-oriented approaches.  Crisis management and transformation remain the dual approach guiding the Assembly’s vision and action.  To this end, he pledged to continue promoting science for a “sustainability transformation”, especially in the preparations for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023.  He also underscored the urgent need to put the 2023 United Nations Water Conference’s gamechangers into action as an answer the unfolding water crisis.  “We cannot let the momentum stop,” he asserted, adding that he looks forward to working with the President-elect on a successful handover and continued progress.

António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General — praising Mr. Kőrösi for his diplomatic skill, stewardship, dedication and commitment to “solutions through solidarity, sustainability and science” throughout his presidency — also congratulated the President-elect.  Mr. Francis, he noted, arrives at a deeply challenging moment for the human family amid conflicts and climate chaos; escalating poverty, hunger and inequality; mistrust and division; and the 2030 Agenda — the road map to a better future — in danger as the Global Goals are slipping out of reach. Across all these issues, the world looks to the Assembly to unite Member States around common solutions.  In that regard, President-elect Francis brings a wide range of skills, experience and knowledge to this essential task as a respected negotiator and long-serving diplomat with a critical perspective from Trinidad and Tobago.

“The General Assembly of the United Nations is a symbol of hope in a world where it is so often missing,” he underscored, emphasizing: “Through dialogue and looking for consensus, you demonstrate that we can gather around shared solutions to tackle the challenges facing our world.”  On behalf of the entire United Nations system, he wished the President-elect every success and pledged his full support in working to forge a better, more peaceful future for all.

Amery Browne, Minister for Foreign and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, said that his country’s contribution to multilateralism has shaped the work of the United Nations. Following the path of constructive engagement, Trinidad and Tobago has often served as a bridge-builder — its size does not limit the scope of its ambition nor does it constrain its commitment to humanity as it recognizes the giant potential that all nations bring to the Assembly.

In describing Mr. Francis as “absolutely respected” at the highest levels, he pointed out that Trinidad and Tobago has never held such a position throughout its history.  As such, its people are beaming with pride and enthusiasm as their country continues to ensure that multilateralism prevails.  “Let us all work together […] to create a better future for all people and for the generation that will follow us,” he urged.

Congratulating the President-elect as well were the representatives of Somalia on behalf of the African States, Syria on behalf of the Asia-Pacific States, Bolivia on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean States, Norway on behalf of the Western European and Other States and the United States as the host country.

In accordance with tradition, the Secretary-General drew lots to determine which delegation would occupy the first seat in the Assembly Hall during the seventy-eighth session, with all other countries following in English alphabetical order.  North Macedonia was picked for the first seat and this seating order will be observed in the Main Committees.

The Assembly then elected the following Vice-Presidents of its plenary:  Bolivia, Congo, Estonia, Gambia, Iceland, Iran, Malaysia, Morocco, Netherlands, Senegal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Zambia.  Those elected join the five permanent members of the Security Council — China, France, Russian Federation, United Kingdom and the United States — which serve annually as Assembly Vice-Presidents.

Speaking afterwards to dissociate himself from Iran’s election as Vice-President, the representative of the United States noted that Tehran’s record in defying Security Council arms embargos, violating human rights and exporting violence and weapons speaks for itself.  “Iran cannot act as an honest broker in its role as Vice-President of the General Assembly because it has shown time and time again that it does not seek to enhance global peace and security but rather works against it,” he said, pledging that his Government will continue to oppose that country’s leadership throughout the United Nations system.

The representative of Israel similarly dissociated himself from Iran’s appointment as Vice-President as he spotlighted Tehran’s activities, which pose a threat to international peace and security.  “Iran repeatedly threatens the State of Israel using harsh anti-Israel and antisemitic rhetoric,” he added, emphasizing:  “It is totally unacceptable that the leadership of a Member State of the United Nations would call another Member State a cancerous growth and publicly call for its annihilation.  This is a blatant violation of the Charter of the United Nations.”

Rejecting those allegations, the representative of Iran stressed that those remarks are not relevant to the Assembly’s agenda item under discussion.  As a founding member of the Organization, Tehran has always actively participated in the Assembly; valued it as the main policy-making organ; and ensured that the Organization’s agendas align with the international community’s priorities and needs. He went on to voice his regret that certain Members misuse the organ to pursue their political agendas.

Following the meeting, Members held consecutive meetings of the Assembly’s six Main Committees to elect their respective Bureaus by acclimation.

The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) elected Rytis Paulauskas (Lithuania) as Chair; Yaseen Lagardien (South Africa), Matías Andrés Eustathiou de los Santos (Uruguay) and Christine Nam (New Zealand) as Vice-Chairs; and Heidar Ali Balouji (Iran) as Rapporteur.

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) elected Mathu Joyini (South Africa) as Chair; Patryk Jakub Woszczek (Poland), Joaquín Alberto Pérez Ayestarán (Venezuela) and Sara Rendtorff-Smith (Denmark) as Vice-Chairs; and Mariska Dwianti Dhanutirto (Indonesia) as Rapporteur.

The Second Committee (Economic and Financial) elected Carlos Amorín (Uruguay) as Chair; Jeswuni Abudu-Birresborn (Ghana), Nichamon May Hsieh (Thailand) and Diego Antonino Cimino (Italy) as Vice-Chairs; and Ivaylo Gatev (Bulgaria) as Rapporteur.

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) elected Alexander Marschik (Austria) as Chair; Nelly Banaken Elel (Cameroon), Mosammat Shahanara Monica (Bangladesh) and Tomáš Grünwald (Slovakia) as Vice-Chairs; and Robert Alexander Poveda Brito (Venezuela) as Rapporteur.

The Fifth Committee (Administrative and Budgetary) elected Osama Mahmoud Abdelkhalek Mahmoud (Egypt) as Chair; Mohammed Khalifa H Alnasr (Qatar), Amalia Irina Pufulescu (Romania) and Kimberly K. Louis (Saint Lucia) as Vice-Chairs; and María Reyes Fernández (Spain) as Rapporteur.

The Sixth Committee (Legal) elected Suriya Chindawongse (Thailand) as Chair; Jhon Guerra Sansonetti (Venezuela), Alis Lungu (Romania) and Enrico Milano (Italy) as Vice-Chairs; and Moussa Mohamed Moussa (Djibouti) as Rapporteur.

The General Assembly will reconvene on Tuesday, 6 June, at 10 a.m. to elect the non-permanent members of the Security Council.