



5 February 2014 - H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe, President of the UN's General Assembly, has just ended his trip to Strasbourg, France, where he has had a couple of very busy days. But why Strasbourg, one might think?

So let's start at the beginning.

Remember year 2000, when computers were supposed to crash and the world come to an end, which, of course, luckily didn't happen? Instead, in 2000, the international community came together and made an ambitious promise and adopted a set of eight time-bound and measurable goals – the Millennium Development Goals – to chart the course towards a new era of shared prosperity.

Since then, significant achievements have been made in reducing poverty and hunger and improving access to clean water and education.

But with a mere two years to go before the target date for the realization of the MDGs, much needs to be done and attention has begun to shift to what should follow in the post-2015 era.

And this is what has brought the President of the GA to Strasbourg, where the European Parliament convenes once a month for its plenary session.

Mr Ashe, who comes from the small island state of Antigua and Barbuda, was elected President of the General Assembly's sixty-eighth session on 14 June 2013 while serving in the dual capacity as his country's Permanent Representative to both the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, positions he held since 2004.

When asked what his position as the current PGA means for a small country like his (the population of Antigua and Barbuda is only 80.000), he said: "Personally I would hope that it provides an example for representatives from smaller UN Member states that it is possible to rise to the highest positions within the organization."

In Strasbourg, the President has addressed a joint meeting of the Committees for Foreign Affairs and Development at the European Parliament, held meetings with numerous top European Union officials and addressed the Members of the European Parliament.

UNRIC conducted an interview with the President of the General Assembly during his visit to the European Parliament's monthly session in Strasbourg and asked what, exactly, he has been up to.

"The EU is an important partner and member of the UN. So for those reasons it's important that the dialogue with the EU is held from time to time. I've been having discussions with the EU both on institutional and organizational level on how we can work together to advance the preparations for the post 2015 agenda", Mr Ashe explains.

The post-2015 development agenda will address the unfinished business of the MDG's as well as the new and emerging challenges. This agenda, with the eradication of poverty at its core, will open a new chapter in the UN history of development by integrating in a balanced manner the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

The EU and its Member States constitute the single largest financial contributor to the United Nations system – underwriting close to 40 percent of its regular budget, more than two-fifths of the peacekeeping operations budget, and about half of all contributions to UN funds and programs.

When asked about the EU's influence on the post-2015 development agenda, Mr Ashe chuckles and responds diplomatically: "We hope they don't see it as influence but rather a major input on the post-2015 development agenda for many reasons, given the global reach of the EU as an organization. "

"The EU remains the world's largest trading block and, collectively, the world's largest donor of official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian aid. While many countries in the Union still struggle with a slow economic recovery, I strongly welcome the decision of the EU to maintain its ODA commitments and to reserve a significant share for development and humanitarian assistance in the 2014-2020 multiannual EU budget.", Mr Ashe said when

addressing the MEPs.

The Members of the European Parliament expressed full support for an ambitious development agenda. They acknowledged the challenges in striking the right balance in terms of national priorities and the development of effective core goals.

“In this regard, I commend the dedicated vision and financial support that has been and is still making a difference in the lives of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable people,” Mr Ashe concluded his address to the MEPs.

*UNRIC's library backgrounder on EU-UN cooperation:* <http://unric.org/en/unric-library/26803>