



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Statement

By

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Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

to the

**General Debate of the
United Nations General Assembly**

27th September, 2019
New York

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Robert Nesta Marley, a great poet of our Caribbean Civilisation, once paraphrased the Book of Psalms in song, singing “*the stone that the builder refused, shall be the head cornerstone.*” As it was in Biblical and musical verse, so it is in modern geopolitics: Small Island Developing States – ignored by the architects of the modern world order – are now increasingly indispensable to understanding and solving the challenges of our day. As the original builders of our global economic and political architecture descend into jingoistic isolationism, and succumb to the narrowest pursuits of short term self-interest, it is the small, the poor and the historically marginalised states of our global village that present the last, best chance to restore the crumbling edifice of international cooperation, and the principles on which that cooperation rests.

With multilateralism being battered by a resurgence of base and dishonest pandering to narrowly-partisan interest groups, and with great power intrigue driving nations further apart, Small Island Developing States, by necessity, will prove to be the glue that holds

together this international experiment in unity, discussion, and joint action.

Mr. President,

The rapid acceleration of Climate Change is the menacing manifestation of a failed multilateralism. Faced with a common threat, ample warning, and overwhelming scientific consensus on the past causes, future impacts and present solutions, the international community has dithered endlessly, and impotently. As emissions continue to increase, legally-binding limits are recast as voluntary targets, and the worst offenders hypocritically highlight the specks of pollution in others' eyes, to distract from the beam in their own. At the same time, many more needlessly suffer and die while indisputably urgent global action is intentionally thwarted by selfish short-termists and convenient climate-deniers.

Today we gather in the wake of indescribable horror in the Bahamas, whose citizens and residents were terrorised by Hurricane Dorian. Weeks after the storm, hundreds remain missing. In recent UN

gatherings, this tale has become sickeningly familiar. Only the names and locations have changed.

[Yet we cannot allow the steady drumbeat of climate catastrophes to become background noise to our annual gatherings. We must remain attuned to the urgency of vulnerable states in the path of cataclysmic storms. Every year, the ferocity of these hurricanes increases. Every year, island states wait with bated breath, and hope against hope that increasingly frequent storms will thread their way between our countries without incident. And every year that we are spared, we grimly acknowledge that our luck will not hold indefinitely.]

Sadly, hurricanes are merely the most violent manifestation of climate change's insidious effects. The floods, land degradation, droughts, landslides, coastal erosions, and unreliable weather patterns across our region, and elsewhere across the globe, place increasingly insurmountable daily hurdles to life, living and production in vulnerable nations, particularly Small Island Developing States. The three international conventions touching and concerning biodiversity, desertification and land degradation, and

climate change are to us a composite, integrated whole upon which our very existence depends.

This week, the Secretary General of the United Nations held a summit to confront our persistent paralysis in the face of the accelerating climate catastrophe. Stripped of the crafted eloquence, the Summit reconfirmed that there are basic litmus tests for commitment to climate action: Enforcement of binding emissions targets that result in a global warming of less than 1.5 degrees; investments in clean air and renewable energy; and provision of easily-accessible adaptation financing that prioritises the most vulnerable nations.

Surely, the catastrophe in the Bahamas must finally put to rest the fiction that arbitrary and inaccurate measures of wealth are of greater import than the self-evident vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States. If measured by per-capita GDP, the Bahamas is a high-income nation, too rich to be eligible for many forms of concessional financing, assistance in building resilience, and post-disaster support. Measured instead by size, location, geography and the immutable laws of nature, the Bahamas' vulnerabilities are

starkly apparent. Before the fury of Mother Nature, our islands are equally vulnerable, and must be equally assisted by any mechanism that purports to address the impacts of climate change. There is a Small Island States Exceptionalism which must be factored, juridically, and non-discretionary, in the architecture of global partnerships on this existential matter.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has long considered major emitters' failure to set – and honour – ambitious mitigation pledges to be an act of hostility against the very existence of Small Island Developing States. As hundreds lie dead in the Bahamas, and thousands more climate refugees are denied safe, temporary haven in the industrialised capitals of the nearest major polluter, those acts of hostility are brought into sharper relief. No nation that contributes to killing us; no nation that closes its eyes, ears and doors to our suffering, truly can with a clear conscience proclaim friendship towards us. A neighbour who pollutes our residence, who brings or facilitates noxious emissions into our homes, who burns fires at our boundaries and smokes us out, commits egregious wrongs against

us and is justly subjected to the requisite remedies of compensatory damages and restraining injunctions.

Mr. President,

A different type of metaphorical storm is wreaking havoc on the bedrock principles that undergird this Organisation. The rising tide of hegemonic, unilateral, interventionist interference now threatens to inundate entire nations, while responsible states stand askance from their responsibilities to speak and act in defence of central Charter tenets. Everywhere – North, South, East and West – the hegemonic imperial hand is visible and oft-times the metaphoric eagle threatens to unleash war and disorder in unilateralist vainglory. What all the world's peoples want is peace, dialogue, security and prosperity.

The sustained and coordinated attempts to engage in externally-imposed regime change in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is but one egregious example of the current trend. We are witness to an illegal economic blockade, eerily similar to the one against Cuba that

we annually and overwhelmingly decry as immoral and anachronistic. We are in possession of indisputable evidence of extensive foreign interference in the sovereign affairs of the Venezuelan people, and the frequent, unambiguous threats of military intervention. We are complicit in an international farce, where the members of the UN General Assembly seat one government as representative of the people of Venezuela while a self-described regional agency within the United Nations – the Organisation of American States – seats a different, ill-defined entity, a fictitious creation of foreign powers. We are mute in defence of the principles that have bound us together, and steered us clear of World Wars for the last 74 years.

Principle, and international law, cannot be sporadically or selectively applied. Whatever the challenges facing Venezuela, they are exacerbated, not remedied, by hegemonic interventionism, and compounded by our inconsistency. The solutions to the conflict in Venezuela are well known, as they are in all other similar conflicts: the facilitation of peaceful dialogue, the cessation of outside interference or threats of intervention, and firm adherence to Charter

principles, including the respect for sovereignty. Those who advance a different agenda are acting against the interests of the Venezuelan people, and are becoming – willingly or unwittingly – co-conspirators in undermining multilateral diplomacy. The vulgar and unjustifiable imperialist weaponising of trade and the banking system must be condemned by all right-thinking nations which are keen to uphold internationally-agreed rules-based global trade and financial systems as fundamental to peace, security and prosperity.

Mr. President,

Without hyperbole, we must now all recognise that the Palestinian peace process is mortally wounded, and near death. Our silence is complicity in the increasingly brazen unilateral usurpations of international law. Neither the Two State Solution nor regional peace can survive the ongoing disavowals of bedrock agreements and the enabling silence of our international community. The Palestinian people deserve more than lip service and hand-wringing. The General Assembly, and the Security Council, must be heard unambiguously on this matter.

Mr. President,

[The proud populations of Caribbean nations, while diverse, remain enduringly shaped by the legacies of horrific native genocide and the trade in enslaved Africans. The indigenous Kalinago and Garifuna civilisation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was methodically replaced by a largely African population, through wars, mass deportations and forcible importations of what the colonial slavers called “human cargo.” Systematic genocide left our peoples unmoored and unconnected from their physical and spiritual forebears, and casting our eyes solely to the northern capitals of our historical exploiters at the expense of an eastward gaze to our ancestral homelands.]

This year, as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines celebrates the 40th anniversary of our reclamation of independence from a lengthy but temporary colonial rule of 216 years, we continue the process of removing historical blinders, reassessing our challenges and opportunities, and renewing our linkages with continental Africa.

This year, after separate visits to the Caribbean by the esteemed brother Presidents of Ghana and Kenya that captured the regional imagination, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has approved, in principle, the establishment of an “ABCD Commission” for further practical elaboration with the African Union, Brazil – the home of over 100 million persons of African descent –, the membership of the Association of Caribbean States and the African Diaspora elsewhere particularly North America and Europe. The Africa-Brazil-Caribbean-Diaspora Commission places the fractured global might of peoples of African descent within a single institutional framework. Within that unity is undeniable and untapped strength. This is a concrete proposal for further upliftment of the goals and targets of the UN Decade for People of African Descent. Africa’s centrality is a core feature of CARICOM’s public policy.

These efforts to add political and administrative structure to the abiding ache for reconnection continue to rest on the Caribbean Community’s formal demand for reparatory justice for the crimes of native genocide and African slavery. As more and more venerable private institutions come to terms with the myriad ways in which

they profited from or contributed to the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the governments of many states continue to dodge and dissemble when confronted with the indisputable evidence of their past actions and their current impacts. Caribbean nations will continue to push, patiently, but insistently, for acknowledgements and actions to remedy this colossal historical injustice. This justifiable demand for compensatory resources to repair the legacy of underdevelopment, which is the consequence of native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies, is urgent and compelling. It is linked inextricably to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their financing.

Mr. President,

The eradication of poverty and the deepening of sustainable, people-centred development remain my Government's central impetuses. Amidst the ominous ubiquity of climate change, the unpredictability of escalating trade wars and the daily uncertainties of erratic global policy shifts, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines must seek

increasingly creative pathways in pursuit of our people's Right to Development.

Alongside our continuing efforts to engender growth and development through greater investments in agriculture, education, health, housing, tourism, and the Blue Economy, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has established a well-regulated, export-oriented medicinal cannabis industry. This industry seeks to marry the latest scientific and pharmaceutical knowledge on cannabis with the longstanding expertise of our traditional cultivators of the plant. In defining the parameters of our medicinal cannabis sector, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has taken great efforts to scrupulously comply with international law while taking into account the specific needs and characteristics of our country, culture and people. Undoubtedly, the rapidly-shifting medical and legal landscape will eventually require the international community to revisit the longstanding treaties governing the use and trade in cannabis. In the interim, it is crucial that the enforcers and interpreters of these international agreements refrain from a brand of hardline orthodoxy

that disproportionately affects small states, while accommodating the disdainful disregard of the law by more powerful nations.

Mr. President,

The General Assembly must stand resolutely against the thinly-veiled war being waged against Small Island Developing States under the guise of combatting tax secrecy and reducing “illicit financial flows.” The constant bullying by ruffians, the bureaucrats of the European Union, in particular, has revealed that the unambiguous objective of the EU is not well-regulated Caribbean financial centres, but a decimated and discredited sector, while pandering to the thriving centres that exist within EU borders, or in other, more powerful locales. The war being waged on legitimate commercial activity in the Caribbean by the European Union trafficks in outmoded stereotypes and is accompanied by the unmistakable whiff of a paternalistic bias that romanticizes the Caribbean servant or subsistence labourer, but instinctively rejects the concept of a Caribbean banker. It is self-evident that opaque, non-inclusive, undemocratic entities are presuming to impose an illegitimate rulemaking authority on island

states in the hope that our financial sector collapses under the weight of onerous regulation, rapidly changing requirements and the threat of unilateral blacklists. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is under no illusions: our financial services sector, and those of our Caribbean brothers, is experiencing a synchronised political assault, masquerading as an objective bureaucratic regulatory exercise.

Similarly, Mr. President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wishes to formally place the issues of de-risking and loss of correspondent banking relations finally on the agenda of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. Well-meaning, but ill-fitting regulatory attempts to combat terrorism and money laundering have had the unintended effect of making it prohibitively expensive for banks to operate in small island locales. The flight of these banks, and the withdrawal of relationships with other financial institutions, threatens to disconnect island states from international trade and commerce, with disastrous developmental consequences.

International cooperation is essential to addressing these vexing challenges of modern globalisation and sustainable development.

Some of our allies, like Taiwan, have been exemplary in offering their perspectives and support to our developmental aspirations, and have proven time and again to be more than deserving of a meaningful role in the specialised agencies and bodies of the United Nations. Indeed, more and more South-South cooperation is moving from the periphery to the centre-stage of the global political economy to the benefit of SIDS like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. President,

Your well-chosen thematic focus on inclusion and multilateralism is an apt encapsulation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' ambitious attempts to advocate our right to be seated and heard at the highest levels of multilateral decision-making.

This year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was proud and humbled to be elected by this General Assembly to serve as a non-Permanent Member on the United Nations Security Council. Our overwhelming mandate remains an important endorsement of our nation's historic quest to be the smallest nation ever seated on this important global

peacekeeping body. More importantly, it was an unequivocal acknowledgement of the right and ability of Small Island States to participate meaningfully in the weightiest matters at the core of the United Nations' *raison d'être*. We hope that our presence will buttress the view of the overwhelming majority of nations that the membership and working methods of the Security Council should be reformed to reflect current global realities and the invaluable perspectives of Small Island Developing States. So, too, must we right the historic wrong of the exclusion of Africa, and others, from permanent membership. We thank the General Assembly for reposing so overwhelmingly its trust in us. We ask for your continued support.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines based its Security Council campaign on the assertion that we are friends to all, and we strive for a better world. We supported that assertion with a belief that problems have solutions. A love of peace and an abhorrence of war. A reliance on the timeless principles of sovereign equality, non-interference and non-intervention. A confidence in systems of global governance based on transparent rulemaking and equitable

enforcement, irrespective of power disparities. And an unshakeable conviction – as enunciated by Martin Luther King, Jr. – that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a country with a small population, a small economic footprint, a small geographic area, and the magnificent part of our legitimate and authentic Caribbean Civilisation. Our small islands, – mere irrelevant pebbles in the eyes of some of the large, the rich and the powerful who ought to know better –, must now form part of the new foundation of international cooperation. Our challenges must be acknowledged, and our voices – long humoured but unheard – must be listened to as the consistent advocates on behalf of people, progress, partnership and principle.

Too often, the UN's foundation principles – like small island states – have been cast aside in the precipitate pursuit of convenient or expedient solutions. Too often, the world has come to regret such reckless haste. Today, we must recognise the folly in assuming that

our organisations' institutions will withstand the challenges of unilateralism, isolationism and inactivity. The proper responses to these challenges is a reinvigorated Assembly, a recommitment to principle, and a renewed focus on the diverse voices of **all** members of this noble institution.

I thank you.