

RENEWAL AT 40!

By

**Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**



**Address to the Nation on the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary
of Independence at Victoria Park,
St. Vincent and the Grenadines, on October 27, 2019**

Office of the Prime Minister
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
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[FORMAL GREETINGS!]

[On the parade before us, in addition to all our excellent participants, there is a contingent of 19 young Vincentians, males and females, who joined the Royal Navy and are here to celebrate with us. We thank them! Further, Dr. Dave Yearwood, the Cadet who raised the original independence flag in 1979. Love for country is growing massive; appreciation of our independence is simply phenomenal among our people.]

Today is the fortieth anniversary of our nation's reclamation of independence. On October 27, 1979, 216 years after the commencement of the conquest and settlement of our country, the umbilical cord of British colonialism was formally severed, and the nation which we now know as St. Vincent and the Grenadines was

born. Immediately prior to 1763, when Britain assumed suzerainty of this country, it was a self-governing nation belonging to the indigenous Callinago and Garifuna, led astutely by the Right Excellent Joseph Chatoyer, Paramount Chief, our first and only National Hero, thus far.

Although European contact with St. Vincent and the Grenadines first occurred in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the rugged nature of our country and the resolute fighting spirit of independence and liberty of our indigenous forebears, kept European colonialism at bay until the latter decades of the 18th century. Indeed, it took British colonialism nearly 40 years to defeat and finally subdue the Callinago and the Garifuna who waged a prolonged, justifiable guerrilla war to defend their land, their very existence, their sovereignty, their patrimony.

In establishing a colonial state and a plantation economy in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the British were ruthless and single-minded. In the process, they carried out a campaign of native genocide and forced exile of most of the indigenous people; they

instituted the enslavement of Africans between 1764 and 1838 — over 55,000 Africans were disembarked on slave ships between then and the end of the slave trade in 1807; and the British recruited as indentured servants nearly 6,000 “liberated” Africans, Madeiran Portuguese, and East Indians between the 1840s and 1881 to supplement the labour of the nearly 23,000 enslaved Africans who were formally freed on Emancipation Day.

Thus, within a 100-year period after the British colonised St. Vincent and the Grenadines, they remade this country by decimating the indigenous people, and bringing to it a ruling class of Anglo-Saxons, enslaved Africans, and indentured “liberated” Africans, Madeiran Portuguese, and East Indians.

Through the fever of history and an extraordinary process of creolization, this very population mix plus a small number of more recent arrivants particularly from the Middle East and China, have fashioned an integrated society, possessed of a core of shared values, inclusive of our love of independence, liberty, the rule of law, and parliamentary democracy.

[Indeed, metaphorically, our St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as a vital part of a magnificent Caribbean civilisation, is akin to a symphony: We are the songs of the indigenous people — the Callinago and the Garifuna; we are the rhythm of Africa, the melody of Europe, the chords of Asia, and the home-grown lyrics of the Caribbean. To be sure, there are occasional dissonances in this integrated whole but these are addressed efficaciously through our in-built arrangements, fit for purpose.]

Amidst all the pain and suffering to which British colonialism subjected our country, including the legacy of underdevelopment arising from native genocide, slavery and indentureship, it also bequeathed us at least five gifts: The common law, an independent judiciary, parliamentary democracy, a sound public administration system, and the English language. Surely, though, none of these reasonably justifies genocide, slavery and their legacy of underdevelopment! In that context, we, and the rest of CARICOM, continue to make the just demand for reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of our African forbears.

In our 40th year of the reclamation of independence — Renewal at 40! — it is important that we correctly apply our historical lessons. First, it is wrong to ignore our history — it is not bunk; it has shaped us. Secondly, we must not sanitise or white-wash it — that approach is likely to deny us our very essence, thus adding to our burdens. Thirdly, we must not live in history and stylise our sufferings in a permanent victimhood — that approach will hold us back by impossibly looking forward to a past while other nations are moving to the future.

Instead what we must learn from our history; let it be a noise in our blood, and echo in our bones, and embrace it to uplift ourselves, without rancor, though with sense and sensibility.

Most of all, we must deepen our understanding of our past so as to avoid the desecration of the future. We must hold no malice or grudge against anyone; we are not better than anybody, but nobody is better than us! We resolve differences through dialogue; we are for peace, not war; we embrace partnerships and multi-lateral

engagements; we reject hegemony and hold aloft international law, the precepts of justice, and the settled, time-honoured principles which elevate humanity and the civilised relations within, and between, nation-states.

At Independence in 1979, our Founding Fathers secured the following majestic words in the Preamble to our Constitution as reflecting the promises of our Independence:

“Whereas the People of the Islands of Saint Vincent, who are known as Vincentians –

(a) have affirmed that the Nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man;

(b) desire that their society be so ordered as to express their recognition of the principles of democracy, free institutions, social justice and equality before the law;

(c) realise that the maintenance of human dignity presupposes safeguarding the rights of privacy of family life, of property and the fostering of the pursuit of just economic rewards for labour;

Since 1979 successive governments, our institutions of State, and our people, have sought assiduously to give life and meaning to these very affirmations, freedoms, principles, and ideals. We thank all our friends and allies in the region and globally, including our former colonisers, the British, who have assisted, and are assisting us, in the realization of all this, and more.

Our National Anthem resonates with like sentiments; its celebrated refrain teaches that:

*“What e’er the future brings,
Our faith will see us through,
May peace reign from shore to shore,
And God bless and keep us true.”*

We accept in this regard, the Pauline teaching that: “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”. But faith without works is vanity, without deeds it is dead. So, we must do well; and we must not eat the bread of idleness. We must think and act creatively and as the folk spiritual enjoins us to “put a little oil in our lamp and keep it burning.” We must not bury our talents; they ought always to be developed and utilised for the benefit of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. And we must be caring to our neighbours to whom we owe obligations. The promises of independence will not be fulfilled unless each of us does his/her part in accordance with his/her ability and be rewarded justly for his/her work.

Since the dawn of the 21st century, your government has embarked upon a quest to build a modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy which is at once national, regional, and global. Each of these words is pregnant with real meaning. Accordingly, a bundle of cross-cutting issues for this economic transformation has been addressed, including: Education, training, science and technology; poverty reduction, renewable energy; airport and seaport

development; the physical infrastructure of roads, bridges, and buildings; health and housing; information communications technology; citizenship security; good governance; regional integration; and productive partnerships globally. In the process, the economy has grown; and has been transformed and consolidated, from one in which the production of goods was dominant to one in which services constitute over 80 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employ more than three-quarters of the working population. The level of our human development is high in this middle-income, resource-challenged, small island developing state. There is, evidently, much for us to be thankful, as we count our blessings and name them one by one. Investments are coming more and more; more jobs are being created; the size of the economy is growing; and the condition of people's lives and living is improving day-by-day; better days are here, and coming ever more.

Still, complex challenges lay ahead arising from our internal weaknesses and limitations and from the complicated and oft-times dangerous condition of the external political economy. These compelling difficulties include: the existential threat of climate

change, desertification, land degradation, and disruptions of our biodiversity; a scarcity of material resources; youth unemployment, social inequality, and intractable pockets of indigence; the aging of the population; incidents of criminality, violence, including sexual violence, and the challenges to citizen security; fake news, disinformation, and their negative impact on a functioning democracy; the adverse economic, social and political fall-out from the new machine age and Artificial Intelligence; the dangers of war, terrorism, big-power hegemony, imperialism, and unrestrained monopoly capitalism; the disruptions and impacts of dangerous global diseases; and the unravelling of global order, multi-lateralism, and a ruled-based system of international relations.

Yet, these challenges and threats do not paralyze us into inaction and learned helplessness or prompt us to adopt unsustainable approaches to development or any faddish mirages of the day. In partnership with other nations in the region, our hemisphere, our traditional friends, and globally, including Africa and Asia, we shall overcome our challenges; we shall remain focused and creative; we shall further fortify our hard and smart work; and we shall be our

brothers' and sisters' keepers. We shall uplift further our nation. We shall not be idle or faint-hearted, nor weary in our efforts to exalt every valley, make low every mountain of obstacles, turn the crooked straight, and smooth that which is rough.

Thus, at this 40th anniversary of our reclamation of independence, we renew our strength; we mount up with wings as eagles; we shall run and not be weary; we shall walk and not faint.

Fellow Vincentians, on January 1st, 2020, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will take its seat as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council as the smallest country ever to be so elected by the United Nations General Assembly. St. Vincent and the Grenadines, our Latin American and Caribbean region and the rest of the world rejoiced at our extraordinary, historic electoral triumph on June 07, 2019. Almost all of the representatives of the world's 7.5 billion people, considered our country and its government worthy of a seat on the highest global council entrusted with the consideration of global peace and security, and thus of prosperity. Our visionary 10-year campaign for such an elevated seat at the

global table succeeded magnificently despite initial, and sustained, derision by unwise detractors at home, who pull down St. Vincent and the Grenadines all the time, and critics abroad. It is the same derision which, at first, met our visionary proposals to build a bridge over the vast Rabacca River, to construct the seemingly impossible Argyle International airport, to carry out the supposedly unreachable Education Revolution, and to reduce poverty and undernourishment from 25 percent of the population to under 5 percent in a ten-year period or thereabouts. Morning by morning new mercies we see; all that we need His hand hath provided; great is His faithfulness.

Listening to me today is a very special group of 18 Vincentians who turn 40 years; they were born on October 27, 1979. I call them by name and celebrate with them and their families on this their birthday:

1. Danieto Bacchus
2. Glennford May
3. Hyacinth Bynoe-Cupid
4. Iantha Radica Richardson

5. Isabelle Marcia Homer
6. Joseph Mc Nickle
7. Kerisa Gibson-Stephenson (who kindly urged me to do this)
8. Kip Sutherland
9. Losette John
10. Marsh Mercury
11. Monique Cuffy-Jeffers
12. Joseph Baptiste
13. Nyasha Garrick
14. Rodney Rodesha George
15. Rohan Simmons
16. Shirla Youlanda Huggins-Mc Millan
17. Shelton Rohan Allen
18. Yeavera Woods

Fellow Vincentians, as usual, I have a few especial announcements to make, actually 20 in all.

First, from January 2020, the monthly public assistance paid to poor and vulnerable persons, numbering approximately 4,500, will be

increased by \$25.00. Thus, recipients who are over 65 years of age will be paid \$275 monthly; those under 65 years of age, \$250 monthly. Our profound commitment to the poor continues. I expect that in the new year, too, the minimum pension paid by the National Insurance Services will increase appropriately after the usual review.

Second, some 112 staff nurses and nursing assistants in the Community Nursing Services who were due certain on-call and weekend allowances but were not paid for various reasons, will be all paid in full these allowances in their December 2019 pay packet, the rate of \$250 monthly for the staff nurses and \$125 monthly for nursing assistants. Individual payments ranging from \$375 to \$28,875 will be paid; the aggregate of these payments amount to \$995,332.56. I thank the nurses who brought this matter to my attention three or so months ago. I am pleased that we are righting this wrong! At the same time, I remind all our nurses and nursing assistants of their ongoing obligation to deliver the best service possible to the various communities. Please do not let us down; you are precious to us.

Third, the final batch of teachers, amounting to just under 100, who obtained university degrees but were not appointed as university graduates, although they receive a graduate allowance, will be appointed as graduate teachers in January 2020. Henceforth, the appointments will proceed as a matter of course.

Fourth, as has been done in respect of the graduate teachers, our government will embark on a similar process from January 2020 to address the position of the unappointed university graduates in the public service, roughly 140 in number, at the appropriate grade level. The Education Revolution has occasioned a massive increase in university graduates; the public service establishment has to be reformed to accommodate this welcome development in university training.

Fifth, in this 40th year of independence, hundreds of outstanding land title issues for grantees of state lands will be resolved to ensure the receipt of proper title; more distribution of housing lots will take place, too, as the land surveys and the requisite infrastructure are done. This government has, thus far, distributed, or accorded titles

for, housing lots in excess of 4,500. On last Wednesday at Cabinet, nearly 200 titles to state lands were approved; tomorrow at a ceremony at Rabacca, 139 formal letters regarding these land titles will be distributed individually. We shall continue to turn dead property into live property; and we shall assist our nationals, always, in putting a roof over their heads.

Sixth, a clean-up Kingstown Campaign is about to commence. The Minister of Works will make the relevant announcements.

Seventh, the Public Access for Village Enhancement (PAVE) costing approximately EC \$6 million is about to start. All over the country, on our rugged terrain, scores of paved footpaths will be built over the next year as a 40th anniversary gift to occupiers of their homes, in pursuit of the easing of access.

Eighth, a \$3 million road-cleaning programme will be instituted towards the end of next month as a follow-up to the \$2.5 million road cleaning in late August-early September.

Ninth, over the next few months, the Medical Cannabis Authority (MCA) will provide \$1.3 million in assistance to traditional marijuana growers who have been licenced to transition into the legal medical cannabis industry. The MCA will also provide educational, health, and rehabilitative support in the sum of \$200,000 to assist drug users who have a dependency on drugs. Further, the government will carry out a land distribution plan on over 200 acres of land on the north western part of St. Vincent for traditional workers and growers who are transitioning to medicinal cannabis.

Tenth, during the next twelve months, 35 housing units will be built by government at the Lowmans Bay area to accommodate the resettlement of 35 families from the Bay Front at Rose Place, the site for the Modern Port. Arrangements are also being made for the relocation of the boats to Edinboro. There will be a magnificent transformation, in the people's interest, over the next few years, in the Rose Place area consequent upon the completion of the Modern Port Facility.

Eleventh, a shipment of 5,160 sacks of fertiliser from Taiwan will be distributed to farmers at highly subsidised prices to boost further agricultural production. A grant, free of cost, of 40 sacks of fertiliser to each of the 16 registered agricultural cooperatives will be made. Note the symbolism of 40! Big up the farmers!

Twelfth, the physical infrastructure for our judicial system and parliamentary democracy will be strengthened consequent upon the recent decision of the government of the Republic of China (Taiwan) to support a soft-loan of US \$20 million from a Taiwanese bank to construct a modern Parliament building and Court House Complex on two parcels of land almost obliquely opposite the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture on Richmond Hill Road. [One of the parcels of land which was acquired by the government, is still enmeshed in litigation on the issue of the extent of the compensation. Our government is anxious to have that matter resolved, if possible through negotiation and mediation.]

Thirteenth, the commencement date for duty-free Christmas barrels and packages is Monday November 18, 2019; the duty-free

concession will run until December 31, 2019. This is the 19th successive year that this government has offered this concession.

Fourteenth, please keep your eyes and ears open for a number of national and community projects, inclusive of roads, which will be formally commissioned or launched over the next few weeks and months. There is a huge number of them. One which touches my heart is the impending opening of a rehabilitated building and associated structures to accommodate, temporarily, our indigent elderly at the Lewis Punnett Home until the construction of a modern geriatric facility at the existing site.

Fifteenth, three deserving nationals are being accorded the status of Cultural Ambassador: Kingsley “Hero” Roberts (pan player and arranger, musician, song writer, and calypsonian; Peggy Carr (Poet and veritable mother to our students in Taiwan); and Cherry Ince, who currently resides in New York (musician, song writer, musical arranger, and music producer).

Five Sporting Ambassadors are also being appointed:

1. Elliott “Morrie” Millington (Captain of the 1979 Football Team);
2. Rawltie Lewis (Outstanding member of Team 1979 and Caribbean Football Team in 1981 and a Coach today);
3. Ian Sardine (Football Administrator);
4. Dr. Kishore Shallow (Vice President, West Indies Cricket Board, and former national cricketer);
5. Doris Mc Intosh (Netball Administrator).

Sixteenth, the project for the writing of a comprehensive “History of St. Vincent and the Grenadines” is being elaborated through the efforts of four Vincentian historians: Dr. Michael Dennie, Dr. Adrian Fraser, Dr. Cleve Scott, and Dr. Arnold Thomas. Cabinet has already approved the initial budget. The government will fund the project fully.

Seventeenth, during this 40th year of reclaimed independence, a final determination will be made in time for National Heroes Day 2020 for the elevation to the status of National Hero of one or more of the following persons: George Mc Intosh, Ebenezer Joshua, Robert Milton Cato, and John P. Eustace.

Eighteenth, a Committee is being established by Cabinet to examine, review, and engage in public consultation regarding the naming and/or renaming of various public places, streets, and buildings. The overwhelming number of Vincentians considers that some colonially-named public spaces, including streets, ought to be renamed. It is part and parcel of the exercise of remaking ourselves in own image to fit our collective sense, and sensibility.

Nineteenth, during the coming twelve months, especial efforts would be made to honour appropriately dozens of our citizens, who have excelled in this or that uplifting human endeavour. The various communities will be asked to assist in the elaboration of a permanent Honours Roll, as a fitting memory to our exemplars.

Finally, the activities under the recently-launched Sport Against Crime and Renewal at 40! will be ramped up over the next twelve months. All hands and minds are needed for these two initiatives.

Fellow Vincentians, as a nation, we have made extraordinary progress, particularly since the onset of our people's social democratic revolution, following the anti-colonial uprising of 1935. Seminal tasks of that social democratic revolution have been accomplished, many others have been partially achieved, and yet others are still work-in-progress as the practical circumstances, at home and abroad, undergo alterations, change, and transformation in every material particular.

Successive generations of our people — men and women — of all classes, ethnicities, status, and affiliations, have worked hard and smart to build this magnificent nation — small in size and population — which we call our home and which is celebrated by right-thinking persons at home and abroad. The names of our political leaders — Joseph Chatoyer, George Augustus Mc Intosh, Ebenezer Theodore Joshua, Robert Milton Cato, James Mitchell, Ralph, and others — have been accorded the historical and contemporary headlines, but the ordinary men and women of our lands and seas have made St. Vincent and the Grenadines what it is with their daily, unsung contributions. Our families, led by our indomitable women who in

their daily heroism also fathered us, are our solid foundation stones. We treasure them all; we celebrate them; and pledge to honour them, day-by-day sweet Jesus, with our love, caring, and respect.

I see today our elderly, unadorned, but distinguished; they reckon weather in their heads; they wear their ages on their faces and wisdom in their eyes; they feel the keen commitment to their families and native land in their bones; they have survived the sting of the sun and the whip of the rain to deliver a better world for us; they still read the day's events from the dawn of the morning; and they deserve their quality days unto the sunset mask of evenings.

It is blissful for us all to be alive but to be young is very heaven. Our youths in this their heavenly condition must embrace and feel the sunlight of promise glowing on their skins and stirring in their blood; to be deterred by nothing; to be not afraid of their future; and to absorb everything that the daylight of their lives, offers. We lift up our children and young people; we thank God for them; and we envelop them with our love as our blessings, now and forever.

All of us present here today must endeavour to come home to ourselves; in this way we get to know our beginning and our end. We are all time; only the future is ours to desecrate; the present is the past; and the past our fathers' mischiefs. As we reflect on our history, its hysteria, its pain and suffering, its joys and triumphs, we choose not to lie down innocently and in lethargy like a tired river meeting a turbulent sea. Instead, we make our own story from our history; we do so with a patience and a calm but yet with all the energy we can summon, knowing that sun brightens stone and a redeeming grace, though not seen is always at hand, the melodies of which when heard are sweet, but unheard, yet resonant, are sweeter! By this amazing grace, if lost we will be found; if blind we will see! How great thou art!

As the Prophet Micah advises us, we must: do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God!

Happy 40th anniversary of independence, SVG!