



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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Statement

By

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of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

This Organisation was founded amid the still-glowing embers and simmering tensions of global war. In the shadows of widespread death and destruction, the nations of the world united in recognition of the fact that global challenges are only overcome through collective action and international law – not misguided unilateralism or short-sighted self-interest.

That recognition remains as valid today as it did 72 years ago, even as new threats to life and development have joined armed conflict as challenges demanding concerted international response.

Mr. President

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stands in solidarity with the Government and People of Mexico as they suffer the devastating effects of yet another earthquake.

As I speak to you today, the island of Dominica has been levelled by a direct hit from Hurricane Maria, even as it was still in the midst of its recovery from the widespread devastation wrought by Tropical Storm Erika two years ago. No individual in that country has been spared. A series of hurricanes, Harvey, Irma, Jose, and Maria, of unprecedented intensity have struck the peoples of our region with unerring accuracy and rapidity.

The States affected are: The United States, Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Dominica, Cuba, Saint Kitts and Nevis, The Bahamas, The British Virgin Islands, The U.S. Virgin Islands, Saint Martin and Puerto Rico.

In the space of five weeks, each of these countries and territories has been struck with the force as of a weapon of mass destruction. Hundreds of people are dead. The damage to infrastructure, while still being calculated, is already over \$130

billion. This Atlantic Hurricane season is likely to be the most expensive in history. Developmentally, the affected countries will take years, if not decades, to recover from the devastating battering.

Mr. President,

Make no mistake: The death and destruction wrought by this hurricane season are not merely freak weather events or vengeful acts of God. They are the direct result of the acts and/or omissions of man. They are the manifestations of climate change; the symptoms of the prescient predictions made by the overwhelming majority of scientists. Almost every year is hotter than the preceding one. Almost every hurricane season more intense. Almost every storm, drought and flood more destructive than the previous one. Today, it is a barefaced insult to the intelligence and experience of the peoples of island states and coastal areas to call climate change a hoax.

At this point, it is almost cliché to reaffirm that Small Island Developing States are the most vulnerable to climate change, while contributing the least to the emissions that cause it. But that truism is the foundation of our just, urgent and unavoidable demand that the nations that have contributed most to climate change similarly do the most to mitigate its effects and assist others in adapting to the dangerous new realities.

Our global community, in the great traditions of the United Nations and in the spirit of the founders of this organisation, came together through hard-fought negotiations to craft the Paris Climate Accord – an ambitious, if imperfect, agreement designed to arrest climate change and assist the most affected. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines views any attempt to disavow the freshly-minted commitments of the Paris Accord as an act of hostility, and we draw a direct, causal connection between any such abdication and the future death and destruction that island states face as the result of increasingly frequent and intense weather events.

Mr. President,

The independent countries of Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Cuba, the Bahamas and Dominica require the special and sustained support of the international community. These countries require immediate and massive assistance in both immediate relief and long-term reconstruction. That assistance must be concessional and free from antiquated notions of per capita GDP. As such, we join other countries in calling for a donors' conference to address the daunting challenges that these countries face. Only together can we recover.

Additionally, the Caribbean territories with special relationships to colonial powers in the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands are in desperate need of assistance and with limited options for international cooperation, given their unique political statuses. Despite our small size and limited means, the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have already sent emergency assistance to these territories, as well as technical expertise. We call on both administering powers and potential donors to look past political issues and look instead at the needs of the affected peoples and communities. We call too on the colonial powers to accept fully their responsibility for the recovery and rehabilitation of these territories.

Mr. President,

The rise of climate change as the existential threat of our era has not replaced the persistent peril of armed conflict across the globe. The human suffering in Syria, Yemen and Myanmar demands greater international attention and action. Similarly, the potential threats to international peace and security posed by tensions on the Korean peninsula, among the Gulf States and in the State of Palestine require persistent and prioritised diplomacy.

Diplomacy, though difficult, is always preferable to the alternative. This United Nations was founded and continues to exist on that fundamental premise. Frustration with the pace of negotiation and mediation cannot give way to the intemperate urge to impose quick military fixes on inherently political problems. Nor can it lead to an illogical interpretation of sovereign self-interest that justifies the trampling on the sovereignty of other states.

Sovereignty is not a sword, but a shield. The United Nations is not a forum for measuring whose sovereignty is bigger, or whose military is better equipped to pursue their narrow, short-term, self-interest. We are a community founded instead on the assumption of sovereign equality of *all* states; rich and poor, large and small. One nation's ability to destroy another does not imbue it with special rights, but rather profound responsibilities, chief among those being restraint. President Roosevelt's *realpolitik* adage of speaking softly while carrying a big stick – whatever its limitations – cannot be replaced with irresponsibly bellicose sabre-rattling that inches us closer to the types of conflict that this Assembly was created to prevent.

Mr. President,

In that context, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines views with alarm the continued threats against the sovereignty of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. To be sure, the people of Venezuela have endured an extended period of political conflict, which has exacerbated other difficulties in the country. But with illegal street violence dwindling and all political parties committed to upcoming gubernatorial elections, the interventionist option increasingly floated by the United States and an imprudent OAS Secretary-General have no place in a modern Latin America.

Similarly, any threat, expressed or implied, against the sovereignty of the peaceful and noble Cuban people is an anachronistic throwback to Cold War posturing

without any logical justification, particularly in light of recent détente between the Governments of Cuba and the United States.

Let us be clear: Latin America and the Caribbean is a zone of peace. There is no conflict, there is no challenge, there is no disagreement in our region requiring military intervention in any way, shape or form; be it covert, overt or by proxy. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is resolutely and implacably opposed to any attempt to ferment external interference or interventionist activities against any nation in our hemisphere.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was honoured to host the 2017 Caribbean Regional Seminar on Decolonisation, consistent with our responsibilities as one of the many Caribbean and Pacific small island States, and former colonies in Africa and Asia, whose self-determination was achieved under the watchful eye of the United Nations. The "inconvenient truth" is that the decolonisation process remains incomplete, and an intensification of effort is essential in achieving the goal of full self-government through the attainment of a legitimate political status option providing for "absolute political equality." This principle must be the guiding standard applicable to the small island territories, just as they were the standards to decolonise other former colonies. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains fully seized of this issue and was pleased to play its role in completing the unfinished business of decolonisation through the hosting of this 2017 seminar, and previous seminars in 2011 and 2005. It is in this spirit that we have great empathy for the legitimate aspirations of the people of West Papua for freedom and independence through legitimate political means to govern themselves and guide their own destiny.

Mr President,

The issue of United Nations reform has gained momentum in recent months, and justifiably so. As a large and old bureaucracy, the UN has not demonstrated sufficient nimbleness or responsiveness to new and fast-paced modern challenges. However, the areas demanding the most immediate and far-reaching reforms are not budgetary allocations or staffing matters, but rather the political and organizational underpinnings of the most fossilized structures of the UN and the wider international architecture.

The litmus test for any serious talk of UN reform is the reform of the Security Council. Those who pay lip service to reform while ignoring the need for a reformed Council – with expanded permanent membership, special voice for island states, and radically revised working methods – are simply engaging in an exercise of attempting to reduce their *financial* responsibilities while maintaining an unjustifiable grip on disproportionate and outmoded power arrangements.

Similarly, the lessons of the global economic and financial crisis have yet to be implemented. Our inactivity has produced an extended period of halting and uneven recovery and an iniquitous globalization whose unequal distribution of benefits and burdens is spurring popular backlash worldwide. This General Assembly, and our Economic and Social Council, must squarely and frontally address reforms to our international financial architecture, in particular the Bretton Woods Institutions.

For Caribbean states, the issue of declining Correspondent Banking Relationships is a grave and gathering threat to our continued growth and our on-going connections to the global economy. The UN, the G20 and international financial institutions cannot shirk this issue as a private banking matter. It is a developmental threat of the highest priority, and it demands a coordinated, political solution.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines applauds your sustained focus on sustainable development. Our Government has located the Sustainable Development Goals at the centre of our national development strategies. In areas of climate change, pollution and biodiversity, we have banned Styrofoam products, banned the hunting of turtles, tightened restrictions on internationally permitted indigenous whaling activity, and implemented new coastal protection regulations. We are investing heavily in geothermal and solar energy, and expect to generate 80% of our energy needs from renewable sources within the next three years.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is also dedicating special funding to technology-based entrepreneurs, improving wages and occupational health legislation and investing in new modern medical facilities.

We have enacted an innovative Zero Hunger trust fund, with targeted interventions against food insecurity and unemployment in vulnerable populations, while simultaneously creating a contingency fund to aid in disaster recovery efforts.

We are serious and committed to the achievement of *all* of the SDGs by the year 2030.

Nonetheless, as you and the Secretary-General have recognised, achievement of the SDGs requires international cooperation and the commitment of new and additional funding. Ours is the only body that can generate and sustain the necessary political will and resources to give life to the ambition of the SDGs. The link between development and peace is well-established; and the link between peace and the United Nations is immutable.

Mr. President,

A substantial part of the backdrop or context of the continuing socio-economic challenges of the nation-states of our Caribbean civilisation is the awful legacy of underdevelopment which European colonialism has bequeathed to us as a consequence of native genocide and African slavery. The international campaign for reparations from the former colonial powers to assist in repairing this malignant legacy is urgent and timely. It deserves the full support of this Assembly particularly within this decade, declared to be focussed on the upliftment of persons of African descent.

Mr. President,

I repeat yet again the necessity and desirability for the responsible authorities in the Dominican Republic and the United Nations to address properly, once and for all, the respective issues of the denial of citizenship for persons of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic and the cholera epidemic which some of the UN troops in Haiti had initiated.

Mr. President,

In the quest for deepening multilateralism, international cooperation, and peace the glaring injustice of the continuing denial of Taiwan's membership of the special agencies of the United Nations demands correction. The ghosts of a divisive past ought to be laid to rest; Taiwan's legitimate incorporation into the family of nations is long overdue.

Mr. President,

The travails of the people of Palestine arising from the illegal occupation of their lands continue to haunt us globally. This UN General Assembly has repeatedly

pronounced in favour of the rights of the Palestinian people but the illegal occupiers backed by a handful of powerful states internationally have continuously thwarted the will of the international community. Peace in the Middle East will continue to be a mirage unless the national rights of the Palestinian people are recognised and upheld in practice.

Mr. President,

As we speak in this hall today, we seek to amplify the echoes of the visionaries of yesteryear who stood at this podium to give voice to the system of multilateral cooperation and mutual respect that has defined our post-war existence. New challenges may arise, but the solutions are eternal: diplomacy, ambitious action, and respect for the sovereign equality of all member states. Multilateral diplomacy may be messy and imperfect. International law may be frustratingly inconsistent. The path of development maybe beset on all sides by natural and man-made obstacles. But, united, we have always been greater than the sum of our individual parts, and together, there is no challenge too great for the collective wisdom of our great nations and our great institution.

As new challenges confront us, let us hew ever closer to the undeniable strengths of our Assembly.

I thank you.