



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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Statement

By

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At the

General Debate

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Please check against delivery

Madame President, our dear friend from Ecuador; your Excellencies:

One decade ago, the world was convulsed by a cataclysmic collapse of its economic order. The devastating global economic and financial crisis began in the boardrooms of greedy banks and spread worldwide, with a rapidity that exposed the shortcomings of an unethical and under-regulated international financial architecture. The adverse socio-economic impact of the Crisis has been vast and far-reaching – especially for the countries least responsible for the genesis of the crisis.

Regrettably, the seemingly self-evident lessons of that economic and financial catastrophe have been distorted and manipulated, to disastrous effect. While the financial architecture has been quietly reassembled, with little more than ineffectual cosmetic changes, the post-crisis socio-economic and political landscape has been radically reordered. Economic difficulties have caused most of the major nations to look inward, eschewing the most noble and beneficial aspects of global cooperation. Craven demagogues, clothed in populist robes, have emerged to exploit economic hardship and fan the flames of division, hatred and isolation. In all corners of the globe, the jarring rise of illiberal intolerance can be causally connected to the economic crisis and its continuing impact.

Solidarity has been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency, illustrating the enduring prescience of the late Kofi Anan's observation that "*When economic conditions are difficult, people tend to be less generous and protect themselves; the question of solidarity doesn't mean much to them at that time.*" We have retreated from the ethos of integration, cooperation and

consensus-building that not only animated the pre-crisis decade, but which is absolutely necessary to solve the global problems that confront us.

In a technologically connected, increasingly educated and rapidly shrinking global village, any belated attempt to place the genies of multilateralism and globalization back into their respective bottles, is dangerous folly. Walls cannot replace bridges, isolation cannot replace cooperation, and clenched fists cannot shake hands.

[Make no mistake: A post-crisis era of muscular jingoism and bellicose isolationist behaviour represents the most direct threat to the principles that undergird the United Nations since its establishment 73 years ago. We are at decisive crossroads. We can either surrender to our worst instincts, and ensconce ourselves in our respective national cocoons and echo chambers, or we can appeal to the better angels of our nature, and reestablish the preeminence of the United Nations by reaffirming the bedrock principles that have steered us clear of world wars and towards beneficial cooperation for the past seven decades.]

The United Nations is not without its many systemic flaws, and the ascendancy of its unprincipled antithesis demands that we address those flaws most urgently. However, after seven decades, the United Nations remains the only institution with the capacity and authority to enable global cooperation for our collective ennoblement.

Madame President,

Your well-chosen theme for this General Debate speaks to the relevance of the United Nations, of global leadership, and shared responsibility. It centers on a recommitment to the bedrock foundations of our Charter: sovereign equality, non-interference and non-intervention, international peace and security, respect for international law and collective cooperation in solving global problems. It is precisely when times are most tumultuous, when deleterious alterations are upon us, that principles must be most unchanging, and fundamental truths must be most vigorously upheld.

The principles of non-intervention and non-interference are of particular importance to Small Island Developing States. Lacking military might or economic wealth, and constrained within narrow borders, we owe our existence as nation states to a global recognition and respect for the principle that no other nation – large or small, rich or poor, near or far – should be allowed to interfere in our sovereign affairs or intervene in matters properly resident in our domestic jurisdiction. Without strict adherence to those tenets, small states' existence dangles precariously on the threads of great power intrigue or changing perceptions of our strategic significance. Without these principles, our international order reverts to a barbarism in which the strong are doing what they can and the weak merely suffering what they must. This is unacceptable.

Because of our undeniable reliance on this cornerstone of international law, Small States are among its staunchest defenders. Every violation of the principle of non-intervention – wherever it may occur – is an indirect assault on our own survival. This principle is immutable, and no amount of heavy-handed coercions or ham-fisted inducements will cause us to abandon our overarching existential interests in pursuit of short-term appeasement. Our shared history of

struggle against colonial oppression and exploitation informs not only our continuing pursuit of reparatory justice for the victims of native genocide and slavery, but places us in implacable opposition to any actions by those who seek illegally to impose their will on independent nations and peoples.

As such, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines stands firmly against the continued interventionist assaults on the sovereignty of our neighbours in the Republic of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The anachronistic economic blockade of Cuba is both illegal and unproductive. The time has long since past for its complete repeal. We regret deeply that the fledgling rapprochement between the United States and Cuba has stalled, and we call for a resumption of mutually respectful dialogue between our two friends.

In Venezuela, the democratically-elected government has been subjected to an unacceptable, coordinated, intense external economic assault, which has had too, indirectly, a debilitating effect on small Caribbean nations which have had generous arrangements of solidarity, for example, through the Petro-Caribe Agreements. To be sure, Venezuela has enormous internal socio-political challenges, but unwarranted and illegal intervention is certainly counter-productive to the people's ongoing quest for peace, democracy and liberty. Venezuela needs a peace and reconciliation mission, not a campaign of sanctions, subversion and threats of armed intervention. Constructive dialogue between and among the contending parties and personalities is urgently required.

The peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean have repeatedly reaffirmed that our region is a Zone of Peace. Our peoples are not the pawns and playthings of any nation. Our America, our Caribbean defiantly affirm this; it is a noise in our blood, an echo in our bones.

Madame President,

No international organization is better suited than the United Nations to fulfill its foundational Charter mandate of “*achiev[ing] international co-operation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character.*” Today, Climate Change is indisputably the defining, multifaceted existential problem that we collectively confront. However, the prospects for an effective international solution to Climate Change are rapidly receding. Our carefully calibrated climate accords are teetering on the brink of irrelevance; wounded not only by high-profile withdrawals but also by the cynical and foolhardy noncompliance with voluntary mitigation pledges that major emitters have loudly declared, but quietly disregarded.

The result of this ignoble hand-wringing and political procrastination is that the world continues to burn while its leaders fiddle. Our sister island of Dominica has been twice devastated by hurricanes Erika and Irma in the space of three years, with Tropical Storm Isaac striking the island a glancing blow only weeks ago. And as I speak, another storm hangs over my country. Beyond the headlines, the story of Climate Change is grimly told in daily experiences of floods, droughts, landslides, coastal erosions, lost lives and livelihoods across our region.

We can wait no longer. The constellation of challenges, externally-sourced, which face our small states demand a focused global response which recognises in theory, and in practice, an undoubted Small State Exceptionalism. The many-sided concept of Small State Exceptionalism ought to be placed at the centre of global discourse to prompt appropriate collective action.

Madame President,

The rising seas and intensifying storms pose an existential threat to Small Island Developing States. Major emitters that fail to set – and honour – ambitious mitigation pledges are committing a direct act of hostility, and we ought to resist the recklessness of those emitters acting against our interests.

In the same vein, the financing of climate resilience and adaptation measures by our development partners cannot be shoehorned into the same glacially slow, labyrinthine bureaucratic processes that have stymied other cooperation initiatives. Our friends and partners must recognize the fierce urgency of this unfamiliar and unprecedented climate threat, and must demonstrate decisive political and developmental action to arrest this extraordinary existential threat. Climate Change cannot be handled by business-as-usual practices, however tried and true. Our global climate accords have birthed entities with ostensible objectives to funnel and deliver urgently mitigation and adaptation financing to the most vulnerable states. However, these entities place the promised support at the center of an impenetrable web of unwieldy rules and processes that serve only to frustrate those most desperately in need of life-saving cooperation.

Madame President,

Similarly, the international commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals falters on the paucity of tangible global effort to their achievement and timeline.

In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Sustainable Development Goals are adopted and embedded within our national development plans. Despite limited resources, we have created both a Zero Hunger Trust Fund and a Disaster Contingency Fund – innovative and unique responses to our own sustainable development needs. We have mainstreamed and prioritized goals related to clean energy, economic growth, sustainability, climate action and biodiversity. We have chalked up home-grown progress in tandem with selfless solidarity from some of our regional and global friends and allies but much more is required to be done.

[We knew from the outset that the SDGs could not be achieved without massive new commitments of resources, both within and across borders. Goal 17 of the SDGs – Partnership for the Goals – is the fulcrum by which all other goals are realized. There have been a number of attempts to assess and quantify the resources necessary to attain the SDGs, but those assessments have been largely ignored in an era of cuts to development assistance and retreats from multilateral cooperation. Unfortunately, like the battle against Climate Change, the attainment of the SDGs cannot proceed on the basis of hollow words and faith. Faith without tangible works is dead. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines therefore calls for a frank, high-level discussion on development assistance and mechanisms to fill the chasm between aspiration and realization.]

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to seek new avenues for people-centred development and economic growth amid rapidly-changing realities. The specter of trade wars poses an immense danger to our developmental aspirations, as does the continual tightening of the procedural noose around the throat of our banking and financial services industries. The prospect of de-risking and the loss of correspondent banking relationships is not an individual banking or business decision, but a clear and present threat to the economic viability of many small states. The modern manipulation of states' access to global banking and finance mechanisms – whether informed by politics, stigma or indifference – is a flagrant violation of the internationally-recognized Right to Development. It is imperialism of a most insidious kind, imposed facelessly from a distance. The United Nations must urgently confront this grave and gathering menace in a coordinated and action-oriented manner.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is also making increasingly innovative forays into capitalizing on the vast potential of the Blue Economy, tourism, niche agricultural products and our historical knowledge in the medicinal cannabis industry. We seek the cooperation of our friends and partners in supporting these initiatives.

[Our nation, like many others, charts its developmental path not in a straight line, but in a relentlessly forward march over, around and through the obstacles we face. Today, we are challenged by a host of problems, both of our own making and of an external genesis. However, no matter the challenge, our resilient and resourceful citizens remain ever confident in the triumph of our possibilities. Ours is a people who have confronted all past and current challenges – from invading armies to encroaching seas – with an indomitable spirit of verve and optimism.

We believe that, what ever the future brings, our faith will see us through. A faith in God, in ourselves, and in the principles that bind us together as a nation and as a Caribbean civilization.

We approach our multilateral engagements with a similar spirit.]

Madame President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' faith in the principles and potential of the United Nations is made manifest in its active participation in all aspects of this body. In recent years, we have demonstrated that small size is no impediment to impactful contributions on the world stage. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has played a leadership role in the UN's post-Financial Crisis response; in revitalization of the General Assembly; in Security Council Reform; in advancing the Law of the Sea; in Small Arms control; in ambitious measures to combat Climate Change; and in the global response to Non-Communicable Diseases. Most recently, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines chaired the Administrative and Budgetary Committee of the United Nations, and currently serves as the president of the Economic and Social Council.

In a similar manner, we feel the responsibility to bring our unique perspectives to bear on the work of the United Nations Security Council. The perspectives of small states – inclusive of Small Island Developing States – have been historically the least heard in the Security Council. As the threats to international peace and security have evolved in diverse ways, so too, has the need for a diversity of viewpoints on the Security Council increased. Small Island States have largely solved – and solved spectacularly – the challenge of forging peaceful, harmonious societies amidst many of the social, ethnic, political, historical and cultural fissures that

traditionally lie at the root of many breaches of international peace and security. We have confronted these challenges not with a surfeit of weapons or dollars, but with mutual respect, dialogue, and an understanding that unique situations require not static ideological solutions, but flexibility and innovation geared towards the specificities of the issue at hand.

The need for more of this type of practical, principled pragmatism on the Security Council is self-evident. It is why the candidacy of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has been endorsed by the member states of the Caribbean Community, and it is why Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to call for reform of the membership of the Security Council to reflect modern realities and challenges.

Madame President,

Our pragmatism affords us the opportunity to see the world as it is, unencumbered by historical or ideological blinders. The United Nations, which justly counts among its members states with populations as small as 10,000 people, somehow continues to remain blind to the 23 million residents of Taiwan. There is simply no principled basis to deny Taiwan the right to participate in the work of the specialized agencies of the United Nations.

Madame President,

The relevance of this institution is rooted in its responsiveness to the needs and challenges of the peoples we collectively represent. We can and must do more to address those needs in direct and

transformative ways. We must ever more match noble intent with decisive action in pursuit of our Charter objectives. Accordingly, we urge practical resolution of the pain and suffering of the Palestinians, the people of Yemen, and those afflicted by the evil of terrorism whether state-sponsored or not. Similarly, the madness of the spread of weapons of mass destruction and the threat of their use is a standing affront to humanity, peace and security and thus demands our continued collective response. Our international agenda for corrective action includes too: trafficking in persons; illegal drugs and small arms; refugees from ravaged lands; violence against women and children; the growing scarcity of water and food in many nations; the war against chronic non-communicable diseases; the rising tide of religious intolerance in certain places; and the reunification of families arising from abductions of yesteryear.

[But beyond the indispensable utility of practical, targeted and tangible responses to issues and events, the United Nations is also a powerful symbol of incredible resonance. It is a magnet, with the potential to draw us together and draw out of us the type of cooperation and solidarity that has formed the basis of all human triumph from time immemorial. It is a monument to our noblest instincts and greatest aspirations. It is a 73-year-old affirmation of the Biblical observation that it is good and pleasant for brethren to dwell in unity.]

Madame President,

We live amid frantic attempts in diverse quarters to rekindle the dying embers of xenophobia and unilateralism in pursuit of a past glory stuffed with mythology. But this noble institution is the keeper of a different flame. Our bedrock principles stand as an open rebuke to those who traffick

in base triumphalism and pursue actions that are fueled by both short memories and short sightedness. Ours is a flame of respect – for sovereignty, for diversity of views, for dialogue, for peace and for development. In changing times, and amid new challenges, the principles that fuel this flame must be zealously defended. As keepers of this flame, and as holders of these principles in trust for future generations, we cannot falter and be found wanting in the face of reactionary assaults. Another way is possible, and that way, that path, is lit by the timeless principles that continue to animate and invigorate the best efforts of the United Nations. Long may those principles continue to guide our collective journey of peace, prosperity and people-centred development.

What then is required of us? The answer is timeless as it is wise: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God!

I thank you.