



## **Inaugural Speech**

**by**

**His Excellency Charles Savarin**

**President of the Commonwealth of Dominica**

**2 October 2013**

It is with a profound sense of humility that I accept the high honour and privilege that you, the members of this Parliament and the people of Dominica whom you represent, have bestowed on me today by installing me as the eighth (8th) President of the Commonwealth of Dominica, our beloved country.

My wife Clara and members of my family join me in thanking you for conferring the dignity and responsibilities of the office of the President on me.

At the outset, I want to say to you the members of Parliament and to all citizens and residents of Dominica, that I assume the office of President without malice or ill will toward anyone, without fear of intimidation, and with respect for the traditions, laws and Constitution of Dominica which I am sworn to uphold.

Last Friday, our citizens and leaders gathered for the official opening of our annual Independence Celebrations which this year carries the theme: "One Mission, One Dominica, Celebrating 35". This theme is an invocation of the biblical truth "a house divided against itself cannot stand". It is a reminder to us, that as we journey together in our mission to build a more just and prosperous society; that differences in approach and priorities will emerge from time

to time; that we should always seek to resolve such differences through dialogue and compromise; and that the bigger picture is Dominica – the State, the people – and not self, nor the interest of any one group or organization.

We are people of the twenty first (21<sup>st</sup>) century, a technologically driven century that has seen a virtual explosion in the access to information. In almost every household, and in hand held devices mastered by even our youngest children, the world is brought into our homes and our individual spaces of private and social interaction, at the click of a button or the touch of a screen.

In this internet age, access to information has had significant effects on our interpersonal relationships, has enriched our knowledge of the outside world, and has triggered a debate on whether this unfiltered access to information is contributing to the preservation and development of our values or to a disturbing change in our behaviour patterns, our adoption of new and alternative lifestyles, and to a growing disrespect for our institutions and for those who hold views that are different to ours.

While all of us, whether part of the political establishment or not, are concerned with matters such as reducing debt, alleviating poverty, providing access to education and health services, creating jobs, developing our physical infrastructure and providing a safety net for the less fortunate, the prosperity and happiness we seek as a nation will be more easily and successfully achieved if we pursue them collectively. Indeed, progress in that regard will be more rapid with the restoration of civility and decency to public and private discourse, cooperation in matters of national importance and with greater respect for the institutions which are the pillars of our democratic society.

After some fifty (50) years of public service, during which I played various roles in the social and political transformation of Dominica, it is clear to me that what should be part of the ongoing public discussion, is an honest attempt to grasp the strategic interventions necessary to build a more dynamic democracy which provides opportunity for all. It is healthy for there to be a continuous dialogue on various points of view, but in doing so, we must strive against creating the impression at home and abroad that we are a people at war with each other.

The Commonwealth of Dominica Constitution Order 1978, guarantees the fundamental rights and freedoms of all citizens, and prescribes the institutions of the state for the good governance of our country. Citizens have a voice through the Constitution; but the voice given is neither unfettered nor unlimited; it is to be exercised in accordance with the limits imposed by the said Constitution and the Laws of the land.

There is international agreement that the Rule of Law is the underlying framework of rules and rights that make prosperous and fair societies possible.

The Secretary General of the United Nations, in a 2004 report described the Rule of Law in these words: “A principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated and which are consistent with human rights, norms and standards.

It requires as well measures to ensure adherence to the principles of supremacy of law, equality before the law, accountability to the law, fairness in the application of the law, separation of powers, participation in decision making, legal certainty, avoidance of arbitrariness, and legal transparency”.

This definition of the Rule of Law, places the principle at a level that is separate and distinct, and decidedly superior, to what may be termed The Rule of Man.

The democracy that we cherish is underpinned by this Rule of Law. It flourishes where societies and individuals accept and appreciate diversity of views. It is nurtured by the cut and thrust of informed debate, and devalued when deliberate misinformation, innuendo and character assassination gain supremacy over fact, respect, and the common courtesies practiced in civilized societies.

The democracy that we want to refine and make more efficient, must continue to be based on the expressed will of the majority of the people. This does not mean that the minority has no voice. The minority and the majority both have access to the parliament, to the media, to the courts and to the political platform. In any true democracy, the voice of the minority can be an important input in the process of moving the society forward, and in such a manner that all views and opinions can be heard and considered. In the final analysis however, decisions will be arrived at by the majority of those participating in the process.

In the Parliament we are trustees of the people. The discharge of this entrusted responsibility is not to be taken lightly. While the majority has the responsibility to propose and to decide, the minority has the responsibility to analyze, and where they disagree with the majority to put forward alternative proposals. They must also see themselves as an alternative or replacement, in due course, to the Government and not as a second or parallel government. This means that the minority must at all times be well informed on the critical issues of the day. It is only if they so inform themselves that they will be able to advance credible alternatives to the important issues and so engage and even persuade the majority to reflect upon their points of view and modify and/ or adjust their decisions where such modification can be shown to be in the interest of the people.

All Dominicans, at home and abroad, as well as temporary residents, are to be engaged in this endeavour to create a more prosperous society for all. We have the solemn and collective

responsibility to perfect our democracy in an atmosphere of peace, respect and goodwill toward all of our citizens and residents alike.

I wish at this time to express my thanks to the many friends and well-wishers who have sent us cards, text messages, called us on the telephone and in other ways sent us congratulatory messages and messages of support and encouragement.

What I ask of you is that you continue to pray for me and for my family as we embark on this new journey in the service of Dominica.

May God bless you and may God bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.

I Thank You.