



Inaugural Speech

by

His Excellency Dr. Nicholas J. O. Liverpool, DAH

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

2 October 2003

Introduction by Mr. Julian N. Johnson, Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Public Service

It is certainly with a great sense of pleasure that I bid you all a very warm and sincere welcome to this short and simple ceremony on the occasion of the swearing-in of His Excellency Dr. Nicholas Joseph Orville Liverpool, Dominica Award of Honour, as President of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey a special welcome to our distinguished guests, friends and colleagues from overseas who are among us today. This includes Chief Jackson of Samoa.

Dominica's first Premier under the 1967 Constitution, the venerable Mr. Edward Oliver LeBlanc and Mrs. LeBlanc are regrettably unable to be present here today and have tendered their deepest apologies.

This University of the West Indies is represented here today by the Resident Tutor of the UWI School of Continuing Studies in Dominica, Ms. Edith Bellot and Dr. Lennox Honychurch. In his letter of congratulations to His Excellency, Dr. Nicholas Liverpool, Professor the Honourable Rex Nettleford, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies has this to say:

"I send greetings on behalf of all your former colleagues in the University of the West Indies and wish for you a most rewarding and fruitful tour of duty. We rejoice for this great opportunity afforded you to continue serving your/our Caribbean.

Sincerely
Rex Nettleford

Vice-Chancellor"

Like our towns, the Villages in Dominica have provided us, over time, with leaders who have served the State in the highest public offices. From Vieille Case we have had former Premier, Mr. Edward Oliver LeBlanc and former President Crispin A. Sorhaindo; from Pointe Michel/Loubiere we have had Dame Mary Eugenia Charles former Prime Minister; Marigot has given us the Honourable Edison Chenfil James, former Prime Minister and presently Leader of the Opposition; and Grand Bay has given us the Honourable Pierre Charles the present Prime Minister and now His Excellency Dr. Nicholas Joseph Orville Liverpool. The villages have indeed served us well!

I consider it a great honour and privilege to invite His Excellency the President Dr. Nicholas J.O. Liverpool, to deliver his first address to the Nation.

His Excellency Dr. Nicholas J. O. Liverpool, D.A.H.

My family and I are honoured that you have been able to grace this ceremony with your presence. I pray that the Almighty will give me the strength and courage to undertake this daunting task.

I express gratitude to our leaders who thought me worthy of this honour. I thank my many friends and well-wishers for the warmth of their encouragement; and in one particular case to which I will refer later, for some wise words of caution.

It is an honour as humbling in its exaltation as it is daunting in its commandment, and I accept it with all my heart. I will endeavour to be a President of the People and for all the People, and to carry out the functions of the office with dignity and dedication.

Many of us believe that the choice of a President should be seen to be above party politics. The consensus on this occasion has therefore given me a personal sense of satisfaction, and a strong resolve to serve the whole nation without fear or favour.

I owe it to my predecessor in office to record that his generosity and graciousness have helped me to begin my spell of duty with a confidence that may well have been absent without his untiring efforts to ensure that the transition was as smooth as possible.

I would like to acknowledge the presence of two colleagues from the Constitution Review Commission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. They are Mr. Parnell Campbell Q. C. the

Deputy Chairman and Ms. Celene Jack, Secretary to the Commission. Through them I express my regrets to the other members of the Commission and to the Government and people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for my inability to continue the interesting task that we had so eagerly started.

I know that most citizens of this country have a concern for unity. Indeed over the past days I have been overwhelmed and deeply touched by the expressions of support from individuals in all walks of life and of all shades of political opinion. It is comforting to feel that as I live up to the oath that I have solemnly sworn all the people of this Commonwealth will think of me as their President. I give the assurance that I will permit nothing and no one to prevent me from bringing to the task before me qualities of independence, evenhandedness, impartiality, objectivity, fairness and consideration for all.

This Presidency begins in the shadow of a period of acute political division, and under a threatening economic sky. However, I have too much faith in the strength and goodness of Dominicans to think that we are doomed, although I suspect that the price of progress will be high. We have it in us to arrest any negative thrust, but where do we begin? I am determined to find out. I suggest that we can best do so if we engage our young people meaningfully, and make a deliberate attempt to bring all Dominicans closer to each other. On this matter of togetherness, I am heartened and comforted by some words that recently fell from the lips of the President of the National Youth Council.

I am also encouraged by an Editorial that recently appeared in one of the local newspapers on the question of national unity. We should all heed the warning signs seriously for the good of our beloved country. Almost twenty-five years ago, on November 3, 1978, we took the bold step to remove the shackles of colonialism and declare our independence as a nation in its own right. It was the first step towards a vision in which we, as a people, would become members of the commonwealth of nations and have a voice and a direct interest in world affairs; forge our own partnerships in trade and diplomacy to the advantage of our people; follow the principles of a mixed economy that would engage all sectors and empower all sections of society; and broaden our economic base to exploit the resources of our country profitably and responsibly, and distribute the increased wealth equitably to all our people.

That vision was not without its challenges. As early as August 29, 1976 in the Salisbury Declaration which preceded independence, the then Premier revealed that there were – "certain elements which continued to attempt to confuse the minds of people for their own political ambitions" and warned that if such attitudes did not change our country would be faced with a curse of confusion, envy and disunity. Reading this today, I wonder how much has changed. The vision articulated then remains basically the same. It seems to me that our attitudes, twenty-five years after independence, have not moved in tandem with our

responsibilities as an independent people, and that we are still faced with confusion, envy and disunity. However it is not too late for us to restore the great vision on which the foundation of our nationhood was built. There is no doubt that there is an abundance of intellectual capital in our midst. The level of our literacy is high. Freedom of speech is untrammelled. But, as William Demas observed, "one cannot create an independent nation-state out of a colony by purely intellectual arguments. In the end, the issue boils down to one of vision, conviction, and even faith in our common destiny".

The challenges from the world outside are overwhelming, and we must be united in our efforts if we are to survive and overcome these challenges. We must work assiduously together for the common good. We cannot accomplish the important and vital tasks that face us if we are divided in our loyalties and in our purpose. It is not important who for the moment is entrusted to execute those tasks so long as every single Dominican has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of progress.

Over the past year, we have heard a lot of arguments about the merits or demerits of economic stabilization and about the completeness or relevance of the IDP Report.

I do not intend to contribute to this debate. But whatever our views on both these matters, the important thing should be for us all to pick up the pieces and use whatever there is to build the fabric of our economy and of our society. Time will not wait until we resolve our intellectual arguments. Opportunities will not wait either. We have to put aside our differences and use whatever material we have, bricks without straw if necessary, to improve the lot of our people. Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen we know that there are two sides to every argument, but it is also very important to remember that every argument must have an end. Our society has been blessed with the gift of diversity without the strains that come with ethnic and cultural differences that obtain in other larger countries. As an independent nation, we have observed a natural charity and benevolence towards all peoples. It is pleasing to see the continuing efforts that are being made to give equality of opportunity to our Carib brothers and sisters. Let us translate this spirit of unity into all our actions in order to promote the development and welfare of our society for the good of every one of us. It is my intention to encourage that spirit among our people.

A very distinguished Dominican friend, on learning that I had been elected to this office, sent me an e-mail message extending his good wishes, and he continued –

"At this stage, your talents for bringing disparate groups together, would be particularly helpful in your office, if the parties have not yet reached that level of obstinacy, where they do not even seek help. And also, one power which you will not have, is that of obviously seeking to help, when all make it clear, that your help is not wanted.

"Despite these wise words of caution, I remain an unrepentant optimist. In the Gospel according to St. Mark, Chapter 9, Verse 40 the Apostle quotes the Almighty as saying –

"Whoever is not against us is for us."

Some professional politicians would have us believe that this saying should be stated the other way round i.e. "Whoever is not with us is against us." But to give the expression this latter interpretation would be to marginalize the thousands of citizens who do not wish to be "with" any party or group. I suggest, therefore, that we should strenuously resist all attempts to change the interpretation of our Lord's words. Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the question which still remains, is – Who will stand for Dominica? I think we all should. After all we are enjoined to do so by the words of the third stanza of our national anthem -

Come Ye Forward, Sons And Daughters Of This Gem Beyond Compare

Strive For Honour, Sons And Daughters

Do The Right, Be Firm Be Fair

Toil With Hearts And Hands And Voices

We Must Prosper, Sound The Call

In Which Everyone Rejoices

All For Each and Each For All

At this time I would like to commit the office of the Presidency to our Constitution and particularly to that part of the Preamble which states that -

".. the People of Dominica respect the principles of social justice, and therefore believe, that the operation of the economic system should result in so distributing the material resources of the community as to subserve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions, but that there should be opportunity for advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity."

My family and I give thanks to the Almighty for all his favours, to the many friends and well-wishers who have sent us expressions of goodwill and support, and for their prayers, to the Honourable Chief Justice who administered the oath of office, to the Vicar General who offered the prayer this morning, to the Security Services, the Prime Minister's office and the Cabinet Secretariat, and to all others who have contributed to today's proceedings.

I thank you all for the courtesy of your attention.