



# **ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT**

## **Our National Emblems and National Symbols**

**BY**

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**President of the Commonwealth of Dominica**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING**

**OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE THIRD PARLIAMENT**

**ON MONDAY, 16<sup>th</sup> JUNE, 1986**

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly

On the occasion of the Opening of Parliament, it is my privilege to extend sincere good wishes from my wife and myself, to you Madam Speaker and Honourable Members, and to all Dominicans everywhere.

We are in our eighth year of Independence and indeed, "We are Growing". Increasingly our people are being exposed to the modern world; many dignitaries, delegations, entrepreneurs and others constantly visit our shores and we must "know what we are about". One important area in which we must develop a greater degree of maturity is in the field of our National Emblems and National Symbols.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

At this point in time, our National Emblems, provided for by Statute include: The Coat of Arms, The National Flag, and The National Flower. It is possible that we may wish to follow the practice in certain countries and add to these, a National Anthem. Already, the Sisserou parrot, scientifically known as *amazona imperialis*, and popularly referred to as "The Pride of Dominica", is widely regarded as the Dominica National Bird. Similarly, our National Song: "Isle of Beauty" used before Independence, has been officially accepted as the Dominica National Anthem.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Since Associated Statehood with Britain in 1967, Dominica has been critically examining its image. What sort of front are we presenting? This is the important question we, as citizens of the Commonwealth of Dominica, must continually ask ourselves.

This image not be like a brooding statue of a deity, but something very full of life; pulsating with the vigour of achievement and dynamic with growth.

How people the world over, think of us should be highly important to all Dominicans, whatever our individual roles may be. We are becoming increasingly sophisticated in economic, social, scientific and political affairs; we are therefore compelled to see ourselves as others see us.

On the other hand, we must go further than the mere acquiring of this knowledge; having found out where we fall short of the image we would like to project, we need to take constructive measures to develop a strategy for promoting these ideals.

We must understand that every country, irrespective of size, has an image. It is the sum total of the bits of information about the country, reaching the public. The country's basic philosophy and facets of its personality, its style of dealing with the public in terms of the services provide, its attitude towards its population, its interest and participation in community matters.

When we consider the overwhelming needs of our Country we are convinced of the vital importance for an earnest effort to build a better image, based on the things we treasure and hold dear.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

A desirable image cannot be imposed upon the public by shouting about its merits. This is something to be built from the inside, taking note of the things which are necessary to any constructive work; - Truthfulness, Integrity and Believability.

It cannot be said too often that little things count in image building. We, individuals as well as Government, are judged by our behaviour, not necessarily in great crises, but in the minor adjustments of our daily lives. An administration, like a person, starts every new day as time of testing. In the course of the day, the administration will be judged a thousand times or ten thousand times; every judgment being based upon some feature of service it presents; for example, its correspondence, its reception of callers, the courtesy of its employees, the spirit of its executives. It is the personal experience of people with the administration's workers its policies and activities, that is of paramount importance in image building.

Our National Emblems play a significant part in this process. Every country has national symbols which are in these days seen as the prime expression of national identity, and the supreme mark of independence. They serve if properly used, to rivet together all the features of the state, such as its people, its history, its geography and its culture. They tie together all our related features. The significance of our National Emblems and Symbols must be continually communicated to the public; and herein lies some of our difficulty. We must decide what traits to emphasize, and then to devise the means of communicating the abstract ideas in meaningful and appropriate words and symbols.

Much can be conveyed by a well done and thoughtful portrayal of an emblem. A Rembrant portrait of an aged Dutch woman represents a person, but representation is made a vehicle for a descent on old age, human fortitude and dignity. So our National Emblems, while picturing an animal, a bird, a reptile, crops, or complex of lines or verses, can be symbolic of abstract qualities like dependability, eminence, purpose, fortitude, courage and the like.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Moulding, shaping and choosing our National Image was a highly positive exercise, approached with vigour, imagination and enthusiasm. Designing our Coat of Arms and the National Flag, composing the National Anthem and selecting the National Flower were not solved by a wall-to-wall electronic machine with a thousand push buttons. No, they needed all the human understanding, - of which Dominicans are capable, - applied, to every facet.

The starting point was the decision as to what kind of image was wanted. This may sound like a platitude, but it is surprising how few persons have more than hazy ideas. What was being built was not just for a year, but something that would last, and would serve Dominica powerfully in succeeding generations.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***National Flags***

Every country has a national flag, which is seen as the prime expression of national identity and supreme mark of independence. The hosting of a national flag is almost always the symbol of the achievement of independence. We proudly witnessed this at midnight on 2nd November 1978. Such a flag is for general use by citizens, although subject to a strict code of etiquette.

There is archaeological evidence that heraldry is as old as the human race and the carrying of banners has been done by nations since the beginning of time.

It is not always easy to understand what transforms a mere rectangle of coloured cloth into an emblem to stir the spirit of a nation. However, we all must try to appreciate and understand the lofty tradition for which this emblem stands.

As Sir Edward Hansley puts it in his well known lines, "it is not so much the flag itself stirs our souls as the deeds that were done beneath it". This is generally true whether the deeds are those of war or of peace, of a nation rightfully struggling to be free, of exploration.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***Flag Etiquette***

An international etiquette of flag usage is essential both practically and because flags can suddenly arouse intense emotions. We must remember that it is possible that an unconscious breach of

etiquette in their use may have the opposite meaning to that which is intended and may well be constructed as an insult to a friendly country.

Therefore care has to be used when displaying flags, not to cause offence by disrespectful treatment. A prime rule is, that no national flag should be hoisted on the same halyard beneath another one: this symbolizes conquest and capture. In fact most of the points of etiquette involve the use of two or more flags together. It is also essential to get a flag the right way up: displayed upside down, it signifies surrender, and in some cases it could turn into the flag of another country. It is also considered disrespectful to allow a flag to touch anything beneath it.

The study of Flag Etiquette is a rather wide one with many departments and cannot be dealt with on this occasion.

A National Flag shall not be dipped in salute to any person or thing except in accordance with maritime practice and it should always be hoisted briskly and lowered slowly and ceremoniously.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

In a world where international trade and contacts of all kinds are rapidly increasing, it is almost impossible to prosper without a knowledge of the flags of other countries. This knowledge needs to be updated constantly, since national flags can be changed, as countries become independent or as their governments change, and embarrassing incidents could occur if obsolete flags are used.

It was the late Henry Ward Bucker who said:- "A thoughtful mind, when it sees a nation's flag, sees not the flag only, but the nation itself; and whatever may be its symbols, its insignia, he reads chiefly in the flag the government, the principles, the truths, the history, which belongs to the nation".

### ***Flag Terminology***

In illustrations, flags are normally shown as flying from the observer's left to his right, a view known as the 'obverse'. However as in heraldry, flags are always described in terms which express the view of the person holding them. Birds or beasts are, or should be shown with heads facing the flagstaff so that they appear to be advancing and not running away, when a flag is carried. It should be of interest to note that the heraldic description of the Dominica National Flag, complies with this rule, using the words *inter alia* "charged with a Sisserou parrot facing sinister perched on a wooden twig proper....."

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

We in Dominica have grown with the British tradition that the National Flag, may be freely displayed by all citizens, but this is not the case with all nations. However, most countries have special days when flags must be flown, especially from public buildings. The important thing to be observed is that whenever a National Flag is flown, it should occupy the position of honour and be prominently placed.

Those who travel overseas observe that the National Flags of a country are the first objects to greet the eyes on landing.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***The Dominica National Flag***

I now make particular reference to the Dominica National Flag. Before achieving independence in 1978, Dominica was an Associated State with Britain. A Coat of Arms was granted in July 1961, and after 1967, the Dominica State Flag consisted of the Blue Ensign with the whole Arms in the fly. On achieving Independence a completely new flag was adopted.

This flag is an adaptation of a design submitted at a national flag competition and consists of a circular red disc bearing a sisserou parrot facing sinister, standing on a twig, encircled by ten lime green stars. This is super-imposed on three vertical and three horizontal stripes of yellow, black and white, forming a triple cross, against a general background of forest green.

The central emblem presents the "Pride of Dominica", - also a symbol of flight towards greater heights and fulfilment of aspiration. The parrot also comes from the Dominica coat of arms, thus symbolizing the official Seal of the country.

The ten limes green stars or mullets, as referred to in heraldry, - the traditional symbol of hope, represents the ten parishes of Dominica, each with equal status, thus the equality of the people. The red central emblem symbolizes Dominica's commitment to social justice.

The triple cross represents the Trinity of God, and the cross itself demonstrates our belief in the Almighty since the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Dominica affirms that this Country is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God. The yellow stripes represents the sunshine of our land, our main agricultural products – citrus and bananas, an abundance of yellow ripe fruits, and also a symbol of the Carib people who were among the first inhabitants of the island. The black stripe, appearing in the centre, represents the black soil of our island on which our agriculture is based and of our African heritage. The white stripes represents the clarity of our rivers and waterfalls and the purity of aspirations of our people. The general back ground of dark green symbolizes our rich verdant forest and the general lushness of the island.

The important thing to remember is that our National Flag represents a living country, and is itself considered a living thing. No one should ever desecrate our Flag by publicly mutilating, defacing, defiling, burning or trampling upon it. It should not be used for purposes of adornment or advertising. It should not be printed or otherwise impressed on anything intended for temporary use and discard. It should not be used as any part of a costume of any description.

It is the universal custom to display the National Flag only from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on stationary flagstaffs outdoors; these should normally be painted white. However, on important ceremonial occasions when it is desired to produce a patriotic effect, the Flag may be displayed in the open after sunset when it should be flood-lit if possible. A National Flag may be displayed inside a building at all times.

The National Flag should be of regulation appearance, and should not be faded or bleached. A torn flag should be mended before it is hoisted, but generally speaking, such flags should not be flown on any occasion. When the National Flag becomes unfit for display it must be disposed of by burning. On no account should it be left lying about with other unusable articles.

Permit me to refer to an address by the late President Wilson of the United States of America who made a very important statement in his 1917 Flag Day Message. I quote: "This Flag, which we honour and under which we serve, is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than those which we give from generation to generation. The choices are ours.....Though silent, it speaks to us of the past of the men and women who went before us, and of the records they write upon it", unquote.

Our National Flag is the proudest emblem of our Country. It is the sign by which we are known to all the world. It is the People's Flag; and it is the Flag to which we pay homage from Independence onwards.

It is therefore our duty, as citizens of this Nation to be proud of our Flag, ensuring that it is always accorded the honour, dignity and respect due to it and hold it in reverence always.

In the words of an anonymous writer....."Fling out the Flag. Let us hope that this splendid banner will give us a high ideal of national character,.....an ideal that will dedicate the national conscience to a still deeper love of country, to a more reverent regard for its institutions, to a higher civilization and a peace, yea, to eternal peace among nations of the earth. This flag means that or it means nothing."

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### *The Coat of Arms*

Reference has already been made to the Dominica Coat of Arms which was granted in 1961. It bears the inscription "Après Bondie C'est La Ter", in our local creole dialect – (After God the Earth). This emphasizes the importance of the soil in the island whose economy is based in agriculture.

In non-heraldic terms, the design depicts a shield divided into four quarters of a cross, referring to the Island's name, because of the discovery which occurred on a Sunday. In the first quarter on the top left is seen the black volcanic soil of Dominica supporting a coconut tree, and in the fourth quarter, on bottom right, a fully developed banana stem bearing a mature bunch of fruit is shown. Our Crapaud, or mountain chicken as it sometimes referred to, is in the second quarter, while in the third quarter, a canoe under full sail glides on the Caribbean Sea. A wreath of silver and blue bears the crest, with a golden lion standing upon a black rocky mount with the Sisserou Parrot (*amazona imperialis*) as supporters.

The Coat of Arms is prominently displayed on all Dominican Passports and on most official correspondence. It is the official Seal of the Government of Dominica and may not be used or reproduced in any form, without the approval of Government.

### *The President's Ensign*

As a matter of interest, I now make reference to the President's Ensign since it incorporates the Coat of Arms.

Following the tradition of independent countries, the Head of state is empowered to use a personal standard. Section 14 of "The President's Emoluments and Conditions of Office Act, 1982" (No.16 of 1982), prescribes that the Presidential ensign shall be the coat of arms of the Commonwealth of Dominica on a forest green background.

It is important to note that unlike the National Flag, the President's ensign should be flown continuously, day and night once the President is in residence. This rule also applies to the ensign on the vehicle used by the Head of State.

This Ensign being a personal standard, is never flown at half-mast except in the event of the death of the President. Should an occasion demand that a flag be flown at half-mast, at the President's residence the National Flag should be used.

Like the National Flag there are certain codes of etiquette which apply. I do not propose to go into these, but it should be noted that on special days of national significance, the National Flag should be flown at the President's official residence together with the President's Ensign to the left of it, and at the same height but on a separate flagstaff.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***The Public Seal***

I should like to make reference to the Public Seal or perhaps I should call it the 'Great Seal' which incorporates the Coat of Arms of the Country. The words 'All for Each' and "Each for All" from the Dominica National Anthem are also, inscribed on the outer border of the Public Seal. However, it is not regarded as a National Emblem.

The use of a Public Seal has been handed down from the British tradition. From Norman days the King's will had been signified by writs, charters, letters patent, sealed with the royal seal. No document without the King's seal could be regarded as an authentic expression of the King's command.

The Public Seal must not be regarded as a ceremonial symbol, it is a real instrument of Government. Every corporation, has a common seal, and a great many things can only be done by the use of this seal. Courts of law take notice of seals, and insist that they be affixed to certain documents.

Many important Government documents bear the Public Seal. For example, enactments by Parliament when assented to by the President, Election Writs, Proclamations, Appointments of Ministers of Government and Senior Government officials and others.

The Public Seal is always kept locked when not in use.

### ***National Honours for Meritorious Services***

My address would be incomplete if no mention is made of the insignia for our National Honours awards to persons who have render meritorious service to the Commonwealth of Dominica. The medal features the Coat of Arms on the obverse side and the words "All for Each and Each for All" from the National Anthem, on the reverse side.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***The National Flower***

I have already mentioned the National Flower. The one honoured is a wild xerophytic plant known scientifically as *sabina carinalis*, commonly known as Carib wood or 'Bois Caraibe'. It was legislated as the National Flower in 1978.

As an indigenous plant, one of the reasons for which it was selected is because it has been a witness to our entire history, and hopefully, will be with us for all time. It can therefore be said to represent the continuity of our young nation.

When in bloom, it displays precocious bright scarlet flowers along the whole length of its branches and is found growing along dry coastal areas. Distribution in the wild is low, but it is an extremely hardy plant. When grown at high elevations, even in good soil, 'Bois Caraibe' will be bushy and will not flower profusely. Around April, when in full bloom, the plant presents a magnificent spectacle.

Its hardiness is reminiscent of our strong and rugged people who have for centuries survived and sometimes prospered under difficult conditions. The scarlet flowers symbolize our Courage, Strength and Fortitude, and Dominica's ability to triumph despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

### ***The National Bird***

As indicated earlier, a national bird is not legislated for. However the Sisserou Parrot is generally accepted as the National Bird of Dominica. This parrot figures prominently on The Coat of Arms, The National Flag, The Public Seal, The Mace of the House of Assembly and Dominica's Honours for Meritorious Service to the Country.

The Sisserou Parrot is protected and it is probably the oldest species of Amazon parrot in the world, and is found only in Dominica.

The sisserou, the larger of the two parrots of Dominica, is a heavy bodied bird, well proportioned with coloured feathers. I should like to make special reference to the iridescent hue of the feathers, for too often we see the colouring incorrectly reproduced with little resemblance to the real bird. I wish to suggest that every effort be made to use as close as possible, the colouring of the bird in its natural state.

Unfortunately, the Sisserou is most vulnerable, particularly when young, but through evolution, it has adapted to various natural changes in its habitat. However, it has not been able to adapt to the influence of man.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***The National Anthem***

The Dominica National Anthem, popularly referred to as "Isle of Beauty" was adopted on achieving Independence; during the period of Associated Statehood with Britain, it was referred to as the National Song. The words were composed by the late Reverend W. O. M. Pond and put

to music by Mr. L. M. Christian. Both of these gentlemen were subsequently awarded a Meritorious Service Award.

Of course the National Anthem deserves great respect, and the general rule is whenever it is rendered, all civilians present should stand at a attention in silence, men with bare heads. Person in uniform are expected to follow their instructions. Normally, one verse only is rendered at any time.

On ceremonial occasions the National Anthem will be played or sung on the arrival and on departure of the President. In many independent countries, it is mandatory that the National Anthem be played at the beginning of all public performances in cinemas, theatres etc.

It is important to note that the National Anthem should never be parodied in verse or in song, neither should it be played in any tempo other than the officially recognised one. Particularly, the tune should never be used as a dance number, or the purpose of advertisement.

In some countries including the Caribbean, person who contravene or fail to comply with regulations in this regard are guilty of an offence and are liable on summary conviction to a fine or imprisonment.

There should be no objections to the use or rendition of the National Anthem at the completion of any public function, or when toasts are proposed at official functions.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

### ***The Mace of the House of Assembly***

I also wish to make passing reference to the Mace of the House of Assembly since our Sisserou parrot is featured so prominently on it. It is above all a symbol of parliamentary dignity, which embraces the authority of the President, the House, the Speaker and some authorities include the Sergeant-at-Arms. But symbol is the operative word, for the Mace must adjust itself to Parliament, not Parliament to the Mace.

The use of a Mace in Dominica dates back to the eighteenth century. In the "Dominica Story" by Lennox Honychurch it is recorded that I 1771 the Governor presented the House of Assembly with an ornate silver mace – the ceremonial staff representing authority and symbol of the monarch during sessions of the House. This two hundred year old mace was used up to 1978, when a replacement, carved from Dominica's wood was adopted by the House of Assembly on the night of the Island's independence from Britain. This new wooden mace, an exquisite work of art, is topped by Sisserou parrot in full flight, and carved by craftsman Martin Allen.

It cannot be denied, that the Mace has come to be regarded as an essential feature of the Parliamentary furniture, and the convention has become established that no formal proceedings can be conducted without it.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Our National Emblems and National Symbols need at all times to be protected in order that they remain untarnished symbols and worthy trademarks of our Country. Government may wish to maintain control of the names of our Emblems which are registered as trademarks overseas. Consequently, everyone should be advised that our Emblems are limited for reproduction. If someone wishes to place our Emblems on any goods or use them in connection with any other project or activity, permission must be first obtained from the responsible Minister.

In order to ensure this respect for, and protection of our emblems, specific guidelines need to be followed.

***The National Emblems Act, no. 18 of 1978***

The National Emblems Act 1978 (No. 18 of 1978), intended to regulate the use of our National Emblems was enacted by Parliament and assented to by the Governor at the time, on the 31st October, 1978. It was gazetted the following day.

The Coat of Arms, National Flag and National Flower only are mentioned, and Section 3 provides for copyright in their design of the Coat of Arms and Flag.

It is the responsibility of every Citizen of the Commonwealth of Dominica to ensure that our National Emblems continue to enjoy the respect they deserve. Our schools appear to me to be the most appropriate place to nurture these sentiments, and I take the opportunity to make special reference to the use of our National Emblems and Symbols in Educational Institutions. I am aware that it is Government's policy to display the National Flag in our Schools. This practice should be observed on school days or in the precincts of all State and State-aided educational institutions from opening to closing time. I also suggest that on the first day of term the Flag should be ceremonially hoisted and on the last day, ceremonially lowered. On these occasions The National Pledge and The National Prayer could with the advantage, be recited. In this context, the term "ceremonially" should be taken to mean in the presence of all the students assembled, and with the singing of the National Anthem.

Our National Flag belongs to all our Citizens – Our National Coat of Arms, our National Flower, our National Anthem and our other Symbols are a sacred trust for all our citizens. So it is today. Please I urge you, let it always be so.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members,

I sincerely hope that we will always be able to say with the Psalmist, "behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

You are aware that 1986 has been designated "International Year of Peace" by the General Assembly of the United Nations. I wish to suggest that it should be the aim and duty of us all to work for the establishment of peace freedom, dignity and respect for all people during this year, and indeed, at all times.

We all know that Peace in the real sense, is the foundation of all good work. It is not only the absence of war, but the creation of conditions which will enable us to develop our personality, our personality, our economy, our culture and our talents, to live in harmony with ourselves and our environment.

Our common destiny lies not in conflict of any sort, armaments – nuclear or conventional, - but in our economic, social and political development. We must learn to appreciate and to recognize the value of living in peace with each other, face to face, and also as world neighbours.

In the pursuit of development, unity and peace, we should strive to reject all that come in the way of development, and everything that cause unnecessary tensions. Strife in any shape or form wastes our vital human resources, our identity and our knowledge.

I am confident Madam Speaker that if Honourable Members face this challenge collectively, a period of economic and social development will be ushered in, and all Dominicans will be able to live in peace, honour, dignity and unity. We have to remember that any man or woman who injures the fabric of unity or weakens it does great harm to the Country and does not serve her cause.

Madam Speaker,

Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

I extend my best wishes for the success of this House and for the good health of all its Members.

May the Almighty guide your discussions and bless the work of this Honourable House.