



**Address to Parliament by His Excellency Charles A. Savarin, D.A.H.,  
President of the Commonwealth of Dominica  
on the occasion of the First Meeting of the  
First Session of the Ninth Parliament  
on Friday February 20, 2015**

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

Allow me to express heartfelt thanks to you for inviting my wife and I to the First Meeting of the First Session of the Ninth Parliament. I also warmly welcome and embrace the opportunity to address you on this important occasion.

Please accept Madam Speaker my sincere congratulations on your re-election as Speaker of this landmark institution of our parliamentary democracy. Your comprehensive grasp and understanding of the rules and customs of this Honourable House gives me, and I hope every citizen, the confidence that you will preside over the deliberations of this Honourable House and apply the Standing Orders with discretion, objectivity, and impartiality. I pray God's blessings and guidance upon you as you exercise this sacred duty.

I also offer congratulations to all the Honourable Members who were successful at the polls in the December 8th General Elections, as well as to the Senators who were appointed on the advice of the Honourable Prime Minister and on the advice of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition to complete the composition of this Honourable House.

I commend and congratulate the Honourable Prime Minister in leading his Party to success at the polls. It is rare in electoral politics throughout the Commonwealth Caribbean for political parties to win a fourth consecutive term. Whereas newly elected political parties usually enjoy what is euphemistically referred to as a honeymoon period, in this case the electorate will be critically focused on the performance of the government from the very first day of this its fourth term. We therefore pray that the Prime Minister and his Cabinet of Ministers will be led by the wisdom that comes from above in all that they do.

I similarly wish to commend and congratulate the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his party's success in doubling the number of elected seats held by the opposition in this Honourable House. That success will similarly impose a responsibility on the opposition to be constructive in their contributions to the debates in the House and the general governance of the affairs of the state.

Democracies earn their credibility not only by the extent to which citizens are allowed to participate in elections that are free and fair but also in the continued engagement of the people in the governance of the affairs of the state. I have read the reports of the observer missions who were invited to monitor the elections. Their favourable comments on the fair and transparent conduct of the December 8th General Elections are an encouraging vote of confidence in our electoral process and I wish to congratulate the electorate for conducting themselves, by and large, in a civilized and lawful manner during the elections.

### **Honouring Our Commitment to the People and the Constitution**

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

We live in times that are more challenging than ever before, and this parliament is charged with the solemn responsibility of delivering on commitments made to the Dominican electorate as indicated in the manifestos presented. This is to be done within the context of a global

environment that is fraught with economic uncertainty as our major partners in trade and development assistance, wrestle with the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis which emerged in 2008 and the impact of the collapse of global oil prices on their national revenue. A review and comparison of the manifestos of both political parties will reveal a congruence on most major issues be they education, health, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, energy, etc. It should not be too challenging therefore for there to be general agreement on the way forward.

Conflicts in the Middle East have introduced a level of barbarity and wanton destruction of life and property that invoke memories of the darkest days of the Second World War and even the Middle Ages. These conflicts suck up resources that could otherwise be made available to treat with the many problems that confront humanity, such as infectious and non communicable diseases, poverty, and the alarming effects of climate change.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

Many scholars and commentators have argued strongly on the pros and cons of the Westminster style of parliamentary democracy which we have inherited. Some have lauded the virtues of the American Presidential System over the Westminster Parliamentary System. It is universally accepted however that no system of governance is perfect and whatever the stance one may choose to adopt on this matter, there is clear evidence that the will of the people is fully reflected within a parliamentary system of governance.

Scholars such as Juan Linz, Fred Higgs, Bruce Ackerman and Robert Dahl, have pointed out that parliamentarianism is less prone to authoritarian collapse. They have drawn attention to the fact that since World War 2, two thirds of Third World countries establishing parliamentary governments, successfully made the transition to democracy. By contrast, no Third World presidential system successfully made the transition from colonialism to democracy without experiencing coups and other constitutional breakdowns.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

A close examination of the Standing Orders of the House of Assembly, will reveal that provisions have been made that create a buffer between the Legislature and the Executive which, properly used, could significantly enhance the supervision of the Executive by the Legislature. I make reference to the provisions for standing committees of the House. I submit to members, for example, that the Public Accounts Committee which is usually chaired by the Leader of the Opposition can serve as a powerful instrument for monitoring matters and concerns that may arise about the management of the Public Finances by the government of the day, while the Standing Orders Committee can review the existing Standing Orders with regard to the interpretation, application and/or amendment to the said Standing Orders.

### **The Rule of Law**

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

As our society develops and some traditional values and beliefs that were once held to be sacred are questioned and challenged, individuals and groups are often inclined to adopt strong positions in asserting what they understand to be their rights. While there may be some generally accepted assumptions for the positions held, there is often the tendency to set aside the fact that our society is under the Rule of Law.

Law has its roots in the very fabric of society. Examples of law are to be found in the most primitive and the most complex societies. People interacting with each other are going to be at odds with one another. In earliest societies, the so called law of the jungle prevailed; that is, the stronger and more dominant member wins. In modern society, the rule of law gives equal protection to those who are weak and vulnerable and are also a part of society.

If there is to be order and development in the country, then the Rule of Law must prevail. Every citizen has the responsibility to act with restraint and respect, even in circumstances where he thinks he is being treated unfairly as in all such circumstances the law itself provides a mechanism for redress. It does the country no good when citizens go on a frolic of their own, doing whatever they like, whenever and wherever it suits them with complete disregard for the applicable law and the effect of their behavior on others in the society.

Our parliamentary democracy is relatively young, and the Rule of Law has been a valuable compass, giving direction and helping to steer the ship of state away from social disorder which would otherwise arise when the very law provided for the orderly conduct of the affairs of the state is either ignored, misinterpreted or misunderstood. Such disregard, misinterpretation or misunderstanding poses a threat to the maintenance of social order. In that regard, I wish to commend the Electoral Commission for the firm and wise guidance they provided to the entire electoral process that concluded with the general election.

The work of the Christian Council in the electoral process attracts equal commendation. The initiative of the Council in providing ethical and moral leadership to the election campaign by drawing up an election code, exemplifies one of the roles of the church in contributing to building a society based on justice, peace and love. Moreover, the willingness of the two contending parties to sign this code, connoted a commitment on their part, lapses notwithstanding, to adhere to the highest standards of respect, honesty, and forbearance in their behavior and utterances on their respective platforms. It behooves both parties therefore to uphold that same spirit in this Honourable House.

### **The need for a genuine reconciliation**

Madame Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

One unwelcome feature of general election campaigns in our small island communities is the string of broken and hostile relationships they create and leave in their wake. The separation of scarce human resources and capacities into coloured camps of anger, bitterness, recrimination and disinterest, does not create an environment for moving the country forward in the interest of all, no matter how attractive and seductive manifestos and platforms may have been.

The elections are over, and it is time for every Dominican who loves his country to reach deep within himself and to find the magnanimity of spirit, that truly places God and country first, and in that spirit, to make himself an agent of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that all hands and minds can work cooperatively in building the country. And what better time to do this than as we enter the lenten season.

There are many sources from which the nation can draw inspiration for doing so. Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, had this to say of the great liberator and unifier Nelson Mandela, “ Before Nelson Mandela was arrested in 1962, he was an angry, relatively young man. He founded the ANC’s military wing. When he was released from prison, he surprised everyone because he was talking about reconciliation and forgiveness.”

In this case, the healing power of reconciliation and forgiveness, spared South Africa the civil war that many had predicted would follow Mandela’s release. In this way the country was able to settle down and begin to right the many wrongs and inequities of the apartheid era.

In more recent times, the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, made these remarks “ True security is based on people’s welfare – on a thriving economy, on strong public health and education programmes, and on fundamental respect for our common humanity. Development, peace, disarmament, reconciliation and justice are not separate from security, they help to underpin it.”

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

The Dominican citizenry regard this chamber as the place where their security, however defined, is deliberated and agreed upon. Prior to the elections, proposals for a thriving economy, strong public health and education, and supportive social programmes, reverberated from both camps of the Members who now make up this House.

The Parliament of Dominica has a history of serious and often inspiring debate on how to provide the citizens with that sense of security in their future. In upholding this noble tradition, there is urgency that the rancor that accompanied the campaigns be set aside and replaced with tolerance, with a willingness to listen to each other, and with the desire to make a constructive contribution to decisions for advancing the common good.

In this post election period, the country needs to be given a chance to settle down. This Parliament is the place to which citizens should look, for leadership on this matter. Let the cut and thrust of debate that takes place here be based on fact, buttressed by research, so as to be the channel that feeds public opinion. In this way, the populace will be weaned away from the diet of speculation, innuendo and misrepresentation that fill our airwaves and populate the social media.

Of course, there will be differences, like a court of law the process is adversarial and the opposing sides will bring all of their experience and expertise to bear in representing the interest of their clients. Unlike a court of law however both sides in this Honourable House have the same clients, the people of Dominica. Members can therefore differ with each other, yet have the magnanimity to clasp each other's hands as friends. This is the hallmark of a civilized and progressive parliamentary democracy.

### **The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

There are winds blowing through the corridors of the international community and within the precincts of some of our traditional donors that may impact the work of this Ninth Parliament. We have to be conscious of the reality that as we continue on the path to development, some values and beliefs we once held to be sacred, are now being questioned and challenged.

This trend is likely to filter through and infect the agenda for the delivery of development assistance. Governments and Parliaments of Small Island Developing States such as Dominica may soon have to contend with the challenge of repealing laws that are deemed to offend the sensibilities of various interest groups, as well as to introduce legislation that is more in keeping with the values of metropolitan societies.

Small Island Developing States such as ours are now being induced to adopt the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs), as the framework for transforming their economies and the world, by 2030. This new approach by the United Nations is being proposed as a result of an evaluation of the Millennium Development Goals ( MDGs ). While Dominica has met and even exceeded the targets set for the MDGs, many Small Island Developing States have failed to meet them. The eight MDGs, it is argued, failed to consider the root causes of poverty, or gender inequality, or the holistic nature of development. Notably, the evaluators argue, the MDGs made no mention of human rights, or specifically addressed economic development.

There is growing acceptance for the SDGs among member states of the United Nations. That body is banking on its acceptance by member states at a summit to be held in September this year. The overall view that is emerging, is that if commitments made for their financing are kept in a timely manner, and if the projects and interventions are well executed, then there could be tremendous impact in transforming the world by 2030.

My message to this parliament is that our efforts at sustainable development must be propelled by sustainable energy generation that maximizes the use of our considerable renewable sources of energy, in the most cost effective and efficient manner. We need to be

cautiously optimistic about the likely outcomes of the SDGs. The point will be reached when members will have to decide to what extent the growing acceptance of a new meaning of the term “human rights” is compatible with the moral and ethical values and beliefs of the Dominican society, and their importance to the legislative agenda of Parliament and the development of the country.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, I pray and ask for God`s blessings and divine guidance upon you all, for a spirited and productive session.

I thank you for the courtesy of your kind attention.