



**ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT
BY HIS EXCELLENCY CHARLES A. SAVARIN, DAH,
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FIFTH SESSION
OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT ON TUESDAY, 30TH JULY 2019

***Pursuing Resilience and Inclusive Growth and
Development in Dominica Post Maria***

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

I give thanks first of all to God Almighty for allowing us to again congregate in this August and Honourable House of Assembly. I thank you Madam Speaker most sincerely for the invitation which you extended to my wife and I to attend this sitting of the House and for me to address this the First Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament.

Madam Speaker, the challenges and trials which have confronted us these last couple of years make the words penned by Charles

Wesley, the brother of John Wesley – the founder of the Methodist Church, particularly relevant, and I quote:

“And are we yet alive, and see each other's face? Glory and thanks to Jesus give, for his almighty grace! What troubles have we seen, what mighty conflicts past, fightings without, and fears within, since we assembled last! Yet out of all, the Lord hath brought us by his love; and still he doth his help afford, and hides our life above.”

Madam Speaker, I chose these words of Charles Wesley, to remind us in this House and in the Nature Island to give thanks and praise to God for the great things he has done for us as a people since we last met at the beginning of the last financial year, and to call on us to pray for his continued blessings upon us, in this new financial year.

On this occasion, I am particularly pleased and honoured to be given the privilege to address you on an optimistic note as we witness the phenomenal recovery which is taking place in Dominica less than two (2) years after the catastrophic impact of Hurricane

Maria. I have therefore decided to address you on the important topic of “***Pursuing Resilience and Inclusive Growth and Development in Dominica Post Maria.***”

The Threat To Our Survival

Madam Speaker, it is widely accepted that the impacts on the local economy of Tropical Storm ERIKA (2015) followed by Hurricane MARIA (2017) represent a loss of 93% (latest IMF estimate) and 226% respectively of the island’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). When taken in conjunction with the underlying phenomenon of Climate Change, these climate-induced natural disasters have altered the awareness and behaviour, the very psyche of Dominicans, in fundamental ways.

The evidence reveals that our survival as a country is under threat and that this danger is coming from sources outside of our direct control. Added to this reality is the incidence of vulnerability of the island to externally influenced economic shocks, such as that which precipitated the demise of the local banana industry several years ago, and the attack on financial services with the risk of the

termination of correspondent bank relationships, is the still higher risk of ‘Climate Induced Natural Disasters’.

As was the case with Erika and Maria, these natural disasters are capable of causing considerable loss of life and of disrupting critical infrastructure and livelihoods in the entire country for extended periods. In the process, hard earned gains in national prosperity, wealth creation and individual wellbeing are either lost altogether or severely compromised. These phenomena force citizens and Government alike into a “*continuous replacement mode*”; replacing roads, bridges, sea and river defences; dredging and re-dredging rivers and water courses; replacing schools, hospitals and health centres; replacing public utilities; replacing hotel and tourism facilities; replacing manufacturing and processing plant; replacing housing and business facilities; re-establishing agricultural and fisheries production and re-establishing the very forest itself, etc.

The Undaunted Dominican Spirit

But this traumatic experience has not daunted the Dominican spirit. Instead it has strengthened the culture of struggle and

resistance embedded in the psyche of the Dominican people, who have had to struggle over time, not just with the elements but with the challenges posed by the very topography. Nevertheless, the overall threat confronting the populace at this time is not perceived by the ordinary citizen as being insurmountable. If there was any doubt as to the resilience and fighting spirit of the Dominican people, we only have to listen to the account of the real life struggles of Miss Jair Pendenque which she articulated in her Valedictorian Address at the 17th Graduation Ceremony of the Dominica State College on Tuesday, 9th July 2019, and her determination to **“never give up”**.

This determination to ‘build back better and stronger’ and never give up is attributable in part to the leadership role being displayed by Central Government in responding to the challenges at hand, by announcing to the United Nations and therefore to the world, just five (5) days after the passage of Hurricane Maria, a vision to rebuild Dominica better and stronger and as the first climate resilient country in the world.

This vision was embraced by the international community and has galvanized support for its implementation, thereby enabling the taking of several strategic steps to include:

- (1) Operationalization of the Climate Resilient Execution Agency of Dominica (CREAD) buttressed by the requisite legislation which was passed in the House of Assembly in 2018.
- (2) The massive housing and re-roofing programme island-wide that is currently underway, spearheaded by Government under the Citizenship By Investment Programme (CBI), and which is also being funded in part with external donor support and humanitarian assistance.
- (3) Rehabilitation or restoration of physical and institutional infrastructure notably with respect to roads, bridges, sea and river defences, drainage systems, capacity building initiatives and management systems.
- (4) The complete relocation of two (2) communities in the south-east of the island namely Petite Savanne and Dubique which were totally devastated by Tropical Storm ERIKA and which has resulted in the resettlement of one hundred and sixty-five (165)

families to a relatively nearby alternative location; that is Bellevue Chopin and an additional fifty (50) families from Dubique resettled at Centre, Grand Bay.

When addressing the United Nations on 23rd September 2017 just five (5) days after the passage of Hurricane Maria, the Prime Minister said **“We as a country and as a region did not start this war against nature! We did not provoke it! The war has come to us!!”**

Madam Speaker, Dominica in 2019 may thus be properly classified as a country on a “War-Footing” after having been attacked by the forces of nature, and therefore focusing on developing its state of readiness to confront the many hazards which we continue to be faced with and which can properly be attributed to Climate Change and Disaster Vulnerability.

The United Nations Agenda For Sustainable Development

Central to that overall effort of developing a state of readiness, is that of fostering *Resilience* throughout the society. This is

consistent with the United Nations (UN) “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, an agreement among United Nations (UN) Member States (including Dominica) which officially came into existence in January 2016. Specifically, GOAL 13 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeks to:

“strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate related hazards and natural disasters in all countries”.

Economic Growth

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, while *Building Resilience* is important and indeed necessary, it must be taken in context; it cannot, and indeed should not be dealt with in isolation of the several other SDGs central to which is the issue of ‘Economic Growth’, particularly as set out in Goal 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) namely to:

“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

A retrospective look at the record on national economic growth performance over the past decade, say 2006-2016, reveals a mean annual growth rate of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.8% for Dominica; this compares with 1.76% for St Kitts & Nevis, the next best performing OECS country when measured against that yardstick. Furthermore, unlike many of the neighbouring island economies, Dominica's topography is such that in addition to the challenges which it presents, we have had to contend with a range of Climate Induced Disasters of varying magnitudes over the period at reference (2006-2016) resulting in flooding, damage from rough seas, drought, pest & disease in agriculture, and landslides. For example, it was during the said period that Hurricane Dean (2007) struck the island followed by Hurricane Omar (2008); these were Category 2 and 3 events respectively.

Prior to this, during the decade of the 1980s "when banana was king", the mean annual growth rate of real GDP in Dominica was 4.4%; that is considerably higher than the comparable figure today. *However, while the data reveals that growth in GDP annually was better or faster back then on average, the evidence is unequivocal*

that the trajectory of the economy during the period at reference (1980-1990) was not sustainable. This finding is in addition to the fact that the onset of Climate Change was in its infancy at that time and hence the incidence of Disaster Vulnerability in the country had not yet transitioned into the global crisis that it is today.

Moreover, the “*continuous replacement mode*” phenomenon alluded to earlier in this address constitute a significant constraint to the growth and development process in Dominica, a situation which can be expected to be reduced or ameliorated as a result of the emphasis on *National Resilience Building*.

Inclusive Growth

Madam Speaker, with respect to achieving *Inclusive Growth*, the National Resilience Development Strategy (NRDS) makes reference to the UN SDGs target annual growth rate of GDP for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) of 7% coupled with low inflation. The NRDS articulates *five (5) Strategic Growth Poles for Dominica to encompass renewable energy, productive enterprises, creative industries, infrastructure and human services*. Necessary action on

several of these Growth Poles is considerably advanced at this time, as is the case with renewable energy for example, as manifested in the Geothermal Energy Development Project. However, I am advised that this is not yet the case with all of the potential Growth Poles mentioned and thus corrective action is necessary to advance progress in those areas.

The Onus Is On All Of Us

It is also important to appreciate that as an Independent Sovereign State the onus is on us to identify the requisite financial resources necessary for investing in the survival and prosperity of our people, whether directly, say for allocation via the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), or through private sector entrepreneurial activity. Prior to the attainment of Political Independence in 1978, that responsibility was shared with Great Britain. In fact such a situation, which may properly be defined as a quasi-colonial relationship, still exist today regarding several of the neighbouring Caribbean islands such as the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the United States Virgin Islands (USVI), Anguilla, St. Maarten and

Puerto Rico, all of which were struck by Hurricanes Irma and/or Maria in 2017. Indeed, this category of countries may be further extended to also encompass the French Caribbean Islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, etc.

As Good As Any And Better Than Many

The evidence is that the recovery of Dominica post the 2017 hurricane season is as good as that of any of the other Caribbean islands which were also impacted and indeed better than most. The ingredients for this phenomenal performance post Maria, may be characterized as a platform for the Emerging Growth Trajectory which the country is transitioning onto, one which is inclusive of anyone who is willing and/or able to invest in the future, whether living here at home or overseas in the diaspora. In this regard, the following major initiatives, already underway in Dominica, are consistent with such a platform namely:

(1) Modernization of the agriculture and fisheries sector to

mainstream greenhouse technology, hydroponics, higher farm productivity, the utilization of robust soil and water conservation

practices, as well as aqua culture and mariculture as envisaged under the US\$25 million World Bank financed “Emergency Agricultural Livelihoods and Climate Resilient Project” and other funding for agriculture.

(2) Continued emphasis on recovery of the Tourism Sector to its pre-hurricane Maria level and beyond, with visitor expenditure targeted to trend above the EC\$383.28 million achieved in 2016. To date, First and Second Quarter stay-over arrivals have surpassed 2016, 2017 and 2018, totalling 43,774 arrivals as opposed to 26,265 in 2018, 40,699 in 2017 and 35,340 in 2016. This improved outturn in 2019 when viewed in conjunction with the massive expansion or investment in new hotel plant in the country that is now underway, most of which are in the five (5) star hotel category, combined with an islandwide re-development of the road network and proposals for the construction of an international airport, a cruise port and cruise village, when taken together all of these augur well for improved sources of employment and income on the horizon for Dominicans, whether resident here on island or living abroad.

A New National Economy

Madam Speaker, it could therefore be said that a new national economy is emerging from the ruins of those climate induced natural disasters of 2015 and 2017, an exercise which will require some nurturing ... *if the seeds being planted now are to bear fruit abundantly in the future.* Against this background, it is prudent to be mindful of the fact that ... *in life, success is never guaranteed.* Indeed, there are numerous examples worldwide, regionally and in Dominica, where well prepared plans and programmes have failed to materialise.

Madam Speaker, I am optimistic about Dominica's future. We have done exceedingly well in our recovery so far post Hurricane Maria and we can all be proud and congratulate ourselves on our achievements to date.

General Elections and the Electoral Process

Madam Speaker, this is the First Meeting of the Fifth Session of the Ninth Parliament which means that when we meet again in this

setting, it will be the First Meeting of the First Session of the Tenth Parliament; that is after the upcoming General Elections.

A General Election may be characterized as the quintessential manifestation of democracy in a country; at its core, it provides citizens with the right and the opportunity to choose their representatives in Parliament and thereby their Government via secret ballot. Additionally, there are the crucial underlying institutions or mechanisms necessary for the proper functioning of the election process to include the Media, the Rule of Law, the Electoral Commission and its associated machinery which, taken altogether, comprise the architecture of a Democratic System.

Typically, General Elections held in Dominica are peaceful and the process is conducted in a manner in keeping with International Best Practice. Furthermore, the country's membership in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) as well as in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS) and of course the United Nations (UN), imply a *Code of Conduct* by Government and

Opposition on matters pertaining to Fundamental Rights and Freedoms and Democracy at the national level.

This upcoming poll is expected to be peaceful as well as being undertaken in a manner consistent with International Best Practice. Essentially, the system or regime for conducting a “Free and Fair Poll” in Dominica is in place, and it has been so for several decades; indeed since before the attainment of independence in 1978.

Madam Speaker, no system anywhere is perfect; indeed in the struggle of life, there is always room for improvement in our various systems and endeavours and that principle applies to our electoral system as well. But generally that system has stood us in good stead over the years and all three (3) of our major political parties have won and lost elections under the existing system.

As our country faces the future, may the Good Lord continue to shower His blessings on our people as together we seek to overcome the many challenges confronting the nation along with fostering the understanding necessary to persevere in pursuit of excellence. We

also seek the Lord's guidance in strengthening our resolve as a people to build a prosperous Dominica, and to do so in a manner which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Because Madam Speaker, when Dominica succeeds it is the entire nation, all of our people, at home and abroad, who will benefit. As Parliamentarians and citizens therefore, let us seek God's guidance to love one another and to unite in a common endeavour, not only to build back better and stronger, but indeed to make Dominica the first climate resilient country in the world.

I thank you.