

2012 Independence Message

By The Hon. Arnhim Eustace

Leader of the Opposition, St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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Tomorrow, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will mark 33 years since we broke free of colonial rule to determine our own path as a people.

Many Vincentians are too young to remember day-to-day life as subjects of the British Empire. The irony of longing to determine our own affairs while singing “God save the Queen!” and beseeching Almighty God in anthem to “make the nations see, That men should brothers be, And form one family, The wide world ov’er” while observing that our colonial masters were somehow “more equal” than we were in our land.

Our political and economic trajectories were largely plotted by British technocrats and colonial ideologues. But because we longed for self-determination and worked en masse toward the same, our colonizers had to contend with and ultimately defer to our will to be masters of our selves.

Thirty-three years later, our government celebrates the grant of loans or gifts from countries either moved by pity for us or seeking to expand their influence in our region. We no longer boast of having secured major contracts for trade. We have become beggars where once we were architects and builders of our own destiny.

Thirty-three years on, farmers who once traded in green gold wait desperately for CESS and strain their eyes for the outline of a spray plane on the horizon. The previously industrious depend on “poor relief”. Parents choose between feeding their children and sending them to school.

We are told this situation is to be expected because the economies of most countries the world over are in decline; that all over the world, people are losing jobs and making do with less. But many countries are still growing, but not St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are the only

country in Latin America and the Caribbean with four (4) consecutive years of negative growth and possibly a fifth.

Yet, countries the world over are fighting to remain independent by cutting costs and putting measures in place to stimulate growth, create jobs and increase opportunities for further education and training. Countries fight so as not to be beholden to any bigger and wealthier country.

Perhaps, the refrain in our own anthem, “And God bless and keep us true!” is too passive. Perhaps, we have forgotten that we must earn our blessings. It would appear that we should ask God to “grant us strength for the hard fight to achieve and keep our freedom.”

May we keep our Independence!