

**MESSAGE FROM**  
**HIS EXCELLENCY**  
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**ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**  
**TO MARK THE 37<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE OF**  
**ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**  
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*We celebrate the great achievement we have made over the past thirty-seven years, and at the same time, we focus on the enormous challenges facing us today, and which are likely to face us in the future.*

I have chosen to highlight a few of these challenges, with the hope that my ideas will start some discussion among our citizens.

Let me be the first to admit that there is nothing new here, and that efforts are already underway to address some of these problems.

I am, however, of the opinion that it is often beneficial to remind us of the things we already know, if only to bring them from the "back burner" into the mainstream.

Everyone will agree that in this global economic climate, it is impossible for small island states to survive on their own. Yet, efforts at Caribbean Integration seem to be moving forward at a snail's pace.

Maybe if we strive for greater unity among our people, on a national level, in all of the islands, the goal of Caribbean Integration might one day become reality.

Our success in the field of education is very commendable; we have many more schools since Independence, better trained teachers, more students in the secondary and tertiary institutions; but is our educational system preparing our students for today's world?

Is there enough focus on science and technology? Are our graduates equipped to join today's job market?

Even in the developed countries, educators grapple with finding the best education model for this changing environment.

Should we also take a critical look at our system to determine if it needs revision?

As a physician, I am very proud of the gains we have made in health. Our infant and maternal mortality rates are very low. Our children are 100% immunized, we no longer see children dying from malnutrition. There are more health clinics, and we can soon boast of an excessive number of nurses and physicians.

However, the increasing incidence of hypertension, diabetes and obesity, plus the emergence of new mosquito-borne diseases such as Chikungunya and Zika, put tremendous pressures on the State's finances.

There are also numerous complaints of the health care delivery system, which would lead one to believe that it is in need of revision.

All developed countries battle with the problem of delivery health care. The systems in the United States of America, Britain and Canada are all different.

Having been exposed in a casual way to many different systems, I am left to conclude, like many experts in the field, that the Cuban model of health care delivery is the best, and I will strongly recommend that we investigate this model to ascertain if it is the best for St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

As we become more and more reliant on tourism, we need to educate the population about its benefits and the need to protect the whole tourism "package" including but not limited to protection of the environment, littering, noise pollution and crimes against tourists.

Most disturbing to me personally is the large number of persons who live below the poverty line. We cannot depend on Government alone to address this problem. I am therefore appealing to all Vincentians, especially the successful professionals and business people to make eradication of poverty one of their priorities.

Time and space do not allow me to speak at length of all the challenges facing our new young independent nation. Others might wish to highlight unemployment, crime and substance abuse, all of which are equally important.

It is time for a National Dialogue between all concerned Vincentians, joining hearts and voices to see how we can preserve and improve this country which we all love so much.

May God bless you this Independence and bless St. Vincent and the Grenadines.