

Independence Message 2017 from The Hon. Dr. Godwin Friday

Leader of the Opposition New Democracy Party (NDP)

27 October 2017

Fellow Vincentians, as we mark our 38th year of Independence, let us thank God for bringing us safely to this point in our lives and pray for his continued mercies as we go forward.

In our tradition, we regard the anniversary of independence as an occasion for celebration. We also see it as a time to take stock of where we are and consider where we are going. A time when we look back with clarity and objectivity at significant moments and events in our national story— at the real trajectories in our social, economic and political life. So, I ask now what is the state of our nation on the 27th October 2017? What has been our experience over the first 17 years of this century, virtually all of which were spent under ULP governance? Do we see in our daily lives what our people had envisioned 38 years ago?

In recent times, we have endured economic hardship, social problems such as increasing violent crime, political strife and moral decline. Our people now live in constant fear of violent crime. Despite these serious threats to the existence of peaceful society, no action is taken by those in power to reassure the public. Official platitudes have replaced substance.

Our decaying physical infrastructure – roads, bridges, schools, public buildings, health facilities, police stations and coast guard facilities – are in plain view for all to judge. Our economy is underperforming. Ill-informed and misguided policies have eroded our economic base and impeded our productive and competitive abilities. Other effects of poor economic policies and management are also in plain view of Vincentians: high and ever-increasing taxes; the lowest wages in the OECS; massive unemployment; and unconscionably high government debt to the domestic private sector.

The last of these ills has forced business closures and made local building contractors afraid to do business with the government. Accountability for the use of public funds is woefully lacking and moral responsibility to account is denied in the highest levels of our government.

A correction is clearly necessary. Just as our Caribbean neighbours in Dominica and elsewhere are gallantly rebuilding after natural disasters, we too must rebuild from our own man-made crisis.

The job to rebuild falls to us, inheritors of this beautiful land that Almighty God made for us. We must not fail. Appreciating that meaningful independence is not a status but a process, we must together use our intellect, experience, training and resources to make our country work for all of us.

I believe with all my heart that we the people—from Fancy in the north to Ashton in the south, from Rose Bank on the leeward coast to Georgetown on the windward side and to Mustique beyond—are up to the challenge of nation-building. And by the grace of God, we will make the right choices going forward and get the job done. I have no doubt in my mind or fear in my heart that we can do what is required to make our country recover and prosper.

Our country is beautiful and bountiful: God made it that way. It is for us to put those generous blessings to good use and make the country work for all of us. Then, we can proudly proclaim we are one people and one nation.

May God Bless us all.