

# **Independence Message 2018 from The Hon. Dr. Godwin Friday**

## **Leader of the Opposition New Democracy Party (NDP)**

**27 October 2018**

Fellow Vincentians, we thank God for watching over our nation.

Thirty-nine years ago, when Robert Milton Cato and other leaders took us into political independence, we celebrated joyously and looked to the future with confidence and optimism. Our founders envisioned better days for our people and hoped that, by now, we would be living their dream of a prosperous, free and safe SVG. For some, especially those closely connected with the government, the dream of prosperity may have come true, as they have profited from preferential access, nepotism and political favouritism. But for most Vincentians, it has been illusive: pursued (as Bob Marley suggests) but not attained. However, we persevere.

My dear people, we cannot speak about political independence without being honest with ourselves. While we seek to build our country and realize the dreams of our founders, we must always acknowledge our strengths and our weaknesses. Our greatest strength as we go forward is in trusting God. That truth is enshrined in our national anthem in the words: “Our faith will see us through”. We must always believe that. The hubris of power and misguided ambition of political leaders must not blind us to this truth. You must insist that our leaders— political and otherwise—humble themselves before God and the people, for this will foster compassion and understanding, and will help us find the right way forward.

More than ever, we need a new approach in our country. Our problems are many and our challenges great. In recent times, we have suffered through economic stagnation and decline. Once lucrative commodities such as bananas and arrowroot remain in our fields, unsold. For farmers who have given up cultivation altogether, they are but a fading memory of bygone days when “green gold” dominated our economy and landscape. As a result, joblessness and underemployment have increased. This has hit our young people hardest. After they and their parents have sacrificed for higher education that promised worthwhile careers and productive lives,

the poor economy and job scarcity have dimmed their hopes and tarnished their dreams. Long-established businesses are struggling or have closed. Taxes such as VAT continue to go up, increasing the burden on businesses and ordinary people. The high cost of electricity and of operating a motor vehicle drive people to despair.

To make matters worse, frequent killings and other brazen acts of violence and crime have galvanized the nation as never before. When we embraced nationhood, our founders did not foresee that 39 years later, ordinary people would live in constant fear of crime and be scared to leave their homes after dark. Yet, like Emperor Nero of old, the Government “fiddles while Rome burns”. Further, instead of garnering praise for crimefighting success, our police, even at the highest levels, are portrayed in negative headlines that undermine public confidence in them.

Despite our challenges and setbacks, we must continue to embrace the promises and possibilities of nationhood and recommit ourselves to making them come true. Our country’s small size poses challenges for development. However, it is not an insurmountable obstacle, for it also means that if we get things right, we can turn our economy and country around relatively quickly and race towards prosperity.

To succeed, we must embrace a new way forward. Our politics must be less of style and more of substance. Our country must not be a mere stage upon which a political leader might strut about like a Colossus. The interests of the people must be given priority. Those interests must guide and determine what our political leaders and government do. Also, in all things and at all times, Government must be accountable to the people. Accountability for the use of public funds should be seen by all as a legal, political and moral requirement that must be fulfilled by those in the executive arm of government, with primary responsibility resting upon the Minister of Finance. The people have a right to expect it and, when—as now— it is not given, we must demand it with ever-increasing voice.

We are a beautiful country and blessed nation. Our people are our best resource and together we can build a better life for ourselves and future generations. To succeed, however, we must have all hands on deck. Fellow Vincentians living and toiling abroad, in far off places like London, New York, Miami, Toronto and Montreal, you must you join with us at home in common cause to make SVG better. Join to invest in local businesses and to find markets in your adopted countries for our

products. Also, continue to contribute materially to your relatives and your favourite causes back home. Geography may separate us, but history unites us. Our deep and abiding love of our country binds us together and, working together, we will succeed. Moreover, in keeping with our Christian tradition, we must agree and confirm that what we build together, we will share together. For that is our way: one nation, one people, one Vincy.

May God continue to watch over and bless us and our nation.