

Emphasising Unity, Peace, Justice, And Prosperity
Address on the Occasion of the 38th Anniversary of
Independence of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on 27
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On the occasion of our country's thirty-eight anniversary of independent nationhood, I urge that our reflections focus on the inter-woven socio-economic fabric of unity, peace, justice, and prosperity in the quest of the further upliftment of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Amidst all the travails, challenges, and dislocation at home and abroad, it is timely and desirable for us to restate the fundamentals which have made us a magnificent, living example of our treasured Caribbean civilization. In this restatement it is clear that there is much to celebrate!

First, we reaffirm that our nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man and woman; that we desire that our society be so ordered as to express a profound recognition of the principles of democracy, free institutions, social justice, and equality before the law; that we realize that the maintenance of human dignity presupposes safeguarding the right of privacy, of family life, of property, and the pursuit of just economic rewards of labour.

Each of these words, phrases, and formulations is pregnant with real meaning for civilized life and living. So, we celebrate!

It is upon these freedoms, ideals, and principles, enshrined and elaborated in our Constitution, that we the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines founded our independent nation on October 27, 1979. These are the bedrock fundamentals which unite us as a people in a specific landscape and seascape known as St. Vincent and the Grenadines and through the prism of which we have been shaped over time; they are the enduring basics which engender our social solidarity, for good, not ill.

Our people's unity and solidarity are made manifest, formally and practically, in CITIZENSHIP which is the bond that holds us together, now and forever. Citizenship is the highest office in the land, higher than that of Governor-General or Prime Minister.

This fundamental truth thus restrains us from joining any bandwagon, however tempting its lure of easy money, which urges us to sell our citizenship and our passport. Our citizenship is not for sale; it is not a commodity for trade or commerce.

And our passport is the outward sign of the inward grace of citizenship; that, too, is not for sale.

In our CITIZENSHIP is suffused a bundle of rights and obligations. The selfish among us extol only their rights, but there are also abiding obligations.

Thus, to adopt and adapt the words of the American President John F. Kennedy, ask not just what your country can do for you; ask, too, what you can do for your country! The heroic and iconic personalities (Chatoyer, Mc Intosh, Joshua, Cato, and others) who litter our history knew this well, not merely in theory but in their lived sacrifices; so, too, our grandparents and great grandparents who, in daunting circumstances, through toil and perseverance, love and caring, solidarity and fellowship, have bequeathed us a solid foundation, and more, upon which to build a better life and living. So, we celebrate!

Citizenship and its concomitant sense of belonging commit us to our country; it is the very geographic space and the idea of St. Vincent and the Grenadines that we ought always to treasure, defend, and promote.

Each adult able-bodied citizen, indeed each invited resident, of this blessed country, is required to exert himself or herself in honest, lawful labour in accordance with his or her ability and circumstance in return for just rewards.

No progressive society has ever been built on leisure, pleasure or nice-time; disciplined, smart, and lawful productive labour is required for material and social progress. Laziness may appear hip and cool to a misguided small minority; but laziness is an absence of virtue and leads to damnation for Jew and Gentile alike.

Sadly in our country, and elsewhere in the Caribbean, among other places, there is a composite of drug-man, thief-man, and gun-man, consumed by envy, greed, and naked, selfish individualism, who has chosen the path of crime as a way of life; their chosen occupation is that of a criminal.

Crime is not merely incidental to them, it defines them. Let us be clear: No one but this hard-headed criminal is responsible for his/her actions. We must not look for excuses for them; we must put the blame and responsibility for their criminal actions on them, not elsewhere.

This unsavory under-belly of a small number of hardened criminals in our small society finds awful expression in its anti-social impact in a context of modern information and communication technology, an availability of unlawful rearms, and alliances of home-grown criminals and foreign hoodlums from our dangerous near-neighborhood.

All this creates a threat to citizen security; it causes much alarm among right-thinking persons; and it undermines, too, the bonds of citizenship and the requisites of citizenry solidarity.

Accordingly, this monstrous criminality must be fought unequivocally on all fronts; the perpetrators of such criminality must be stopped.

Our civilization will never allow a handful of gun-men and their opportunistic allies to hold sway. We shall be relentless in pursuing them. Our Parliament, Cabinet, Law Courts, Police Force, and all other security and law-enforcement agencies, at home and abroad, in communion with a supportive people as a whole, will defeat these vile threats to our citizen security.

More broadly, however, without in any way absolving the individual gun-man of his personal criminal responsibility, it is necessary and desirable for our country, on an ongoing basis, to ramp up its efforts to ensure that the many-sided breeding ground for such anti-social persons be extinguished.

In this grand effort, the family, the school, the church, the media, the government, the community along with the formal institutions of law and order have much work to do. All hands must be on deck to cripple and destroy this unacceptable malignancy of violent crime. The criminals must meet their justice; justice must be available, in practice, to suffering communities; and there will thus be peace.

It is vital as a nation that we ought never to allow lamentations and negativism to dene us or to anaesthese us in a doomsday morass. The overwhelming majority of our people are good, hard-working, productive, steeped in the tried-and tested values of our civilization which are at the core of our citizenship.

We thus possess huge possibilities and strengths which are made manifest daily by working people, farmers, fisherfolk, professionals, doctors, and nurses, students and teachers, police and prison officers, prelates and administrators, sports and cultural persons, leaders and followers. Beyond the overwhelming goodness of the vast majority of our people, we know, through faith and reason, through divine inspiration and human imagination, that we can depend on the mercies of our God, His compassion faileth not, morning by morning new mercies we see, all that we need His hand provides, great is His faithfulness. So, we celebrate!

Our goodness, our unity, our possibilities, our strengths, and the mercies and faithfulness of God have caused the great people of our small country to have chalked up the impressive individual and collective accomplishments in all fields of commendable endeavor.

Such progress reaches its outer limits only with disciplined and smart work, individually and collectively, in faith and reason, in a land of unity, justice, and peace informed by precepts, ideals, and principles of our alive CITIZENSHIP as embedded in our Constitution. So, we celebrate!

At Independence Day 2017, let us keep our focus on the vital matters of unity, peace, justice, prosperity. We know the way; we have the vision, the ideas, the programmes.

Beware of false prophets and the apostles of gloom and doom in whatever garb they come, particularly those enwrapped in an antinational political clothing.

Beware of he or she who would see this country burn, metaphorically, if he or she could be the king or queen of the ashes. Always remember in your reflections, too, that public policy is serious business for serious people; it is not part of the entertainment industry.

For all the overwhelming good and abundant blessings in our country, we celebrate!

Happy Independence 2017!