



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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## **Statement**

By

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At the

**General Debate  
of the 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes your ascension to the presidency of this 65<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly with a great deal of anticipation. As one of the primary architects of your own country's membership in the United Nations, you have demonstrated your belief in the importance of this institution and its role in the modern international context. As you stand on the shoulders of the giants who have preceded you in this role, we are confident that you will ably apply your unique set of skills and experiences to the advancement of our complex agenda.

We are also excited by the theme you have proposed for your tenure as President of the General Assembly, namely "Reaffirming the central role of the United Nations in global governance." It is a theme that resonates loudly with Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and indeed, with many of the small and marginalized states that form a significant part of the 192 members of the General Assembly.

We small states have emerged as some of the most jealous and zealous guardians of the United Nations Charter. This vigilance is born of principle and necessity. The Charter is the document that guarantees our place in this Assembly as the sovereign equals of every other country of the world. And the United Nations remains the only venue that affords us both a seat and a voice in global affairs. To Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the United Nations must be the center of global governance because it is our only option for global governance. There are some states that fortuitously find themselves in the inner sanctums of the Security Council. And the G8. And the G20. And the OECD. For them, the centrality of the UN may vary with the political winds or the shifting sands of great power intrigue. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has no such luxury. We cannot take our ball and go home, to play on other fields and interact in other fora. The United Nations is all we have. Its centrality in global governance, for us, is therefore an essential and indisputable truth.

Mr. President,

You assume the leadership of this General Assembly at a time when the centrality of the United Nations' role is being challenged as never before. Various organisations and small groupings of states, with selective membership and opaque *modus operandi*, have coalesced to become global decision-makers and shapers of our post-Cold War existence. For our purposes, it is irrelevant whether these groupings have formed to respond to, or to precipitate, the UN's declining effectiveness. However, the fact is, that in the face of global crises of economy, climate, trade and reform, we have been tested and found wanting. We face the real threat of devolving into a mere "talk shop," an amalgam of unwieldy bureaucracies or a toothless rubber stamp of decisions taken elsewhere. To avoid such an ignominious fate, we must actively defend our role and legitimacy as the global center of international governance and decision-making. Permit us the opportunity to offer a few simple suggestions to assist in achieving this goal.

First, for the concept of global governance to have meaning and relevance, we must inject some measure of consistency and predictability into the rules that govern our family. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is committed to the international rule of law and the role of the institutions that advance the rule of law and adjudicate international disputes. Governance is ineffective if the rich and powerful among us can place themselves beyond the ambit of timely compliance with rules and decisions.

In this regard, we cite the case of the ongoing dispute between the United States and Antigua and Barbuda on the issue of online gaming, which has already been adjudicated in Antigua and Barbuda's favour by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). We urge these two countries – both strong friends of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines – to quickly arrive at a just and equitable resolution of this matter. Our region was the unfortunate, and no doubt unintended, victim of WTO rulings that have gutted our once-thriving banana industry and threatened to stall that crucial engine of development. The case against banana tariffs was successfully brought to the WTO by the United States, which does not grow a single bunch of bananas.

We are confident that our friends will honour this relatively minor gaming ruling as we have been compelled to adapt to previous, major decisions.

Second, the resolutions adopted and decisions taken by the General Assembly must have some worth beyond the paper upon which they are printed. In the dusty archives of our body are hard-fought decisions and resolutions on Palestine, on human rights, and on the economic crisis. We have made annual, near-unanimous, calls for an end to the Cuban embargo. And our documents are dutifully filed away to be ignored by dissenters or resuscitated in future sessions with, at best, incremental advancement.

As long as General Assembly decisions and resolutions remain a buffet from which member states can selectively pick and choose, our role in governance will continue to be hamstrung. Member States must take the sovereign decision to honour the will of the international community, not because they have to, but because it is the right thing to do. If we continue to champion the decisions with which we agree while disregarding all others, we are not participating with good faith in the deliberations of this body and we are doing violence to the very concept of a community of nations.

Nor should states manipulate the concept of consensus to make it a virtual veto on UN action. Consensus must always be a central goal, but never a barrier, to decisive action by the General Assembly. Necessary, desirable and urgent action cannot be sacrificed on the altar of consensus. Democracy demands that, when consensus cannot be achieved, the recorded will of the majority should be respected.

Third, we must hold every nation to account for commitments that have been voluntarily taken. Much has been written and said about “donor fatigue,” which is shorthand for the limited attention span of multilateral and bilateral donors when confronting systemic development issues. Much less is said about *commitment fatigue*: the developing world’s exasperation with oft-made, but seldom-honoured commitments. But make no mistake, fatigue has set in, as we grow increasingly tired of waiting for the 0.7% of GNI promised by the developed world at Monterrey in 2002; the billions pledged in Gleneagles for the doubling of aid to Africa; the \$10 billion in ironically titled “fast-start” funding that was to materialize this year for climate change adaptation; and the \$1.1 trillion promised by the G20 in April 2009.

To the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, therefore, it is puzzling how some of our friends and development partners can suffer from donor fatigue when they have yet to donate what was originally promised. It is similarly confounding when, reflective of this supposed fatigue, donors attach so many conditions and bureaucratic impediments to unlocking assistance that it becomes all but inaccessible.

Small states like ours have neither the capacity nor the desire to establish entire bureaucracies dedicated solely to navigating the administrative labyrinth of irregular and unpredictable aid flows. Nor are we interested in the upkeep of armies of foreign consultants who seem to be the primary beneficiaries of some international development efforts.

Mr. President, commitment fatigue morphs into anger when considered in the context of the Haitian people in the wake of the indescribably devastating January 12<sup>th</sup> earthquakes. In March of this year, the UN held an inspiring donors conference, in which over \$10 billion was pledged for Haiti’s recovery from the earthquake. Today, six months after the conference, and eight months beyond the earthquake, a pathetically miniscule percentage of those pledges have actually been delivered. While less than 20,000 temporary shelters have been built to date, over 1.5 million Haitians are still living in tents.

A few days ago, we learned that women and children living in tent cities were killed when heavy rains and winds struck Haiti. No one can claim that this result was unexpected, as we in CARICOM have been sounding alarms for months about the dangers inherent in the imminent rainy season. To survive an

earthquake, only to be killed by rain, is an unfathomable tragedy. The entirely avoidable deaths of those women and children will remain a stain on the collective conscience of this body and our membership.

Mr. President, talk is cheap, even when it is the heady talk of billions of dollars. Commitments made must be commitments kept. And we must hold to account those who repeatedly make empty promises.

Fourth, we must cede no ground to the creeping encroachment of non-inclusive, non-transparent, non-representative groupings. We have no doubt, for example, that the G20 has a useful, and even essential, role to play in the global economy. There is an undeniable logic to a small group of the world's largest economies – almost all of which are our close friends – meeting informally to thrash out matters that affect only their own large economies. However, the logic fades somewhat in the face of a crisis that has spread rapidly and comprehensively to every corner of the globe. This is why Saint Vincent and the Grenadines noted with concern the G20's statement from Pittsburgh a year ago, which proclaimed “[w]e designated the G-20 to be the premier forum for our international economic cooperation.” Our esteemed friend and brother, President Obama of the United States, repeated these sentiments from this podium a few days ago when he stated “we made the G20 the focal point for international coordination.”

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was not included among the “we” who established this role for the G20 in Pittsburgh. Indeed, we, like 172 other member states, were not admitted to the meeting, we saw no agenda, and we read no minutes of the discussions that took place. As dedicated champions of the UN Charter, we also note that Articles 1 and 55 of that document designate the United Nations as the forum for international economic cooperation and solutions.

Indeed, our caution towards the G20 can be found in President Obama's very endorsement of it: “because in a world where prosperity is more diffuse, we must broaden our circle of cooperation to include emerging economies – economies from every corner of the globe.” We could not agree more.

In the wake of worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, 172 economies should not be locked out of economic discussions, waiting anxiously on the doorstep of the G20 for signals and policy shifts that affect our continued survival. We in the Caribbean have been disproportionately and devastatingly affected by the crisis – which we played no role in creating. Yet we have been forced to rely on friendly nations as interlocutors on our behalf. We believe that the deliberations and decisions of the G20 – from its misunderstanding of the vulnerabilities of small, highly indebted middle-income countries to its draconian outlook on offshore financial services – would have benefitted from our perspective.

We therefore call on the UN membership to give meaning to the words of our Charter, and to reestablish our body as a forum for meaningful solutions and cooperation on economic matters. We must reinvigorate the work of ECOSOC. We must renew the mandate of the Ad Hoc Working Group to decisively follow-up on the issues contained in the Outcome of the Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development.

Good global governance must therefore be premised on global inclusivity. This, Mr. President, is our fifth point. No corner of the world should be excluded from participation in the global family.

In that regard, we once again highlight the case of our friends in Taiwan. The United Nations and its Specialized Agencies must find ways to ensure the meaningful participation of the 23 million people of Taiwan. Just as their economic strength has merited inclusion in the WTO, and the universality of global health challenges have logically compelled their participation in the World Health Assembly, so too should the global reach of climate change merit the meaningful participation of Taiwan in the UNFCCC. The interconnectedness of global air travel, and our shared safety concerns, similarly mandate the participation of Taiwan in the International Civil Aviation Authority. This is not the case of a tiny NGO, to be allowed or denied meaningful participation on some bureaucratic whim. This is a legitimate and

vibrant expression of the ancient and noble Chinese culture, with a population 200 times larger than that of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

The government and people of Taiwan have advanced a reasonable and responsible policy of engagement to usher a new era in cross Strait relations, and an have enviable record of development cooperation and assistance. The international community can and should encourage and reward this responsible global citizenship with meaningful participation in the relevant specialized agencies.

Similarly, an urgent and more inclusive reform to the membership of the United Nations Security Council is the litmus test of our verbal commitments to governance, reform and revitalization. There is simply no justification for the continued exclusion of the entire African continent or other powerful and influential emerging powers from permanent membership in the Security Council. The defenders of the status quo may soon find that they are protecting an increasingly irrelevant and illegitimate institution. However, we feel that the Council is too important to be allowed to wither into obsolescence. Reform and expansion of the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council, including a provision of dedicated non-permanent membership for small island developing states, is an imperative that is long past due.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is proud to have announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the 2020-2021 term. If successful, we would be the smallest country ever, by population, to occupy such a position, and only the fourth of CARICOM's 14 UN Member States to assume such a responsibility. Our bid is premised on the historical exclusion of CARICOM states and SIDS from this critical body, and the value that we believe our presence and perspective will bring to the Council's deliberations.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines makes miniscule monetary and military contributions to the UN. But our contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security is measured in our historical aversion to wars, our culture of tolerance, peace and plurality and a small state perspective that understands that peace is not always best achieved with millions of dollars or armed enforcers, but often with dialogue and small but meaningful peace building actions. Our contribution is succinctly captured in our national motto, which, translated from Latin, reads simply "Peace and Justice."

Sixth, and most importantly, we must never be shy to use this institution to operationalise our commonly held ambitions for a better world, and to tackle the global issues of our day. Too often, we spend time lowering – rather than rising to meet – the expectations of a world that is clamoring for our leadership.

Our continued failures to achieve a binding solution on climate change mitigation and adaptation is a case in point. In the months since the painful lessons of the so-called Copenhagen Accord, devastating floods in Pakistan and heat waves and fires in Russia have taught us again that no nation is immune from the reach and impact of climate change. But the vulnerability of large nations to ruinous hurricanes, floods and fires does not approach the very unique and specific existential vulnerabilities of small island developing states. For while all states are vulnerable to natural disasters, only SIDS are threatened with being wiped off the map entirely – of ceasing to exist.

As such, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is not interested in the lowering of expectations as we head to Cancun. The need for a binding and meaningful agreement on climate change cannot be deferred indefinitely. And we view with disgust the transparent attempts to measure the financial or political cost of doing what must be done to save our planet. We are threatening to destroy our own world, as we shamelessly squabble over dollars and degrees. If we fail in this endeavour, history will look most unfavorably on the narrow, short-term interests that we placed ahead of our own survival. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has no interest in fiddling merrily while the earth drowns, suffocates or burns. Climate change is the global challenge of our time, and failure and delay can no longer be a viable option.

Mr. President,

In a similar vein, and in the interest of time, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines echoes and adopts as our own the proposals enunciated by our CARICOM sister states for prompt action on the global challenges of non-communicable diseases, small arms, narcotics and transnational crime, the decade-old Doha Development Round of trade negotiations, international cooperation in tax matters, and concessional assistance and debt relief for middle income island states. We cannot allow narrow ideological agendas to distract us or detract from the accomplishment of these tasks, upon which there is broad agreement.

Finally, Mr. President,

A crucial component of the overarching principle of sovereign equality is that of sovereignty itself. We believe wholeheartedly that, in the words of the great Caribbean singer and poet Bob Marley, “every man has a right to decide his own destiny.” We therefore reject, with equal fervor, any foreign or outside interference in the democratic processes of independent states. This is a principle upon which we are unyielding. In many of our small countries, it takes only a few minor mercenaries, and ideologically misguided or misinformed millionaires, to fundamentally threaten the fabric of our fragile democracies. Unfortunately, these interlopers are often aided and abetted by those unpatriotic opportunists who see sovereignty as a fungible commodity, to be bartered and traded to the highest nefarious bidder for short-term political gain.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is populated by a proud and noble people, with a history of fierce struggle for freedom and independence. There is a steel in the psyche of our Caribbean civilization and its Vincentian component. A steel forged in the fires of slavery and genocide, and beaten on the anvil of colonialism, exploitation and resistance. Our small size belies our indomitable spirit. We possess an independence that undergirds Cuba’s heroic resistance to an unjust and internationally condemned blockade. We have a strength that informs the nobility of the Haitian people’s response to unimaginable tragedy. We lay claim to a resilience that is etched in our collective history, and reverberates in the names of our region’s national heroes; like Nanny, Garvey, Bussa, Martí, and Chatoyer, to name but a few.

Our democracies can neither be bought, sold, nor intimidated. And our commitment to the democratic inclusivity of the United Nations and the supremacy of its Charter is similarly unshakeable.

It is against this backdrop, Mr. President, that you will find Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to be a strong ally in your efforts to reestablish the central role of this body in matters of global governance.

I thank you.

