



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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

800 2nd Ave., Ste. 400G, New York, NY 10017 • Tel: (212) 599-0950 • Fax: (212) 599-1020 • www.svg-un.org

Statement

By

Dr. the Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves

Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

At the

**General Debate
of the 67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines extends heartfelt congratulations to you on the assumption of your responsibilities as President of this crucially-important Session of the United Nations General Assembly. We also express our appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser of the State of Qatar, who left an indelible mark on the General Assembly.

We meet again in the quest for development, equity, and peace.

Last year, our Debate occurred against the backdrop of rapid, often violent, geopolitical change, as well as continuing economic instability and uncertainty. Last year's General Debate – though marked by winds of change and clouds of uncertainty – was not without hope and optimism. Member States anticipated meaningful progress at the Rio+20 Summit on Sustainable Development; we predicted a robust and legally-binding arms trade treaty; we embraced popular homegrown calls for political change; and we scanned the economic horizon for encouraging signs of recovery and growth.

Today, global optimism, though still enduringly present, is in scarcer supply, as the international community has encountered the challenges of a new world and found itself wanting. Our global structures – including the United Nations – are faced with changes of a scope, scale and rapidity that substantially outpace our ability to react, partly exceed our capacity to respond, and demand a level of courage, principle and decisiveness that is not sufficiently matched by our political will. Today, we are not merely spectators to a moment of global change. Rather, we are nations in the valley of decision, confronted with two questions that we must answer: What is our vision of tomorrow's post-crisis, post-conflict world? And how, collectively, can we achieve that vision?

Our avoidance of these fundamental questions threatens to set our Assembly adrift and rudderless, shirking responsibility and afraid of action. We must resist the temptation to bury our heads in the shifting sands of meaningless resolutions while we studiously disregard our imperative quest for a unifying principle and purpose. To succumb to such a temptation would be to condemn this institution to a future marked not by new ideas, but new rationalisations. Our noble battle of ideas will descend into a battalion of excuses; of blame-sharing and buck-passing; of sound bites disguised as insights. Such a future, which we are on a path to realise, would do a disservice to our respective States, our international obligations, and the proud history of the United Nations. We would, by our impotence, acquiesce to the possible obsolescence of this organization, as peoples and governments would, justifiably or not, turn elsewhere for the solutions to global challenges. Such a future can and must be vigorously avoided, in the interest of our peoples' collective advancement and humanisation.

Mr. President,

In our Caribbean region, the global economic and financial meltdown continues to be felt most acutely by the poor, the youth, the elderly and the vulnerable, who bear no responsibility for the rampant financial speculation and unregulated movement of capital that spurred the crisis. Today, four years into an externally-imposed meltdown, which has produced negative or marginal growth across the Caribbean, our region is forced to contemplate the implications of a potential "lost decade" of development. Our region is not immune from the economic pressures and fissures that have turned other parts of the world into tinderboxes of social unrest and political upheaval. Our citizens, who have nobly struggled under the weight of externally-sourced contraction, austerity and hardship, are not possessed of limitless patience or endurance. Our hard-won developmental gains are in jeopardy, and our settled political stability is in possible peril. The international community cannot ignore our plight based on a distorted calculus of middle-income status and relative prosperity, or on simplistic, even offensive, stereotypes of Caribbean paradises. Small, highly-indebted middle-income developing countries, like those in the Caribbean, which are very vulnerable to natural disasters and international economic convulsions; have especial concerns which the international community is obliged to address properly in partnership with the people of our region. External shocks, derived from nature or the workings of an uneven casino capitalism, are not merely episodic to our Caribbean; they are a constant feature of our regional economies.

Mr. President,

Central to our urgent reexamination and reconfiguration of the existing economic apparatus is the recognition that our modern context and individual national characteristics do not lend themselves to strict classical or Keynesian

economic prescriptions or their variants. In the case of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and our Caribbean neighbours, our peculiarities of size, openness and vulnerability require uniquely homegrown economic policies that are rooted not in any prevailing ideology or fashionable theories from outside; but in a sensible, flexible and focused practicality. We have little interest in esoteric arguments about the role of the State in economic activity, because, historically, our national governments have been a force for good in the stimulation, diversification and growth of our economies in tandem with the private and cooperative sectors. While we welcome and solicit assistance and consultation with relevant institutions and organisations, such consultations must be free of the type of textbook orthodoxies or formulaic prescriptions that are inapplicable to our times and circumstances. Our path to development must be our own.

The cause of development, as a goal and as a right, has suffered from the neglect of the international community in recent, post-crisis years. Within the United Nations system, the current budget for peacekeeping dwarfs the resources allocated to fostering development, even as we recognise that most conflict is rooted in underdevelopment. The age-old pledges of developmental assistance have been skirted, and their fulfillment delayed, by States that cite their own struggles with the global economic fallout. As a result, even as we contemplate post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, it is painfully apparent that the Millennium Development Goals will not be met across large swaths of our planet. The poor, especially in Asia, Africa, **the Pacific**, Latin America and the Caribbean can hardly be expected to wait any longer for relief and sustainable development.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is thankful to the nations and organisations that have found it possible to continue extending their hand in cooperation with our people, even in difficult economic times. The support and assistance of these States and organisations is a mark of their friendship, solidarity, and strong global citizenship.

Mr. President,

The prolonged global economic uncertainties have propelled the international economy into a dangerous new phase. Even the International Monetary Fund has so concluded. In the process, the crisis has found the principals wanting, even innocent of the extant condition, with no clear idea as to the way forward.

In both global economics and politics, the *ancien régime* is passing. The discerning acknowledge that a transition is at large but immense challenges arise immediately from at least four pertinent queries: First, is the transition manageable or must it be played out in a chaotic manner? Secondly, assuming that the transition is manageable, how is it to be managed in the most efficacious way, and in whose interest? Thirdly, is this a transition to a dead end? And fourthly, given that the transition itself, like all human condition, is dynamic, what is the destination of this transition?

It is a truism that men and women make history not in circumstances of their own choosing, but in those which they meet, which they inherit, which emerge on their watch. Noteworthy is the fact that the histories of nations and the ghosts of the dead weigh heavily on the brain of the living. Often unacknowledged is the abiding truth that each people possesses its own history, its own legitimacy, its own nobility, and its own trajectory for further ennoblement.

Unfortunately, the power of some to define things globally distorts these elemental truths. It is well-known that the lion's view of history does not coincide with that of the gazelle or the lamb; the elephant and the ant do not see things eye-to-eye. But human beings possess the capacity to go beyond these limitations of the animal kingdom. That is fundamentally why we have gathered together under the rubric of the United Nations with a Charter so uplifting and magnificent in its ideals and purposes that they constitute the best hope for the human race. Arrogant and unbridled power, from whatever source, is thus to be contained. It is always thus wise to remember that the greatest exercise of power is the restraint in the use of that power. That is true within and between nations. It is the surest way for the malevolent across the globe to be accorded no space to flourish and to be defeated.

Mr. President,

It is within this large context, that the text of a prosperous, safe, independent Palestinian State must be written alongside a secure state of Israel, living in friendship and non-belligerence. This is a matter of grave urgency; the injustice meted out to Palestine must end now. So, too, must continue our global quest for inter-faith dialogue and an alliance of civilisations, amidst their splendid diversity. Similarly, let us not forget our pledged solidarity to Haiti.

Likewise, reparations for the genocide committed against indigenous peoples, and for African slavery must continue to be pursued vigorously on our international agenda.

All of this is achievable by, and through, the United Nations. Thus, our collective will can bear fruit abundantly through the strengths and possibilities of wise leadership, peaceful dialogue, among and between sovereign nations, international cooperation, and regional compacts.

Mr. President,

Closer to home, our developmental and political partnerships increasingly reflect a spirit of strengthened regional integration and greater South-South cooperation. In the immediate post-colonial phase of our national development, the nations of the Caribbean and Latin America oftentimes had stronger and closer relationships with distant colonial powers and developed nations than we did with the countries in our immediate neighborhood. After centuries of colonial conquest, settlement, and exploitation, our deepening bonds of friendship, cooperation and integration within the Caribbean and Latin America are a fundamental manifestation of our States' growing independence and political maturity.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines enjoys membership in a number of inter-connected circles of regional integration. The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) is an economic union with a shared currency, judiciary and nascent representative assembly. The fifteen-member Caribbean Community (CARICOM) also furthers the cause of Caribbean integration with important implications for trade and the free movement of people. Our State is a proud member of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), which has created bonds of socio-economic solidarity and cooperation among Caribbean, Central and South American States. CARIFORUM, the Association of Caribbean States and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) are also homegrown manifestations of our peoples' desire to forge linkages and partnerships with our regional brothers and sisters.

The strength and genuine cohesion of these growing regional integration initiatives is built on a solid foundation of shared experiences and common values. The members of the OECS and CARICOM are bastions of good governance, democracy and the rule of law, and we share those experiences and aspirations with our South and Central American sister-states, which have also established unshakable foundations of democracy and good governance after fitful periods of political unrest and foreign interference in the past. The upcoming 7th October presidential election in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is but one example of the manner in which that country and the region continue to institutionalize popular, participatory democratic systems that reflect and respect the will of the people.

Mr. President, even as we strengthen linkages with our immediate neighbours, we remain deeply committed to our historical ties and traditional friendships. The bonds that we share with our friends in Europe, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States are as strong as they are mutually beneficial. As a multi-island nation, the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines have always been highly migratory and outward-looking – so much so that even the words of our national anthem memorialize our proclivity for travel to distant lands. Many of the largest and most vibrant cities of our nationals exist not in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, but in major metropolitan hubs including those in Brooklyn, Toronto, and London. Those productive and hardworking centers, and many others, have immeasurably enriched their adopted homes and provided needed remittances to relatives in the land of their birth. We remain grateful to those friendly States that have opened their doors and embrace to our migrants, and we view the ongoing, hassle-free movement of our peoples back and forth as the truest testament of our friendship and solidarity.

Mr. President,

The recent increase in regional conflicts and unrest around the world cannot be ignored. The hopefulness and idealistic optimism that may have imbued much of the early days of the so-called “Arab Spring” has been replaced by a cynical fatalism and rampant political opportunism in many important quarters. In other continents, some nations flirt with border wars, while others grapple with insidious and barbaric terrorism. In the midst of this global upheaval, we have witnessed the aggressive reemergence of those that would seek to reshape the world in their own image and to their own purposes. Would-be interventionists, unilateralists and hegemons – both new and old – have rushed to fill and exploit political vacuums, to settle ancient grudges, and to strengthen their grip on global or

regional power. It is a pattern that predates colonialism and the Cold War, and one that once again brings into focus many of the United Nations' founding principles. These principles, which bind us, cannot be ignored, reinterpreted or sacrificed on the altar of poll-driven political expediency and electoral ambition. We have bound ourselves together in the solemn goal of promoting peace, not fostering wars; of self-determination, not unilateral intervention; of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, not the callous disregard for the wellbeing of our fellow man. To depart from these principles – explicitly or by implication – would be to abandon the better angels of our nature, and to succumb to the forces that made this institution necessary in the first place.

Mr. President,

The war against global terror is real, and is being fought by all responsible states on multiple fronts. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is firm and unequivocal in our rejection of all forms of terrorist activity, and in our revulsion at the methods and twisted logic that accompany this barbarism. Our friends and brothers in the United States of America are often unfortunately and disproportionately targeted by these repulsive killers, most recently in the deeply saddening murder of Christopher Stevens, the United States Ambassador to Libya, and some of his staff. We support unreservedly the United States' determination to bring Ambassador Stevens' killers to justice.

At the same time, we are baffled at the continued reference to the Republic of Cuba in some quarters as a state sponsor of terrorism. The undisputed evidence is that Cuba neither supports nor harbours terrorists of any type. Indeed, the Cuban government – itself a victim of orchestrated terror campaigns – has cooperated on numerous occasions with the governments of both its allies and ideological opponents in the fight against terrorism. It has also played a useful and constructive role in facilitating peace talks between governments and armed rebel groups in Latin America. These facts are not contested. As such, to label Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism, in any context, is to cheapen our shared global struggle against that insidious scourge.

In his famous 1960 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, then-President Fidel Castro observed that *“hysteria can go to any length; hysteria is capable of making the most unlikely and absurd claims.”* This particular absurd and unlikely claim, like the absurdity that undergirds the continued economic embargo against Cuba, is one that is best abandoned.

Mr. President,

The fascinating rapprochement unfolding across the Taiwan straits between the Peoples' Republic of China and the Republic of China-Taiwan, lends practical weight to the reasonable and overdue call for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the specialised agencies of the United Nations. My country, and several others in the Caribbean and Central America, bear testimony to Taiwan's principled conduct of its inter-governmental relations. Surely, the time has now come for this exemplar of the magnificent Chinese civilization to be permitted to participate in the work of various agencies of this world body.

Mr. President,

Allow me to turn to other existential challenges facing my country, my region, and the world. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is angered by the continuing and inexcusable failure of the States assembled in this room to move decisively towards a meaningful and legally binding climate change treaty. Entire nations that currently occupy this Assembly, whose representatives sit among us as friends and equals, may simply cease to exist as a result of our inaction and political cowardice. Other nations, including my own, are already victim of increasingly intense and frequent storms, hurricanes and weather events. These changes threaten not only our way of life, but risk reversing our recent developmental progress.

The islands of our planet are at war against climate change, warming temperatures and rising seas. This war is not a future event, it is a present-day and ongoing battle. As all of you in this Assembly are aware, it is a war that we are currently losing. The survival of our islands is at stake, and the responsibility for immediate change lies undisputedly with those whose reckless pollution over generations has led us to the brink of catastrophe. In a different time and context, Winston Churchill inspired his people and the world to *“fight on the seas and oceans [and] defend our island, whatever the cost may be.”* Today, Excellencies, know this: We shall fight the rising seas and encroaching oceans and defend our islands' right to exist at any cost. We call on all nations to join us in the fight, for this is a war that can still be won. Our negotiations to arrest climate change are not merely some arcane

academic or diplomatic pursuit, and cannot be treated as any interminable, run-of-the-mill United Nations process. Let us set aside narrow, short-term interests and act as we are capable of acting: for the benefit and protection of all mankind.

Mr. President,

Another existential threat whose solution has fallen victim to UN paralysis is our common pursuit of a global, robust and binding arms trade treaty. In the Caribbean, over 70 per cent of homicides are committed with firearms, a remarkable statistic for a region that produces not one single gun or bullet. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has a largely unarmed constabulary and lacks a standing army, yet we struggle daily against an influx of illicit and untraceable firearms that poses a grave threat to our national security and way of life. The producers of firearms, as well as the source and destination markets for illicit narcotics, can and must cooperate to restrict and regulate the international flow of small arms, light weapons and ammunition. While we have failed in our initial attempt to forge an arms trade treaty, I call on this Session of the General Assembly to redouble its efforts to negotiate such a binding agreement before we reconvene this debate next September.

Mr. President,

The people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are strong and fiercely independent. It is an independence forged in the heroic struggles of our indigenous and Garifuna peoples against genocide, and hardened in the fires of our resistance to slavery, indentureship, colonial and neocolonial domination. Our strength, our independence and our sovereignty do not permit us to look to the United Nations or any other country or group of countries for the solutions to our problems and challenges. However, as a small state in an interconnected world, we recognise that many of the difficulties we face have been born and incubated beyond our national boundaries. The United Nations is our primary multilateral vehicle to address and confront these externally-imposed challenges.

As such, today's statement is not intended merely to chronicle the global ills that have befallen Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. No. It is a call for principled and practical global action to address and resolve these problems. To do so, we stand ready to work with you, Mr. President, and all States to effect meaningful change in this Assembly and throughout our planet.

Ernest Hemingway once wrote that "*moral courage is a rarer commodity than bravery in battle or great intelligence. Yet it is the one essential, vital quality of those who seek to change a world which yields most painfully to change.*" Today, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines calls on this body, and on all nations assembled herein, to harness that essential moral courage to produce change in a world whose potential is limitless, and whose problems are soluble. The rhetoric of change and hope may lack the cachet that it enjoyed hitherto, but we still believe that our peoples and governments possess within us the courage and conviction collectively, to change and materially improve the condition of our nations' citizens.

Mr. President, let this 67th Session of the General Assembly establish conclusively that our faith is well placed. I thank you.