



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

H.E. Camillo M. Gonsalves

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

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**General Debate
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We gather this week to reaffirm our commitment to peace, justice and development.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines proudly recognises His Excellency John Ashe, son of our Caribbean soil and immediate past President of the United Nations General Assembly, for his invaluable contribution in advancing the international agenda during his superlative tenure. We joyously welcome you, Mr. President, as our new standard-bearer. As part of the African Diaspora, we celebrate with the Continent in claiming you as one of our own, and investing the same faith and confidence in your role as do the people of your native Uganda.

Mr. President,

Fifteen years into the 21st Century, the challenges of our times have caused some nations to question the value or role of sovereignty in an increasingly borderless world. Globalisation and modernity have unleashed a number of forces that operate independently of national governments or borders: The ills of climate change, communicable diseases, and economic contagion spread like wildfire as external shocks that pose serious developmental and existential threats beyond the scope of individual states to address. Groups have emerged – from terrorists to drug cartels to certain rapacious multinationals – that span the globe and exploit systemic weaknesses to further their own nefarious self-interest.

The pressures of keeping pace in an interconnected world have led to suggestions that we can no longer rely on a traditional rulebook that does not specifically contemplate our modern challenges. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines emphatically rejects this suggestion. The “rulebook” that governs our international cooperation is the United Nations Charter, and its principal, golden, rule is that of respect for the sovereign equality of all States. To be sure, certain administrative aspects of our rulebook are clearly long overdue for meaningful reform – like the composition and working methods of our fossilized and increasingly irrelevant Security Council. However, the principles that inform our Charter and undergird this Assembly are timeless.

Any attempt to deviate from the Charter – in word, deed or spirit – would constitute an assault on sovereignty, a departure from diplomacy and the improvisation of international law on the fly. Loss of sovereignty has never benefitted the weak or powerless. Erosion of sovereignty has never restrained the interests of the powerful. The list of nations whose sovereignty has been violated in the interest of great power convenience grows inexorably longer; while the tally of those whose populations are demonstrably better off for such violations remains tragically short. Accordingly, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines rejects the choice between modern interconnectivity and traditional sovereignty as false, and intended to accelerate a global slide into lawless unilateralism.

As upholders and adherents of international law we continue to struggle in search of common themes to help us understand which coup d’etat is legal and which is not. Which foreign intervention is just and which is criminal. Which particular sovereignty or territorial integrity is a worth fighting for, and which should be conveniently disregarded and swept under the rug of endless, impotent debate. Which national border constitutes a barrier, and which represents an invitation. Which WTO decision will be enforced to the detriment of the weak, and which, as in the case of our CARICOM neighbour Antigua and Barbuda, will be ignored by the guilty, but powerful party. As a small, open, vulnerable state, we cannot accept the suggestion that our existence rests on the whim, generosity or benign neglect of powerful states. International law and sovereign equality are the bulwarks against the type of naked aggression and unilateralism that have too often led our nations to the precipice of war.

Mr. President,

The cancer of terrorism continues to spread. The world has witnessed the celebration of savagery and the multiplication of misery by those who sow death and hatred in the name of religion. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, like every other civilised nation, is outraged at the global rise of militant groups that commit unspeakable acts of mass violence in their quest to enforce a brutal and indefensible social order.

However, the terrorists' disregard of national borders and sovereignty is no excuse for us to do the same. We must not stoop to their level in neglecting the bedrock principles of the peaceful coexistence of nations. Nor must we ever repeat the mistake of believing that terrorism is something that can be harnessed or supported to further some greater political objective. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines cannot accept that the difference between noble rebel and evil "terrorist" can hinge on something as arbitrary as which side of a border they decide to perform their rapes, beheadings and bombings. We unequivocally support genuine efforts targeted at eliminating this scourge, and call for global solidarity and international cooperation in this urgent cause. Politics may make for strange bedfellows, but in a civilised world, humanity must always trump ideology in the fight against murderous barbarism.

Mr. President,

The political manipulation of the term "terrorist" threatens our shared resolve to eliminate its growing menace. Nowhere is this manipulation more glaringly objectionable than in the United States' false designation of the Republic of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. Cuba has been a victim of state terrorism, a condemner of state terrorism, and a collaborator in the fight against state terrorism. Meanwhile, other actors nakedly support and lavishly fund the most despicable terrorist groups without so much as a hint of public reproach. It is unimaginable that the United States, an unquestioned global leader in the fight against terrorism, and target of the most heinous attacks, would want to distract itself, or its allies, from the fight at hand by maintaining its unfounded characterisation of Cuba.

Similarly, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates the call of the overwhelming majority of states for an immediate end to the illegal economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba. The external projection of political self-interest is not a sovereign exercise, but a retrograde and anachronistic attack on the very principles that undergird this institution. The United States is a far greater nation than this petty, punitive and illegal embargo suggests. We encourage it to demonstrate the courage to cast aside this Cold War relic.

Mr. President,

We are one month removed from the disastrous consequences of yet another violent conflict between Israel and the State of Palestine. Thousands are dead, and thousands more were wounded, the overwhelming majority being Palestinian civilians.

Whatever the motivations for this particular conflict, no one can doubt that the underlying problem remains unaddressed and unresolved. At its root is the invasion, occupation and economic strangulation of Palestine, and the steady, illegal erosion of its internationally established borders. Despite regrettable actions on both sides of this dispute, no amount of political relativism can apportion blame equally between occupier and occupied. The unquestionable right of Israel to exist in peace and defend itself does not and cannot give it unfettered licence to occupy, oppress and suppress the sovereign rights of the Palestinian people. Israel is a powerful, accomplished, democratic nation with powerful friends. It diminishes itself, and the status of its allies, by its unchallenged actions in Palestine. Once again, it is the absence of borders, and the disregard of sovereignty, that threaten to make the concept of a two-state solution nothing more than feel-good rhetoric with limited applicability on the ground.

A great Caribbean artist, Peter Tosh, once lamented in song that while “*everyone is crying out for peace, none are crying out for justice.*” Peace cannot be assumed in the absence of war, nor can it be established in the absence of justice. This Assembly owes the people of Palestine its attention and action in the long overdue quest for real peace and statehood.

Mr. President,

Climate Change does not respect national borders – a fact known all too well in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Despite a tiny carbon footprint and miniscule emissions, our country has nonetheless been repeatedly victimised by weather anomalies partially caused by the historical and continued environmental abuse of major emitters. In the last four years, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has experienced a hurricane, a drought and two floods. The loss and damage caused by those each of those events has resulted in annual double-digit hits to our Gross Domestic Product. Last December, in a mere three hours of unseasonal rainfall, 17% of our GDP was washed away in flash flooding. Lives and livelihoods were lost, homes and infrastructure were destroyed, and a developmental hole was dug from which it will take years to emerge.

Yet, despite the gathering and intensifying global threat of climate change, with its real and ruinous present-day impacts, historical and major emitters continue to act as the planet has time on its side. The excuses offered for continued inaction – be they political, historical, scientific or economic – grow increasingly indefensible. The prospects of genuine progress against climate change become increasingly remote with each passing day of diplomatic dithering, buck-passing and finger-pointing.

Last week, the Secretary-General convened a High-Level Climate Summit here at the UN Headquarters in an admirable attempt to galvanise political will for ambitious and legally binding climate treaty by 2015. However, the tangible results were less than encouraging. Despite some welcome new pledges, the numbers simply don’t add up to anything close to what is required to cap global warming at 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels. Further, the new resources raised and pledged for the financing of adaptation to climate changes effects were a drop in the bucket – akin to having a bake sale to settle the national debt.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is worried that the legally-binding agreement, which we are scheduled to enact next year, will be insufficiently ambitious to solve our looming climate crisis, and that adaptation financing will be woefully short of what is required. If narrow interests and local electoral cowardice force us to retreat behind our national borders and bury our heads in the sands, we may squander a decade of effort, and our only real chance to save the planet upon which we live. The stakes are that high. We cannot afford to fail.

Mr. President,

It is appropriate that you will preside over the launch of the International Decade of People of African Descent, which runs from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2024. The theme of that decade will be “*People of African descent: recognition, justice and development.*” The meaningful and action-oriented implementation of this theme can have far-reaching positive effects in both the African continent and its far-flung Diaspora.

One element of *recognition, justice and development* that will be of central importance to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the wider Caribbean Community is the advancement of our claims for reparatory justice from the European colonizing powers that engaged in native genocide, the transatlantic slave trade, and the prolonged system of chattel slavery itself. Over the past year, CARICOM heads of state and government have unanimously approved a series of policies, structures and initiatives aimed at educating

our populations and engaging former slave holding and slave trading nations in a conversation about reparatory justice.

The level of priority that CARICOM governments accord to issue of reparatory justice cannot be overstated. At the historical root of our region's many developmental impediments is an enduring legacy of slavery that has been the unchanging millstone that we have been forced to carry uphill for generations. We seek the support of the international community in furthering our just and timely cause.

Similarly, in a region still grappling with the after-effects of systematic discrimination, victimisation and human rights violations under the cover of unjust law, we cannot countenance the re-emergence of judicially-sanctioned bigotry within our Caribbean civilisation. The application of the now-year-old decision of the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic continues to retroactively deny thousands of Dominican-born citizens of their rights to nationality, identity and equal protection. The unanimous international condemnation of the decision has led to welcome and increased political interaction between Haiti and the Dominican Republic on a host of bilateral issues. We hold out great hope for those discussions between neighbours. However, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and the wider CARICOM remain outraged at the core human rights violations that have not been corrected and cannot be solved by bilateral *tête-à-tête*. We are beyond the point where continuing human rights violations can be masked behind seemingly benign bureaucracy. We call on the international community to assist our brothers in the Dominican Republic in reinstating the constitutional and human rights of those Dominicans who have been so wrongly stripped of their citizenship and dignity.

Last year, at this podium, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines called on the United Nations to accept its role and offer recompense to the victims of the cholera outbreak that its peacekeepers have been proven to introduce to Haiti. A year later, the UN continues to dodge its moral and ethical responsibility. The legitimacy of this body to conduct future peacekeeping missions and the legacy of its leadership at the highest levels, will be irreparably damaged by failure to immediately redress this glaring wrong.

Mr. President,

The prestige and legitimacy of the United Nations can be further enhanced through further acceptance of the reasonable calls for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the specialised agencies of the United Nations. Taiwan already participates actively and constructively in many critical international bodies. 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,

Your chosen theme for this General Debate – *“Delivering on and Implementing a Transformative Post-2015 Development Agenda”* – reflects a wise focus on a central priority and core strength of this institution. The exercise and advancement of the Right to Development is an overarching priority for the overwhelming majority of the world's peoples. And it is the absence of sufficient developmental progress that is often the root cause of a great deal of global violence and unrest.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda must coalesce around a series of goals and targets that offer a people-centred path of progress for developing countries. In elaborating that agenda, and in this, the International Year of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), it is critical that the vulnerabilities and unique characteristics of SIDS inform that document. The recently-agreed S.A.M.O.A Pathway, which emerged from the historic Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, must

constitute a foundational input in shaping the development agenda in the areas such as concessional financing for development, poverty alleviation, debt relief, disaster risk reduction, oceans management and education.

In that regard, we consider it vital that post-2015 goals and indicators focus equally on targets within developing countries and measurable, timely commitments from development partners. A major shortcoming of the Millennium Development Goals has been the nebulous nature of the so-called Global Partnership for Development. Let us anchor our shared future ambitions in concrete, measurable and predictable action.

Mr. President,

Civilised governments and peoples must respect borders and sovereignty, even if some of the forces unleashed by globalisation and modernity do not. Let us build on what is right and good and proper in our new interconnected world, and cast away not the rulebook, but the excuses for disregarding its time-honoured rules.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines celebrates the good of a world in which every Vincentian student can browse the stacks of an American library using their own Taiwanese computer that was assembled in China. A business environment where we can rely on the support of an American NGO in engaging an Icelandic company and its Canadian counterpart in harnessing our national geothermal resources. We celebrate an international solidarity in which brotherly nations offer support in our time of need after a natural disaster, and engineers and architects converge on our shores to help us rebuild. We welcome technology that allows us the opportunity to communicate, celebrate or commiserate with our migrant diaspora in real time, and affords them the opportunity to send remittances to their families at home from every corner of the globe. We value an international order that allows a tiny state to disagree with a large one, without fear of unjust repercussion. We revel in the regional integration arrangements – like CARICOM and ALBA and CELAC, where sovereignty is respected, and often pooled, in the furtherance of a cooperative, people-centred vision of growth and development.

These are not dreams, but modern realities in our country today. They demonstrate the path of peaceful coexistence and development that are possible when sovereignty is enhanced, not eroded. Any nation can like or dislike another. Approve or disapprove of its decisions. Admonish or praise its actions. Befriend or avoid its governments. These are sovereign rights. But through it all, nations are obliged to respect their counterparts' equal, unfettered right to exist, act, and determine its own political destiny and developmental path.

The challenge of the 21st century is not the obsolescence of *rulebook*, but the outmoded *playbook* of cynical strategies, tactics and inconsistent application of international law by those who see it as a tool to further their goals, rather than a restraint on hegemonic geopolitical ambition. Sovereignty is not the right to erect a wall of repression and injustice around your national borders. Nor is it the right to protect and project your national interests to the detriment of another. It is neither sword nor shield. It is, instead, a responsibility to adhere to an ethic of reciprocity – to do unto other nations, only what you would accept being done unto you.

Thank you.