



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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Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

At the

**General Debate of the
70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the Christian Bible, the Book of Proverbs suggests that mortal men live for threescore and ten years, a number that fairly accurately reflects the current modal life expectancy of the global population. Today, we have assembled for the 70th time in the life of the United Nations, with the legitimate question of whether this imperfect Assembly of mortals has seen its best days, or if, by reason of the strength of our principles and actions, we may endure to overcome tomorrow's challenges.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines looks forward to the wise and experienced stewardship of President Mogens Lykketoft during this 70th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. President Lykketoft – who will also celebrate his 70th birthday during his tenure – can confidently stand on the exceptional works performed by His Excellency Sam Kutesa during last year's Session.

This year, possibly more than at any point in our modern history, our Assembly is beset by global threats and risks that force us to consider the ways in which our core principles of sovereignty and non-interference can overcome today's challenges.

Borderless menaces like terrorism, economic crises, contagious diseases and climate change heed neither geopolitical boundaries nor governmental jurisdiction. Further, the calamitous fallout of military adventurism, economic recklessness or environmental negligence is not confined to discrete national confines. Rather, the chickens often return to roost in far-flung, unexpected and often blameless locales. As such, more than ever, our international relations must be defined by cooperation, collaboration and decisive action.

Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a small, mountainous archipelago of 32 islands scattered across a shimmering Caribbean sea. But the idyll implicit in our verdant peaks and crystal waters is now belied by the grave and gathering threat of climate change. Rising and raging seas attack our coastline and infrastructure from beyond our shores, while rains and climate volatility make landslides and deadly flooding a real and increasingly-frequent internal threat to lives and livelihoods. The intensifying vulnerability of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and its neighboring islands to climate change is clear in the alternating bouts of drought and flooding that have caused hundreds of millions of dollars in loss and damage in my country in successive years. Less than two years ago, devastating flooding washed away 17% of our fragile Gross Domestic Product and claimed 12 lives. Our quest to recover, and to make our people whole again, is a continuing struggle, and one that takes place against a backdrop of hope that we are not soon beset by a similar tragedy.

One month ago, Tropical Storm Erika struck our sister island of Dominica, a mere 150 miles north of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The death and destruction wrought by the storm is heart-rending, and serves as yet another unwanted reminder of the ominous threat of global warming and the precarious nature of our developmental aspirations in the face of an increasingly inhospitable climate.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and other Caribbean countries have joined friendly states in assisting the Commonwealth of Dominica in its hour of need. I beseech other countries that have not yet supported this noble effort of relief, recovery and reconstruction to do so with the utmost urgency and generosity.

Mr. President,

Our existential struggles in the face of climate change inform our posture in the frustratingly meandering negotiations to arrive at a legally-binding agreement within the parameters of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. We are two months away from a deadline for reaching such an agreement at COP 21 in Paris, but the precariousness of our global plight is not matched by the ambition of our partners. Indeed the posturing and recalcitrance of some major emitters suggest that COP 21 may be yet another empty diplomatic dance that prioritizes process over progress.

[Let us be clear: Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, island and coastal states will not settle for any agreement that does not comprehensively and unambiguously bind major emitters to deep and ambitious emissions cuts, and meaningful financing commitments to fund adaptation and mitigation efforts in the most vulnerable countries.]

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is embracing a green future. We are actively engaged in transitioning from fossil fuels to a renewable mix of solar, hydro, and geothermal energy. Within the next three years, 80% of our electricity needs will be provided by renewable energy. If we could control our own climate destiny, and insulate ourselves from the recklessness of other emitters, we would approach the future with greater confidence. *[But we know that our own mitigation efforts are inadequate in the face of a global threat. We know that the politics of delay and denial threaten our very existence. The world has run out of time and excuses. The future cannot be saved by the timid or entrusted to companies whose seductive words of corporate responsibility mask deceptive practices that place profit over planetary survival.]*

Mr. President,

The aftershocks and repercussions of the global economic and financial crisis continue to convulse developing nations. The Crisis cast a shadow on our collective efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and shrouds our newly-adopted Sustainable Development Goals in uncertainty. The measure of our recovery is not the health of corporations or the rate of jobless economic growth, but the ways in which we have reformed our financial

architecture, and the reordering of priorities that places people and the alleviation of poverty at the center of our developmental discourse. [Former U.S. President John F. Kennedy once said that “*if a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.*” The fortress of wealth is not impregnable to the growing unrest and instability born of crushing poverty. Our failure to address and assault global poverty in this era of excess, and innovation, stands as the most stinging rebuke to our existing systems of crass commercialism and unfettered corporate profiteering. In an Assembly shaped by the desire to end global wars, we must remember Gandhi’s admonition that “*poverty is the worst form of violence.*” We cannot simply pay lip service to people’s right to development. Instead, that right must emerge as the driving force in this Assembly’s senior years.]

Mr. President,

The roots of modern poverty and underdevelopment are deep and diverse. But even the most casual student of history will acknowledge the debilitating and continuing impacts of native genocide and the institution of slavery on Caribbean states; they constitute, in the aggregate, an awesome legacy of underdevelopment, an historic bundle of wrongs to be righted. Today I reiterate the united call of the Caribbean Community for reparatory justice from the major participants in, and beneficiaries of, the transatlantic slave trade. Our quest for justice is supported by the 33 members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States and numerous progressive nations globally. The fate of our indigenous peoples and the legacies of slavery and colonial exploitation are neither partisan political talking points nor historical afterthoughts. They are an ever-present modern reality, whose redress remains a noise in our blood and an echo in our bones. [The discussion and engagement with those who benefitted immeasurably from their monstrous crimes must begin in earnest. We are resolute in our pursuit of a just redress and the furtherance of our collective healing and humanization.] These issues must form part of the Post 2015 development conversation; and as part, too, of our combined efforts to uplift the Decade for Peoples of African Descent.

Mr. President,

It pains me that I must yet again speak, and demand appropriate redress, on the subject of retroactive stripping of citizenship of persons of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic, and their forcible deportations to Haiti, a country to which many of these victims have only a vague ancestral connection. [I am aware that certain domestic complexities prompt this deep-seated institutionalized intolerance and discrimination.] We in the Caribbean Community are pledged to work with our Caribbean family in the Dominican Republic to assist in ending this tragedy at the heart of our Caribbean civilization, but the authorities in the Dominican Republic must demonstrate a good faith not merely in words but in deeds.

We in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines cannot remain silent or indifferent in the face of this gross violation of human rights. This is not a migration issue of the type that is currently engulfing the European Union. At its core, this is an international human rights issue of the gravest kind upon which United Nations must pronounce unambiguously. [Accordingly, we demand a full and just resolution of this cynical denial of human rights; we urge the United Nations to stand in firm opposition to those who obstruct and make ill-founded arguments rooted not in international law and

universalist values, but in a jingoistic abuse of the concept of sovereignty in a quest to perpetuate a status quo which is plainly wrong.]

Mr. President,

Seventy years ago, this United Nations was founded with a central goal of “*sav[ing] succeeding generations from the scourge of war*” – the very first principle enunciated in our Charter. Today, wars and the rumours of wars continue to bring untold sorrow to mankind. Too often, these wars are the product of great power arrogance and decisions based not in fact, but on wishful ideological impulses. The results of these actions and inactions almost invariably exacerbate underlying conflicts and produce unwanted global repercussions. International terrorism threatens us all, and requires concerted international cooperation. Anti-terrorist intervention must not be shaped by which side of a border the terrorist armies happen to encamp or one’s ideological affinity for the governments most threatened by these barbaric hordes. [We have already learned that modern terrorism, wherever it takes root, can threaten peace and prosperity in any corner of the globe. Stamping it out must be a shared and pressing priority.]

Mr. President,

Diplomacy ought to be most active in averting conflict and diffusing disagreements. Within the zone of peace that encompasses Latin America and the Caribbean, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is concerned with the sharpening of rhetoric between our longtime friends and allies in Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Their border dispute, which dates back to the 19th century, has long been constrained by the ties of brotherhood, solidarity and international cooperation. Accordingly, we call for renewed and reinvigorated diplomatic engagement in the management and ultimate resolution of this vexing issue.

Mr. President,

The maintenance and restoration of international peace and security has been the responsibility of the UN Security Council for the last 70 years. The Security Council, more than any other body delineated in our Charter, is unmistakably in a period of doddering dotage, unable to act with the nimbleness or decisiveness necessary to meet modern challenges. The necessity of reform and rebirth, which is acute in any institution entering its eighth decade, is particularly pressing in the case of the Security Council. For too long, reform efforts have fallen victim to the geopolitical ambitions of entrenched Council members and the regional rivalries of legitimate aspirants. This must end. [The clearest signal of the United Nations’ desire to remain relevant in modern times would be a decision on the contours of a reformed and expanded Security Council that recognizes the emergence of new powers, revises working methods, and gives voice to other important perspectives such as those of African and Small Island Developing States.]

Similarly, the important and indispensable work of UN peacekeepers around the world must be above reproach. The United Nations must claim responsibility not only for their successes but their occasional grave failures. Our collective sanctimony rings hollow when the United Nations shirks its undeniable responsibility for spreading cholera in Haiti, to the tune of 9,400 deaths and over 400,000 hospitalised. Legal loopholes cannot mask moral responsibility in this case. Nor can we condemn sexual violence as a war crime while shrugging off the unacceptable actions of some UN Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. Our Assembly has a responsibility to be open and transparent, to meet these sporadic failings head on, and to offer redress to all victims of peacekeeper negligence or aggression.

Mr. President,

On Wednesday, I will stand a few meters away from where I am speaking today to witness the raising of the flag of the State of Palestine alongside other states' flags on the UN compound. The overwhelming decision to fly the Palestinian flag here at the UN is an unmistakable endorsement of a true two-state solution with a viable and safe Palestine living alongside its neighbours in a secure Israel. But the symbolic nature of next week's ceremony is no substitute for continued action to make that two-state solution a reality. With each passing day, realities on the ground make such a solution increasingly difficult. Though the conflict between the states of Israel and Palestine are undeniably complex, they are not beyond the capacity of the parties and the international community to resolve. [However, those who continue to stubbornly obstruct justice and progress in this conflict will be judged harshly by future generations, and will undoubtedly blot the pages of history with the blood of innocent Israelis and Palestinians.]

The Assembly's unambiguous position on Palestine is reminiscent of our longstanding and overwhelming opposition to the United States' commercial and economic embargo against the people of the Republic of Cuba. The embargo has persisted for 55 of the 70 years that the United Nations has been in existence, and its toll is measured in billions of dollars, hundreds of lives, and countless developmental opportunities lost. This year, Presidents Obama and Castro have demonstrated laudable courage in working together to move past years of enmity and mutual mistrust. But the welcome détente between the two countries has not yet led to a lifting of the embargo. There is much more to be done to unshackle the Cuban people from the chains of an unjust, illegal and plainly outmoded blockade. Our collective pressure, so critical to the belated rapprochement, cannot waver. Instead, we must intensify our calls for the complete lifting of this anachronism, and to make whole this rupture in our hemispheric family.

Mr. President,

This 70th year of the United Nations must therefore be a year of not only action, but inclusion, outreach and redress of calcified injustices. As such, we must move beyond our inexplicable exclusion of Taiwan from the work of the specialized agencies of the United Nations. The perspective, experience and example of Taiwan as an active and

responsible global citizen are self-evident arguments in support of their greater inclusion and participation. Taiwan's continued exclusion can neither be explained nor justified by any rational and forward-looking global gathering.

Mr. President,

In this our 70th year, let us pledge ourselves to liberate our nations and our global family from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation and warfare; to emancipate ourselves from the mental slavery of discrimination and learned helplessness; to unshackle our policies from the narrow nationalism, and imperialist ambition, that constrains the limitless possibilities of the human spirit. As nations and peoples we have choices. *[In the 70 years of this Assembly's life we have sometimes chosen unilateralism. Many have chosen militarism. Many have chosen, too, to defer and dissemble.]* Today, as we look toward a complex and uncertain future, let us instead chose love. Love of our fellow human beings, love of our planet, and an abiding love, not of problems, but of their practical solutions. For with love, faith and works, and hope, all things are possible; including a further 70 years, for the better, of this remarkably important global gathering.

I thank you.