

Independence Message 2013

By His Excellency Charles Savarin, DAH

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

3 November 2013

My fellow citizens, residents and visitors to our fair isle,

It is with a deep sense of patriotism and pride in being Dominican, that I warmly embrace the opportunity afforded me to extend this message to you as we celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of our political independence.

In the preamble to our Constitution, we affirm: “that the Commonwealth of Dominica is founded upon the principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the position of the family in the society of free men and free institutions, the dignity of the human person, and the equal and inalienable rights with which all members of the human family are endowed by their creator.”

It is to God therefore, that we must give thanks for seeing us through the many challenges which we have encountered as we journeyed forward as an independent state these last thirty five years.

The period surrounding November 3rd, the anniversary of our independence, has the effect of drawing Dominicans of all walks of life together, wherever they may be in the world, in a kind of homecoming characterized by joyful expressions of brotherhood, as we proudly display and celebrate our Dominican nationhood, heritage and culture.

The theme for our celebrations “One Mission, One Dominica: Celebrating 35”, calls on all citizens and residents alike, to a deeper reflection on the kind of nation we want to build, and to a collective unity of vision and purpose in getting there.

As we continue on this important journey of perfecting our democracy, our institutions, our economic strategies for growth, and for improving the quality of life of all, I invite you to direct your reflections on the provisions of our Constitution as written, on the institutions which it establishes for the good governance of our state, and on all the organizations, development partners and individuals who have stood firmly and consistently by our side in building the country that we cherish as home.

Let us welcome in a special way all our visitors to our shores, more particularly our brothers and sisters living in the Diaspora, who are visiting relatives and friends, and who are looking forward to re-immersing themselves in, and enjoying our rich cultural heritage. We should encourage them to visit our tourism sites; to hike the various segments of our world famous Waitikubuli National Trail, based upon their individual levels of fitness; and to familiarize themselves with the developments which have taken place all over the island since they were last here in their homeland.

One important development to which we are committed is renewable energy, more particularly geothermal energy. We are satisfied that we have the potential not only to generate enough geothermal electricity to meet our needs but also significant surplus which we can export to Martinique and Guadeloupe in the first instance. Less expensive electricity will benefit all consumers and lower the cost of doing business in Dominica. We have pursued this with the support of various development partners including the regional councils of Guadeloupe and Martinique with whom we hope to share the benefits of non-carbon emitting, clean and less expensive generation of electric power. We are also committed to regional cooperation.

To give meaning and relevance to the regional integration movement, we must embrace the freedom of movement and right of establishment provisions of the CARICOM and OECS treaties and welcome our OECS and CARICOM citizens who take up residence here in much the same way that we would expect to be welcomed in other CARICOM and OECS countries in which we seek to reside and work. Our CARICOM Community Passport is one of the most tangible symbols which identifies us as citizens of a wider Caribbean community.

We must also welcome our closest neighbors from Martinique and Guadeloupe with whom we share a Creole culture and language, and who visit us in large numbers at this time of year to participate in our festivities and in particular the World Creole Music Festival and Creole in the Park. Both Martinique and Guadeloupe have expressed their interest in becoming members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). The economic and social benefits of such expanded regional integration are tremendous, especially for us here in Dominica as we are located between these two overseas departments of France.

If we truly embrace regional integration as the way forward for our overall development, we must refrain from statements and actions which in their ordinary meaning could be interpreted as being insular, hateful, racist and xenophobic. In a democracy, we must tolerate differences in opinion on a whole range of subject matters including matters of policy and national development. Debate on such issues must be respectful of other people's views, of the law and the Constitution, and should not degenerate into acrimonious exchanges aimed at destroying the personal or public reputation of those with whom we disagree. In fact, vigorous debate can

be for the common good, as it can assist us in a wider examination of proposals put forward to advance the national interest. We must not however substitute opinion for fact, nor import into our laws and Constitution, provisions which do not exist, in an effort to bolster our arguments. We must rely on the facts as they are, whether they are convenient or inconvenient.

As we observe our 35th anniversary of Independence, let us resolve to put the national interest first and foremost in all our endeavors, and let us treat with each other as members of one Dominican family with one mission, to develop this island state for the benefit of its entire people at home and abroad.

My wife and family join me in extending to one and all God's blessings for an enjoyable and peaceful 35th Anniversary of Independence.