

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

Independence Message 2017

By His Excellency Charles Savarin, DAH

President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

3 November 2017

Fellow Citizens and Residents,

My message to you two years ago on the occasion of the 37th Anniversary of our Independence, reflected our focus and concentration of all our efforts and attention in facing up to, and dealing with the aftermath of the devastation caused by Tropical Storm Erika on the 27th of August 2015. This devastation was very evident throughout our beloved Dominica, more particularly in Petite Savanne and Dubique, where approximately 30 people had lost their lives and the two villages which had been engulfed by landslides, had to be evacuated and were later declared unsafe for continued habitation. With tremendous effort, hard work, commitment and dedication on our part and the support of our regional partners and the international community, we had achieved significant progress in our rehousing effort and were well on our way to fully recover from this great calamity which had befallen our people and our country.

The country had made great strides in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Erika and we were looking to the future with a sense of hope and great optimism. Despite the devastation and setbacks caused by Tropical Storm Erika, the Dominican economy performed well in 2016 recording 2.8 percent growth. In the 2017 Budget Address, the Honourable Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, presented a plan to build a new, modern and prosperous Dominica which would benefit all Dominicans with improved physical infrastructure: roads, bridges, sea and river defences, an expanded housing program, a more fully diversified economy with emphasis on agriculture, tourism, entrepreneurship, human resource development, modern health care facilities in Roseau, Marigot and island wide, and access to a globally interconnected system with a way forward for advanced air and seaport facilities, ICT systems and geothermal electricity development.

Regrettably, on this the occasion of the observance of the 39th Anniversary of our Independence, we are once more addressing a national disaster, the greatest disaster that has ever befallen our nation – Hurricane Maria, which

totally destroyed and/or severely damaged all that we had built over the years; road infrastructure and public utilities, housing stock, tourism and business establishments, crops and the loss of loved ones, even the very forests which had earned us the sobriquet “Nature Island of the Caribbean,” were not spared. As with the aftermath of Erika, a number of Government projects and programs have had to be put on hold to focus on relief and recovery.

As with Erika, Maria has come and gone and we are left to deal with the aftermath. We have been there before with David (1979), Erika (2015) and calamities in between; and we will and must rebuild after Maria, and we must do so better and stronger. This time we will need to apply an even greater sense of togetherness, commitment, dedication and determination, as we are in this war to combat climate change together; not as Catholics and Protestants but as Children of the one true God, not as Labourites, UWPites, and Freedomites, but as Citizens of Dominica; not as Locals and Diasporas but as Nationals of Dominica; not as Rich and Poor, but as one People.

In normal times, we take the fundamental right to freedom of expression enshrined in our Constitution to its absolute limit. There are those of us who whether for religious, political or personal reasons, have people whom we love to hate, and we show this by never having a good or kind word to say about such people. Our favourite platform for giving expression to such views is social media of one form or another.

These are not normal times and negative words can have negative effects and paint us as a people and a country in a negative light regionally and internationally. We now need to love our neighbour and to really become our brother’s keeper in our thoughts, in our words and in our deeds.

We should be further comforted by the tremendous support we have and continue to receive from regional governments and the international community and the quick and great progress we have made in the direction of relief and recovery in a very short space of time and under very trying and difficult circumstances. Most parts of the country have been cleaned up and cleared of debris. Clearing is still ongoing; communication by road was restored within days; electric power and telecom services have been restored in parts of Portsmouth and parts of Roseau and environs and is expanding daily; water was restored in many areas including Roseau and environs within weeks; there has been a resumption of commercial passenger traffic at Douglas-Charles and Canefield airports; schools are being reopened on a phased basis; the Princess Margaret Hospital can now offer most of its usual services; the Portsmouth Hospital

and all major health centers are functional; and most of the banks and many commercial houses have opened their doors for regular business from Monday to Friday.

The Prime Minister in his address to the Nation on Monday, 16th October 2017, highlighted Government's economic recovery and rebuilding plan.

Prior to the announcement of the plan, the Government had put the necessary mechanism in place to facilitate salary and pension payments; Government also announced a six-month waiver of duties on construction materials and food; and offered convening power to ensure insurance payouts are faster and bank charges lower. The Prime Minister also informed that two of the CBI funded projects namely, the Jungle Bay Resort in Soufriere and Kempinski Hotel in Portsmouth, will recommence construction later this month.

Our greenery which makes us so unique has started to return. So my fellow citizens and residents, there is hope for a better and brighter future. There is hope to build the new, modern, climate resilient and prosperous Dominica that will serve as a model to others. To succeed in this national endeavour, we need to rise up from the ruins of Maria and rally together as one people setting aside all differences and connected in heart, mind and spirit to rebuild a better and stronger Dominica.

The theme chosen for the observance of this year's Independence, "Building A Brighter Future Together," requires us, whether at home or abroad, to come together to rebuild and restore our beloved country and to look to the future with great optimism. As we celebrate the 39th year of our Independence let us look out for the vulnerable members of our communities to ensure that their needs are met; let us continue to contribute to the recovery and restoration effort by getting involved in a project in our respective neighborhoods now, on Community Day of service, and beyond. Let us also remember in our prayers our sister territories who suffered great devastation at the hands of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and continue to offer our support to them in whatever way we can, to bring much needed comfort and relief.

I wish to take this opportunity to register my profound thanks and appreciation to our first responders – our police, fire service and medical personnel who were tested and challenged by Maria but remained at their post without relief in some cases for 48 hours; to the many volunteer agencies and regional and international organisations and governments who quickly responded to the urgent relief and recovery effort and to the cleanup crews and public utility personnel who have and continue to work unwaveringly to restore our country to normalcy in the shortest possible time.

We must as a people and Government continue to seek God's guidance and wisdom to face the many challenges that lie ahead in our effort to rebuild our beloved country better and stronger.

Let us continue to lift our hearts, hands and voices in thanksgiving to Almighty God for His bountiful blessings and steadfast love. Let us acknowledge that in light of the intensity of the storm, the death toll could have been much higher, and give thanks for the intervention of our loving and merciful God.

My wife and I convey our deepest condolences to the families and friends who have lost loved ones during the passage of Hurricane Maria and pray God's strength to carry them through during this period of great trauma and deep loss. We also wish to empathize with the members of the business community who suffered great loss as a consequence of Hurricane Maria and its aftermath.

My wife and I also wish to take this opportunity to extend to each citizen and resident of this beloved nation, our very best wishes for an enjoyable 39th Anniversary of Independence.

The road ahead is going to be long and hard but there is nothing we cannot accomplish with the help of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

May God continue to bless us and keep us and our beloved Country, the Commonwealth of Dominica.