

**Address to the Nation**  
**Delivered By**  
**The Honourable Edison C. James**  
**Prime Minister of The Commonwealth of Dominica**  
**On the Occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence**

**Windsor Park, Roseau**

**November 3, 1998**

Your Excellency President Vernon Lorden Shaw and Mrs. Shaw

Hon. Speaker of the House of Assembly

Hon. Ministers of Government

Hon. Members of Parliament

Former Heads of State and Heads of Government of Dominica

Your Lordship the Bishop and Members of the Clergy

Your Lordship the Resident Judge

Your Excellency Jose Andueza, Minister of the President's Secretariat of Venezuela

Your Excellencies Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

Specially Invited Guests

Uniformed Groups

Friends of Dominica

Fellow Dominicans

It is now twenty years since we lowered the Union Jack and hoisted our own national flag. On that day, 3rd November, 1978, the nation's feet were set upon a path which was uncharted and unsure. To many, the challenge of independence seemed so daunting that it was a path they feared to tread. Many others though, with faith in the Almighty and confidence in our people, made that quantum leap.

Today, as we stand at the door of the 21st century, let us give thanks to the Great Master for bringing us thus far. Much has been achieved. Much more remains to be achieved.

I am delighted to welcome all of you who have come to celebrate with us the anniversary of our independence. It is a welcome which is extended to visitors and returning Dominicans alike.

I recognize in a very special way His Excellency the President, Mr. Vernon Lorden Shaw and Mrs. Shaw. It is their first attendance at a National Day Parade as holders of their high office. Mr. President, as you know, our people have had their say. We did not all say the same thing, but now we all rejoice in the choice. Welcome Sir.

I also take this opportunity to thank in the name of all, His Excellency Mr. Crispin Sorhaindo for his five years of service as Head of State. I have no doubt that he will continue rendering service to his country and to his countrymen in other capacities.

I acknowledge the representatives of countries which have diplomatic relations with Dominica, and those of other friendly countries. Some of you have taken up your assignment during the course of the year, and are celebrating with us for the first time. Congratulations and best wishes. I ask that we remember at this moment Her Excellency Cherrie Orr, High Commissioner for Jamaica, who a few months ago, two days after paying her farewell visit to Dominica, passed away in Antigua. We extend once more our condolences to her family and friends, as well as to the Government and People of Jamaica.

I am aware that many of our visitors are here to participate in what is now uniquely Dominican, the World Creole Music Festival. The encounter with you at Festival City leaves me in no doubt that you have enjoyed yourselves. Thank you for coming. Thank you on behalf of the hoteliers and others in the Tourism and Service Sectors. We look forward very much to seeing you again next year.

There are those who suggest that festivals have no place in national development. We do not agree. We know how dull Jack would be if he worked and never played. But he would be worse off still if he did not work and only played. That is why since assuming office, our Independence themes have urged citizens,

- in 1995, to work for National Development
- in 1996, to serve (work) with Pride and Dignity
- in 1997, to work to achieve,
- and this year, 1998, to "Work towards Excellence".

I am sure your will agree that when it comes to work, your leaders in government have been leading by example.

Fellow Dominicans! It is only through the production of excellent goods and services that we will succeed and survive in this increasingly competitive Global Village. You know all too well of the pressures that are being exerted on our banana industry through the challenge to the European marketing regime for fruit from the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It is a challenge which is as relentless as it is baseless, and it is evil.

Our friend and neighbour, with whom we stand side by side in the battle against the drug barons is quite prepared to see us sacrificed on the altar of the greed of the multi-nationals. Our chances of survival will be significantly enhanced only as we continue to produce bananas of excellent quality on a consistent basis. On your behalf, I thank all farmers for their efforts so far and encourage them to continue their good work. They can rest assured of government's continued support.

Fellow Dominicans! As we work towards excellence, let us do so in the service we give to each other, and to all those whom we are called upon to serve. Last year I urged that we take a hard look at our attitudes to work. I promised then that the social partners would be brought together to determine the approach to bringing about improvements. Since then discussions have been held with the Unions, the Employers, the Dominica Association of Industry and Commerce and the Permanent Secretaries. A Committee on work ethics and work attitudes has been set up and is expected to report early in the New Year.

The report of the Statutory Minimum wages Committee has been received. Its recommendations will be considered by Cabinet shortly. So too will be the findings of the Labour Force survey carried out by the Statistics Division. All these and more, Fellow Dominicans, point to a committed effort by your Government to address the question of the rights and responsibilities of the working population. It is in this context also that we intend to take legislative action to establish a Standards Bureau and to provide the consumer with appropriate protection.

Our goal is excellent work, as manifested through the production of excellent goods and excellent service.

Fellow Dominicans! To achieve our goal, we must be an educated people. This Government is educating its people. For us, education is a priority, especially so the education of our young people.

It is because of this that we have trained a full cadre of teachers who will drive the Basic Education Reform Programme.

It is because of this that we introduced and developed the free school text book programme.

It is because of this that during the year, we began construction work on the Grand Bay Secondary School building and expanded the Portsmouth Secondary School.

It is because of this that children in the catchment area from Atkinson to Morne Jaune were able to receive Secondary education in Castle Bruce for the first time in our history.

It is because of this that access to Secondary education through the Common Entrance examination has moved from a paltry thirty per cent five years ago to a healthy sixty per cent today - well on the way to universal Secondary education.

It is because of this that expenditure on grants and scholarships for college and University education has increased from EC\$800,000 in 1994/1995 to the current level of EC\$3 million.

It is because of this that we are paying increased attention to the technical training programme.

It is because of this that we are introducing at the Clifton Dupigny College an associate degree programme in such disciplines as nursing, pharmacy, tourism, architecture and others.

It is because of this that we say thanks to our teachers throughout the country, and urge that they continue delivering quality and excellent service, no matter to which Association they may belong.

As I speak of the youth, it is appropriate, at this stage to recognize and applaud the success which they have achieved in winning the under-seventeen netball tournament in St. Kitts, the Sir Garfield Sobers under-fifteen cricket tournament in Barbados, and the Windward Islands inter-school tournament in St. Lucia. Then there is young Wayne Phillip, who is now a member of the West Indies 'A' team.

I salute you young people. But we will do more. In the not too distant future work will begin on the transformation of this very arena, the Windsor Park, into a modern sports facility. This will include international standard football and cricket fields, net-ball, basketball and volleyball courts, and a national standard athletic track. This new stadium will give our sportsmen and sportswomen the means to develop and display their talents right here in Dominica, for the

satisfaction and enjoyment of our people. We will not allow anyone to destroy your stadium just for the sake of destroying it.

Fellow Dominicans! I am aware of the anxiety which our nation has been experiencing over the past few days because of the seismic activity taking place in the south of the island. I wish to assure you that government and all those working with us are concerned primarily about the safety of all our people. I know many people in the areas more directly affected by the recent tremors are frightened. Do not panic, and avoid depending on, or spreading rumours. Government has appointed persons to provide correct and necessary information.

Be assured also that we are taking the necessary action to mitigate the impact, should there be a volcanic eruption. We thank all those members of the Task Force who have been working tirelessly in the face of this latest threat, a threat which further highlights the vulnerability of our island states to natural disasters.

A disaster of another type happened just over two months ago, when we experienced our first commercial plane crash. Eleven persons, most of them young Dominicans perished. We continue to mourn our loss, and our hearts go out to their families and loved ones left behind.

The tremendous outpouring of emotional energy which was manifested at the memorial service in Marigot showed that our nation can come together. But we do not have to await a national disaster for this to happen. Let it be so "tous les jours!!"

By this, I do not for one moment suggest that criticisms must cease. Let the criticisms flow - we thrive on them, because they spur us on.

They spur us on to have the Morne Trois Pitons National Park declared a World Heritage Site.

They spur us on to provide water for our indigenous people for the first time in five hundred years.

They spur us on to put in place a recovery plan for our vital banana industry and to provide growers with a guaranteed price.

They spur us on to encourage Ross University to expand its business here, showing confidence in the investment climate and improving the job opportunities for our people.

They spur us on to expand economic activities in the Portsmouth area - our second town.

They spur us on to play our role in the Regional and International fora, whether it be in the EU/ACP negotiations, the Summit of the Americas, the WTO in Geneva, the battle to defend the regional banana industry or in helping to bring together the brothers and sisters in St. Kitts and Nevis.

They spur us on to take legislative action to improve the lot of musicians, artistes, spouses, and retired non-established workers through appropriate amendments to the Title by Registration, Pension and Copyright acts.

They spur us on towards the achievement of our goal to construct an international airport in our country as we look forward to a positive outcome to the donors meeting to be held in Barbados in three days' time.

They spur us on to be confident of a significant increase in economic activity over the coming months, and an improvement in the quality of life of our people.

Let the critics do their work. Your Government is doing its work. Your Government is in control. Your Government is in charge.

Fellow Dominicans! Last year I informed the nation that the report of the Inquiry into the conduct and management of the Police Force had been received, and that the recommendations contained therein were being examined.

Since then, the authorities vested with the power to exercise disciplinary control over the Police Force have assumed jurisdiction over the matters requiring disciplinary proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, and have taken the decisions required by the facts and circumstances of the cases.

Apart from dealing with irregularities and disciplinary matters, the report of the Police Inquiry made a number of important recommendations regarding the Force as a whole, the infrastructure, police buildings, communications and other services and management and deployment policies. In order to address some of these concerns, we were able through the Commonwealth Secretariat and in association with the British Executive Services Overseas (BESO) to obtain the services of a former Commissioner of Police and Police Adviser to undertake a three months consultancy on the Police Force, and to advise on an implementation plan vis-à-vis the recommendations of the Inquiry. This ended last week.

I have now received the report from the consultant, and Cabinet will be reviewing its main recommendations with a view to their expeditious implementation.

I wish to thank the Commonwealth Secretariat and the British Executive Services Overseas for their great assistance in this matter, and I will be inviting the further support and participation of the Government of the United States, Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth and friendly countries in order to implement the aspects of the report that deal with the work urgently required for the rehabilitation and enhancement of the Police infrastructure.

In keeping with the recommendations of the Report, Mr. Simon Darroux has been appointed substantively to the office of Chief of Police with retrospective effect to the 6th of May, 1998. I invite all leaders and persons of power and influence in the country, as well as the general public, to give him the fullest support as he continues the great task of providing strong leadership to the Police force and maintaining law and order in the country.

We express our thanks to former Chief of Police Mr. Blanchard for his years of service as head of the Force. Our deep sympathy is extended to the family and relatives and friends of Inspector Michael Sylvester who died suddenly a few days ago.

Fellow Dominicans! The Constitution Review Commission appointed last year has been working. Wide-ranging consultations have been held with citizens of Dominica in the main communities - urban and rural. I am advised that very many persons and institutions have submitted memoranda containing their views on the provisions of the Constitution that require amendment. All the political parties have been consulted. Former Heads of State and Heads of Government, Senior Public Officers - past and present, the private sector and the Trade Unions have all submitted their views and recommendations. Indeed, the Constitution review process has been a fine example of democratic Constitution making - a process which stands in sharp contrast with a similar exercise undertaken in 1982.

I wish to give the nation the assurance that there will be the fullest consultation in Parliament on all the major recommendations of the report with a view to arriving at the widest consensus on its implementation.

Fellow Dominicans! Today, the nation recognises those who, by their hard work, by their dedication to the job at hand, and by their determination to apply the best of themselves to the task, have enriched the lives of Dominicans in many fields of endeavour. Whether it is in the area of environmental conservation, whether it is in giving selfless humanitarian service to the elderly, or in the preservation and dissemination of knowledge of our indigenous culture, or whether it is in the field of sports development and character building of the young through encouragement and example, the persons whom we are honouring today have all autographed their works with excellence.

Fellow Dominicans! I must now on your behalf thank our friends in the region and beyond for the valuable support and assistance which they have given over the past several years. To name names might result in omission and offence. But for your help in Education, both the physical building and Human Resource Development; in fisheries development, the provision of fire services and road construction equipment; for your commitment to airport construction, social and cultural development, your support in the fight against drug trafficking, assistance with

hospital infrastructure, restructuring and improving our banana industry, and much more. I say thanks.

Fellow Dominicans! We are only fourteen months away from the new millennium. Between now and then, we will reach our own national milestone, our 21st birthday as an independent country. Our celebrations - Birthday 21/Millennium 2000 will run from August 1st next year through to April 2000. The programme of activities as planned by the appointed Commission will be released shortly. It is my expectation that every living Dominican and every friend of Dominica will be in Dominica at some stage during that period.

Come home Dominicans, come home my fellowmen and women. Come home to my land and your land. Come home to our land. Come home to "this gem beyond compare". Come home, let us do the right thing, let us toil with our hearts and our hands and our voices, giving thanks and praise for this great gift we have as we work towards excellence, striving for honour, seeking to prosper, all for each and each for all. Come home.

My wife, who for reasons beyond her control, is not here today, joins me in wishing all of us a happy and peaceful celebration.

May God bless us all.

I thank you.