

Independence Message 2015

By The Hon. Lennox Linton

Leader of the Opposition

3 November 2015

My dear Dominicans at home and abroad:

It is a great joy and honour to offer the congratulations and best wishes of the Parliamentary Opposition on the occasion of Dominica's 37th Anniversary as an independent nation.

We celebrate this important milestone just over two months after the devastating flood waters of Tropical Storm Erika left us to mourn the loss of loved ones, resettle evacuated communities, restore livelihoods and secure the 1.3 billion dollars needed to rebuild our damaged infrastructure. It is not an easy road. But we are a resilient people designed to persevere and triumph against all odds.

And so in the spirit of the theme for this year's independence celebrations "Rebuilding Dominica Together", each one of us, citizens and leaders, both civic leaders and religious leaders needs to commit to rebuilding Dominica in the "all for each and each for all" spirit of our National Anthem:

-Let us create a 'Dominica First' environment of caring, mutual respect, trust and commitment in which nationals at home and abroad, and especially traditionally disadvantaged groups, can participate fully with their unique talents and backgrounds in achieving and sharing the fruits of our success.

-Let us strengthen democracy in government institutions and civil society organizations while purposefully reducing the size and cost of government.

-Let us prioritize the resettlement of the evacuated residents of Petite Savanne and Dubique and those in other affected communities who had to be relocated from their badly damaged or destroyed homes.

These citizens live in a heightened state of anxiety about their future and we need to act swiftly and purposefully to bring their lives back to normal.

-Let us implement a food security stimulus package to increase production of traditional agricultural crops and develop production of high value, in-demand items like coconut oil, cocoa, coffee, cashew, vanilla, essential oils and wellness herbs. As key drivers for their enthusiastic, sustained engagement, farmers need fertilizer, inputs, seedlings on concessionary terms, cash allowances to compensate for TS Erika losses and secure markets. Let's join hands now on the immediate action needed to resolve farm access challenges arising out of the destruction to roads and bridges especially in high production areas.

-Let us agree on a national plan for the utilization of the billions of stones and the thousands of tons of sand that now occupy our river beds and gorges and ravines as gifts of the mining miracles of mother nature.

-Let us establish a reconstruction incentive program for private sector investments in tourism, manufacturing and services to facilitate rebuilding the trading capacity lost or reduced as a result of damage and/or destruction by TS Erika.

-Let us establish a special employee assistance facility to provide compensation and transition to new employment support for those who lost their employment as a result of the passage of TS Erika.

-Let us enact the comprehensive Disaster Management Bill drafted years ago with all its supporting Regulations

-Let us, in the interest of ensuring transparency, accountability, efficiency and the prevention of corruption in the utilization of reconstruction resources, make the Public Procurement Act to be made fully functional without further delay.

We rebuild together to return the gleam to our nation's eyes; to bring back the confident glide in her stride; and to restore the integrity of her voice in the assurance of good Christian living.

We rebuild together a Dominica anxious for a new path on which we will learn to live in harmony with the natural environment and thereby secure wellness, happiness, progress and prosperity.

We rebuild together a 300 square mile island paradise in the Caribbean Sea, as close to nature in its purest form as you will find on this side of heaven.

Our lush green gift of nature's beauty offers the world a tropical haven of peace and tranquility at a time of increasing tensions arising from on-going global economic and political crises.

Let us be an exemplary God fearing, rule of law society. Let us rethink and renew health care, education and other social services. Let us care for our elderly with respect and dignity... And let

us give our youth the growth and development opportunities they need to compete and win on the international stage.

Let us use our healthy land to feed our nation and the entire region. Let us maximize intelligent use of our abundant renewable energy resources and allow them to guarantee our economic independence in this time of turmoil in global financial affairs. Let us export more of what we can produce for others and import less of what we can produce for ourselves. Let us woo the world to our shores for unique and compelling tourism and international business experiences. Let us not drag our feet any further on giving our magnificently green country the support of a model green economy growing at no less than five percent per year and delivering thousands of sustainable jobs.

We sincerely believe that the devastating blows to life and property suffered in the ravages of Tropical Storm Erika, present a national reconstruction challenge to create a social transformation success story from the adversities of severe misfortune... From the bottom of our hearts we thank all those who have sympathized and empathized and will continue to stand with us in our time of greatest need.

The task before us is to lead by example and rally the citizens of Dominica around a new vision of hope inspired by a national commitment that we can use this disaster as a platform for effective development cooperation that will secure for our nature island a thriving, exemplary, green space in global civilization.

For this cause, we rise... For this cause we serve with love, devotion and surrender.