

IN DEFENSE OF OUR CONSTITUTION

2016 Independence Message on the occasion of Dominica's 38th Anniversary of Independence

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3 November 2016

My dear Dominicans at home and abroad:

As a God fearing Parliamentary Opposition team of good conscience uncompromisingly committed to truth, righteousness and justice, we rise as is customary at this time of year, to offer congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of yet another Anniversary as an independent nation.

Like those that have come and gone before it, the theme for this year's independence celebrations "Strengthening Our Commitment to Nation Building" attempts to put us in the zone of stepping up to individual and collective responsibilities that address the common good.

But with every passing year, as national leadership undermines our democracy by disrespecting the Constitution and manipulating the rule of law, the gap between expectations and results widens. The hypocrisy stares us straight in the face. We still enjoy our uniqueness, our patriotic fervor, our relative successes but we pretend the slippage, the descent into mediocrity, the increased poverty is something else. We pretend we can just go on as is. We pretend it is something else.

In this democratic republic those who have held the responsibility of government for almost 17 years remain hostile to the imperative that in a truly democratic society people select and discipline government of the people, by the people for the people, through elections with integrity and through balanced, strong and independent institutions that serve the public interest.

After 38 years as an independent nation the ruling party since 2005 continues to insist that Dominica's electoral system should only be reformed to legitimize the corrupt practices of bribery, treating, denial of media access to the opposition, outrageous campaign spending from questionable sources and illegal overseas voting that it has engaged to secure re-election.

So we still have no identification cards for voting; the register of voters remains inaccurate with more voters than residents; government resources are used openly to buy votes; bribery and treating offenses have become the norm; the state media is under the iron fist of a dictatorial regime; and, in the absence of campaign finance reform, the ruling party alone is spending 5 times more per voter in general elections than the United States spends on its Presidential elections.

The nation's highest decision making body has been reduced to a total farce with the hijacking of Parliamentary oversight of government operations by the government majority in Parliament.

We have serious nation building problems that will not be solved by ignoring them or pretending they don't exist.

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where there is no rigorous, people-centered debate of legislation and the ruling party is proud of its blatant disenfranchisement of constituencies that voted for the opposition?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building without free and fair elections as the backbone of our democracy?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building when our institutions that are to serve the public interest are compromised, weakened and broken?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where a government presides over calculatedly unfair, unjust distribution of state resources for national development?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where every single state event is reduced to a feature in the pageantry of petty, partisan, Labour Party politics?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where a government organizes for its members and friends to do exceptionally well while the rest of the country catches hell in joblessness and grinding poverty?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where government overspends the national budget by over 100 million dollars and sees nothing wrong reporting this discrepancy to the people 4 months after the close of the financial year?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where a government violates the constitution to hold hundreds of million dollars from the sale of Dominican passports outside of the Consolidated Fund?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where a government claims a right to award public contracts to friends and supporters worth millions of dollars without public tender and/or competitive bidding?

How do we strengthen our commitment to nation building where international crooks and criminals are issued with our diplomatic passports and government declares the people have no right to know who are the characters chosen to represent Dominica in the international community?

First we deal with the hypocrisy embedded in the annual calls for noble endeavors that surface every independence season; we call things by their correct names; put the party colors aside; and join hands and hearts in the honest pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number. More of the same, year in year out, will not cut it.

38 years is more than enough time for every citizen of Dominica to stand resolutely in defense of our Constitution and insist on good and just governance through which each and every son and daughter of this land will be able to celebrate our National Day with true pride and dignity.

May God bless our continuing efforts to emerge as a genuinely independent nation shining its light of enlightened humanity engaged in the advancement of global civilization.”