



**Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica**

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION**

**BY**

**HONOURABLE ROOSEVELT SKERRIT**

**PRIME MINISTER OF**

**THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

**On the occasion of the**

**28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence**

**Sunday, November 3, 2006**

***“Strengthening the Family for Nation Building”***

**Botanic Gardens, Roseau**

The celebration of another anniversary of our Independence provides an ideal opportunity to reflect on our achievements as a people and the immediate past is a good point of reference.

This year we have chosen the theme “Strengthening the Family For Nation Building.” The theme is a timely reminder that although national growth and development are often measured in terms of economic indicators and considerable investments in infrastructure, human development remains a key factor to achieving this desirable overall national development to which we all aspire.

Therefore, it is imperative that in the pursuit of national development, a happy balance is struck between macroeconomic gains and the provision of basic human needs.

We should be mindful that citizens needs are reflected in their concerns regarding the availability of decent, affordable housing for their families, the quality of education their children are receiving the types of jobs in which they are engaged, the price of goods on the supermarket shelves, the quality of the food they consume, the ease with which they can travel around their country, the access they have to health care services and the security they enjoy when they walk the streets or go to sleep at nights.

I am happy to say that this Government is committed to pursue objectives that will bolster nation building while concurrently strengthening family life.

This year’s chosen theme is also a reminder that the family is the building block of the nation. If families are strong then the nation is strong.

It is within the family that fundamental lessons are learnt which last a lifetime. It is within the family that the core values that are essential for good citizenship are inculcated.

It is within families that we learn to fear God, to respect life, to be productive, to share, to protect and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

So as we celebrate 28 years of Independence, let us reflect on the state of the family and adopt an approach that puts people and their families at the very core of our country’s development. Let us affirm today that we will not lose sight of the fact that human development is key to the attainment of national development goals.

There is no doubt that the structure and function of families have changed dramatically since 1978. Some of us can remember a time when the family was the focus of economic, educational and recreational activities.

Many families earned a living from working the land; and children received much of their informal education while working and socializing with members of their extended family.

Most people now work away from home and formal educational institutions and the mass media have taken responsibility for the education of young people. People spend less time with their families.

As a result the family is often blamed for all the shortcomings of youth, for any act of crime or violence in our society.

Today I urge every institution, whether it be political, religious, economic, educational, recreational or social to commit to strengthening the family in Dominica as an essential part of the process of nation building.

I believe that we have to care for all our people as a family cares for its members. I am sure that it is this care for our people, our policy of putting people first and our systematic efforts to empower all Dominicans that won us a second term of office in May 2005.

We have therefore interpreted that new mandate as a vote of confidence in our people-centred approach to development. I therefore recommit this Government to doing all in its power to strengthen the family.

Our commitment to building strong families is incorporated into the policies of this administration. Fundamentally, we have taken all the necessary steps to ensure that the economy is sound and we have begun to see the results. Current data confirm that economic activity is expanding strongly and is more broad-based.

Domestic demand has remained optimistic and there are strong indications of private sector confidence. With the exception of agriculture, growth indicators were favourable for the key sectors and growth is expected in the financial sector, hotels and restaurants, real estate, and transportation.

Visitor arrivals particularly those staying in paid accommodation increased significantly this year, and tourist receipts are substantially higher as hotel visitors and student enrollment at the offshore schools increased significantly. Another indication of strength in the economy is the growth in credit provided by commercial banks.

Increased bank credit to the private sector is undoubtedly a strong sign of private sector confidence in the economy and in the policies the Government has articulated to manage the economy.

Based on the foregoing, our cautious estimate is that real GDP growth is expected to accelerate from 3½ percent in 2005 to 4 percent in 2006. Inflation remains subdued, despite the impact of

the very high oil prices earlier in the year. Fiscal performance remained strong throughout FY 2005/06. Revenue performance was exceptionally strong due in part to the recovering economy.

Current expenditures were kept within the target range, despite higher outlays for utilities and gratuities for retirees, and capital spending was in line with the target, despite slow project execution earlier in the year.

At the end of their most recent review, the IMF confirmed that all quantitative performance criteria agreed under the IMF supported programme were met. In addition we continue to make good efforts to reduce all outstanding arrears to statutory corporations and the domestic private sector.

As was indicated in the 2006 budget address, Your Government is focusing on enhancing the investment climate and creating more opportunities for investors to do business in Dominica. Shortly, I will lay before Parliament a detailed Growth and Social Protection Strategy (GSPS). This document outlines the strategy the Government is adopting to promote economic growth.

Medium-term objectives include improving the investment climate by streamlining the investment approval process, reducing the cost of doing business, maintaining and extending the social and physical infrastructure, and achieving a smaller and more efficient public sector.

What is significant is that the contents of the document represent the many views of stakeholders who were involved in the widespread consultative process.

We will also continue to implement the structural agenda, which will further enhance the business climate. Reform of the Customs has started with a manpower assessment being done currently. This work is expected to help us strengthen the staffing at the Customs and to put at the disposal of the private sector the best available skills.

The improvements at the Customs department are aimed at enhancing efficiency, modernizing the operations, and reducing the processing time. In addition, reform at the NDC continues apace.

The outcome will likely produce separate organizations geared towards tourism development and investment promotion.

Cabinet is close to approving an action plan to eliminate the unfunded liabilities to the DSS. Wide consultation with stakeholders has also been a welcome and integral part of the process. The action plan is one of, if not the most comprehensive set of reforms proposed to a national insurance scheme in the OECS.

The proposed reform measures will be implemented gradually distributing the burden of reform across generations and minimizing potential disruptions to the economy.

Last year I asked the nation to work with the Government to ensure the smooth implementation of the value added tax (VAT). This appears to have been done satisfactorily, with a high filing rate and revenue collection that is in line with projections, but a continuous monitoring of developments is necessary.

We gave our commitment and have been able to make timely refunds. We have just passed the first six months of implementation and have started the implementation of good audit and risk management programmes and mechanisms.

I must report also that I have requested and received nominations of representatives to the Task Force, which will begin the review of the income tax regime.

The Task Force is being chaired by Mr. Gilbert Williams, a former Financial Secretary, and it is expected to begin its work this month.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you are aware, the European Union is a major development partner of Dominica, supporting programmes in both the economic and social sectors. The intricacies of dealing with the European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union are legendary. In recent times however, we have made some progress with the European Commission in our development assistance programmes.

After two and a half years of exchanging amendments and revisions of a Grant Contract and Rider, funds amounting to EC\$3.2 million have been released to allow commencement and operations of the Dominica Social Investment Fund (DSIF). We are hopeful, that this signals the dawn of a new day for the response mechanism of the European Commission in their delivery of development assistance.

This thesis will be put to the test over the next few weeks, as we await the European Commission's release of substantial resources under other financing agreements which were signed as much as two (2) years ago.

Let me stress that Agriculture and bananas in particular are priorities for this Government. We recognize the importance of agriculture and the impact of bananas on family life in Dominica.

Indeed your Government is convinced that had it not been for the strength of the Agricultural Sector and food production in particular we could not have ridden out the crises of the early years of this century. We are therefore committed to agriculture as one of the bedrocks and buffers of our economy and for providing food security.

I am delighted to report that banana output and exports are on the increase. Production at the end of September 2006 was 8,680 tonnes, compared to 8,125 tonnes for the same period in 2005, a growth rate of 7%.

Due largely to Dominica's high quality performance, TESCO, the largest fresh fruit supermarket multiple in the UK, has committed to continuing to do business with Dominica and expressed the desire for greater volumes of fruit from Dominica.

Between 2005 and 2006 over \$2 million were invested in the form of grants and zero interest loans to growers. To this must be added various services in extension, training and technical advice, leaf spot control, quality control, Fair Trade and Tesco Nature Choice Certification (TNC).

The DBPL successfully negotiated improved and stable prices to growers and adopted a policy of restraining input price increases in the face of pressure from rising petroleum prices.

Dominica and the Windward Islands have been able to secure market share for Windward Island Bananas due largely to Fair Trade certification. In addition to ensuring a higher price, Fair Trade provides a social premium for every box of bananas sold under the Fair Trade brand.

Dominica achieved 100% Fair Trade Certification in 2005.

Considerable progress has also been made towards Tesco Nature Choice Certification (TNC), another standard required by Tesco supermarket, which distributes Dominica's fruit on the UK market.

TNC will help us to further differentiate our fruit and secure our place in the market. Well over 100 of our growers have been certified, another 300 are before the certifying body and the balance of roughly 300 growers should be certified by December 31st.

The prospects for the industry look much better at present than appeared about one year ago. Demand for our fruit on the UK market is strong and there appears to be good growth prospects on the regional market.

The DBPL has prepared a production plan for increasing production in the first half of 2007 and over the next two to three years. The plan focuses on rehabilitation of fields, new planting, productivity and quality including tissue culture and irrigation.

The Banana Industry Trust continues to invest in support facilities for the banana industry with the completion of a Tissue Culture Hardening and Weaning Facility at Londonderry. This facility is due to be opened at the end of November. The facility will produce 50,000 high quality banana plants per cycle (3 months) for the industry.

The Agricultural Diversification Programme has been progressing well. During the period November 2005 – October 2006, a total of 80 farm access roads were rehabilitated islandwide, benefiting in excess of 350 farmers and other stakeholders in the sector.

Construction work is expected to begin in 2007 on a National Centre of Testing Excellence to facilitate Dominica's trade in the regional and international markets.

An Amphibian Research laboratory was completed at the Botanic Gardens and is now fully operational, continuing on the monitoring of the diseases affecting Dominica's crapaud or Mountain chicken.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and the Environment will spearhead the planning of a major Agricultural Symposium to discuss the state of Agriculture in Dominica and to identify critical areas for investment in the sector.

The Symposium is expected to review current programmes being implemented in Dominica by the public sector, private sector companies, statutory organizations, regional and international institutions, Agriculture affiliated institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations in the context of international, regional and national trends in agriculture and to determine where targeted interventions are required for enhancing growth in the sector.

The symposium will engage all the stakeholders in the agricultural sector in meaningful dialogue and will serve as a platform for further collaboration of all our partners in order to consolidate ongoing initiatives and initiate new approaches for the sector.

The Tourism Industry is quickly becoming a major source of income for our families and so your Government continues to focus on ways to develop this vital industry.

The Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Private Sector Relations continued to place emphasis on enhancing and strengthening product quality, destination marketing, community tourism and investment promotion all geared at increasing economic growth and enriching the lives of the people of Dominica.

To guide this process of enhancing and strengthening the overall sector, a Tourism Master Plan will soon be available as a policy framework for 'development, management and monitoring the long-term sustainability of the tourism sector for the period 2005 – 2015.'

This Master Plan emphasizes the need for "Dominica to broaden its tourism product base, while at the same time maintaining Dominica's green island destination appeal." In addition to these major macro-development activities undertaken in the tourism sector, focus was placed on the continued development of the tourism product, destination marketing and air access to Dominica.

Thirty-one young Dominicans are pursuing studies in tourism and related fields at associate, bachelor's and master's degree level. Twenty students at the Dominica State College who benefited from ETDP Scholarship for their two-year Tourism & Hospitality Programme will soon complete their studies. Investment in enhancing our natural attractions and sites has been a priority under the ETDP.

Special mention has to be made of the sum of \$750,000 being invested in the rehabilitation and restoration of Fort Shirley which will be the flagship tourism project for the North as more cruise visitors are expected to visit the north for the 2006/07 cruise ship season.

Other sites where works are progressing satisfactorily are the Soufriere Sulphur Springs, Middleham Falls, Boiling Lake, Emerald Pool and Trafalgar Falls. Just recently other sites were opened in Syndicate and at the Fresh Water Lake.

In keeping with Government's policy of providing opportunities for the private sector, the management of these sites is being contracted out to private sector individuals and community groups.

Communities around the island are also benefiting from resources under the Eco-Tourism Development Programme to develop sites and infrastructure for creating products and activities at the community level for visitors and locals alike.

These projects will increase and spread the benefits to be derived from Tourism to Dominicans at the basic community level.

In relation to tourism investment, Government is in active discussions and negotiations on three major tourism projects. One of these is the proposal for Woodford Hill where the issue of beach access by the public has been much discussed. I want to assure you that public access to the Woodford Hill beach will be provided. This resort will be a 5 star resort known for its spas internationally. Another involves a Hotel Marina in Portsmouth, and the other at Hampstead.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I can boldly say that 2007 will see the start of a major housing revolution in Dominica. The development of housing forms a major pillar of the social and economic development thrust of the Dominica Labour Party Government. Housing construction is critical because of the multiple effects it has on the society.

It improves the social conditions of the population, creates employment, empowers the beneficiaries and engenders in them a sense of civic pride, national ownership and patriotism.

In pursuance of its housing policy, the Government's priority has been the poor – those on the social and economic fringe of society and for whom the acquisition of decent and affordable housing cannot be a reality without the direct assistance of the Government.

The provision of housing assistance to Dominica's indigent is an aspect of the Government's housing obligation. The Government is aware that the demand for housing extends beyond that section of the society, and that a holistic approach towards the provision of housing is not only desirable but necessary.

The greatest challenge to the provision of housing has been the Government's lack of financial resources.

It is therefore with great pleasure that I announce that the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has responded positively to a request from my Government and has made available a grant of \$22 million for housing development in Dominica.

This sum was received in Dominica last week. A complimentary soft loan of \$7.3 million at the rate of 2% per annum will follow shortly. I wish to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Government and People of Venezuela for their continued generous support for the Government and people of Dominica.

With these funds in hand the Government will shortly launch a far-reaching housing development programme in various communities on the island. The details of this programme will be provided at another forum, suffice to say, that the poor and underprivileged will not be left out, and I have already indicated that \$ 7 million will go to the Government Housing Loans Board for low interest housing loans. Another \$ 5 million will be made available to the AID Bank for mortgage loans - again on special terms.

These programmes to which I refer will be accessible to all workers, employed in both the private and public sectors, but special concessions will be made for public officers, particularly professional groups such as nurses, teachers, police, fire and prison officers.

This is a promise that your Government made towards the end of our first year in office and it is a promise that we intend to keep.

Additionally, the Government has also initiated the process for low-income earners to have access to concessionary mortgage financing for home renovation and new housing construction under the Shelter Development Programme which makes loans available to individuals earning \$1,000.00 or less monthly or couples earning \$1,500.00 or less monthly.

Under this Special Mortgage Facility, \$5.832 million has been made available by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) for access by low-income earners for home improvement (to a

maximum \$20,000.00) and for new home construction (to a maximum \$60,000.00). The special mortgage programme is being executed by the AID Bank on behalf of the Government.

Government has embarked on a Squatter Regularization Programme as a means of improving the living conditions of many households in Dominica. As a result, Cabinet decided in October 2005 that lots occupied by the squatters in designated areas before December 31, 2004 shall be surveyed for sale at a price not exceeding \$1.00 per square foot.

Cabinet also decided that such sale shall include a waiver of fees (including transfer fees) and assistance to obtain certificate of titles.

To date, implementation of this policy has been successful.

This decision is another indication of Government's commitment to deal with the most vulnerable sector of the housing market by providing security of tenure to many less fortunate citizens and thereby empowering them to lift themselves from poverty.

Under the Squatter Regularization Programme squatters in the following areas have been regularized:

- Fond Cole South
- Ravine Bernard in Canefield
- Chemin Neuf in Pointe Michel
- Stock Farm (below State College)
- Fond Cole Housing Scheme
- Guillet-Savanne Paille Housing Scheme
- Calibishie-Savanne Paille Housing Scheme

Squatters on the Geneva estate will be regularized soon.

One hundred and fifty-six (156) squatters have been regularized under this Programme thereby making them eligible for loans under the Special Mortgage Facility mentioned above.

My fellow Dominicans, your Government is aware of the serious negative impact that the increases in the price of energy is having on Dominican households and businesses.

As a result the Government has taken a number of initiatives, some of which you are already aware, to address the problem. They include:

1. Amending the Electricity Supply Act to allow for competition in the generation/transmission/distribution of electricity and to make the electricity provider more accountable and transparent. This amendment will go before parliament next week.
2. The establishment of a committee of professionals to examine the operations of DOMLEC and to advise the Government on steps which can be taken to reduce the rates payable by consumers.
3. The PetroCaribe Initiative under which petroleum products will be received from Venezuela on concessionary terms. We have already received two shipments of bitumen and on Wednesday of this week the ceremony to mark the commencement of construction of fuel storage tanks was held.
4. Initiatives in Alternative Energy Studies show that Dominica has tremendous potential in the area of geothermal energy. We are presently collaborating with a number of overseas agencies and Governments - particularly the French and OAS - to develop that potential.

However I am advised that bringing together all the players in geothermal energy generation and the requisite funding is not a matter which can happen overnight. Government however continues to be optimistic that in the medium terms, Dominica's geothermal potential can be realized.

Dominica must however remain mindful of the need to conserve energy not only because of the financial cost, but perhaps more importantly, because of the cost to our environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

By far the largest project for the next financial year is the impending West Coast Road Rehabilitation Project. Your Government is fully aware that improved physical infrastructure must complement its social programmes. As we have already mentioned, the road will begin upon completion of yet another landmark project, the Windsor Park Stadium.

Another significant project, estimated to cost in the region of EC fifty-four million dollars, scheduled to start construction in the first quarter of 2007, is the Melville Hall to Roseau Road. This vital road will be completely rehabilitated to provide hassle-free access to the Melville Hall Airport. Funding is provided for by the AFD, Agence française de développement.

As reported earlier during the Budget Address 2006/07, RIMP, the Road Improvement and Maintenance Project is also scheduled for the first quarter of 2007 at a cost of \$13 million dollars.

The Ministry is also pleased to highlight the assistance of CARICOM in our development thrust.

The country has received grant funding from the Petroleum Fund for infrastructure development amounting to over EC twenty-four million dollars.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Your Government continues to uphold the fundamental principle that every citizen of this country should have full access to quality preventative, curative and rehabilitative health care services in a timely and respectful manner irrespective of one's ability to pay; and that decentralization of services should be integral to the delivery of health care.

There is no doubt that HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact on families, and, therefore, the emerging needs of persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS will be given urgent and priority attention.

Dominica has been able to scale up the access to care and treatment for those persons who are affected by this disease through assistance from the Global Fund and DFID.

As a nation, we must continue to respond aggressively to minimize the negativity and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS and its potentially disruptive effects on the family and national development.

The prevention and control of avoidable causes of blindness have been identified as a vision 20/20 priority in Dominica. To achieve this, eye-care is provided as an integrated service within the Primary Health Care System.

To complement these efforts, your Government has introduced the Miracle Mission Eye-Care Programme with the assistance of the Republic of Cuba. Under this new initiative, close to 10,000 Dominicans have been screened and approximately 1700 have received corrective eye surgery in Cuba.

We will build on these achievements through persistence with current initiatives and the pursuit of new initiatives within the Ministry of Health. The vigorous attempt to address critical human resource needs in the health sector is noteworthy and stands out as a bold step in the right direction.

Our nursing programme with assistance from the Government of Cuba, is today a model for many of our Caribbean neighbours. In September, the eighty-six (86) student nurses of this

programme were relocated to a facility which was refurbished at a cost of approximately \$1 million dollars.

Nurses remain our major front line health care workers, who interact daily with families either at the primary or secondary level.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

“Strengthening the Family For Nation Building”, cannot become a reality if substance abuse continues to threaten the very foundation, on which we seek to build. Families and communities must play a greater and more effective role in helping to reduce the demand for both legal and illegal drugs.

To this end, the European Union-funded \$700,000 Drug Demand Reduction Programme is now at a very advanced stage of implementation.

All of what I have spoken about could not have happened without the necessary investment in our Health Infrastructure. This financial year \$4 million has been allocated for infrastructural projects in Health facilities including the construction of a new Castle Bruce Health Centre and refurbishment of the Psychiatric Unit and the Glover Ward at the Princess Margaret Hospital.

Additionally under the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF), renovation work continues to be undertaken on a number of rural health centres (Soufriere, Warner, Marigot, Laudat, Fond Cole, St. Joseph and the Carib Territory).

In August of this year, the Ministry of Health marked a historic milestone in the development of Health Care in Dominica when a Diagnostic centre was established at Portsmouth to the tune of over \$20 million.

In addition an Intensive Care unit will be officially opened at the Princess Margaret Hospital later this month.

These institutions, which were jointly financed by the Governments of Dominica and Cuba, will greatly enhance our efforts to improve not only Health Care but Dominica’s budding tourism product as well.

In spite of our best efforts in promoting healthy lifestyles, Government recognizes that in order to maintain healthy families we must ensure that there are improved pharmaceutical services in both the public and private sector.

In this regard I am pleased to report that the medical drugs and supply debt of \$948,000 was completely paid off in June of this year. In addition, the drug and medical supply budget allocation was increased from \$2,469,000 to \$3,150,000.

Our advances in Health Care have resulted in an ageing population with the number of pensioners increasing. Pension Reform has therefore been a major area of attention for Government.

Your Government also believes that education is the most effective means of empowering families. We have therefore redoubled our efforts to ensure that the people of Dominica have access to education throughout their lives.

During the past year we have improved the provision for children at the pre-school, primary and secondary level, achieving Universal Secondary Education in September 2005. Our goal now is to ensure that there is a graduate in every household by 2015. We expect the Dominica State College to play a vital role in the achievement of this target.

We are making progress with the construction of new schools in:

- i. Portsmouth, The Roosevelt Douglas Primary School
- ii. Salybia
- iii. San Sauver
- iv. Newtown
- v. Goodwill

By November 10th, the tender documents for the Roosevelt Douglas Primary School will be ready with a contract expected to be awarded before the end of the year. The Ministry of Public Works and Public Utilities has confirmed that work on Phase 2 of the new Dominica Grammar School will commence over the next few months. This project is expected to cost \$2.54 million.

The Government is keeping true to its promise to appoint and make permanent all teachers who have been teaching for three years and over, and are suitably qualified. In collaboration with our partners: the Dominica Association of Teachers, the Faculty of Education of the Dominica State College, Principals and Teachers, we are developing a programme of training to be taught during the usual school sessions as well as during school holidays. The result of this programme will be a pool of trained teachers by 2010.

Simultaneously, we are increasing young people's access to skills training and employment through the Youth Development Division. During the last year we have also been increasing the opportunities for them to create employment and wealth as entrepreneurs through the Dominica Youth Business Trust.

We have begun the process of drawing up legislation to further improve education through:

- Education Regulations
- Code of Ethics for Teachers
- National Accreditation Bill
- School Maintenance Policy

The Sports Division has remained focused in its continued efforts to promote and develop sports on the island despite the many challenges facing the Division.

Through training activities, competitive programmes and support services, the Sports Division has been able to actively engage a large percentage of our school-based youth in physical activity, assist national associations and community-based sports organizations deliver sports programmes and facilitate the participation of national teams in regional and international tournaments.

While we pursued the Programme of Economic stabilization and adjustment, your Government gave the commitment that it would continue to enhance the social safety net and other social support programmes.

The Mission and programme of the Ministry of Community Development, Gender Affairs and Information impact heavily on families. The Ministry's achievements include:

Community Service Order, a project aimed at reducing the number of young persons being sentenced to the State Prison at Stock Farm by providing an option whereby the Court could sentence some of those individuals to perform unpaid work for a specified number of hours in a selected community or location in the country.

The establishment of a 'Place of Safety' at Jimmit to house children at risk, such persons on a temporary basis is currently at an advanced stage of construction. The building will accommodate 32 children. Completion date is set for the first quarter of 2007.

The focus of Basic Needs Trust Fund expenditures is on Poverty Reduction via small-scale infrastructural projects and/or practical income earning skills training projects. Both are aimed at strengthening the local capacity for self-reliance and employment, including self-employment, especially in rural communities in Dominica.

Funds disbursed, ladies and gentlemen, during the past year under this CDB grant financing facility amounted to \$714,800 for both infrastructure and skills training projects, with a further \$900,000 of projects approved and currently awaiting disbursement.

Dominica's culture is a rich blend of the traditional and the contemporary. These manifestations of the culture are found in expressions of dance, art, drama oral traditions, customs, values and other forms.

The traditional culture of Dominica is rich and vibrant and makes up the base of Dominica's cultural heritage and finds expression in festivals such as Carnival, DOMFESTA, Emancipation, Independence, Christmas and various feasts.

The traditional culture plays an extremely important role in developing and maintaining a strong sense of national identity and pride among Dominicans. It is also a vital part of the rich cultural product.

Your Government is very conscious of the fact that our cultural heritage and various cultural expressions need to be continuously preserved and promoted in order for them to survive.

The preservation and development of our traditional culture must therefore be encouraged and promoted in all schools and communities around Dominica in order that as many Dominicans as possible can participate in the process of cultural and national development.

In this connection, your Government is making available a sum of half a million dollars to the Cultural Division to implement a major programme of training in the Traditional Arts in Dominica. We expect that the implementation of this special comprehensive training programme will give a tremendous boost to the preservation and promotion of Dominica's cultural heritage.

My Fellow Dominicans, I have always maintained that Dominica's main foreign and trade policy must be guided by the advancement of Dominica's national development interest and improving international relations with its bilateral and multilateral partners.

In terms of bilateral relations, diplomatic relations were established with five new States as follows: Greece, Thailand, Slovak Republic, Turkey and the Republic of Algeria. Relations with these non-traditional partners should assist in strengthening Dominica's position in the international community and forming a network of relationships based on the interdependence of political, economic and other interests.

Dominica continues to receive assistance from friendly Governments under several technical and financial aid schemes in particular those offered by the countries with resident ambassadors in Dominica, notably the People's Republic of China, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba.

Multilateral Relations were strengthened through Government's participation in meetings and Summits of important regional and international organizations such as CARICOM, the OECS, the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the Non- Aligned Movement.

On Wednesday June 21, 2006, your Prime Minister joined his OECS Counterparts and signed a Declaration of Intent by Heads of Government of the OECS on the Participation of their Countries in the OECS Economic Union.

This signing coincided with the unveiling of a new Economic Union Treaty. The new Treaty will guide the thrust by the OECS region to create an Economic Union among Member States, and would replace the Treaty of Basseterre which established the OECS on June 18th 1981.

On July 3, 2006 at the twenty-seventh Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I had the distinct honour to join the rest of my counterparts from OECS Member States to sign the "Declaration of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community on their participation of their Countries in the CARICOM Single Market." This historic event marked the coming into being of the CARICOM Single Market in Dominica.

The Government and people of Dominica reaffirm their commitment to the continued development and implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy.

As we celebrate our 28<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, the Government and people of Dominica remain concerned about the struggles of our brothers and sisters in Haiti. While there has been democratic elections and the political situation has stabilized, the situation is still grave.

We therefore call on all our friends in the regional and the international community to assist in the more efficient disbursement of resources so as to allow for the recovery efforts to bear fruit. Haiti needs us now more than ever before.

As we celebrate Independence this year, there are many things for which we must give thanks. During the first five years of the new century we have been tried and tested. As a Government we faced a succession of challenges, both natural and man-made.

At all times we were honest with you, the people. We consulted you on a regular basis and gave you the facts as they emerged. We asked for your trust...and you believed in us. We are not fully out of the woods yet but we are beginning to see the fruits of our labour and our sacrifices.

We have now embarked on a mission to further empower our families for nation building.

Next year at this time for instance, I expect to be delivering my Independence Day message from our newly constructed state-of-the-art Windsor Park Stadium.

I expect that by that time, work would have started on the construction of the Soufriere/Scottshead sea defense wall, as already, over \$12 million has been approved by the Venezuelan Government to begin this project.

I expect by then several junior clerks, police officers, nurses and teachers would have started construction of their own houses since we have just received \$22 million and expect an additional \$7 million within the next two weeks from the Government of Venezuela. We will utilize \$3 million of these funds to effect repairs to houses of poor families.

I expect also that the West Coast road would have started with funds from the People's Republic of China.

Ladies and Gentlemen I expect that all Dominicans and visitors alike will have sites in Dominica to visit and enjoy as we now have reception centres at the Fresh Water Lake, Trafalgar Falls, Syndicate, Emerald Pool, The Carib Territory, the Rain Forest Tram and several others are being developed.

I expect with these significant investment plus the commencement of the \$76 million dollar Roseau Road reinstatement Project, the construction of the \$16 million dollar Roseau Valley Road programme and the construction of the \$54 million dollar Melville Hall Airport Road to the capital city Roseau, we expect much employment to be generated from these massive investments.

On behalf of all the organs of Government, the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Executive, I express our gratitude to all our friends and partners in the regional and international community for helping us to reach this point in our development. I thank all Dominicans, at home and abroad for the tremendous support given at all times.

Today, we have taken a bold and historic decision to bestow on CARICOM our country's highest award: The Dominica Award of Honour. We do so in recognition of the tremendous support and leadership demonstrated by CARICOM in the mobilization of resources particularly during the economic stabilization and adjustment programme.

We are forever grateful to the Governments, people and the staff of the Secretariat for their collective efforts. Special gratitude must be extended to Secretary-General Carrington for his leadership in that regard.

I am very pleased that the Chairman of CARICOM comrade Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis, Dr. Denzil Douglas and the Secretary-General of CARICOM, Dr. Edwin Carrington are present to accept the award on behalf of the Caribbean Community.

I express congratulations to Mr. Frank A. Baron for his achievements and all other recipients, especially Honourable Charles Savarin, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

I wish all my fellow Dominican brothers and sisters a Happy Independence Day and I look forward to realizing many more achievements with you in the coming years.

No one can doubt when we look around the countryside that this year, is one that witnessed the most comprehensive participation at all levels in our independence celebrations. More than that we have come to love Dominica and be proud to belong to this Island State.

We have come to appreciate the words of our National Anthem that we are: “ a people strong and healthy full of Godly reverent fear.” Truly we can never cease to praise the Almighty God for these gifts so rich and rare and for families who continue to work together to build this beautiful land of ours.

May God Bless you all. May God Bless Dominica.