



**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  
34th Anniversary of Independence**

**Saturday, November 3, 2012  
Windsor Park Sports Stadium  
8:00 am**

To God be the glory...Great things he has done!

A few days ago, on the island of Nevis, a young man congratulated me on what he saw as two recent regional and international successes for Dominica.

He referred in particular to Jerelle Joseph, the 2012 Valedictorian at the recent Graduation Ceremony of the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies and the elections of Dr. Carissa Etienne as Director of the Pan American Health Organisation headquartered in Washington D.C.

I graciously accepted his very kind remarks, but it set me thinking, Ladies and Gentlemen, about the other unheralded achievements of Dominica over the past few years, as well as the factors that would have contributed to Dominica assuming the image as a centre of excellence, in several respects, in the Caribbean and farther afield.

Fellow Dominicans, on this the occasion of the celebration of our 34th year of National Independence, I believe it is important that we pause and reflect upon God's rich blessings and mercies to us as a nation.

We may not be where we had hoped to be 34 years ago but no country in the world that I know of, is. What is evident for all to see however, are the vast strides we have made as a developing nation; in infrastructure, social services and most importantly, in human resource development. Dominica has come a long way in 34 relatively short years!

Fellow Dominicans, it has been said, that were Christopher Columbus to return to the Caribbean and the Western Hemisphere, Dominica is one country he would instantly recognise. In fact, this has been used by some as our stain for years. Today, on the 3rd day of November, 2012, I

challenge anyone, anywhere in the world, to make that claim. Christopher Columbus, were he to come back today, would probably wish to purchase property and settle in Dominica.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I do not limit my judgment of development and modernity only in terms of high rise buildings and four lane highways. Nor do I believe that having a modern airport facility or the ability to dock large mega ships is the most reliable indicator of a nation's progress.

Like all of you, I am proud of these achievements as a Dominican, but nothing pleases me more, than the scenario a couple weeks ago in Barbados, when, out of hundreds of graduates, drawn from every nation of the Caribbean and farther afield, the person considered best suited to speak for and on behalf of the student body was none other than a Dominican of humble origin, Ms. Jerelle Joseph who happens, coincidentally, to be from the beautiful village of Vieille Case.

In her remarks, she proudly promoted the virtues of her island, Dominica, and highlighted the outpouring of love and assistance she received during a very trying year of personal tragedies.

This morning, I have personally invited Ms. Jerelle Joseph, who majored in Mathematics and Chemistry, to attend this event and be the toast of this National Ceremony, at this particular time. However due to circumstances beyond her control, she is unable to be here with us.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I have reflected upon the term and the meaning of 'Independence' and I believe accomplishments such Ms. Joseph's, are precisely what the architects of our political independence intended for our people when they took that giant step 34 years ago.

I submit, ladies and gentlemen, that what we celebrate today is our struggle and triumphs against adversity, and the progress and success we have recorded in the process of forging an identity that is truly Dominican.

Interestingly, during my address in Nevis last weekend, I saw the look of astonishment on the faces of my audience, when I made mention of the fact that, in addition to Dr. Carissa Etienne being installed as the head of the Pan American Health Organisation, the Secretary General of CARICOM, Ambassador Irwin Larocque, is also a distinguished Dominican. Shortly thereafter, one very prominent businessman on Nevis said to me: "sorry, Prime Minister, I actually thought he was St. Lucian".

What that told me, Ladies and Gentlemen, was that as a people and as a nation, we are not beating our chests loudly enough. We are not heralding enough the successes and achievements of our country and its people.

As far as Geneva in Switzerland, Dr. Cleopatra Henry, another Dominican national, holds the position of Director of the International Labour Organization.

For example, we whisper very softly the fact that Dominica has more Centenarians per capita than perhaps any other country in the world. This fact, Ladies and Gentlemen, speaks volumes to our quality and natural way of life.

It says much about our food, grown right here on the island of Dominica. It is also a reflection of our caring attitude towards each other; particularly the elderly. It speaks volumes about our environment; about the clean air that we breathe and about the scope for healthy and natural living that we often take for granted.

Dominica is also acclaimed for its ecology and topography. There are raving reviews regarding our scuba diving and underwater experiences, and about our natural and man-enabled tourism attractions. Some travelers visit Dominica simply to experience its peace and tranquility. Fellow Dominicans, when last have we stopped and reflected upon all these attributes?

I have taken this course this morning, Ladies and Gentlemen, because I knew many of you came to this stadium expecting to hear me speak economics....about dollars and cents; about projects and new jobs; about efforts at reducing the cost of living; and about what this government is doing for the various sectors.

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, it would seem that as a people, we may have fallen into the global trap of gauging and perceiving progress and development through the materialistic eye.

In response, I could boast this morning about the great strides we are making on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the island's main roads, particularly since the recruitment of local contractors to assist in the completion of the Roseau to Melville Hall Road project and the recently completed Edward Oliver Le Blanc Highway and the Point Mitchel Sea Defense Project.

I could point as well to the spectacular State House currently under construction, or the continuing work at the community level to improve road surfaces, expand utility services and generally upgrade the living conditions of many of our citizens all over the Island.

Fellow Dominicans, were I to point to emerging designs for a new state of the art hospital, I would be applauded.

I would be congratulated as well, if I spoke of the emphasis we have placed on early childhood education and our most ambitious goal to attain universal tertiary education; Of the enhanced learning facilities at the Dominica State College and the strides we are making at the primary and secondary level to prepare our children for the life that lies ahead.

I could use this occasion, to remind you of the special fund access windows we have put in place at institutions like the AID Bank, the National Bank of Dominica and the Dominica Youth Business Trust for the nurturing of small enterprises; Or of our quick response mechanisms in the aftermath of hurricanes and storms, to assist in particular our farmers, fishermen and vendors.

Then there is the record of the tremendous advances we have made in the area of housing, reflected in the hundreds of families who now own a roof over their heads, as a result of the enlightened policies of your Government.

Fellow Dominicans, our progressive foreign policy has seen us establishing diplomatic relations with scores of countries around the world and developing very close ties with nations that have demonstrated genuine friendship and a keen interest in the forward movement of Dominica.

Some of these countries are represented here this morning and I would wish to thank them once again for the continued support of our efforts.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, these are all areas of achievements that the Government could point to as reflective of the strides that have been made, even in the midst of the worst global economic recession known to modern man.

But, if I were to remain in this mode of material accomplishment, at what time would we as a people pause to muse upon our true blessings as a nation? When would we reflect upon our human development achievements, individually and collectively?

Dominica is today a country with a proud and unique identity! Within the last few years, we have made our way back into the West Indies senior cricket team...and I take this opportunity to again congratulate Mr. Shane Shillingford from Dublanc on his remarkable achievements, and for the pride and joy he brought to all Dominicans with his phenomenal performances during the recent home series.

I am also compelled to single out from among the list of 'Dominica's finest,' another distinguished son of the soil, Dr. Lennox Honychurch, who was recently recognized by the University of the West Indies for his sterling contribution to our region. I wish to therefore congratulate Dr. Honychurch for the receipt of an Honourary Doctorate for the accumulation of his work over the years, in archaeology, anthropology and community education.

Fellow Dominicans, were we to speak politics and economics this morning, when then would we speak of the still relatively low crime rate here in Dominica? There have been a few aberrations in recent times, but I am pleased to report that the Dominica Police Force has made significant progress in bringing such antisocial behaviour under control. Still, let this not minimize or distract us from the reality of Dominica remaining one of the safest and most peaceful places on earth in which to reside.

The advent of the internet and acceleration of information technology has made it possible for persons who are only now hearing of Dominica for the very first time to use the various search engines to discover this gem in the Caribbean. But, when they go in search, Ladies and Gentlemen, what exactly do they find? What do we post about our country on the internet?

Have we all been promoting this country as Jamaicans, Trinidadians and Barbadians do theirs? Do we all reflect that pride in our achievements and natural attributes? We need to stop, as a people, and think Dominica! We need to believe in Dominica and truly love and appreciate this fair land of ours.

At a meeting last week with potential investors, I was touched by the comments made by people who had never visited the Caribbean, far less Dominica, but who were in love with the Nature Isle, because of the continuous boasts by Dominicans living abroad whom they had encountered.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the reality is that there are Dominicans holding citizenships of other countries and residing permanently elsewhere, who speak far more proudly and positively of this country, than some who reside here and who have nowhere else to go; whether life here becomes better or worse.

Why are some of us not marketing our country? Why are we not boasting of our attributes and exploits? Why are we not speaking with greater pride about our own.... those among us who have excelled and are held in high esteem by the international community?

I have had many overseas encounters in recent months, since the intended retirement of our former President, Dr. Nicholas Liverpool, was made public. I was amazed by the number of people, the world over, who knew of and valued the enormous scholarship and other personal attributes of our esteemed former Head of State. Dr. Liverpool is known, loved and respected the world over! He has flown the Dominican flag with pride and with humility. He has done well for this country.

Fellow Dominicans, I am not pointing fingers at any specific person or group of persons this morning, but I would like those who have made it their favourite past time to bludgeon the name of Dominica at home and abroad, to stop it! We have to close ranks as a people. We have to close ranks as a nation. We need to bridge the gap as citizens. Dominica has a story to tell! Ours is a Success Story!!!

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, General Elections are held in Dominica, as in many other countries, every five years. In most of those countries, for the ensuing four and a half years, there is one nation, one people, one destiny that is being pursued.

For some of us here in Dominica, the campaigning season seems never ending. We could not even install a new President without rancour! This is not what 34 years of National Independence should produce. Ladies and Gentlemen, we can and must do better.

We need to separate campaigning for an election from the governance of a country. Ladies and gentlemen, there is a level of statesmanship that is required from both the elected government and the opposition during a period of governance.

But first, we must pursue a common purpose. We need to wrap more of our thoughts and actions in our national flag; in our national emblems; in our national interest! We need to think and talk Dominica more!

Some of us would do better taking a page from the practice of thousands of Dominicans living abroad who market and sell this country day in and day out, as if it was their only domicile option.

For some of us, Dominica is all that we have. Yet we take pride in seeing ourselves quoted at home and abroad as saying the vilest, disparaging and degrading things about her and life therein. I want all of us on the occasion of this 34th Anniversary of Independence to stop and take stock.

Dominica is a blessed land. Dominica's sectorial performances continue to be strong. We are no longer the underprivileged sibling in CARICOM. Indeed, Dominica assumes a leadership role, at every level, in most things regional or sub-regional. Internationally, we are recognised and respected, as a former Caribbean leader would say, as 'friend of all, and satellite of none'. Indeed, in many respects, we are the bridge between north and south, left and right.

Fellow Dominicans, we need as a people to cherish what we have, celebrate our achievements, and unite behind the goals we have set ourselves. In keeping with this year's theme, this is truly a people partnership, a partnership for progress and development.

I believe in this nation and I want each and every one of you to do the same!

This is the 34th Anniversary of National Independence. In six years, we will be 40. What type of political, social and economic DNA would we like Dominica to have at age 40? Think for a moment about this!

I urge you this morning to reflect upon this and join the journey towards that 40 year objective, today!

Let's go forth and serve our God and Country. May God bless each and every one of you. May God Bless beautiful Dominica.

Happy Independence to all.

I thank you.