



**ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT
BY HIS EXCELLENCY CHARLES A. SAVARIN, DAH,
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FOURTH
SESSION OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT
ON WEDNESDAY, 25TH JULY 2018**

Get Up! Go Forth! Replant! Rebuild!

Madam Speaker,

I wish to first of all thank God Almighty for His bountiful blessings and steadfast love being relentlessly bestowed upon us as a people and nation, and to thank you most sincerely for the kind invitation which you extended to me and my dear wife Clara to attend the First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the Ninth Parliament and for me to address this Honourable House. My wife and I are delighted to be here and she joins me in thanking you for your kind and gracious invitation.

Defining Moments in the History of Mankind

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

Throughout the long history of human existence on planet earth, several major events have punctuated the history of mankind which has marked one epoch from another. Thus, in Genesis Chapters 6 to 9 we are given an account of Noah's flood where we are told that it rained for forty days and forty nights and the waters enveloped the earth and destroyed all flesh except for the occupants of the Ark. When the waters had subsided Noah went forth with his wife and his sons and his sons' wives and all that was aboard the Ark and was blessed by God to "Be fruitful, and multiply and replenish the earth." In other words, Madam Speaker, Noah and his household were mandated by God to Get Up! Go Forth! Replant! and Rebuild!

So apocalyptic was this event that man's existence on earth ever since is referred to in 2 epochs; antediluvian, that is before the flood, and current times, which is referred to as after the flood. This is not the only transformational event in man's history as recorded in the Bible, for the Bible is not so much about Noah as it is about Christ; the promise of a Redeemer, His birth, His life among us, His death and His resurrection. That event too has had an indelible impact on mankind, and our history up to the time of Christ is referred to as Before Christ, B.C; and thereafter, as the Year of Our Lord or in Latin, Anno Domini or A.D. for short. Madam Speaker, A.D. is not as some would have it, i.e. After Death.

Other Defining Events

The other major event which has to a large extent defined our modern world, would be the World Wars of the first half of the 20th century, more particularly the Second World War which saw the dismantling of empires, the creation of independent nation states and the division of the world into ideological political blocks of East and West. Thus, our most recent history is divided into the period before the wars and after the wars. World War I which is sometimes referred to as the Great War or the War to end all wars was followed in a mere 21 years by an even more catastrophic war, World War II.

When we look at separate or individual countries we find that each country has had its own major events which have defined that country, its history, its culture, its economy.

Such defining events may be wars or revolutions, political upheavals, major discoveries of natural resources or catastrophic natural disasters.

For us in Dominica, the major defining moments of our short history as a nation state was not the attainment of independence itself, the fortieth anniversary of which we will be observing this November, but the major natural disasters which we, as a young fledgling micro state, have had to endure not once, not twice, but three times in our short history and on each occasion, we, like Noah and his family, have had to Get Up! Go Forth! Replant! and Rebuild!

Hurricane David

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

When on the morning of August 29, 1979, we woke up to the news that Hurricane David had veered toward us during the night and that we were now directly in the path of that monster storm we were completely unprepared as the forecast the day before was that the hurricane would pass well south of us. All that had changed during the night and we were already being affected by the outer bands of the storm. In a matter of hours, we were experiencing the full force of Category 5 Hurricane David. The eye of the hurricane passed over the southern part of the island, but the impact was islandwide. In about 6 hours we were totally devastated; with public utilities, housing and commercial buildings, roads and bridges all destroyed. Some 40 lives were lost and the economy, which was heavily dependent on agriculture, primarily banana exports to the UK was completely ruined. In the aftermath, tent cities were set up at the Botanic Gardens,

the Pottersville Savannah and elsewhere. Everyone instantly became a carpenter, a mason and/or a chainsaw operator. The following day the British ship HMS Fife arrived in Dominica and since we were completely cut off from the outside world, (except for a ham radio being operated by Fred White, Chief Technician at DBS), a communications centre was set up by HMS Fife in the upper rooms of Government House which is now the State House Conference Centre, thus allowing the Interim Government and the Committee for National Salvation to appeal for international assistance. The sailors aboard the HMS Fife assisted with clearing of roads, water purification and temporary reroofing of the Princess Margaret Hospital. I was privileged, Madam Speaker, to host Admiral John Lippiett Retired and his wife Jenny at the State House on 25th of March 2017. Admiral Lippiett had been a Flag Lieutenant aboard the HMS Fife at the time of its visit in

1979, and was paying his first return visit to Dominica since Hurricane David.

In response to our appeal, (at that time there was no ODM, no CDEMA, no RSS), relief supplies poured in as did emergency personnel, including the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Sea Bees. We became totally dependent on food aid and relief supplies, called “brogodow,” for about 6 months.

We had never experienced anything like Hurricane David in living memory, but we lifted ourselves up, we replanted, and we rebuilt. Hurricane David therefore became a defining moment in our experience and a reference point in our evolution as a society, so much so that life experiences in Dominica were categorised as being before David and after David.

Climate Resilience Post Maria

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

The more recent experience with Tropical Storm Erika where some 90% of our GDP was lost, and now with Hurricane Maria, where the loss was in the region of 224% of our GDP, clearly demonstrates that we must make the transition to a Climate Resilient Country. This is mandatory for continued social and economic advancement of ourselves and our country. We must improve our capacity to withstand these catastrophic natural events which we are told are likely to become more frequent and even more devastating, and to mitigate the effect and recover more quickly if and when impacted. The alternative would be retrogression with each and every event.

The Government has taken the initiative in articulating a vision to make Dominica the First Climate Resilient Country in the world. It is however incumbent upon each of us, whether at the household level, at the community level or within individual enterprises, to play our part. The fact is that going forward, we must all collaborate around a designated Climate Resilient Pathway for overall success and for our survival as a country and a people.

The question could then be asked as to what exactly does the *Transition* to a Climate Resilient Country entail and how best should the associated programme(s) be implemented in practical terms.

Conceptually, there is an inverse relationship between vulnerability and resilience; that is, a decline in vulnerability means an increase or improvement in resilience. Accordingly, a society which is Climate Resilient, as measured by Objectively Verifiable Indicators (OVIs), is also a society whose vulnerability to weather induced disasters/catastrophes is low. Note that in the real world of today, vulnerability of any society or country to adverse climatic conditions can never be eliminated completely or quickly; rather, the magnitude or extent of such vulnerability may be reduced or mitigated, or alternatively, the adaptive capacity of relevant entities in the society may be strengthened.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

Resilience of the local economy and indeed Climate Resilience has perhaps emerged as the pre-eminent challenge of the 21st century and hence the onus is on us, both individually and collectively, to address our own vulnerability urgently. The problem is rooted in the phenomenon of Global Warming and Climate Change, the evidence on which indicates, that the causal factors associated with Global Warming and Climate Change originated largely outside the Caribbean and specifically in industrialized countries. We have essentially become innocent victims of man's assault on the environment resulting in Global Warming and Climate Change. That situation notwithstanding, as one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, Dominica has a responsibility to seek to mitigate the negative impacts of Climate Change on its people, and to devise strategies towards finding solutions to this problem. In that regard, we continue to

partner with the international community and will seek to develop best practices which can be replicated elsewhere.

In that way, the country would be on a Sustainable Development Path in accordance with the accepted United Nations definition of sustainability, that ... “development is sustainable when it meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

Overcoming Challenges

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

It is worthy of note that Climate Resilience is a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. Generally, the *raison d'être* for Government anywhere continues to be to spearhead efforts aimed at improving the ‘Quality of Life’ of its citizens; that is, whether or not utilization of the principles

of Climate Resilience is relevant or germane in the particular circumstances.

Accordingly, as the new financial year 2018/2019 unfolds, operations of the Climate Resilient Execution Agency of Dominica (CREAD) will begin to emerge as the vehicle providing technical support and guidance for effective and efficient implementation of selected projects emanating from the *National Resilient Development Strategy (NRDS)* and thereby contribute to returning the country onto a Sustainable Development Pathway. Towards that end, it is envisaged that activities of the CREAD will encompass overcoming *Challenges* in such areas as:

Sea and River Defences; Transport Infrastructure, i.e. roads, ports and airports; Public Buildings such as Schools, Hospitals, Clinics and Hurricane Shelters;

Police and Fire stations; the Agriculture Sector; the Housing Stock; Water and Sanitation Facilities; the continued undergrounding of Utility Lines; the further Development of Renewable Energy and an enabling environment for private sector development and expansion.

Additionally, there will be need for a change of attitude, perception and productivity by the populace as a whole, which is necessary in order that:

- Dominica's recovery from Hurricane Maria can be as effective as possible with the ensuing reconstruction undertaken in keeping with the "Build Back Better" guidelines;
- Dominica can become more resilient to natural disasters thereby resulting in minimal damage or disruptions to livelihoods; and

- The entire society can become better equipped to manage disasters as well as to recover from disasters.

The Challenge

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

In retrospect, it can be said that the raging flood waters and ferocious winds of Hurricane Maria knocked us about and threatened our very survival as a people and a country but we are nevertheless undaunted. We are therefore very thankful and eternally grateful for the rapid response of our Caribbean neighbours and the international community and for the fortitude of our first responders and the indomitable spirit of our people.

The *Challenge* now that we have picked ourselves up, is to **Go Forth! Replant! and Rebuild, Better!** and to do this within the context of a Sustainable Development Framework so as to make Dominica the First Climate Resilient Country in the Caribbean and in the world.

May the good Lord shower His blessings upon us all and protect us from further catastrophic natural disasters.

I thank you.