



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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Statement

By

Hon. Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves

Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

At the

**General Debate
of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is proud whenever a member of our Small Island Developing States assumes the Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly. As we thank outgoing President Mogens Lykketoft for his noble labours in our global vineyard, we repose special trust in you, Mr. President, to lead our Assembly at this crucial juncture. From our Atlantic archipelago to your Pacific one, we pledge our cooperation and solidarity in your important mission.

Mr. President,

[This annual gathering of nations is stuffed with ceremony, but it is not merely ceremonial. Those of us who are entrusted with the sacred honour of representing our countrymen and women take this podium to not only reaffirm the principles that undergird this Assembly, but to give voice to our people's needs, fears and aspirations. This gathering allows for an indispensable exchange of views and viewpoints from every diverse corner of our global village. If we pay attention to these voices, not out of polite protocol, but genuine interest, we will hear among them both the diagnoses and the prescriptions that will define a forward-looking, action-oriented global agenda.]

With each passing year this Assembly has heard more and more voices, with greater and greater intensity, chronicling the shortcomings as well as the possibilities of our modern global order. As this crescendo of collective wisdom has grown ever more powerful, it has become increasingly apparent that our global architecture's in-built inequalities are threatening the very foundations of this 72-year-old international experiment: inequalities of access and opportunity; unequal distribution of global

burdens and benefits; a system of double standards untethered from principle; a calcification of the very divisions that globalization was meant to obliterate.

However, even as the voices have grown more powerful, the inequalities they decry have remained stubbornly intractable. The voices from the periphery, no matter how loud or plentiful, appear unable to rouse the core beneficiaries of a flawed system from their affluent apathy. No matter how many global crises have been, and are, plainly rooted in global inequalities, powerful short-term self-interest has prevailed in the face of collective common sense.

2016 has seen the ripening of the fruit of that short-sighted approach. The pressure for change now comes not only from the marginalized outposts of globalization's casualties, but internally, from within the rich and powerful nations themselves. Globalisation's discontents and its discontented have reached critical mass within the citadels of casino capitalism and consumption. This discontent has been transmitted with crystal clarity via ballot boxes from Montana to the British Midlands, where the cool logic of the status quo was trumped by emotional appeals for a return, however undesirable, to past glories, imagined or real.

The crescendo of voices is now borderless and crosscutting. It is impossible to ignore any longer.

Mr. President,

[The promise of globalization has been lost amid old insularities and among ancient and aspiring hegemony that seek to plunder the benefits, but defer the burdens of our evolving international order. What has evolved is a bastardised version of what was first envisaged: a globalization that integrates investors but puts working people in disarray and isolates immigrants. A system that clamors for commodities but denies the shared responsibilities of a warming planet, rising oceans and the destruction wrought by a wronged mother nature. A condition thus emerges, and consolidates, a regime where the contagion of crisis spreads rapidly along globalisation's superhighways, but the promise of prosperity is stalled on the neglected back roads of great power indifference. Within our shrinking world, the illusion of intimacy has given way to an epoch of intolerance, where the far right, the ultranationalist charlatans and the religious zealots find common cause in exploiting globalisation's fissures to stoke old fears and prejudices.]

The threadbare cliches of globalization's assumed benefits are of cold comfort to marginalized nations and peoples. They have thirsted too long at the dry spigot of promised trickle-down prosperity. The long-foretold "rising tide that lifts all boats," has come in the form of rising seas that threaten to inundate Small Island Developing States, and a tsunami of corporate consolidations that have had a deleterious effect on small states, small business, small farmers, and the poor.

In 2016, we must confront the chasm between our idealistic expectations and our deeply flawed realities. Modern globalization, as a concept, as a system of rules and norms, and as an international practice, is unbalanced and unsustainable. It is a system that is broken; not beyond repair, but in urgent need of transformation. The benefits accrue to

a few; and the burdens of globalization are too onerous for the many. To use a cricketing metaphor, we must take a “fresh guard.”

Mr. President,

It is this urgent need for a fresh and transformative approach that adds impetus and immediacy to your theme for this General Debate, which calls for a “universal push to transform our world.” In recognizing the potential of the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve that transformation, you Mr. President have correctly identified our existing difficulties as rooted in the inequalities that the SDGs seek to address. Our collective quest to achieve those goals is indistinguishable from the overarching pursuit of a fairer, more just, more equal world. We must accept your invitation, Mr. President, to reimagine and redesign our global compact, not in the narrow interest of modern-day robber-barons, but with people-centred programmes and policies.

In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, my government has aggressively adopted the SDG agenda. Our focus on economic development and job creation, quality education, poverty eradication, the strengthening of institutions and infrastructure, renewable energy, climate resilience, citizen health and wellness and security, are all central to our national medium-term development plans.

This year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines launched a “Zero Hunger Trust Fund,” inspired by Goals 1 and 2 of the SDGs. The Zero Hunger Trust Fund employs a narrowly targeted and multifaceted series of tools designed to ensure that no citizen will go to bed hungry by the year 2020. We hope that the Fund will be generously supported by our

development partners, and that it will become a best-practice template that can be adopted and adapted in other Small Island contexts.

Goal 7 of the SDGs speaks to the development of renewable energy, with particular emphasis on Small Island Developing States. In our own quest for affordable and clean energy, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has invested heavily in developing our geothermal resources. We anticipate that, by 2019, fifty percent of our national energy needs will be supplied by geothermal energy and a full 80% of our energy will be generated by a mix of renewable resources, including hydro and solar. We are indebted to the Clinton Global Initiative, the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, DFID, the Caribbean Development Bank, the International Renewable Energy Agency, among others, for their invaluable support in this initiative. [If a small, resource-challenged nation like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines can revolutionize its energy mix and radically reduce our reliance on fossil fuels in a few short years, we find it impossible to accept the dilatory foot-dragging of rich powerful nations that have a real responsibility to rapidly reduce their emissions footprint.]

Mr. President,

As big-emitters continue to dither, more frequent and intense hurricanes wash away large swaths of our GDP in a matter of hours.

The terrible effects of climate change are already upon us. The spotlight on mitigation has to now be shared with adaptation, which is a more immediate concern. We are on a trajectory of rising temperatures and the mitigation pledges made by countries ahead

of the Paris Accord in December 2015 put us on a track for a 3 to 3.5 degree Celsius increase in global temperatures by the end of the century.

I applaud the international community for reaching the much-anticipated Paris Agreement in December 2015 and the Secretary-General for convening a high level event on the entry into force of the Agreement during this 71st session. However, the promises in the Paris Agreement to mitigate climate change and to provide climate finance are inadequate and unenforceable. Indeed, as President Obama noted in his final UN address as Preseident, the Paris Agreement is just the framework and we still need to increase ambition.

[While the Paris Agreement is non-intrusive, non-punitive, respectful of national sovereignty, and avoids placing undue burden on Parties, climate change and its attendant effects are intruding into our sovereign territory and causing destruction coral reefs, hurricanes with increasing frequency and intensity, alternating droughts and heavy rainfall and sea level rise.

This year some 14 percent of our total Capital Budget has been directed towards the strengthening of our country's resilience to natural disasters. These funds have been diverted from other important areas to fix an existential problem that we did not create. Meanwhile the creators of the problem are not being held sufficiently accountable.]

The failure to mobilise sufficiently and simplify access to the promised climate finance mirrors official development aid scenarios where most developed countries have failed

to meet the 0.7% of GNI target agreed to in the Monterrey Consensus (2002) and accessing the promised finance is like pulling teeth without anesthetic.

[The intentionally blurred line between climate finance and official development assistance effectively deprives us of the new and additional funds promised to fight climate change in developing countries.]

Mr. President,

For a transformed globalization to be legitimate, it must be fully inclusive. Its inclusivity must be based on the principles embodied in the letter and spirit of our Charter: Sovereign equality, non-interference, and an end to the type of cynical enabling of great power intrigue at the expense of people's lives and livelihoods.

Nowhere is this cynicism and feigned impotence more apparent than in the civil war that has devastated the Syrian Arab Republic over the last five years. This Assembly and the Security Council have too frequently turned a blind eye and a stilled tongue to the actions of countries that sought to fund and foment war and instability in Syria. Military victory is not available for anyone in this conflict; clearly creative diplomacy is the answer. [Seduced by the externally-crafted narrative of an "Arab Spring," the Security Council shifted its attention from the role of the global economic crisis in causing unrest, and instead embraced the same regime change playbook that once caused them to imagine Weapons of Mass Destruction in places where none existed. Beyond the many compelling theoretical and practical arguments for an expanded and reformed Security Council — which Saint Vincent and the Grenadines wholeheartedly

supports — the ongoing ineptitude of the current Council on Syria is a self-evident justification for rapid and far reaching reform.

Today, Syria has devolved into an old-fashioned proxy war, with the added unpredictable element of savage terrorists who commit cold-blooded murder in the name of God. Today, as warring factions and their benefactors retool and resupply under the guise of a fragile cease-fire, this body, and the Security Council, have a special responsibility to devote clear-eyed diplomatic effort to a realistic, lasting, termination of hostilities and reunification of Syria.]

The impotence of learned helplessness and the tyranny of fossilized inaction has allowed for the continued and manifestly unjust exclusion of many nations from the promise of an integrated world. The people of the State of Palestine are victims of this impotence, despite overwhelming recognition of Palestine and the obvious need for an independent, contiguous, internationally-supported state, living in peace alongside it's Israeli neighbors. With each passing day, and with each land-grab and illegal settlement by Israel, a two-state solution becomes ever more remote, and instability in the Middle East becomes all but guaranteed.

The people-centered and progressive leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean, who dared to dream of alternatives to an iniquitous status quo, are once again being punished for their impertinence. From the continued embargo of the noble Cuban people, to the externally-stoked unrest in Venezuela, to the parliamentary coup d'etat in Brazil, we are entering a new but depressingly familiar chapter in a book already soaked with the blood of progressive heroes. However, yesteryear's schemes of dirty

tricks and divisions will fail in the face of a new solidarity that has taken root across our region. Within CARICOM, CELAC, ALBA and the signatories to the PetroCaribe agreement, our states understand the unshakeable strength that comes from unity, and the courage of our collective convictions. [We know that there are solutions for our region and our people other than the flawed hand-me-downs of external hegemony. Our hard-earned solidarity in the face of new adversity will be a standing rebuke to their ambitious machinations.]

Mr. President,

2016 has marked the inauguration of a new, democratically-elected President in the Republic of China (Taiwan). [We applaud not only the peaceful transfer of power but President Tsai Ing-wen's commitment to making the will of the Taiwanese people the dominant force in shaping Taiwan's future.] The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms our continued solidarity with the aspirations of the Taiwanese government and people, as they have stood with us throughout our post-independence development journey. We decry the myopia of a body that would pretend 24 million people don't exist, or one that forces a false choice between two magnificent exemplars of the noble Chinese civilization. Such behavior only marginalizes a vibrant people and creates space for parasitic opportunists to prostitute principle for personal gain. We must recognize Taiwan's exemplary global citizenship and commitment to development worldwide. It is high time that Taiwan be allowed to participate meaningfully in all of the Specialized Bodies and programmes of the United Nations. There is absolutely no compelling argument to the contrary.

Mr. President,

I have spoken in the past of the United Nations' shameful failure to acknowledge its indisputable role in the spread of cholera in Haiti. The catastrophe has now killed over 10,000 Haitians and infected almost 800,000 others. The outbreak shows no sign of abating. Last month, the United Nations belatedly acknowledged its culpability, while continuing to use claims of immunity to deny the victims of this tragedy their fundamental right to be made whole. The cholera epidemic and the UN's failure to address or arrest it has laid bare a shameful ethical bankruptcy and institutional cowardice through legal subterfuge. The draft report on this issue by UN Special Rapporteur Professor Philip Alston has called the UN's response to the cholera epidemic "*morally unconscionable, legally indefensible and politically self-defeating.*" We agree.

In Haiti's neighbour, the Dominican Republic, the human rights crisis affecting tens of thousands of Dominican-born citizens of Haitian descent remains unresolved. As the Caribbean Community and other actors have sought to persuade the Dominican authorities to respect the rights of its citizens against statelessness and state-sponsored ethnic and racial victimization, the UN's indifference is wholly unacceptable. [It is becoming difficult to imagine precisely what type of human rights catastrophe could befall Haiti or her descendants that would cause the United Nations to act in a caring, responsible or credible manner.]

The Caribbean Community's determined quest for reparatory justice for victims of the transatlantic slave trade and native genocide continues to gather momentum. Historians, economists, other academics, human rights lawyers and social activists have

coalesced into a formidable advocacy and educational force in this cause, and our citizens continue to be enthusiastically engaged in the process of discussion and awareness. We call upon the European nations that created and profited immeasurably from this indefensible trade in human beings to join us in the conversation about the contours of a just and appropriate response to this monumental tragedy and its consequential legacy of underdevelopment.

Mr. President,

[While we agree that the Sustainable Development Goals hold within them the power to transform our world, other reforms are urgently necessary. Too many bad ideas have solidified into conventional wisdom; not because of a lack of alternatives but due to a lazy acceptance of past practice, stoked by the few beneficiaries of these global errors.]

The uneven and prolonged aftermath of 2008's global economic and financial crisis highlights the need for major revisions to our global financial architecture, which has proven unable to either prevent or respond to major crises. Voice and vote reforms of the Bretton Woods Institutions cannot be deferred any longer. Similarly, a number of rules and regulations implemented in the wake of the 2008 crisis and the global war on terror have had unintended, and potentially devastating impacts on the economies of small states. Current heavy-handed Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations have led to a wave of de-risking and loss of correspondent banking relations in the Caribbean banking sector. [The result will be a disconnecting of our countries from global finance and a shifting of potentially risky transactions to institutions that lack the regulatory wherewithal to handle them.] These regulations must be revised urgently

before legitimate transactions in the Caribbean—from credit card payments to remittances to foreign direct investment—grind to a halt.

Mr. President,

[The dream of equitable development cannot be deferred any longer. This institution cannot busy itself any longer with the choreography of dancing angels on the head of a pin. Every time we shirk from the big questions, shrink in the big moments and defer the decisions that must be taken, we diminish this institution; we diminish this era of global cooperation; and we encourage the type of insular self-interest that sows the seeds of our collective crisis.]

Let us imagine a better world. A fairer world. A peaceful world. A world with a safe and sustainable future. And let us work toward that world. Not burdened by the errors of the past or constrained by the shackles of learned helplessness, but confident, optimistic and clear-eyed about the boundless possibilities of genuine international cooperation.

[The famous Renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci once said

"I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do."]

The universal push to transform our world is urgent and necessary. We know and feel this fundamental truth. It is time for focused and meaningful action. Let's get on with it.

I thank you.