



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

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

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## **Statement**

By

**H.E. Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves**

Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

At the

**General Debate of the  
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the outset, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines express its solidarity with the people of Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and the United States, who have been savagely battered in quick succession by Hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike. Within the Caribbean and Our America, the heroism, bravery and resilience of the Cuban, Haitian and Jamaican people and ordinary Americans are a well-documented source of pride to us all. We wish you a speedy recovery, and stand with you in your rebuilding efforts.

Mr. President, allow me to express my pleasure in noting that the Presidency of the General Assembly is now held by a man whose native shores are kissed by the magnificent Caribbean Sea. I am comforted by the knowledge that you have a full appreciation of the majesty of our landscape and seascape, the opportunities and challenges facing our region, and the nobility of our Caribbean civilisation. Your dream that “Another World is Possible,” as courageously outlined in your inaugural Presidential statement, is both timely and prescient. I wholeheartedly endorse your call for frankness, democratisation, and a focus on the needs of the poor, all under the redemptive and transformative rubric of love and solidarity with our fellow man.

It is in that spirit of love and frankness that I come before you today, Mr. President. In all candor, I must reaffirm what you have already concluded: That the United Nations, as the supreme multilateral institution of a profoundly troubled and iniquitous world, can and must do more, in the form of decisive action, to improve the condition of our planet, the living conditions of the less fortunate, and the safety of our global family.

The late Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia once stated that:

*“Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph.”*

There can be no doubt that the right-thinking and civilised peoples of the world are aware of the challenges facing us, and of the path to peace, progress and prosperity upon which we must collectively embark. However, the work that we have entrusted to the United Nations is compromised by apathy and inaction by too many of us, and the crippling pursuit of narrow self-interest by a handful of powerful countries. We have, in this session, an historic opportunity to reassert the relevance and credibility of this body by keeping the promises that we have made to ourselves and the world.

The United Nations is charged with tackling the weighty problems that beset the world, not with the refinement of the art of impotent diplomacy. I have no doubt that the principles concealed in the language of “mandate review,” “system wide coherence” and “revitalisation” are important, and doubly so to the professional diplomats who look inward rather than outward, and who lose sight of the forest for the trees, in their endless quest to choreograph the dancing of ever more angels on the head of a pin. But bureaucratise will neither excite nor engage the poor and marginalised people that we have created this body to serve. When our signature achievements and emphases are esoterically bureaucratic, it speaks to a broader failing of the United Nations to achieve the noble goals of its overarching mandate, as spelt out so compellingly in the preamble of its Charter.

Mr. President, One year ago, I stood at this very podium and denounced the failure of the international community to end the genocide in Darfur. One year ago, there were promising, though belated, signs that the UN was finally beginning to act decisively in this regard. One year ago I said that “the force on the ground is still insufficient, its mandate ambiguous, and its emerging presence years too late.” Today, one year later, I am shocked by our continued collective failures in Darfur. Last month, Force Commander Martin Luther Agwai compared his role to that of a boxer in the ring with his hands tied behind his back, because his promised force of 26,000 personnel is still less than 10,000 strong. I am forced to wonder whether our promises of “never again” and our commitments to the memories of one million Rwandans mean nothing, as the blood of hundreds of thousands of Africans again stains the soil of the Continent and our collective conscience. As a people whose past and future are inextricably interwoven with the Continent, the citizens of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines ask ourselves, in the words of Caribbean Nobel Laureate from St. Lucia, Derek Walcott, “*How can I face such slaughter and be cool?/ How can I turn from Africa and live?*” The conflict in Darfur is over five years old, and the time has long since past for genuine international action to halt this unspeakable human tragedy.

The conflicts on the African continent, and the half-hearted half-measures employed against them, beg the question of why no African country has joined some of their former colonial exploiters and enslavers as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council; and why the membership of that Council remains an anachronistic reflection of a bygone geopolitical era. While I congratulate the General Assembly on finally clearing the way towards intergovernmental negotiations on Security Council reform, it cannot be an illusory or insincere process. The credibility of the decisions made by the United Nations in the name of peace and security hinges on the existence of a Security Council that is democratic, and representative of the regional and developmental diversity of our body.

Mr. President, as you are well aware, the scarcities and escalating prices of basic foodstuffs have already led to riots and political instability worldwide and within our own Caribbean Community. While Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has confronted the crisis with a creative National Food Production Plan that mixes agricultural incentives with education and assistance, our local measures are only ameliorative, and cannot totally insulate us from what is largely an imported problem. We are again buffeted by the winds of unequal trade liberalisation, in which the agricultural subsidies of developed states force our own nascent agro-industries to an uncompetitive demise. We are witness to a world where crops are grown to feed cars, while people starve, and where climate change ruins age-old farming and fishing livelihoods. The so-called food crisis that we now face is but a symptom of deeper structural flaws in our global economic system and consumerist culture. It represents the human face at the confluence of countless systemic flaws and poorly conceived strategies, including trade barriers, the mad rush to biofuels, adverse climate changes, and anemic development assistance. Any meaningful attempt to alleviate the suffering of the poor and hungry of the world must start with these systemic issues, and resist the urge to treat the symptoms while ignoring the disease and its causes.

The banana farmers of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continue their heroic struggles to eke out a living in the face of corporate greed, thinly disguised as principled globalisation. Our farmers, tradesmen and private sector are still waiting for the oft-promised opportunities that

supposedly accompany globalisation, but the evidence to date suggests that the international community has inadvertently institutionalised and entrenched poverty within a system of global winners and losers. The ironically titled “development round” of Doha looks less and less like a negotiating process and more and more like a suicide pact within the WTO, in which the major economic powers want everything and concede little or nothing to the poor and developing nations of the world. The solutions to our economic crises hinge upon genuine negotiation and compromise in the interest of the world’s least privileged. We are ill-served by benign neglect, unequal enforcement, and concepts of welfare colonialism. The recent troubles in the world’s premier financial and banking countries exacerbate the profound challenges facing developing nations.

Six years ago, world leaders gathered in Mexico and gave birth to the Monterrey Consensus, in which they pledged their objective to “eradicate poverty, achieve sustained economic growth, and promote sustainable development as we advance to a fully inclusive and equitable global economic system.” I prayed at the time that the conference would not devolve into “a dragon’s dance upon a decorous platform of the finest diplomatic language which few are determined to embrace for action.” Six years later, Monterrey is remembered as the site of grand, unfulfilled commitments to the developing world, much as Africa recalls the empty promises of Gleneagles. The four decades old promise of devoting 0.7% of GNI to Official Development Assistance remains more illusion than reality. Countries like ours, therefore, are forced to scour the globe for friends willing to partner with us for the development of our people, while others would rather sit in judgment of our developmental decisions and priorities than rise to offer a helping hand. Irish philosopher Edmund Burke once opined that “*Hypocrisy can afford to be magnificent in its promises; for never intending to go beyond promises; it costs nothing.*” The unfulfilled promises of the powerful are a comfort to no one, and subvert the credibility of the developed world and the multilateral process.

Mr. President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines once again pleads with the international community to be cognisant of the plight of Taiwan’s 23 million people. Even though the United Nations’ historical neglect of the Taiwan issue has not been a source of pride, the government of Taiwan has acted responsibly and without confrontation to subordinate many of its legitimate political claims into efforts aimed at reducing cross-Strait tensions, promoting peace and building relations with People’s Republic of China. The United Nations must now act to ensure the survival of this fledgling rapprochement. Taiwan should be encouraged on its path to peace by permitting its meaningful participation in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. Much as Taiwan’s vibrant economy is recognised through its participation in the WTO, there is no compelling reason why its equally vibrant people should be denied participation in the WHO and other specialized agencies.

Mr. President, the Caribbean is in the midst of its annual hurricane season, and the awesome winds, sea surges and torrential rains of Gustav, Hanna and Ike have brought the issue of climate change into sharp relief. The hitherto once-in-a-lifetime storm is now an almost annual occurrence, and our day-to-day life is becoming severely affected by irregular weather patterns, coastal erosion, coral bleaching and tragic landslides. The mitigation promises made by the developed world must be kept without delay. This is a matter of life and death to the people of the Caribbean and other Small Island Developing States. Similarly, the cost of adaptation to the changes wrought by our industrialised brothers and sisters must be borne – adequately and

responsibly – by those who have so profoundly altered our global environment. Hurricanes remind us in the Caribbean of our existential oneness. Accordingly, the efforts of Caribbean nations to fashion a more perfect union is to be fully supported as a vital strategic necessity.

The geographic happenstance that has placed the innocent people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the path of increasingly intense storms has also located us unfortunately between the supply and demand that fuels much of the West's narcotics trade. As a result, our scarce resources are increasingly being diverted to stem the tide of drugs and small arms flowing through our region. To the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, disarmament does not mean the eradication of nuclear weapons, which we lack the will and resources to build, but the elimination of small arms, which threaten to shoot holes in the fabric of our democracy and compromise the values of our civilisation. We are assailed by guns, which we do not build; and by deadly narcotics such as cocaine, which we do not produce. The United Nations must act to protect the innocent victims of the world from the scourge of small arms and light weapons.

Mr. President, in recent months, I have been profoundly troubled by the creeping return of cold war rhetoric to the language of international and hemispheric discourse. In this globalised and interconnected world, it is no longer possible to divide the world in competing hemispheres, or to completely quarantine ideological friend from foe. We must guard against the return of discarded philosophies and learn from the recent past, in which developing countries were used as pawns and proxies for the hegemonic ambitions of others. Our multipolar experiment is too young for the developing and globalizing world to return to the old rhetoric and recriminations that invariably blossom into violence and death, most often visited on the peoples of developing countries. It is my sincere prayer that this august body hews closely to the principles of multilateralism and sovereign equality of all states, and resists any pressures for the United Nations to devolve into a playground for the triumphalist ambitions of presumptive superpowers.

Mr. President, you sit at the helm of a body entrusted with the wellbeing and safekeeping of humanity. We have gradually strayed from the noblest of our goals, and increasingly paid only lip service to problems that are well within our ability to solve. In countless spheres, we have promised action. Let us now keep those promises, for the good of our global family.

The late John F. Kennedy, former President of the United States of America, once said that *“there are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”* I believe in the power of the Member States of the United Nations, individually and collectively, to act meaningfully for the betterment of mankind.

The poetic summation of Robert Frost is apt:

*“We shall be saying this, ages and ages hence,  
Two roads diverge in the woods, and I . . .  
I chose the one least traveled by  
and that has made all the difference.”*

Let us choose with courage the road least traveled by. Each of us can make a difference, accordingly.

I thank you!