



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

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

800 2nd Ave., Ste. 400G, New York, NY 10017 • Tel: (212) 599-0950 • Fax: (212) 599-1020 • [www.svg-un.org](http://www.svg-un.org)

## **Statement**

By

**Dr. the Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves**

Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

At the

**High Level Plenary Meeting  
on the Millennium Development Goals**

22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2010  
New York

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Mr. President, Excellencies, distinguished ladies and gentlemen:

The purpose of this United Nations Summit is to consider our individual and collective progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, which we committed to achieve by the year 2015. We have also gathered, as we have in the past, to reiterate our political commitment to achieving the MDGs. However, the threadbare rhetoric of good political intentions is meaningless without a demonstrated and tangible fulfillment of past pledges.

Over the past 10 years, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has made tremendous strides in achieving many of the MDGs. Indeed, even in the face of an increasingly difficult international economic environment, we have achieved many of the MDGs far ahead of schedule.

For example, Goal 1 of the MDGs codifies the overarching goal of our global pact – namely, the elimination of hunger and poverty. The standard set by the international community was that, by 2015, each country should reduce by half those persons who live in extreme poverty. I am proud to report that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has far exceeded this target, well in advance of the 2015 deadline. In the past decade, extreme poverty has been reduced from roughly 26% of the population to a mere 2.9%. This amounts to an almost 90% reduction in indigence.

To be sure, poverty, more broadly defined, remains a stubborn and vexing challenge in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. We have reduced non-indigent poverty by one-fifth in the past decade, but 30% of our population continues to struggle with less extreme forms of poverty.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has also far exceeded the goal of universal primary education. Indeed, we have achieved universal *secondary* education – improving access from 39% to 100% in just five years. By 2015, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will have achieved universal access to primary, secondary *and* early childhood education. Our ongoing “Education Revolution” remains the cornerstone of my government’s people-centered development policy.

Our health ministry has worked diligently to meet the relevant MDGs. Under-five child mortality has been reduced by almost half, and now approaches developed world standards. The spread of HIV has stabilized in my country, and we remain hopeful that we will begin to claim measurable success in reversing its prevalence in the coming years. We have increased access to pipe-borne water from 70% to over 98% through prudent infrastructural investments. Internet connectivity has tripled, and we now have more active mobile phone subscriptions than we have citizens.

Mr. President,

Despite these tremendous developmental strides, many obstacles still remain to achieving and sustaining the MDGs in our national, regional and international context. The collapse of the world economy, climate change, inequitable trade regimes, and the impact of transnational crime, all threaten our fragile gains.

From the perspective of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the most woefully unmet MDG is Goal 8, titled “A global partnership for development.” While developing countries continue their heroic struggle to advance in an increasingly difficult economic environment, many of our development partners have replaced their firm and measurable commitments of assistance with platitudes and empty rhetoric.

The United Nations has reported<sup>1</sup> that the developed world has provided less than half of the development assistance that it pledged to deliver. The developing world received \$120 billion in 2009, far short of the \$300 billion that was pledged. The Gleneagles commitments to Africa are \$20 billion short. The Official Development Assistance pledge of 0.7% of Gross National Income remains a cruelly unfulfilled promise for all but a few countries. The limited trickle of available assistance is unreliable, unevenly distributed and heavily influenced by political, rather than developmental, considerations. The financial crisis and the failed Doha Development Round belie the Goal 8 pledge to “[d]evelop . . . an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system.” From the perspective of the small, heavily indebted states of CARICOM, the Goal 8 commitment to debt relief rings similarly hollow.

Further, I must emphasise that much of the developing world remains mired in a situation that is not of our making. The developed world’s unmet pledges of development assistance were made well before those same countries plunged the world into a global economic and financial crisis. And their words of commitment were uttered before we had the full measure of the impacts of climate change. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had no role in creating the financial and economic crisis. We are blameless in causing climate change. Further, the responsibility for the crises in food and fuel prices is not ours.

Yet, in a brazenly illogical and indefensible manner, those who are culpable for these crises unacceptably cite the very calamities that they created as the basis upon which they can avoid their commitments to developing countries. They point to the fact that poverty and unemployment are rising drastically in the world’s major economies. They resort to thinly disguised code words like “aid effectiveness” and “governance structures” to mask their failings to meet their own assistance targets.

Somehow, we are expected to soldier on, with less assistance than promised, and in an international environment that is hostile to development, while the creators of the crises and the deliverers of empty promises often look askance at our developmental needs.

Mr. President,

The achievement of the MDGs is at a critical juncture. My government’s people-centered strides towards these goals are vulnerable, and potentially reversible, in this period of increasing global economic hardship. Internationally, the MDGs are unattainable and unsustainable without a shrinking of the yawning credibility gap between what is pledged and what is delivered by our development partners. For the next five years, Goal 8 must be the engine of further development, and the fulcrum by which we leverage our own national and regional best practices. The difference between achievement of the MDGs and failure is the difference between real commitments and empty promises; between responsibility and avoidance.

The great American President Abraham Lincoln once said that “[y]ou cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” As 2015 approaches, no one is served by evasive words and deeds by our friends, our development partners. A renewed global partnership to development, evidenced by measureable and demonstrable efforts to honour past commitments, is the only sure way that we can collectively attain meaningful and sustainable global development.

I thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> MDG Gap Task Force Report 2010, *Millennium Development Goal 8: The Global Partnership for Development at a Critical Juncture*, 2010