



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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

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Statement

By

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**General Debate
of the 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

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Mr. President,

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the presidency of the 64th Session of the General Assembly. Your experience and abilities are well known and respected, and you have our full support in the coming year. Indeed, we in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are particularly pleased that the presidency has moved from Nicaragua – a country touched by the Caribbean Sea – to a continent that is the ancestral home of the vast majority of our citizens. We have, in essence, kept the presidency within our extended family. We trust that you will continue the exemplary work of your predecessor, Father Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, who fearlessly and tirelessly championed the role of the “G-192” in addressing global challenges.

Mr. President, we face many challenges within our international community. But the majority of our challenges, at their most basic, are symptomatic of a single underlying issue: a struggle by the powerful to cling to their dominion, long after the legitimate bases of their power have faded. We find ourselves in a world governed by outdated norms and assumptions, and our failure to adapt has wrought disastrous consequences on our peoples.

In his welcome and inspiring maiden statement to the General Assembly last Wednesday, our esteemed brother and friend President Barack Obama of the United States correctly identified the challenges to our multilateral unity as “*rooted in a discontent with the status quo.*” We wholeheartedly endorse this assessment. It is a discontent with the status quo of a 63-year-old Security Council, which continues to administer our collective security unchanged and impervious to the logic of a new world. It is a discontent with the role, effectiveness and mandate of the 65-year-old Bretton Woods Institutions, which were created in a bygone era to address bygone circumstances. It is a discontent with a 49 year old blockade on the noble people of our neighbor Cuba, the continued illegal application of which is illogical when viewed through the prism of geopolitics, economics or humanitarianism, and can only be successfully explained by reference to narrow local political considerations.

It is a discontent, even, with the stagnation of efforts to *change* the status quo in other critical respects. The eight years of unresolved negotiations of the Doha Development Round, the 12 years of toothless commitments of the Kyoto Protocol, and the seven years of unfulfilled Monterrey Consensus promises to achieve a 0.7% of GNP for Official Development Assistance – 40 years after this modest percentage was first mooted.

Through it all, the geopolitical status quo remains. The structural bases of international interaction are distressingly similar to their decades-old antecedents. These structures were forged in the fires of World War II, hardened in the frost of the Cold War, and entrenched by the legacies of colonialism and exploitation. But World War II has long since ended, the Cold War is relegated to history books, and the reach of formal colonialism continues to recede. The structures spawned by these historical episodes are no longer valid.

Our discontent is born not only of stagnation but also of exclusion. Although we have a seat in this hallowed building, it is often the seat of a spectator in a historical drama. The directors and actors script history not in the General Assembly, but in other rooms and locales, without our input or knowledge. In many significant ways we are attendees, rather than participants, on the international stage.

Mr. President,

We are in the midst of a global financial and economic crisis of unparalleled depth and scope. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines played no part in the reckless speculation and corruption that precipitated this crisis, yet the people of our country are hard hit by its effects. Our tourism industry is suffering, remittances are shrinking, foreign direct investment is scarce, and the specter of unemployment is a real and gathering regional threat. However, we are actively excluded from the solutions to this problem. Last week, we learned that the G20 anointed itself “the premier forum for our international economic cooperation.” Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is not a member of the G20, nor were we consulted on its ascension to the ranks of arbiters of our economic fate.

While there is an undeniable logic to a small group of the world’s largest economies meeting informally to thrash out matters that affect only their own large economies, the logic fades in the face of a crisis that has spread rapidly and comprehensively to every corner of the globe. Additionally, the G20 faces a serious legitimacy problem: aside from being non- inclusive and unofficial, many of the countries at that table represent the champions of the financial and economic orthodoxies that led the world down the rabbit-hole to its current economic malaise.

Further, the G20’s recent self-congratulatory pronouncements of ‘mission accomplished’ in the midst of this economic upheaval are of cold comfort to the suffering peoples and countries of the world. While the G20 may claim that their actions have “worked,” and claim a “sense of normalcy,” the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and our Caribbean region are under no such illusions. The invisible hand of the market is still clasped firmly around the throats of poor people and the developing countries of the world. We see none of the so-called “green shoots” that populate the fantasies of discredited economic cheerleaders. Indeed, the seeds sown by this crisis may produce the strange and bitter fruit of increased poverty, suffering and social and political upheaval. The crisis itself, with its disproportionate impact on the poor, will only widen and deepen the yawning gap between developed and developing countries.

Mr. President,

It is not merely the economic crisis against which the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continue to struggle heroically. Today, we face the triple threat of being globalized, climatized and stigmatized. We have been globalized by the WTO out of our trade in bananas, which until very recently was the engine of our economic growth. We are on the verge of being climatized out of our reliance on tourism as its developmental substitute, as climate change wreaks havoc on our weather systems, intensifies our hurricanes, destroys our coral reefs, damages our costal infrastructure and erodes our beaches.

Now, we face being stigmatized out of our transition into financial services, as the G20, the OECD and other non-inclusive bodies seek to scapegoat and root out so-called “tax havens” in a pathetic effort to cast a wide and indiscriminate net of blame across a swath of legitimate and well-regulated countries’ development efforts. We note the irony of these paternalistic prescriptions from the same countries that are unable to stem corruption and mismanagement within their own borders, where corporations recklessly squander trillions of dollars and a single buccaneer investor can make \$50 billion disappear into thin air – an amount greater than the combined annual budget expenditures of the entire CARICOM sub-region.

The unholy trinity of exogenous assaults on our developmental prospects posed by globalization, climatization and stigmatization cannot be ignored. Nor can the security threats engendered by the

illicit trade in firearms and narcotics. We in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines find ourselves unfortunately located between the supply and demand of these poisons and weapons, and their deleterious effects rip holes in our cohesive social fabric. The Caribbean, which produces not one single firearm and one single kilo of cocaine, is awash in drugs and guns, and is now the sub-region with the world's highest per capita murder rate. Our plight cannot be ignored. Indeed, we are heartened that the UN Office of Drugs and Crime, which inexplicably ended its presence in our region, has now seen fit to reconsider its decision to cede the Caribbean to drug cartels and murderers. We hope that it represents a genuine – and generous – recommitment to our regional challenges.

Mr. President,

As a small island archipelagic state, we, more than most, are affected and threatened by the ravages of climate change. We, more than most, recognize the critical importance of a meaningful, measurable and enforceable global compact on climate change. However, we do not simply want to “seal the deal” at Copenhagen, as posited by the sloganeers in the UN. We want to seal the *right* deal, the *just* deal, and the deal that ensures our continued survival. We most emphatically will not seal a suicide pact that will assure the elimination of small island states and our way of life. The Alliance of Small Island States has recently issued a declaration that contains what we consider to be the essential contours of any meaningful agreement on climate change. We trust that our blameless position on the front lines of climate change fallout will be considered and respected in the global effort to “seal the deal.” We cannot, as in the case of the world economy, be excluded in any way from the solutions to a problem that so fundamentally affects us.

Mr. President,

The theme of exclusion is equally applicable to our friends in Taiwan. The United Nations and its Specialized Agencies must find ways to ensure the meaningful participation of the 23 million people of Taiwan. Just as their economic strength has merited inclusion in the WTO, and the universality of global health challenges have logically compelled their participation in the World Health Assembly, so too should the global reach of climate change merit the meaningful participation of Taiwan in the UNFCCC. The interconnectedness of global air travel, and our shared safety concerns, similarly mandates the participation of Taiwan in the International Civil Aviation Authority. The government and people of Taiwan have advanced a reasonable and responsible policy of engagement to usher a new era in cross Strait relations. The international community can and should encourage and reward this fledgling rapprochement with meaningful participation in the relevant specialized agencies.

Mr. President,

Any cursory analysis of the excluded and the included, of the discontented and the defenders of the status quo, will quickly reveal that many current inequities are rooted in our colonial history, and that the struggle for geopolitical balance and inclusiveness is indeed the last struggle of decolonization, as we the former colonial territories remain excluded from the inner sanctums and power structures that were established by and for colonizers in a time long since passed.

On 27 October this year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines will celebrate her 30th anniversary of independence. However, we recognize that Independence is a process, not a one-time event. Our independence journey continues today. Thirty years after formal independence, we retain the Queen as our head of state, and our highest judicial appeals travel from our shores to the United Kingdom to be decided by Her Majesty in Council. While we cherish a special, modern and respectful

relationship with the United Kingdom, we do not intend to tarry on colonial premises a moment longer than is necessary. Even as we wage a wider war of attrition against geopolitical colonialism, our citizens are preparing to vote on a new and home-grown Constitution that will break the chains of outmoded dependence and place Saint Vincent and the Grenadines firmly on its two feet as a truly independent republic. This new proposed Constitution, the product of six years of open, transparent and inclusive public consultations, is testament to the political maturity of our people, and of the value of locally tailored solutions to externally imposed impediments.

In a similar manner, our brothers and sisters in the developing world, including Cuba, Venezuela, Turkey, Mexico, Malaysia, Iran, Libya, Brazil, and many others have forged new links and bonds of friendship, cooperation and solidarity with our country that go beyond historical, geographical or colonial linkages. We value these friendships and partnerships as important additions to our traditional and treasured allies in the United States, United Kingdom, Taiwan, Canada and the European Union.

Just as our myriad bilateral friendships and partnerships span geographic, economic and ideological divides, so too must our multilateral cooperation be inclusive and participatory. We can no longer maintain the illusion of holding hands in artificial solidarity across the moats and turrets of structural and systemic inequalities. Modern multilateralism cannot proceed on the bases of the included and the excluded, of the political haves and have-nots. Nor can token assimilations of individual developing countries serve to mask the necessity for deep structural changes to existing power arrangements. We urge our brothers and sisters who have gained limited access to the halls of power to not only be a voice for their excluded brothers, to not only remember where they came from, but also to view themselves as the tip of the spear, the thin edge of the wedge, that will use their newfound privileges to dismantle these structures from within, even as we continue to make our presence felt outside the citadels of stasis and indifference.

Psalm 118 of the Bible teaches that the stone that the builder refused shall be the head cornerstone. We, the poor and developing countries of the world, are the stones that the builders of this body refused and ignored. In rebuilding and revitalizing, we will either be the cornerstones of this institution, or this edifice of multilateral cooperation will crumble into irrelevance and illegitimacy.

Addressing the economic crisis, poverty and development is not an academic exercise. Climate change is not a theoretical event. Reform of global governance is not a diplomatic parlor game. They are the clear and present dangers of our time. And they reflect the need for the real and inclusive participation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Caribbean, and the developing world. They represent also, a need to reflect and address our discontent with a status quo perpetuated for far too long.

Mr. President,

We stand now in the autumn of our discontent. But, as Gandhi said “*Healthy discontent is the prelude to progress.*” The challenge of the discontented is to rise above the ancient animosities and artificial balkanization to achieve the clarity of vision, unity of purpose, and political will to finally and successfully storm the castles of stagnation and status quo, and to drive our peoples, our politics and our planet into a new era of genuine inclusiveness, equity and meaningful people-centered progress.

I thank you.