



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Permanent Mission of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

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STATEMENT

BY

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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with a profound sense of anticipation that I welcome your assumption of the Presidency of the 62nd General Assembly. In your acceptance of the Presidency, you succinctly outlined an exciting *raison d'être* for a modern, active and engaged United Nations; namely, a focus on multilateral cooperation to combat the challenges of globalisation, climate change, terrorism, immigration and sustainable development. I have every confidence that, under your enlightened Presidency, the General Assembly will fashion positive, tangible and creative solutions to these global challenges.

Mr. President, our recent history has taught us that triumphalist, imperialist unilateralism is a consistent cause, but infrequent solution, to the problems confronting today's world. But it is in this moment, as the philosophy of unilateralist misadventure is in its death throes, that a modern and multilateral United Nations must seize the day, fill the vacuum, and live up to the noble and immutable principles of its Charter.

This modern, multilateral UN, under your Presidency, should never sacrifice principle for an ignoble practicality, but instead be suffused with a fairness that views the world through the eyes not of imperial czars, indifferent diplomats or apathetic agencies, to whom suffering is but a television event, easily erased with the flick of a remote control button; but through the eyes of the vast majority of the world's citizens, who struggle daily for survival, who dodge bullets in their backyards, who coax a meager living from parched and exhausted soils, and who have been globalised to the brink of extinction. It is not idealistic or naïve to assert that engaged, fair and genuinely concerned states, working together, can solve the seemingly intractable problems besetting our imperfect planet. Our problems are largely man-made. So too shall be the solutions.

Mr. President, the recent focus on the issue of climate change and global warming by the United Nations is a welcome development and it is the prayer of mankind that this belated momentum has not come too late to reverse the damage already inflicted on our planet. After all, we are short-term caretakers of this earth and it is our sacred duty to preserve it for future generations. The insincerely protracted scientific debate has long since been resolved, and we know both the causes and effects of global warming. Some within the scientific community may wish to busy themselves with questionable esoteric discussions on this subject, but the UN must act now, and act decisively. This is a great cause of our time. And we must not be timid or doubtful in the face of any great cause.

I remind this General Assembly that, 15 years ago, the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change recognised that global warming would have a special impact on small island states, countries with low-lying coastal areas, and countries with areas prone to natural disasters. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, the overwhelming majority of our hard-won infrastructural developments, by way of geographic necessity, lie mere inches above sea level, and perilously close to the coastline. Through absolutely no fault of our own, the physical manifestations of our emerging modern, post-colonial state can be obliterated by

inexorably rising sea levels. The Caribbean's vital banana industry, already buffeted by the winds of iniquitous globalisation, has been repeatedly devastated in recent years by increasingly intense hurricanes, which have placed a hitherto dominant economic sector on veritable life support. In any event, the environmental damage caused in producing quality bananas for the European Community over the recent decades is ignored by those whose consumerist demands engender further environmental damage.

The solutions to the climate change problem are multifaceted, but an indispensable component must be the adoption by the UNFCCC of the Climate Change Adaptation Fund for the environmentally challenged African, Asian, Caribbean, Latin American and Pacific states. This Fund would put flesh on the skeletal commitments of the Convention on Climate Change, which compelled developed countries to provide additional financial resources to assist the developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of global warming. The Fund should be both a source of disaster relief and of the technological and infrastructural support needed to adapt to climate change. The developed member states of the UN can no longer afford to view the increasingly frequent and intense natural disasters as individual events, capable of narrow prescriptive solutions and subject to the vagaries of donor fatigue. They must live up to their obligations, both legal and moral, to assist the developing world in dealing with the changes that were born in the smoke-belching factories and car-clogged highways of the polluters.

Mr. President, you, as a proud citizen of the Republic of Macedonia, are all too familiar with the terrors wrought by wars born of ethnic conflict. It is my earnest prayer that your personal experience will lend urgency to what has been the UN's heartless neglect, in practical terms, of the genocidal campaign being waged in Darfur. While recent developments, including the Security Council resolution authorising the establishment of an AU/UN Hybrid operation in Darfur and the recent appointment of the AU-UN Joint Special Representative for Darfur, Rodolphe Ada, and Force Commander General Martin Luther Agwai, are somewhat encouraging, let us not delude ourselves: the force on the ground is still insufficient, its mandate ambiguous, and its emerging presence is years too late. For too long we have looked the other way. And we in the UN have caused the world to wonder about the relative worth of a Sudanese or Rwandan life, versus an Israeli, Chinese, American or European life. What is happening in Darfur is genocide – let us call it what it is. The United Nations must remain committed to alleviating the suffering of the men, women and children of Darfur.

Mr. President, in the same vein, the Government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines stand unequivocally with the people of Myanmar in their current struggle for democracy and life without tyranny.

Mr. President, the drama of war, the fight against global terrorism, insecurity and poverty, the struggle for reparation for the descendants of African slaves in the New World, and the insidious impacts of climate change must continue to hold the collective attention of the General Assembly. But there are other eminently avoidable ills afflicting the developing world that also demand our focus. The Caribbean faces the worst epidemic of chronic, non-communicable disease in the Americas. In 2004, the six leading causes of death in the Caribbean were heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, injuries and hypertensive disease – each of which claimed more regional lives than HIV/AIDS.

This looming health crisis, though largely self-inflicted, has an obvious global component. Globalisation has spawned a creeping cultural hegemony and homogeneity with a distinct mass consumption bias. Our home-grown Caribbean culture, our Caribbean civilisation, is being challenged and undermined by a shallow consumer ethic driven by multinational corporations

whose sole interest is to create a standardised population of global purchasers. The explosion in media and informational technology, for all its obvious benefits, has been an all-too-willing handmaiden to this cultural invasion. The homogenised, vapid and consumerist culture of the multinationals and empire is exported worldwide, beamed directly to our computers, televisions, newspapers and cinema screens. It is devoid of context, yet rich in subtext. Its message, in a nutshell, is simple: "Our culture, our civilisation, is better than yours." It is a subliminal message that too many of our people have unfortunately been accepting at a rate faster than our health care systems' ability to adapt. Colonialist, imperialist and a mindless homogenising globalisation have wrought havoc and its deleterious contemporary manifestations must be resolutely resisted. The acceptance of a core of universal, human values does not mean a submission to the consumerism of any empire. A quest by some to establish a global hegemony in everything will never be able to erase or subjugate the legitimacy of the particularity of civilizations, including our Caribbean civilisation. In this context, the call for an Alliance of Civilisations commands our support. It is likely to be more uplifting and enduring than a quest for dominance by one over the other.

The costs associated with treating this chronic, non-communicable disease epidemic are staggering, and constitute a serious threat to our already-strained health care budgets. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has therefore declared war on chronic, non-communicable diseases, and is in the embryonic stages of developing a comprehensive strategy to elaborate a wellness revolution among and by our citizens. This is part of a well-articulated strategy, regionally, by member-states of CARICOM. To that end, we urge the World Health Organisation and the Pan American Health Organisation to partner with Caribbean nations in devising effective strategies to combat these debilitating lifestyle diseases.

Mr. President, the erosion of trade preferences at the multilateral level has brought with it new challenges to the Small Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) of the Caribbean, requiring governments to engage in structural adjustments and fiscal calisthenics to keep our economies afloat. At the same time, the development deliverables which the Doha Round promised to our countries and which, like the Biblical manna, are urgently needed for our sustenance, are yet to materialise owing to the floundering negotiations of that Round. Let us recall, Mr. President, that the first and last of the UN Millennium Development Goals speak respectively to the eradication of poverty and global partnership for development. But for SVEs, the attainment of these two goals are significantly compromised if the multilateral trade rules and provisions are not sufficiently accommodating to the special needs of countries like ours. Special and differential treatment for developing countries is vital to offset the potential losses which are occasioned by globalisation and the liberalisation of markets. This is why Aid-for-Trade and a mobilisation of resources must be on the agenda of the multilateral organisations, to be used as an instrument for growth and capacity-building in developing countries. The recent launch of the "MDG Call to Action" by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown is an initiative that my Government supports and may well act as a much-needed spur to get us back on track to achieve the MDG's by the target date of 2015.

Mr. President, St. Vincent and the Grenadines yet again pleads with the United Nations to permit Taiwan to be accorded its rightful admission to the United Nations and its specialised agencies. Taiwan, a democratic and progressive country of 23 million people, remains a legitimate and vibrant political expression of the ancient and magnificent Chinese civilisation. There is no adequate justification for the continued exclusion of Taiwan from participation in the numerous global exchanges in the UN and other international bodies. We urge Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to accept and deal with Taiwan's membership application in accordance with the Charter. Taiwan possesses all the attributes and qualifications for membership of the United Nations. Let it be done!

Further, the United Nations must play its role in reducing tensions across the Taiwan Straits. Aggressive conduct must be restrained in a context where Taiwan is committed to peace and a comprehensive political dialogue.

Mr. President, these issues of cross-border belligerence, global terrorism, ethnic conflict, a culture of homogenised consumerism and ozone depleting excesses are foreign to our homegrown Caribbean civilisation. We live in peace with our neighbours. We have solved, spectacularly, the debilitating issues of racial, ethnic, religious and cultural intolerance that so muddy the waters within and between civilisations. Our magnificent seascape and landscape have caused us to cherish each and every one of our environmental blessings. Indeed, our appreciation is manifest in our Vincentian national anthem, which begins with the words "St. Vincent, land so beautiful."

However, by virtue of geography – which has made us small, and placed us in a vulnerable position relative to the equator and other, more domineering civilisations – we are forced to confront and take ownership of these problems. Although we are not the cause of these problems, we are often acutely familiar with their effect. And our perspective on the solutions is an integral component of any multilateral deliberation.

Mr. President, I conclude as you have begun: by urging swift, effective multilateral action to tackle the challenges of the modern world. As Cuban poet and national hero José Martí once said, "It is a sin not to do what you are capable of doing." By that measure, the UN's sins of omission and commission are manifold and manifest, despite its successes; and our collective, multilateral and principled penance must be measured even more by our actions from this day forward.

Thus, "Together Now", we must act on each of the world's enduring challenges. Each nation, each person has a vital role to play. An arrogance, born of triumphalism, which seeks to exclude so many who stand askance from an imperial agenda, must cease. The master poet from Martinique, Aimé Césaire, addresses this issue well in his famous *Cahier d'un Retour*:

*"No race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength
and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquests and we
know now that the sun turns around our earth lighting the parcel
designated by our will alone
and that every star falls from sky to earth at our omnipotent command."*

I thank you!

New York
28th September, 2007