



Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Statement

by

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Mr. President, Your Excellencies:

In these dawning years of the third decade of the twenty-first century, despite the progress and huge potential for the further upliftment of the world's civilisations, the human condition is racked, overwhelmingly, by global turmoil, convulsions, dislocations, and the gravest uncertainties about the future.

The specifics which have produced, in their aggregation and multiple inter-connections, this debilitating malaise and tumult, are well-known. We identify here and now those of centrality and urgency: Irresponsible and dangerous man-made climate change; a dominant economic and trading system, awash with antagonistic contradictions, which has delivered unacceptable burdens to the poor and the weak, on the one hand, and benefits in abundance to the rich and the strong, on the other; unnecessary and unwise conflicts, declared and undeclared wars, which subvert the settled norms and precepts of international law, and contribute to economic hardship, and immense suffering globally; avoidable public health emergencies, inclusive of pandemics, and the distorted, uneven

responses thereto; and the dangerous vanities, delusional vainglories, and hubris of men and women in power, particularly in the global centres of imperialism and in the locales of those intoxicated with the quest for hegemony.

Mr. President, across this world the faces of ordinary men and women are strained and anxious. Indeed, there is, increasingly, a sense of despair. At such junctures, historically, civilisations have either descended into a barbarism of one sort or another, or accepted the necessity to REPAIR, to embrace fresh hope conjoined with love for humanity and an abiding faith, made perfect in works. Surely, this is the time to embrace fresh hope! This existential longing that touches the human spirit and soul, goes beyond a mere amelioration of our current travails; it demands correctives or reformations of a structural or fundamental kind, and fresh thinking. Without fresh hope, a desecration of our future awaits us.

Fresh ideas are a core foundation of fresh hope. Over 130 years ago, the Cuban patriot José Martí advised that “*weapons of the mind-----vanquish all others.*” Through Martí we learn that “a vital idea set

ablaze before the world at the right moment can, like the mystic banner of the last judgement, stop a fleet of battleships.” Our tumultuous times demand fresh ideas and an invigoration of those which have stood the test of time in the march of civilisations into modernity and uplifting governance.

Unfortunately, stale and outmoded thinking too often shapes, and dominates, the global outlook and conduct of the most powerful nations to the detriment of peace, security, and prosperity for all. For example, at least one mighty state affirms wrongly that it possesses an exceptionalism grounded in a manifest destiny to rule the world; another considers, also wrongly, that its population size, growing wealth, enlarged military prowess, and a civilisation that goes back to near antiquity, justifies its quest for global hegemony; and still others, not quite behemoths, conjure up ancient glories and historic empires as the illusory bases to reconstruct the past, oblivious to the fact that any such presumed future of unalloyed grandeur is actually behind them. Amidst all this competitive jostling for power and vainglory, confusion reigns and the overwhelmingly majority of the world’s population suffers.

It is instructive to note that the contemporary circumstances of the global political economy and society have prompted the powerful and some “wannabe” powerful countries to proclaim the necessity to construct a “New World Order”, each with its own peculiar agenda. But from the global periphery, which encompasses most of humanity, I ask the relevant and haunting questions: What’s New? Which World? And Who Gives the Orders? The future of humanity depends on satisfactory answers to these queries.

In this maelstrom, the centre cannot hold and things are falling apart. Yet, we must not wring our hands, metaphorically, in learned helplessness. The principals are certainly not innocent of the extant condition and there are bundles of credible ideas in our multilateral system to fashion possible lasting solutions in pursuit of peace, prosperity, sustainable development, and security for humanity as a whole. So, where do we go from here?

Central to a credible, equitable path forward for humanity and our civilised life, living, and production, is the requisite of quality global leadership. It is a truism that, usually, men and women make history

only to the extent that the circumstances of history and contemporary reality, permit them so to make. But it is also true, indeed necessary and desirable, for global leadership to transcend the existing circumstances, given and transmitted from the past, and to push the boundaries of possibilities, for humanity's sake, beyond the normally-considered outer limits.

I am satisfied that the world's peoples are demanding a quality global leadership which not only inspires them, but draws out of them their goodness, elemental yearnings of humanity, and nobility of purpose; oft-times to draw out of them this goodness, humanity, and nobility which the people themselves may not as yet know that they possess.

Mr. President, at this very moment of our assemblage here in civilisation's finest hours, we are eyewitnesses and earwitnesses to immense conflict, strife, and harrowing suffering in the world-at-large. It is an indictment on our civilised Assembly that horrific wars rumble on, unabated, in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, parts of Africa, and elsewhere; at least one of these wars may lead to a nuclear Armageddon. How much longer, too, do we have to stand the

balkanisation and systematic oppression of the people of Palestine by those who are in arrogant disregard of world opinion and international law? Why are the illegal, unjust economic embargo, undeclared war, and criminal interventions against Cuba permitted to continue without let up, despite overwhelming, near-unanimous denunciation by this General Assembly? Why do we not resist unequivocally the sordid attempts by imperialism to subvert the duly-elected governments of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Nicaragua? How can we stand askance, in relative silence, and contented inaction, in disregard of Taiwan's legitimate right to exist in accord with the wishes, and will of the Taiwanese people? Why do we not encourage peace and security across the Taiwan Straits by, among other things, permitting Taiwan's participation in the specialised agencies of relevance in the United Nations' system such as the World Health Organisation and the International Civil Aviation Organisation?

All these, and other, twentieth century quarrels and contentions have potentially viable solutions, or at the very least, mutually acceptable levels of dissatisfaction, lodged within a framework of peace and

security. Quality global leadership, in communion with the world's peoples, credible ideas for resolution, and a coherent multilateralism grounded in international law, constitute the only viable way forward for humanity.

Mr. President, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has had to face immense challenges since March 2020, and continuing. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived upon us like the proverbial thief in the night. Although we did not close our country down, not even in the darkest days of the pandemic, much of the world locked down on us. Life, living, and production were, and still are, badly affected. In April 2021, my small country suffered 32 volcanic eruptions which caused widespread destruction of property, immense social dislocation, immiseration of our people, and the evacuation of one-fifth of the population into emergency shelters. In early July 2021, Hurricane Elsa struck resulting in further loss and damage. In late February 2022, open hostilities between Russia and Ukraine erupted, which exacerbated the economic turmoil which was already brewing, globally. The knock-on effects of the Russia-Ukraine war has been terrible for faraway St. Vincent and the

Grenadines, and our Caribbean. Prices of basic commodities such as imported fuel, food, fertiliser, and hand tools have gone through the roof!

[All these exogenous shocks piled upon the extant vulnerabilities and limitations of a small island developing state, inclusive of the ravages of climate change; the challenges arising from the contemporary global political economy; and the historical legacies of underdevelopment which flow from native genocide, the enslavement of African bodies, the indentureship of Madeirans and Indians, and an awful colonial over-rule.]

Still, we are a resilient people; we are not a people of lamentations; and we are recovering and embracing fresh hope. We in St. Vincent and the Grenadines are working hard and smart, but without a fair and just economic order globally, an especial regard for “small island exceptionalism”, a global architecture of enlightened multilateralism, and internationalist solidarity, our herculean national efforts are unlikely to yield the requisite abundant fruit. Trying to go up a fast-moving down-escalator is a challenging exercise.

Accordingly, I adopt and adapt the poetic words of the iconic Barbadian, Edward Kamau Braithwaite, from his “Awakening”: “I will rise and stand on my feet; ever so slowly I will rise and stand on my feet.... I am learning, just let me succeed.” Just let St. Vincent and the Grenadines and other developing countries succeed!

Mr. President, St. Vincent and the Grenadines expresses its profound gratitude for the regional, hemispheric, and international solidarity accorded it at its time of real peril during, and immediately after, the series of volcanic eruptions last year. Within twenty-four hours of the first cataclysmic eruption, my dear friend the Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency Antonio Guterres, telephoned me and placed the Secretariat and the UN specialised agencies at my country’s disposal. The World Food Programme, UNICEF, and UNEP were particularly heroic in their efforts, admirably coordinated by the United Nations’ Regional Office for the Eastern Caribbean. The World Bank was most helpful; so, too, were the Caribbean Community and its affiliate institutions, the Community of States of Latin America and the Caribbean, and individual nations across the world. The

outpouring of regional and international solidarity was impressive and deeply appreciated.

Episodic support must, however, metamorphose into structured, ongoing solidarity if small island developing states are to survive and thrive in this increasingly hostile world in which the metaphoric elephants trample with very little regard for the proverbial ants who make up much of humanity and are vital to the well-being of our global civilisation's landscape and seascape.

The agenda for small island developing states is well-known. Some major planks in it are: Concerted global action on climate change, inclusive of a sufficiency of resources for adaptation and mitigation measures; availability of optimal financing for development, including the roll-out of a multi-dimensional vulnerability index and a compensation mechanism for loss and damage; an especial and meaningful carve out for SIDS in international trading arrangements; the cessation of the unacceptable weaponising of the financial system; an appropriate reformation of the United Nations to reflect the interests of SIDS; and efficacious implementation of the 17

Sustainable Development Goals, particularly in relation to eliminating hunger, poverty, and inequality.

Of especial concern, too, for our Caribbean is the urgent issue of reparations from the European states for their commission of native genocide and the enslavement of Africans that has caused painful legacies of underdevelopment. Time has surely now come for this issue to be addressed urgently! Reparations is a just and juridically-grounded demand; it ought not to evoke confrontation, but support.

[Indeed, the entire global community ought to support it, devoid of any mean-spiritedness. Realistically, our Caribbean, our Africa, our Latin America, and our vast diaspora must lead this charge without let up.]

Mr. President, the continuing deteriorating situation in Haiti demands focused attention from the United Nations. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), to which Haiti belongs, is pained at Haiti's circumstances and the relative neglect by the international community of this nation of inestimable value. Together, we must do better with, and for, Haiti in concert with the Haitian people, based

on their own home-grown solutions, and led by them. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been actively engaged on this issue within both CARICOM and the United Nations. Haiti's eleven million people deserve better; further, a safe and prosperous Haiti means a far more secure and peaceful Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, beyond the Haitian issue, our national and regional efforts are stymied by the unfairness and relative unresponsiveness of the global political economy; oft-times, too, the unintended consequences of the actions by the centres of imperialism or hegemonic forces induce suffering, or hold back our progress. For example, our Caribbean has had its correspondent banking arrangements compromised or withdrawn by the application of rules which our governments have had little or no role in making. Similarly, "black lists" or sanctions are imposed or threatened by faceless bureaucrats in imperial centres, for this or that matter, without any regard for multilateral rule-making or settled international law. [And unjust, unilateral, and illegal sanctions against Venezuela and the weaponising of the banking system have had the effect of bringing to an end the Petro Caribe Agreement which

benefitted tremendously most Caribbean countries; yet, we note that a special carve out is being sought for Europe from these very sanctions consequent upon that continent's well-publicised, pressing energy requirements. Unfairness, plain wickedness, and hypocrisy are at once conjoined by imperialism!]

Meanwhile, interference in the internal affairs of our nations persists through external state agencies or private entities of imperialist or hegemonic centres bent on imposing their wills to their advantage. Oft-times their relentless misuse and abuse of the modern means of information technology with falsehoods and misrepresentations galore have the effect of polluting democratic discourse and undermining democracy itself. The United Nations must address this issue urgently!

This United Nations, too, must reform itself to do its work better. In this regard, the reform of the Security Council ought not to be delayed any further. Many sensible ideas for reform are on the table. Let us get on with it and not make perfection the enemy of the good.

The many-sided global turmoil of today prompts me, Mr. President, to conclude with the probing insights of Guyana's Poet Laureate, Martin Carter, in his celebrated poem, "Bitter Wood":

*"Here be dragons, and bitter
cups made of wood; and the hooves
of horses where they should not sound.
---Here is where
I am, in a great geometry, between
a raft of ants and the green sight
of the freedom of a tree, made
of that same bitter wood."*

Mr. President, in our final reflections at this General Assembly, let us never forget that our work here is to improve markedly the lot of all our peoples. To this mighty end, we must construct, optimally, a partnership between all nations, whatever our differences, to take care of yesterday's heritage, to accommodate and reasonably address today's interests, and to pursue effectively, in peace and security, tomorrow's hopes.

Thank you!