

**October 4<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Excerpts from the 2019 UN address by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves**

### **Introduction**

Small Island Developing States – ignored by the architects of the modern world order – are now increasingly indispensable to understanding and solving the challenges of our day. As the original builders of our global economic and political architecture descend into jingoistic isolationism, and succumb to the narrowest pursuits of short term self-interest, it is the small, the poor and the historically marginalized states of our global village that present the last, best chance to restore the crumbling edifice of international cooperation, and the principles on which that cooperation rests.

With multilateralism being battered by a resurgence of base and dishonest pandering to narrowly-partisan interest groups, and with great power intrigue driving nations further apart, Small Island Developing States, by necessity, will prove to be the glue that holds together this international experiment in unity, discussion, and joint action.

### **Climate Change**

The rapid acceleration of Climate Change is the menacing manifestation of a failed multilateralism. Faced with a common threat, ample warning, and overwhelming scientific consensus on the past causes, future impacts and present solutions, the international community has dithered endlessly, and impotently. As emissions continue to increase, legally-binding limits are recast as voluntary targets, and the worst offenders hypocritically highlight the specks of pollution in others' eyes, to distract from the beam in their own.

At the same time, many more needlessly suffer and die while indisputably urgent global action is intentionally thwarted by selfish short-termists and convenient climate-deniers.

Today we gather in the wake of indescribable horror in the Bahamas, whose citizens and residents were terrorised by Hurricane Dorian.

Weeks after the storm, hundreds remain missing. In recent UN gatherings, this tale has become sickeningly familiar. Only the names and locations have changed. Yet we cannot allow the steady drumbeat of climate catastrophes to become background noise to our annual gatherings. We must remain attuned to the urgency of vulnerable states in the path of cataclysmic storms.

Every year, the ferocity of these hurricanes increases. Every year, island states wait with bated breath, and hope against hope that increasingly frequent storms will thread their way between our countries without incident. And every year that we are spared, we grimly acknowledge that our luck will not hold indefinitely.

Sadly, hurricanes are merely the most violent manifestation of climate change's insidious effects. The floods, land degradation, droughts, landslides, coastal erosions, and unreliable weather patterns across our region, and elsewhere across the globe, place increasingly insurmountable daily hurdles to life, living and production in vulnerable nations, particularly Small Island Developing States.

### **World Peace**

A different type of metaphorical storm is wreaking havoc on the bedrock principles that undergird this Organisation. The rising tide of hegemonic, unilateral, interventionist interference now threatens to inundate entire nations, while responsible states stand askance from their responsibilities to speak and act in defence of central Charter tenets. Everywhere – North, South, East and West – the hegemonic imperial hand is visible and oft-times the metaphoric eagle threatens to unleash war and disorder in unilateralist vainglory. What all the world's peoples want is peace, dialogue, security and prosperity.

The sustained and coordinated attempts to engage in externally imposed regime change in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is but one egregious example of the current trend. We are witness to an illegal economic blockade, eerily similar to the one against Cuba that we annually and overwhelmingly decry as immoral and anachronistic. We are in possession of indisputable evidence of extensive foreign interference in the sovereign affairs of the Venezuelan people, and the frequent, unambiguous threats of military intervention. We are complicit in an international farce, where the members of the UN General Assembly seat one government as representative of the people of Venezuela while a self-described regional agency within the United Nations – the Organisation of American States – seats a different, ill-defined entity, a fictitious creation of foreign powers.

We are mute in defence of the principles that have bound us together, and steered us clear of World Wars for the last 74 years. Principle, and international law, cannot be sporadically or selectively applied. Whatever the challenges facing Venezuela, they are exacerbated, not remedied, by hegemonic interventionism, and compounded by our inconsistency. The solutions to the conflict in Venezuela are well known, as they are in all other similar conflicts: the facilitation of peaceful dialogue, the cessation of outside interference or the cessation of outside threats of intervention, and firm adherence to Charter principles, including the respect for sovereignty. Those who advance a different agenda are acting against the interests of the Venezuelan people, and are becoming – willingly or unwittingly – co-conspirators in undermining multilateral diplomacy.

### **The Middle East**

Without hyperbole, we must now all recognise that the Palestinian peace process is mortally wounded, and near death. Our silence is complicity in the increasingly brazen unilateral usurpations of international law. Neither the Two State Solution nor regional peace can survive the ongoing disavowals of bedrock agreements and the enabling silence of our international community. The Palestinian people deserve more than lip service and

hand-wringing. The General Assembly, and the Security Council, must be heard unambiguously on this matter.

### **The Africa Re-connection**

This year, after separate visits to the Caribbean by the esteemed brother Presidents of Ghana and Kenya that captured the regional imagination, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has approved, in principle, the establishment of an “ABCD Commission” for further practical elaboration with the African Union, Brazil – the home of over 100 million persons of African descent –, the membership of the Association of Caribbean States and the African Diaspora elsewhere particularly North America and Europe.

The Africa-Brazil-Caribbean-Diaspora Commission places the fractured global might of peoples of African descent within a single institutional framework. Within that unity is undeniable and untapped strength. This is a concrete proposal for further upliftment of the goals and targets of the UN Decade for People of African Descent. Africa’s centrality is a core feature of CARICOM’s public policy.