

November 16th 2018

**Excerpts from the 2018 Independence address: Part Three  
Solid Progress continues amidst Challenges**

**Introduction**

Fellow-Vincentians, it is painful and sobering that despite our immense progress in material and non-material terms, a small number of persons, mainly young males who are wholly unrepresentative of our nation's young male population, have chosen a life of crime, especially violent crime. They have chosen to invest in low-end but dangerous gun violence and have become "armed entrepreneurs", living illegally off the fat of the land, making absolutely no contribution to the country's development, sucking from it, and on innocent law-abiding people of all walks of life.

Some persons who should know better make excuses for these persons and their criminal conduct; sometimes these ridiculous excuses come close to bizarre justification. The simple fact is that neither the society nor the economy commits violent crime; it is the individual; that is where the responsibility lies. There is absolutely no reason for any person in St. Vincent and the Grenadines to be violent toward another or to rob anyone. There are enough opportunities and support systems for anyone who considers himself or herself disadvantaged.

Sensible people do not buy into this so-called "disadvantaged thesis" as the cause of crimes. It is important to note that most of the violent criminals are not truly disadvantaged; they are greedy and covetous; they refuse to work; and they take some selfish pleasure in using violence against other persons. Yet, we must seek to rehabilitate them even as the legal system addresses the appropriate punishments.

**Fighting Crime**

It continues to be the policy of this government to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. The coercive and other apparatuses of the state are doing their jobs. But this venture demands the practical support of all: the family, the school, the community group, the church, and the media. What we do not need are cynical political operatives and some less-than-thoughtful radio hosts who tilt at the proverbial windmills and make absurd excuses for the violent criminal, but who at the same time traduce unfairly the solid and risky anti-crime efforts of the Police.

Fighting crime and criminals in a liberal democracy is not always easy but our liberal and democratic values must always be maintained in this fight against violent criminals. To be sure, the tiny band of criminals will never win. On this fundamental matter the government and people are ever more determined to constrain and defeat crime and criminals.

Having said all this, I reiterate that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is overwhelmingly a peaceful and secure part of God's earth. Let us bolster further its peace and security against the handful of violent criminals. Emphatically, we must not be dumb and soft on crime; and we stand askance from those who are playing smart with stupidity on this issue of crime. We must strive for peace on earth; and it begins with you and me, as the popular hymn avers.

### **Opportunities for Development**

Our government continues to protect, uplift, and afford opportunities for personal development to those who find themselves in a disadvantaged condition. In this regard, a raft of initiatives exist which are fit for the purpose; the recently-established Zero Hunger Trust Fund is performing excellently and offers more than a ray of hope for its beneficiaries.

I urge all persons, young, old, and middle-aged, men and women, who face onerous challenges in their lives and living to seek the support and assistance from one or more of the relevant government's agencies and programmes. Seek and you will find; knock and opportunities are available. Still, remember always that you must make the maximum individual effort in order to better your life and living. Young persons, in particular, are being urged to take full advantage of the bountiful, lawful opportunities available.

Fellow Vincentians, on Independence Day 2018, I urge all of us to reflect carefully on, and learn from, all the factors and circumstances which have ensured our continued progress despite serious challenges, mainly externally-sourced, but also home-grown. This blessed place called St. Vincent and the Grenadines is our home; this place belongs to us; we own it; it is up to us to make it better, to make it the best it can be. People and governments from other lands may help us but no one owes us a living.

To be sure, there are global challenges which all of Earth's peoples must work together to address and overcome wholly or partially. But at the end of the day, we Vincentians have the primary obligation to take care of our own affairs. We have been doing so fairly well, but each of us must do better today than yesterday, to do the best we can. There are abundant possibilities and strengths in our condition despite weaknesses and limitations.

I reiterate what I said in my last year's address: *"Be optimistic, not pessimistic; be positive in our attitude, not negative; be upbeat, not borne down by lamentations; think and act creatively, push the outer limits of our possibilities; do not allow limitations to encumber you. Beware of false prophets and the apostles of gloom and doom; avoid those, in whatever political garb they come, who pull down St. Vincent and the Grenadines and who never see anything good, only bad.*

*Beware of those who wish the worse for us, those who would see our country burn, metaphorically, only for them to be kings and queens of the resulting ashes. Such persons are always in a condition of permanent dissatisfaction and who have nothing in them but a self-absorbed personal agenda which is unlikely ever to be satisfied. Listen not to those types; stay true to your positive self!"*