

October 16th 2020

**Address by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Sutherland to the general debate of the UN
General Assembly 2020
Excerpt No.2**

Introduction

Fundamentally, Mr. President, the old order is passing away before our very eyes as a consequence of the pandemic, but a new one is yet to come into being; indeed, there is not in place even a transition to a better, optimal, and enduring condition. We are still quarelling about inconsequential matters, insisting on too many sideshows, and casting our gaze askance away from the main events, metaphorically.

It is a truism, repeatedly ignored by powerful nations globally and ruling classes in dominant countries, that our central global challenges cannot be solved in isolation of each other or only on the terms of the powerful. Yet the old reflexes kick in, harming inevitably the strong and the weak, though not in equal measure. So, we end up, metaphorically, with a proud man who is ignorant of that which he is most assured.

Right reason and mature reflection teach that over the past 50 years of the dominant human civilization, and its appending off-shoots, there has been an explosion of individualism and freedom engendered by a huge enlargement of personal, financial, technological, and social spaces. Atomised individualism has been elevated as the apotheosis of progress; and social solidarity has become frayed, tattered, and diminished as a public good. So, along comes a pandemic and the atomised individual has to rely on the prudent and collective good behaviour of his neighbors to stay healthy. This circle cannot be easily squared in an individualistic, dog-eat-dog social order; and, metaphorically, all hell has broken loose.

Thus, internally in our societies, we ought in the current altered condition, to build a social individual, not an atomised one; this social individual necessarily, has to be grounded in the requisite of social solidarity. Across nations, too, we must initiate and build a fresh compact of enduring solidarity, as we in our Caribbean Community (CARICOM), have done with much success, despite a limitation of resources. Our United Nations, and its specialised agencies, are the locales for the construction of an ambitious, renewed global compact, not of world government, but of a genuine community of nations through a bona fide multilateralism, grounded in international law. This is not merely a technical exercise but a profoundly political one of the first order in which this revitalised compact is efficaciously fashioned on the fertilised soil of genuine commitment among all nations. Let us thus lift Lift Humanity Higher!

In this regard, powerful states must roll back their unilateralist, unwholesome and prejudicial constraints on weaker nations. The list is long and includes: unilateralist

sanctions; weaponising of the trade, banking and financial system; the misuse and abuse of so-called “blacklists” by developed countries against developing ones; the unilateralist termination of correspondent banking relations on purely spurious, and hypocritical, grounds; the breaking of international law, willy-nilly, to serve narrowly national interests on this or that issue, including the existential matter of climate change; and the relegation of Small Island Developing States to the expendable margins of the global political economy.

SIDS concerns

Mr. President,

As a small island developing state faced with an exceptional and unique admixture of existential circumstances, ranging from our inherent vulnerabilities as a small open economy with porous borders, to the legacies of underdevelopment left in the wake of European settler colonialism, native genocide, the enslavement of Africans, and the indentureship of Madeirans and Indians, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has made tremendous strides to advance meaningfully a progressive and people-centred development agenda. Yet, despite our best efforts, the disastrous economic implications of a global COVID-19 recession threatens to stymie our advances.

These detrimental impacts, already disproportionately felt across the Global South, stem from sharp declines in remittances; significant disruptions of trade, travel and other economic activity; and the negative effects on social welfare, as limited resources are diverted to save lives. For small island developing states, without predictable and reliable financing through concessional loans, without scaled up development assistance, and flexible and innovative forms of debt-relief, we risk falling further behind - unable to safeguard our human development agenda or provide necessary social protections to many of our people. To avert these grim prospects, ambitious reform of the international financial architecture that takes into account our Small Island Exceptionalism is urgently needed.

Cuba and Venezuela

Mr. President,

The continued use of the illegal and inhumane economic embargo on the Republic of Cuba, and the unilateral economic sanctions imposed for the purpose of stoking social unrest as part of an externally-driven "regime change" agenda in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are but two egregious examples of how the norms and principles of international law are desecrated for sake of power and self-interest. Despite their own serious challenges, the governments and peoples of Cuba and Venezuela continue to stand as models for camaraderie and solidarity, dispatching medical brigades and essential supplies in response to COVID-19.

Such is the absurd contradiction that those who employ the human rights mantra as a guise for unilateral action would wilfully deprive millions of people, living in countries near and far, of their right to dignity and development by deploying the most debilitating foreign policy tools. The immense suffering of the people of Syria, as a result of a conflict that they

did not choose, and geopolitical forces over which they exert no influence, stands as a prime example of the paradox of humanitarian intervention. In similar fashion, the convergence of a parallelogram of contradictory forces in Yemen has precipitated a humanitarian crisis of monumental proportions. Syria and Yemen are arguably two of the biggest catastrophes in the world which require constructive forms of multilateral engagement that yield people-centred solutions with full respect for international law. I feel sure that interested regional powers yearn for peace and stability in Yemen and Syria.