

Oct 9th 2020

**Address by Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Sutherland to the general
debate of the UN General Assembly
Excerpt No.1**

Introduction

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates and Friends,

Seventy-Five years ago, our predecessors founded this noble institution as the primary international platform to promote dignity, security, and freedom for all. Crafted in the midst of seething political tensions and the immense human suffering wrought by preceding global wars, our United Nations has served as humanity's most credible attempt at securing a peaceful and prosperous future for all nations and peoples. Yet, as we convene today against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic - *the likes of which we have not experienced in over a century* - the future we want and we all **rightfully deserve**, appears in grave jeopardy.

Amidst the rising tides of Climate Change; the scourge of desertification and land degradation, including in the Sahel; the challenges to biodiversity; the social, political and economic inequities of the global economy; and the unevenness and contradictions of a lopsided multilateral system in which the norms and rules are conveniently applied and upheld in favour of the powerful, the bellowing calls for global reform and a renewed multilateralism reverberate ever more loudly. We are indeed at an important crossroad. A well-functioning United Nations, fit for the purpose of safeguarding the bedrock principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of **all** states, while addressing the critical issues of our times, is urgently needed.

Mr. President,

Covid 19; The Effects

COVID-19 has laid bare the indisputable fact that coordinated multilateral action to achieve the sustainable development goals is the surest pathway to global peace and security. In our increasingly interconnected and hyper-globalised world, we protect ourselves when we safeguard our neighbours. Indeed, peace and security are the ideals of a collective identity, moulded through stable relationships. The urgent challenges of our times cannot be solved by building walls, nor can they be effectively addressed by retreating to a corner of nationalistic isolationism. We must build bridges. And we must stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters throughout the world as we lift each other up from the feverish ashes of COVID-19. In this regard, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines pays tribute to all frontline workers and first responders - our "Capeless

Heroes” - whose selfless contributions and sacrifices have kept many of us safe throughout the pandemic. We also extend our sympathies to the many families who have endured suffering throughout this ordeal. We stand with you as you honour the memories of your loved ones. We must “Keep the Faith”, and more.

Mr. President,

The simple truth is that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a profoundly altered condition of life, living, and production. None of the awesome challenges arising from this altered condition can be solved by incrementalism or minimalist pragmatism which merely tinkers with the pre-existing global economy. To be sure, human ingenuity and science will produce a vaccine within the next few months or a year and the COVID rate of infection, hospitalisation and deaths will come down globally.

But haunting questions remain: Would the vaccine be available cheaply and universally to all peoples the world over? Or would its distribution be so skewed within, and across countries, that there is likely to arise a deafening roar that: “Only Rich Lives Matter?”

The good intentions of our United Nations and its specialised agencies such as the World Health Organisation may nibble away at the inequity of a skewed outcome but their impacts are likely to be only marginal unless there is an enforceable, international rules-based compact between all countries and major pharmaceutical companies to deliver universally and affordably the fruits of science and human ingenuity. It cannot be the usual result of corporate profits ahead of people’s lives, livelihoods, social solidarity, and security.

Even if, in this instance of COVID-19, the international community rises to the challenge and confirms that faith and good intentions without practical works is an illusion, would this be only an episodic response which leaves the pre-existing global order in place until the next, and inevitable, pandemic arises? This irrational dangerous cycle has to be reconfigured with a global consensus not merely to “build back better” but to build back optimally and enduringly for all of humanity’s sake.

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.

To be continued...