

Independence Day 2012 by Dr the Hon Ralph E. Gonsalves Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Fellow Vincentians, at home and in the diaspora, it is with tremendous pride and happiness that I deliver this Independence message. On October 27, 2012, St Vincent and the Grenadines celebrates the 33rd Anniversary of National Independence. Independence is indeed symbolic because it reminds us of the magnificence of our sovereignty and the freedom which we enjoy in a constitutionally-grounded democratic society. Independence for us as a struggling people means the promise of hope for a better future, a future guided by the teachings of the church in our development of morality, peace and justice.

Our distinguished heroes, from His Excellency, Paramount Carib Chief, Joseph Chatoyer, to our nation's founding father Robert Milton Cato, have delivered and the legacy of our ancestors has enriched and ennobled generations of Vincentians.

Our outstanding statesmen, including George Augustus McIntosh, Ebenezer Theodore Joshua, Sir James Mitchell, and Sir Vincent Beache, have all crafted a magnificent path in our nation's history. They stand out as beacons in our nation's annals for their involvement, commitment, contribution and service.

Our blessed nation has also benefited from the enormous contribution of other outstanding sons and daughters in all spheres of life. Many of them have left us for the great beyond, but they continue to live on in our memories. Dr Earl Kirby, Dr Gideon Cordice, Mr Frank Mason, our late community and church leaders and public servants, doctors, farmers, fisherfolk and business professionals. We will continue to lift them up in our prayers.

Fellow Vincentians, the policies of the government embody the dreams and aspirations of our founding fathers, and our nation's comprehensive development plan embraces reforms in all spheres and prioritises the enhancement of the human condition. Indeed, the transformation of the national economy touches every facet of life and production. This 33rd anniversary of Independence of St Vincent and the Grenadines, however, comes at a time when our nation is feeling the backlash of the global recession.

Additionally, several other ills which hinder human development continue to plague our citizens in the form of breakdown in families, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, disrespect for authority and property, obstructionist messages from talk radio, consumerism, intolerance, ill discipline, all of which are unacceptable.

Importantly, these recurring challenges have placed tremendous strain on the social services and the church.

Despite the setbacks, our nation is full of hope and optimism, the unbridled enthusiasm of our citizens at home and in the diaspora, the creative potential of our youth, the numerous opportunities created for our people through the education revolution, the advances in science and information technology in the production and social apparatus, the confidence in the national and citizen security initiatives, the excitement and creativity shown in the thrust to provide world class competitive air and maritime transport systems, all serve to

encourage us to continue to fashion St Vincent and the Grenadines into a nation in which its citizens will have boundless pride.

This year, Almighty God has been good to us, with the abundance of rainfall to fortify our crops, a fairly calm hurricane season, the wherewithal to assist parents in sending children back to school; a plan to stimulate employment with increased activity at the Argyle international airport, and in the housing sector. The tourism sector has received several accolades abroad and with the new thrust in agriculture our farmers are reinvigorated to fight the diseases which infect their crops.

As we reach another great historic milestone, let us continue to be inspired by those who have used little to achieve much, and in the words of scripture “be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God”, Philippians chapter 4, verse 6.

In these turbulent economic times, let us strive for peace in our nation, and for the common good. Let us all be our brothers’ keepers. Let us return to our strong religious values to guide our thoughts, ideas, convictions, concepts, and code of conduct which will help us to respond to all sorts of circumstances; continue to value self, family and nation.

In closing, I urge the citizens of this nation, whether in the public sector, private enterprise or self-employed, here at home and in the diaspora, to work diligently and smartly, strive for high ideals, value your contribution to nation building by working individually and collectively.

Our nation is small, but we can have big dreams and achieve much greatness. On this Independence Day, continue to have strong faith in God, love of one another and in the words of Phillipians, chapter 4, verse 8:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

May God bless our nation!