



Statement to

His Excellency George W. Bush

President of the United States of America

By

Her Excellency La Celia A. Prince

On the occasion of the

Presentation of Letters of Credence

As Resident Ambassador of

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

To the United States

Mr. President:

It is my distinct honour and privilege to present to you this letter of credence from the Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, appointing me as Ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United States of America.

I take this opportunity to bring you warm greetings from both our Governor-General, Dr. Frederick Ballantyne and our Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, and their wishes for the continued well-being and prosperity of your great country and our dear ally, the United States of America. My Prime Minister recalls the warmth and friendship with which you greeted him during the June 2007 Conference on the Caribbean, held here in Washington D.C. and wishes you every success for the remainder of your presidency.

I have succeeded to the position as Ambassador with an excellent platform already laid for me by my predecessors who have worked tirelessly at fostering strong diplomatic ties and a true bond of friendship between both our countries. Mine is the duty to build on the work which has already been done and to consolidate this relationship even further. I therefore pledge to you, Mr. President, my commitment for working towards a greatly enhanced and mutually beneficial relationship between our two countries.

Mr. President, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is fully committed to governing our nation in a manner that is consistent with strong democratic values, with respect for human rights and the full observance of the rule of law. We recognise that democracy needs an enabling environment in which to thrive and that economic development and social stability are the necessary supporting structures for reinforcing democracy. Among the top priorities which my government vigorously pursues are economic and social development, poverty alleviation, the education of youth, the creation of employment, and the fight against corruption, as well as ensuring national and regional security.

With our meagre resources, St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues to honour its commitment to fight against drugs and the expanding networks of transnational organised crime threatening our nation and the Western Hemisphere. Our full engagement in the work of the Organisation of American States and the United Nations has put us in good stead to frontally tackle many of these emerging security concerns. Indeed, our government considers it a step in the right direction that both CARICOM and the United States have issued a joint statement pledging cooperation for an initiative to combat the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

However, the challenges faced by my government in realising some of the goals are enormous and further exacerbated by global trends which have an adverse effect on our small vulnerable economy, readily susceptible to external shocks. The global rising cost of food prices has put an even greater strain on the country's food import bill and has had a knock-on effect on other aspects of our economy. We have never faced a greater threat to our food security.

Mr. President, throughout your distinguished presidency, you have demonstrated your commitment to St. Vincent and the Grenadines and our sister nations of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) through the sustained engagement of your administration in significant areas of cooperation. St. Vincent and the Grenadines has benefited tremendously from some of the initiatives of your presidency such as the Third Border Initiative, security support for the Caribbean's hosting of Cricket World Cup 2007 and PEPFAR. Indeed, our government, along with those of our CARICOM sister nations, greeted with enthusiasm, your commitment during the June 2007 Conference on the Caribbean, to work with Congress to extend and expand the Caribbean Basin Trade Promotion Act (CBTPA).

In its efforts to build a modern, post-colonial economy reflective of the development needs for the 21st century, the government of St. Vincent and the

Grenadines considers the extension and expansion of the CBPTA to be a most important instrument by which our country can secure a viable trading relationship with our most important trading partner. Around us in this hemisphere, there have been investment and production diversion to other countries enjoying more favourable trading terms than we do. For this reason, St. Vincent and the Grenadines needs the support of the United States in facilitating its own development strategies that ultimately raise exports and inflows to its GDP.

Many of our government's own investment and development initiatives have necessarily involved substantial financial undertakings. To date, debt servicing absorbs at least 50% of government revenue, one of the highest ratios of debt to GDP in our region. In order to continue its pursuit of sustained economic and social development for our country, the government is seeking the forgiveness of debt which will allow it to use its revenues in a manner consistent with our nation's development agenda. It is our earnest hope, Mr. President, that your administration can give favourable consideration to the forgiveness of some or all of our debt as we have previously requested.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines acknowledges that as a small island nation faced by the challenges presented in a globalized world that our path to development lies in forging cooperation among countries with similar circumstances such as our own. We are resolute in our commitment to deepening regional integration at various levels, on the one hand through the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), by way of an Economic Union, and on the other hand with CARICOM by way of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). Given the wide scope that exists for CARICOM-US cooperation, the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines believes that the United States as a natural ally of CARICOM, can assist the development of our region by lending its support to the Caribbean Regional Development Fund, a key element for the successful implementation of the CSME.

Mr. President, your country is home to a very large community of Vincentians. Many of our people come to the United States, drawn by the promise of economic and social prosperity in exchange for hard, honest work. These Vincentians, like others from the Caribbean, contribute to the continued prosperity of your nation and its people. Indeed, in recognition of the noteworthy achievements made by the Caribbean Diaspora to the United States, in 2006 you proclaimed June as Caribbean American Heritage Month.

The government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is cognisant of the potential that lies within its Diaspora in the United States for contributing to the development of our nation. We are therefore appreciative of your administration's efforts at reforming the immigration system to allow for legal immigration, which can be mutually beneficial to our countries.

Mr. President, I see a field of opportunities for fruitful engagement between both our countries. I embrace with enthusiasm the mission which has been set before me to consolidate the partnership between St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the United States. I thank you for receiving me and reiterate to you once more the friendship and goodwill of the government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines towards you and the people of the United States of America.

Thank you.
