



**EMBASSY OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**Independence message by Her Excellency La Celia A. Prince
Ambassador of St. Vincent & the Grenadines to the U.S.A**

President and Executive Members of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Association of
Massachusetts;

My Fellow Vincentians, friends of Vincentians and well-wishers;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good Evening!

Let me thank, the Massachusetts Association President, Ms. Amelia Edwards for the invitation to deliver the keynote address at your Association's annual Independence dinner and dance. In fact, it is my first time visiting Boston and although the weather is not very encouraging for my tropical temperament, I am happy to say that Ms. Edwards and all the other members of the Executive have given me a very warm welcome, which has more than compensated for Boston's chilly reception!

My Fellow Vincentians:

It is my happy duty, and also a privilege to address you as Ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United States of America, on the grand occasion of our nation's 30th anniversary of Independence.

Thirty years as an Independent nation! I don't know about you, but I am very excited about this milestone in our Vincentian history. In fact, I am more excited at our nation turning 30, than when I myself celebrated my 30th birthday! You know how it is with getting older—especially with women: we worry about losing our youth and vitality. When I turned 30 –not so long ago-- , I literally had panic attacks, because I asked myself whether I had achieved as much as can be expected for someone of 30 years.

So what does it mean for St. Vincent and the Grenadines turning 30 years old? To some, 30 years as an independent nation may not seem *that* significant when compared to nations that are at least half a century old. However, when I permit myself some reflection, I have come to conclude that 30 years as an independent nation is indeed a significant milestone in any nation's history.

I am reminded of an ancient Chinese proverb which says that “**The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step**” [*repeat*]. For those of you with children—can you remember the first single step that your children made when they were infants?

St. Vincent and the Grenadines when personified, can be likened to the coming of age of a human-being, maturing into adulthood. Our infancy was characterized by our noble forefathers who tested the ground as they took the first step towards our nation's independence. Many of you present here may have lived in St. Vincent and the Grenadines while it was still a British colony. Many of you may remember that day in October 1979 when the Union Jack was lowered and the flag of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was hoisted for the first time. I am sure that witnessing this event, you may have felt remarkable pride that our nation was being born—a nation that is independent and sovereign; a nation able to chart its own course and its destiny.

From infancy, St. Vincent and the Grenadines matured to adolescence. During our adolescence, we started creating our own identity, while still looking to others with more experience than us, who can help by pointing the way. Finally, the coming of age-- that is, the transition to adulthood. Adulthood normally symbolizes the age of reason, maturity and accountability. This is not to say that these elements were absent from the

earlier development of our nation, but rather, that adulthood casts a higher onus on a nation to master its own destiny and development.

Cognizant of the critical period during which it sits at our nation's helm, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues in its effort to assert our nation's independence while fostering its development. There are many global challenges impacting St. Vincent and the Grenadines which make government and governance a bit more challenging: the global financial crisis; the concomitant assault waged by developed countries on St. Vincent and the Grenadines and other small jurisdictions that operate legitimate international financial services industries; climate change and the evil winds that it blows our way, including the threat to sustainable tourism; as well as the failure of the World Trade Organisation to bring much-promised trade and meaningful development to developing countries such as our own.

In spite of the myriad of challenges, our Government remains resolute in its aim to mature our country and uplift our Vincentian humanity. The Government's creative and bold foreign policy thrust, which does not keep our nation singularly and unequally yoked to colonial, imperialist and paternalistic powers, instead seeks to forge new and equal partnerships characterized by mutual respect and commonality of purpose. Strategic alliances and partnerships with countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Libya, Mexico, Turkey and Venezuela continue to yield tremendous benefits to St. Vincent and the Grenadines, most notably in the areas of education and infrastructural development. And of course, new opportunities are constantly being sought in your adopted homeland, the United States of America.

It is no secret that for the first time in its history, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been producing the largest number of nationals with tertiary level education. Through the Government's own direct investments in education, as well as a number of scholarships awarded through our bilateral partnerships with other countries, our nation is rapidly developing a cadre of highly-trained, highly qualified professionals. A nation that is heavily investing in its youth and their education is a nation that is guaranteeing brilliant returns and a successful future.

We are also pressing on with our quest to bring more foreign direct investment and greater tourism to our shores by first ensuring that the requisite infrastructure is in place realize these goals. With the help of our bilateral partners, the construction of an international airport in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is slowly becoming a reality.

The independence that adulthood offers would not be worth having if one were still subject to restrictions dictated by one's parents. Adulthood necessarily implies the ability to determine one's own path and take the necessary steps in pursuit of that journey—it is a rite of passage. For this reason, our Government has over an extensive period of time, consulted with all Vincentians—both at home and abroad—to offer a new and improved framework to guide the nation's future by virtue of a proposed revised Constitution. As an independent and sovereign nation governed by democratic order, the people have been consulted and the people will determine their future on 25th November by voting on the Referendum which proposes the revised Constitution.

There can be no equivocation: the positive strides which our nation has been making in our development are well acknowledged in the international community and are reflected in St. Vincent and the Grenadines' upward climb on the ladder of the United Nations' Human Development (HDI) Index for 2009.

My fellow Vincentians, we have gotten to this point in our nation's development thanks to that single first step which our political forefathers and mothers took 30 years ago towards creating an independent nation. But we have also to thank each and every person who has applied their brain and brawn into some productive endeavour which has enhanced and ennobled our nation. It therefore behoves each and every one of us to continue in this vein as our nation's journey of thousands of miles continues into the future.

Of course, our nation-building and development cannot be credited exclusively to those who currently live in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is an undeniable truth that much of the country's development is owed to the contributions made by our hard-working and patriotic Diaspora.

Our Prime Minister, The Honourable Ralph Gonsalves, takes pride in talking about the Vincentian Diaspora and how you can impact on the development of our country. In fact,

so important does he deem the Diaspora to be, that two years ago, he created a special Unit within his Ministry called the Regional Integration and Diaspora Unit, which is being headed by my predecessor, Ambassador Ellsworth John. This Unit is responsible for coordinating the Government's integration policies and maintaining a relationship with the Vincentian Diaspora, and as you would all know, they have been very active in developing a programme for Vincy Homecoming 2009.

So what exactly is this **Diaspora** of which I speak? I checked the meaning of the word "**Diaspora**" and discovered that it comes from a Greek word which means "**the scattering or sowing of seeds.**" The word '*Diaspora*', or 'the *Diasporic community*' therefore presumes a nexus between the emigrant people and the land from whence they came.

So in my view, you-- Vincentian Diaspora should be thought of precisely as the scattering and sowing of seeds which will germinate to reap fruit that redound to the benefit of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The official theme for this year's Independence back in SVG is the same theme used for the Vincy Homecoming 2009: "***As one people in many lands, we shape the future with many hands***". The whole idea behind this theme is a clear recognition by our Government of the role that the Diaspora plays in our nation.

Let me put this into context somewhat: As you know, our tiny island-state is not rich in natural resources—we have no oil-wealth, no bauxite, no mineral deposits. But we have our PEOPLE! This is precisely why our Government invests in its human capital for our country's survival.

For any country that depends on a young and vibrant workforce for its survival, migration can represent a loss or brain-drain that can stymie the economic development of that country. Each migrant that leaves their home country represents an opportunity cost to that country, that is to say, a foregone opportunity of investing in that individual, and that individual investing of himself or herself in that country. An educated and skilled workforce is a valuable commodity to any country.

However, there is also another side to migration—a most positive aspect, and that is the ability of the Diaspora to harness its potential in making a significant contribution to the

development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The most obvious way in which the Diaspora contributes to the development of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines is through the millions of dollars in remittances which are sent back home each year. For countries like ours which largely depend on agriculture, tourism and other small services for their mainstay, remittances comprise the lion's share of the country's GDP each year as the major foreign exchange earner, even above and beyond Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Whether it be money sent directly to family members or to a savings accounts, the money which is being remitted contributes to either a cash flow or a cash reserve in the home country.

Now, as the Vincentian Diaspora living in the United States—how do you see yourselves? Many among you may have left our shores several decades ago. Do you consider that you have a role to play in the development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines? Or is St. Vincent and the Grenadines a place from your distant past?

For me, the answers to these questions are obvious. It is evident that as members of the Vincentian Diaspora, you have not forgotten your roots. The reason that you have formed yourselves into a Vincentian Association and come here to honour our nation's anniversary of independence is because as true Vincentian patriots, and you recognize that although we Vincies are scattered in many lands, you are still committed to shaping the future with our many hands.

Your presence here tonight tells me that you already know that giving of one's self for the development of one's nation is something that we should all remember is incumbent on us, whether we actually live in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, or whether we live abroad in the Vincentian Diaspora. One's time, talent, skills, money—it is all important. And when you really stop to think about it, you owe it to SVG, because that is where you all got our head-start that has allowed you to go all over the world and integrate yourselves into the labour force of your adopted country.

The vibrant work of Associations like yours help to promote the visibility of St. Vincent and the Grenadines abroad. You are all Ambassadors for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Your contributions to social programmes and charitable organisations at home also make their mark on our development. You have shared your thoughts and ideas on how to make our country better and these thoughts and ideas have been incorporated into the

revised Constitution which will be voted on next month. You have been fully engaged in our preparations for Vincy Homecoming in an effort to stimulate home-to-Diaspora community relationships. In spite of the economic downturn, some of you already have or will in the future contribute to the International Airport Development Fund.

Brothers and sisters, as an official of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I want to thank you for not forgetting our nation. I thank you for recognising that a nation needs the input of all its sons and daughters to build, to develop and mature. It is through efforts of people like yourself living in the Diaspora for many years, that younger generations like mine are able to benefit from the value of your contributions.

Remember what I said: *the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*. We are well on our way with our journey. As Vincentians, let us celebrate our achievements and commit ourselves anew to uplifting and ennobling St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the Vincentian humanity even more. With all of us chipping and doing our part, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will continue to grow; she will continue to mature and she will step lively into the future!

To all Vincentians: Happy 30th anniversary of Independence and God's richest blessings!
