



Statement

to the Permanent Council

of the

Organization of American States (OAS)

by

Her Excellency Lou-Anne Gilchrist

Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the

Grenadines

Wednesday, November 9th 2016

Washington DC, USA

Thank you very much, Madam Chair:

Secretary-General, H.E. Luis Almagro

Assistant Secretary-General, H.E. Nestor Mendez

Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Alternates

Distinguished Permanent Observers

Staff of the General Secretariat of the Organisation of American States

Ladies and gentlemen

Good day:

I thank you for the great privilege of addressing this Permanent Council as the new Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the Organisation of American States (OAS).

My presence in these hallowed halls comes with great humility and appreciation, specifically for the confidence reposed in me by Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves and Foreign Minister, the Honourable Sir Louis H. Straker, to undertake this challenging yet dignified task. I seize this opportunity wholeheartedly and profit also of the occasion to acknowledge my immediate predecessor, Ambassador La Celia A. Prince, who did a tremendous job in serving the People and Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Madam Chair, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a young, sovereign, democratic nation firmly grounded in the belief in God and committed to the fundamental principles of the rights, dignity and freedom of all men as enshrined in our constitution. Our foreign policy endeavours to promote an international order entrenched in the fundamentals of the equality and sovereignty of all nations, with a desire for lasting peace, freedom and prosperity and the need for

international cooperation in all fields of human enterprise. Our national interest and development agenda employed through our foreign policy are driven by the real need to enhance cooperation and collaboration with friendly states for promoting the economic and social advancement of the Vincentian people, at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

For St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the OAS is vital for the advancement of our national development agenda. In 1981, my country became a member of this exemplary Organization, a mere two years after gaining independence. Our participation in this Organization, since then, has been deeply rooted in the principles and ideals of democracy and good governance; integral development; the promotion and respect for human rights and the maintenance of multi-dimensional security in our hemisphere. These, Madam Chair, are the pillars on which this Organization was created.

The present occasion therefore affords me the opportunity to pause for a moment to deliberate on the Organization's performance in recent times. Indeed, the OAS is an Organization in which we have placed our hope for the peace, development and security of our hemisphere. To a certain extent, the objective of the OAS is being realized, but there is much more to be done. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is grateful to the OAS for the valuable technical and financial contribution it has provided over the years. Accordingly, we are appreciative of the Organization's assistance in monitoring events such as successive General Elections, the most recent being in December 2015; assistance provided in monitoring the historic constitutional referendum in 2009; the fellowship and scholarship programs which have provided a number of Vincentians the opportunity to pursue higher studies; financial assistance through the Development Cooperation Fund (DCF), formerly known as the Special Multilateral Fund of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (FEMCIDI), which has enabled the implementation of numerous developmental projects in my country; assistance in the area of security through the Secretariat

for Multi-Dimensional Security (SMS), specifically the departments of the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission (CICAD) and the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism (CICTE), which have provided assistance to tackle frontally the myriad emerging security issues in our hemisphere as well as assistance in our recovery efforts following devastating hurricanes, tropical storms and floods. Likewise, we are satisfied to have a forum afforded to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Member States within the Committee on Hemispheric Security (CHS) to address the security concerns of Small Island States of the Caribbean. These, Madam Chair, are just a few of the outstanding contributions and initiatives delivered by the OAS to assist St. Vincent and the Grenadines in establishing a modern, competitive, post-colonial nation.

However, in spite of the assistance of the OAS and the significant progress made in my country and throughout the hemisphere, there are still considerable shortcomings. During my tenure as Permanent Representative, St. Vincent and the Grenadines will continue to address in a robust and dedicated manner its developmental concerns; vehemently addressing, initially, three issues which are damaging to the small economies of Caribbean countries, namely: the lasting legacy of underdevelopment in the region resulting from native genocide and the enslavement of Africans; the threat of severing correspondent banking relations among banks in the Caribbean and those in developed countries; and finally, the issue of climate change.

Firstly, like many of our sister nations of CARICOM, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is grappling with the effect of the gruesome correspondent banking crisis which is a current existential threat to the countries in our region. Effectively, we echo a clarion call to developed countries to assist in having this matter addressed and redressed with expediency, with the hope that their financial institutions will review the de-risking issue to remedy this grave problem.

Of equal importance, Madam Chair, is our call for reparation of native genocide and the enslavement of our African forebears. CARICOM continues its pursuit for reparations from those former colonial masters who have exploited our resources for their own personal enrichment and grandeur, leaving a lasting legacy of underdevelopment in the region. The *gravamen* of this issue is a development concern for my Government and for CARICOM.

Thirdly, Madam Chair, we are all too familiar with the devastating effects of climate change. Whilst we are cognizant that all Member States of this Council have signed the recent Paris Agreement, we urge those who have not yet ratified the said Agreement to do so. Natural disasters have a more immediate and far greater adverse wave effect on the economies of Small States such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines than, maybe, on the larger economies. Small States therefore cannot sit idly by until disaster strikes; we must be proactive, expect an event, even though we hope it will never occur, and seek to ensure that Organizations such as the OAS exert their considerable influence to alleviate the hardship caused by these disasters. In this vein, I wish to reiterate on behalf of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, our most sincere commiseration to all of the bereaved families of those victims who recently lost their lives owing to Hurricane Matthew in Haiti, the Bahamas, Cuba, the United States of America and in my own country, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Madam Chair, the OAS has a critical role to play in the ongoing geo-political developments within our region. It is essential that this Organization act as a trusted and objective mediator, especially during difficult moments. There must be no double standards in addressing critical issues. The OAS must be able to balance delicately its standing in solidarity with Member States on particular developments and must not appear to be too deeply enmeshed in the internal affairs of a sovereign State. The latter is a principle which is enshrined in both the Charter of this Organization and that of the United Nations (UN).

Additionally, the OAS must further enhance its promotion and protection of the rights of persons of Afro-descent across this hemisphere. This Organization has to be more sensitive, mindful and even helpful in relation to the peculiar vulnerabilities and challenges of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

St. Vincent and the Grenadines is a small nation, but one with a clear view of what proactive and pragmatic role it must assume in regional affairs, and particularly in this Organization. We are cognizant of the constraints which have hindered our development and continue to do so to this day, but we will continue to assist this Organization in achieving its goals and fulfilling its mandates, as far as is practically possible. Undeniably, St. Vincent and the Grenadines looks toward the OAS for its constructive role to assist in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) and the Inter-American Program for Sustainable Development (PIDS).

Madam Chair and distinguished colleagues, let me remind you that the lack of progress in this Organization may in certain instances be ascribed to political inertia. It is political will that is needed to steer this ship through turbulent waters. It is only political will which can move us beyond the realm of traditional nation-to-nation interests or disputes, surely the major issues confronting us today transcend traditional relationships between individual countries. Poverty, hunger, development, energy, environment, terrorism and human rights issues are not only shared real problems; but their solutions are fundamental for the continued existence of mankind.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines considers the Organization of American States a true hemispheric institution that may further, through co-operative and collective endeavours, development, peace and stability with progress and prosperity for its members. Undoubtedly, this sixty-eight year old Organization – the oldest international regional organization in the world - has the experience and the know-how to tackle effectively the problems of economic, political and social co-operation of member States of the western hemisphere.

Madam Chair, I look forward to working with you during your tenure as Chair of this Council and pledge my delegation's support. We have many mandates to implement arising from previous Special and Regular Sessions of the General Assembly, the Summit of the Americas, the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of the Organization and the Strategic Plan on Management Modernization. I commit to working with my colleagues as we advance our collective agenda to further the ennoblement of the peoples of the Americas.

I thank you.
