

Open Letter from the Dominica Freedom Party to the Prime Minister of The Commonwealth of Dominica

Dominica Freedom Party
C/o Marinor Enterprises Ltd
River Estate Works
Canefield
Commonwealth of Dominica

December 3, 2017

Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance
of the Commonwealth of Dominica
Office of the Prime Minister
6th Floor
Financial Centre
Kennedy Avenue
Roseau
Commonwealth of Dominica,

Honourable Prime Minister,

The Dominica Freedom Party deeply shares the pain of the people of Dominica brought on by the passage of Hurricane Maria. While those of us living at home are most directly affected, Dominicans living abroad also share our pain and have moved to organize to bring or send assistance to the country and certainly to their families. Moreover, our neighbours in the region including Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, St. Lucia and other OECS countries have responded to our emergency needs and we wish to thank them very much for this. Other countries, multilateral organizations, and NGOs from abroad have also responded to our emergency needs and we trust that they will continued to assist in the long-term recovery efforts.

We have not yet had a response to our direct letter to you as Prime Minister dated November 13th 2017, in which we suggested that you and your government convene a forum of all political parties and other pertinent national stakeholders to discuss and make recommendations on putting the country on the best footing to overcome the new challenges posed by the passage of Hurricane Maria. Therefore, we are following up on this letter, but this time, to encourage your response, we wish to do so through this open letter.

Prior to the passage of Hurricane Maria, the country's per-capital income was still low; there was a high level of poverty and high employment or underemployment among our people; our productive industries were not internationally competitive; the tourism sector was weak and largely it had never prospered; manufacturing which once showed some promise had declined; the once flourishing agriculture sector was in the doldrums; and our commercial sector was weakened. The truth be told, economic dynamism in our country have been declining over the past 25 years. We have all been experiencing it! And now the impact of Hurricane Maria has made the situation much worse at a time when we had not yet redressed most of the damage cause by storm Erika in 2015

On the social front, we have a society that is not socially cohesive and there is much evidence of social fragmentation. There is clearly a sense of hopelessness in our land and nothing manifest this more than the insatiable desire for young people to migrate! We have not engendered a strong sense of belonging among our people and this is manifested by crime and deviant youth behaviours, high levels of littering and indiscriminate dumping, discourtesy on the road, unkindness to each other or the lack of awareness of how we impact the life of others, the "us against them mentality", an attitude of seeking to destroy the success of others, exploitation of others, the looking down on those who find themselves in financially less fortunate circumstances, and the lack of sharing of honest success in genuine and meaningful ways. Our social situation needs urgent attention as it is clear that there are latent pressures waiting to explode as it did following the passage of Hurricane Maria. We say thanks for the assistance of the regional security forces that have help us to contain these pressures following Hurricane Maria, but a lasting solution needs to go beyond policing efforts! We do think that many of the negative attitudes and behaviours that we observe in our society are greatly influenced by the behaviours, examples, and attitudes displayed by many individuals in the current political administration, but clearly, we have much more to do than simply to recover from the physical impacts of Hurricane Maria! Moreover, we already had much to do to build a resilient country given vulnerability to natural disasters, climate change, and other external economic shocks.

The passage of Hurricane Maria has certainly added new challenges, while it also loudly reminds us to pay much attention to addressing our vulnerability to natural disasters. Clearly, as a nation we have not fully learned the lessons of Hurricane David which struck and devastated our country in 1979. Chief among the new challenges is the need to manage the recovery process well, so that the country gets back to normalcy as quickly as possible and contains the adverse implications of the hurricane on the economy. For instance, there is need to support the full and speedy recovery of activity in tourism, agriculture, offshore education and commerce. If these are not adequately addressed, the dynamism of the economy will regress even compared to the weak state that it already was in. It is also important to assist citizens to cope with the situation especially with regards to their ability to meet their daily food requirements while efforts are made to fully recover from the impact of the hurricane. In that regard, while there has been food relief, there is need for the process to be efficient, strategic, equitable, and fair. Failure to do so will only heighten the current divisions in our society, re-enforce undesirable habits that will continue to constrain the sustainable development of our land, and further weaken the economy.

Given the above and other new social, economic and humanitarian challenges we face as a nation stemming from the impact that Hurricane Maria had on our country, the Dominica Freedom Party offers to dialogue with the political leadership of the current government on putting the country on the best footing towards building a strong independent nation - a nation where people have economic dignity; one that is sustainable; one where there is a strong sense of belonging, strong national pride and strong community spirit among the citizens. We suggest that other political parties and other pertinent stakeholders be included in this dialogue. As a fragile nation, we need to tap into the skill sets of our people both at home and abroad to fashion a strong and resilient country. We need not only to promote economic growth in the production of goods and services, but also to promote growth that is inclusive, and to promote a socially cohesive society – one that is wholesome and safe and where we all can raise strong and happy families, and one in which our young people can be contented! Towards all of the above, it is necessary to maintain the ideals of democracy and in that regard, we continue to encourage sensible electoral reforms and open and transparent public discussions towards this end. Electoral reforms must exclude amendments to the electoral law that will seek to legitimize elections bribery. This area is also necessary to build goodwill, social cohesion and trust as we seek to move forward as a nation.

Moreover, we wish to also have a dialogue with the political leadership of the government on the accessing of financing from multilateral and regional organizations and in relation to the pledges of assistance that has been made in the wake of the impact of the hurricane on our country, as we wish for the country to be in the best position to meet all the conditions there may be for accessing such financing. Such financing is important to place the country on the best footing towards building the nation. The Dominica Freedom Party is well aware that there is need to build goodwill and trust among political parties and in the nation at large. In that context and in the best interest of all citizens, we suggest that the convening of a national forum as we have suggested, be facilitated by a regional or multilateral organization. This is the reason that the direct letter that was sent to you was copied to the CARICOM Secretariat and the OECS Secretariat. Hopefully, through your Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as per protocol, a copy of the letter would have also been forwarded to the OAS secretariat and we trust that there was enough goodwill in your government for doing so. The letter was also copied to the Political Leader of the United Workers Party who is also the Leader of the Opposition. Additionally, the letter was copied to other stakeholders in Dominica including the Dominica Association of Industry and Commerce. We would be glad to sit with the government and with other stakeholder to draft the terms of reference for such a forum.

We look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

KENT VITAL
POLITICAL LEADER
DOMINICA FREEDOM PARTY