



ADDRESS

BY

HON. ROOSEVELT SKERRIT

PRIME MINISTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 45TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE

“ANNOU SELEBWE”

Friday November 3, 2023
Windsor Park Sports Stadium
10:00 AM



Fellow Dominicans on this our forty-fifth anniversary as an independent nation, I greet you with a shared sense of nationhood, a strong conviction in our ability to overcome adversity, a genuine sense of pride and fulfillment in our many achievements, and a deep measure of faith in God.

Patriots, comrades, friends, let us pause to reflect on our journey, a difficult but rewarding journey, that despite the odds, we have made tremendous gains and set the pace for a hopeful future filled with possibilities.

Amidst the silence of our reflections, the profound virtues of our story must be told - we are strong, courageous and resilient, we are survivors - we are blessed!

Fellow citizens, the current global landscape is perhaps the most perilous it has ever been. We are witnessing the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering impacts on health, social and economic sectors.

People and businesses the world over are still recovering from multiple blows dealt by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russia Ukraine war is also negatively impacting food and commodity supplies on which the world depends, driving up prices and inflation; and a new conflict is raging between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Every day, depressing international news cause a sense of fear and uncertainty among Caribbean people who know only too well that we are never immune to the impacts of global events.

To successfully navigate and resist global events which threaten our growth and survival, we must strengthen the relationships and cooperation that flow from regional bonds. Our Caribbean brothers and sisters share a common history, unique experiences and challenges, but with the understanding that we must work together toward a shared common and prosperous future.

Fellow Dominicans, friends, well-wishers, despite external shocks and natural disasters, the impact of climate change, which have slowed but not halted our national development, we Dominicans have much to celebrate.

That is why we observe this year's Independence under the theme: "Annou Selebwe," "Let us Celebrate."

Our celebration is a prayer of gratitude to Almighty God for leading us through numerous challenges. It is a reference to all that we have overcome as an independent nation, and it is a celebration of the work of this Labour Party Government and you, our dear citizens to overcome difficulties.

We celebrate the empowerment of our people, who are the real engine of growth, the heart of our society and the core of what makes us unique.

We celebrate the role that women have played in shaping this country .. and we celebrate the recent election of Dominica's first indigenous and first female president, Her Excellency Sylvanie Burton, D.A.H.

Dominica continues to show the world that we are committed to the advancement of women and recognizing gender equality, particularly in our governance structures.

We celebrate that in this country we have continued to put our people first, to create jobs and opportunities, to ensure our citizens have access to quality education, health care, housing, essential services and support for our vulnerable citizens, while prioritizing our public officers and our productive sectors.

We have seen the growth of our small businesses and just this past week, over 60 small business that have benefitted from the progressive policies of this Government were able to showcase their products and services at the Ti Village.

We also should be proud, and celebrate the fact that Dominica continues to produce a world class creole music festival, and maintains its attractiveness and appeal to citizens and visitors alike.

In seeking to give full prominence and benefits to our people, we have recently enacted new legislation to give greater protection to the rights of women, children the elderly, and victims of domestic violence, to improve their access to justice.

We have increased the salaries of nearly 3000 public officers, resulting in an overall increase of 6.0 percent, with some officers benefitting up to a 13 percent increase.

Our retired public officers have also benefited from an increase in their pensions by 2.8% effective October 1, 2023.

In Agriculture we celebrate with our farmers and the considerable progress which has been made in agricultural diversification, and the increased production of root crops and vegetables for local consumption and regional export.

Our farmers are benefiting from investments in livestock production, horticulture and fishing, which collectively will help reduce the national food import bill, contribute to our food and nutrition security, and bring increased sales and revenues to farmers.

We are working steadfastly towards our goal of achieving the contribution of 700 million dollars to the economy from agriculture by 2030. Efforts towards achieving that goal includes moving the sector to new areas of activity and income streams.

We are providing assistance to farmers with financing, technical support, greenhouses and operating space for start-up agricultural enterprises.

We are pleased to see that our efforts and investments are bearing fruits, in that many more young people are making a career for themselves in agriculture. We want to see this continue and for them to employ new technologies in developing agriculture as a business and add value to our agricultural products.

In Housing we also have cause to Celebrate – Just six years ago Hurricane Maria dealt a devastating blow to 90% of our housing stock. We have committed as a Government, and a people to “Building Back Better”. I can say to you without a shadow of a doubt, that this Government has built and helped thousands of citizens to build and repair their homes to resilient standards.

Ladies and gentlemen, Government’s housing policy is about protecting lives and livelihoods, providing safety and security, and increasing individual and community resilience.

The indigenous Kalinago community has benefited from new resilient housing under several programs, including under the government housing revolution, and the housing recovery programme. Additionally, they have already received 36 out of 50 resilient homes funded by the European Union.

Prospective occupants from across our country are rejoicing over the 358 housing units, which are nearing completion and are expected to be handed over in the first half of 2024.

Looking toward the immediate future, to address the extreme vulnerability of residents of Good Hope, San Sauveur, Petite Soufriere and Campbell, 327 homes will be built for their relocation and resettlement. Young professionals, the youth, and employees in the public and private sectors will also be assisted to realise their dreams of owning a home, with the constructed of 50 new homes in Warner and Cotton Hill.

Our commitment to uplifting the circumstance of our people, safeguarding their lives and livelihoods, and making them more resilient to the impacts of climate change is undeniable.

In Health We Celebrate the wellbeing of our nation's people and unprecedented access to quality health care at all levels.

We have been able to construct new and improved health and wellness facilities in 11 communities with funding from the Citizenship by Investment Programme; and other health facilities have been upgraded into SMART Centres with assistance from the Government of the United Kingdom.

We celebrate the top-of-the-line new Hospital at Goodwill, with modern facilities and new technologies, a generous gift from the People's Republic of China, and our new Hospital at Marigot funded through our CBI Programme.

Fellow Dominicans, we should be proud of the investments that we have made in developing the skills of our medical personnel, and the advancements in the provision of medical equipment to deliver better patient care.

These include the new MRI, fully equipped Cardiology Unit; the Brenda Strafford Foundation Eye Centre, the Cardiovascular Imaging Centre and the Tele-medicine Centre.

Each of these facilities will ensue a more resilient and modern health system that is equipped to serve Dominicans as well as patients from other Caribbean islands.

These investments have created many new jobs and enable us to provide specialty medical care for our population.

We remain committed to addressing the shortcomings within the system, to ensure that all Dominicans receive the highest level of care and attention, at all times.

In Tourism, we celebrate Dominica's growing appeal and popularity as a unique and much sought-after tourism destination.

We have pursued a deliberate policy to improve and expand the quality of our hotel room stock, and now we have several 5-star and even six-star hotels available, while others are being constructed through our CBI programme.

The International Airport, the largest single capital project in Dominica's history, is under construction. This project is being funded under the Citizenship by Investment Programme resulting in zero debt burden to the citizens of this country.

Dominicans have long yearned for an international airport a facility that every previous Government promised to build but never did. This Labour Party is delivering on that promise. It is no longer a figment of your imagination or a dream; you can see it unfolding before your very eyes in the Village of Wesley.

By God's grace, our international airport will be built!

The enormous benefits to be derived from a substantial increase in airlift to and from the island should not be underestimated. We have already seen a marked increase in stayover arrivals since we established direct air access to the US mainland.

In the meantime, we are making further investments in the extension of the runway at the Douglas Charles Airport to accommodate additional flights from the US as a response to increased demand for the destination.

Construction has also started on a Cable Car system in the Roseau Valley that will take visitors to the boiling lake. For those of you who are unable to make the hike, you will finally be able to view the boiling lake by taking a short 20-minute ride.

We are pursuing the development of the Cabrits Marina in Portsmouth. These investments, will make Dominica a more attractive place for visitors and result in the creation of thousands of jobs for citizens.

In Environment and Physical Development, we celebrate the protection and sustainable use of our natural heritage, and new physical infrastructure promoting resilience and serving as the basis for new economic opportunities, foreign exchange for our country and jobs for our people.

We are celebrating initiatives which give Dominica new recognition and status. To encourage activity in the blue economy, we will establish the first Sperm Whale Reserve in the world; recognizing that, in order to retain our reputation as the authentic Nature Island, we must protect our biodiversity.

We continue to invest in improving our road infrastructure. Major works are ongoing on the East Coast Road Project, and we intend to start work on the Loubiere to Grand Bay Road project soon.

We shall go to Parliament on November 10, 2023, to seek approval for a loan from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to implement the Roseau Enhancement Project and the construction of an entertainment complex, which will include attractions for families such as a bowling alley, built-for-purpose theater, a recording studio for our artistes, among other features.

We have made significant strides in the development of our geothermal plant in Laudat. We expect very shortly to sign an agreement with a developer for the construction of the power plant, and we have also secured financing for the new transmission lines from Laudat to Fond Cole.

We are actively pursuing the development of a Green Eco Industrial Park, with the support of the Green Climate Fund. This will not only spur industrial development on a large scale, but also attract businesses interested in utilizing clean, green and affordable energy.

My dear Dominicans, I know that there are many of you from the Diaspora sitting in the audience today. I want you to begin thinking of the possibilities for engagement in this transformative project.

These undertakings would not be possible without the contributions of our many friends and allies from around the world.

And so, we celebrate the partners that Dominica has had along this journey, who have stood by our side supporting us every step of the way.

Some of them are represented here today, and I say thank you to all of you for your presence and for the continued support of your countries and organizations.

I congratulate this year's meritorious service awardees who have made significant contributions to our nation's development in their various fields. The Government and people of Dominica value your efforts which have elevated the social and economic wellbeing of our country. While we may not say thanks to you every day, rest assured that as Prime Minister, I have always applauded your contribution to Dominica and today, by presenting you with this national award, we express that appreciation.

May God continue to bless your endeavours.

Fellow Dominicans, we stand together at this juncture in our nation's history, mindful of the challenges, but still a hopeful people, grounded in an unshakeable faith.

We shall march into the future, optimistic about the possibilities for people development and the opportunities to take our country to greater heights of development.

At these crossroads, we understand that personal responsibility, national discipline and unity of purpose will guide us through.

In the spirit of patriotism and love for country, let us recommit to protecting our land and its people; to overcoming our challenges; and to placing Dominica on a firm trajectory to growth and prosperity.

Let us go boldly forward to celebrate that bright future ahead, working hand in hand, confident that we will triumph!

Brothers and sisters, people of Dominica, Happy Forty-Fifth Independence, "Annou Selebwe!" and May God continue to Bless and protect this beautiful land/ and may God bless each and every one of you.