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to the United Nations**

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Statement

by

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**STATEMENT BY DR. THE HON. RALPH E. GONSALVES,
PRIME MINISTER OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
TO THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY 80TH SESSION**

Your Excellency, the esteemed President of the United Nations General Assembly; Your Excellencies:

The condition of today's world is more complicated, more dangerous than ever, more uneven in its human development, more integrated, yet more disparate and desperate. At the same time, much progress and advancements have been made by humanity; and there is an enduring hopefulness amidst despair; a persistent sense in much of humanity that a better tomorrow is possible, even as catastrophes loom and dangers lurk.

[So, we have been witnessing an exacerbation of conflicts and wars between some nations, and at the same time, abiding quests for comity and peace by others; we have been observing a wanton disregard of international law by powerful states yet a yearning from others for the upholding of an international legal order grounded in

long-established precepts; and international trade has become disruptive and chaotic through unilateral actions on tariffs, the weaponising of currency and the payments systems by the powerful, contrary to all basic international norms, amidst resistance by those who rely on multilateral agreements.]

[At the core of the destabilising actions of imperial powers and rising hegemony have been an absolutely insane ambition for unilateral dominance, globally and regionally, and an abandonment of a necessary and desirable multilateralism as envisaged by the Charter of the United Nations and other global compacts on this or that pressing or existential issue.]

Your Excellencies,, big-power rivalries, interlaced with personal vainglories and hubris, are gravely unsettling the world to the advantage of not one single nation-state. Civilized discourse, tempered with a patience and a calm, has given way to a bellicosity of language shouted across continents and oceans designed, presumably, to satisfy nativist longings in the breasts of those who those who think that, despite their good fortune, relatively, they have

been grievously wronged by some dark and hidden forces. Can none of these persons pause and reflect upon the question posed and answered by all the world's great religions, but in particular, through the words of the Hebrew Prophet Micah: "What does the Lord require of us? To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God."

[Historically, and manifestly so today, powerful nations make at least four major, but avoidable, errors: First, they downplay or ignore, at their own peril, the material and other interests of less powerful nations; secondly, they arrogantly believe that they are better than everyone else, and are blind to the uplifting histories of those they consider their inferiors; thirdly, powerful nations in an asymmetrical relationship with others tend to believe, mistakenly, that their dominance is permanent and just, that resistance by others is futile, doomed to failure; and fourthly, in the reassertion of unilateral dominance, great powers invariably hanker for an illusory past that never was; such posturing inevitably leads to frustration, disillusionment, open conflict, further militarisation, and war. A nation cannot look forward to a glorious, unblemished past that never was, and succeed; this pristine "fatherland" or "motherland"

fantasy to which modern-day imperial giants and rising hegemonies of the west or east seek to return, in glory, is a pathway to damnation for the great power itself and for humanity as a whole. History ought to be a guide to an uplifting future, not a mirror for misplaced vainglory of an imaginary, distorted past, in pursuit of ignoble goals today. Proud man, and woman, imperial or hegemonic, dressed in temporary authority, ought not to be found most assured of that which he or she is most ignorant.]

The intractable problems facing humanity cannot be solved by any one nation acting unilaterally. A mature multilateralism is required to address satisfactorily rampaging climate change in the age of the Anthropocene; to resolve the threats posed by nuclear weapons and their further spread; to pursue peaceful coexistence rather than conflict, terrorism, and war; to reform the system of financing for development, inclusive of a just climate financing; to tackle successfully the growing challenges of Artificial Intelligence; to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, be guided by the Global Digital Compact and the Pact for the Future; and to reshape global governance more inclusively.

[This bundle of global issues of the moment are of interest and concern to all of humanity, but especially so to those which are Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including my own country, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Each of these momentous issues has solutions to save Planet Earth and advance a much better life, living, and production for all; and these solutions have been proffered repeatedly, but a handful of powerful nations have opposed, declined or withdrawn from meaningful engagement thereon, multilaterally or at all.]

[For example, the lucid proposals for a joint climate financing, and more broadly, financing for development advanced in the Bridgetown Initiative 3.0 by Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados as endorsed by the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), have received a genuflection from the global power-houses, not an embrace, in a cynical maneuver by them to whittle down into near-nothingness the ambitious and progressive content. Similarly, President Irfaan Ali of Guyana has put forward a credible and implementable bundle of policies and programmes to fortify Mother Earth's biodiversity;

conjoin them with the 2024 Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS, and the world would be a far better place.]

[Reasons of no serious merit have been offered for non-engagement, or downright opposition by certain major, and emerging powers on these critical matters for humanity's survival and advancement. Indeed, one or two rich and powerful countries have absurdly trotted out a proposition of untruth that they are the ones who have been disadvantaged and thus must use their commanding wealth and power, unilaterally, to become further advantaged. Such absurdities are contributing immensely to the global condition of descending, metaphorically, to hell in a hand basket. A more unequal, oppressive, resentful, and Manichean world is the emerging result.]

It is thus of the highest importance for this august body, the United Nations, and the overwhelming majority of nation-states within it, to continue our efforts to persuade the powerful to act equitably, honourably, and multilaterally to tackle efficaciously the extant and looming challenges facing the global community. Oft-times, it is frustrating and disheartening to those of us who are committed to

this necessary and desirable path of mature multilateralism because our herculean efforts seemingly deliver, correspondingly, negligible results. Nevertheless, we cannot give up; we cannot afford to get weary; we have no choice but to persist in this ever-more urgent multilateral solidarity and cooperation as we pursue the political and economic spaces to make this world a better place for all humanity.

[In the process, we ourselves must resist creatively; devise our strategies and tactical approaches with understanding, wisdom, and acute judgement; act sensibly and maturely; be principled and unyielding yet not averse to compromises as the circumstances admit or demand; proceed with urgency where necessary and desirable but know, too, that the tyranny of now can often be unproductive.]

Your Excellencies, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like all countries globally, have been shaped by our history and geography, our nature and neighbours, our extant circumstances and our dreams for a better future. For example, we carry the benefits and the burdens of our geographic location, near to the greatest economic, military, scientific, and culturally-dominant power the world has even seen. St. Vincent and the Grenadines is where it is; it cannot be lifted up

and taken to Vladivostok or the mouth of the Amur River. Yet, as a free and independent people, we have the right to pursue peacefully and securely our quest for shared prosperity without domination, interference or intervention from any of our neighbours or from any power that comes from afar. [Among other things, we have the right to choose our friends so long in doing so, we do not engage in any action, singly or jointly with others, to the detriment or subversion of the peace, security, and well-being of any other state. But my country's right in this regard is being disrespected, not by any of our neighbours, but by a rising, or risen, hegemon from elsewhere, far away from our hemisphere.]

[Historically, our Caribbean, including St. Vincent and the Grenadines, has had to endure European colonialism, native genocide, the enslavement of African bodies; we have had to come to terms with egregious post-colonial, imperial designs. We have resisted all of this and more; and we have made accommodations as we consider appropriate in all the circumstances.] Today, as I speak, my government and my people have another challenge from the nefarious activities of the agents of a rising, or risen, hegemon from

another hemisphere, and from some greedy, unprincipled non-state operators in Europe, acting in concert, seeking to pollute, and interfere in, our democracy, our free and fair elections which are scheduled to be held later this year. Their conduct is unacceptable and hugely injurious to our people. [The rising or risen hegemon from the east which pretends to be the friend of disadvantaged countries is demonstrating to me that it possesses no moral or other superiority to old-fashioned imperialism; if it continues to permit its agents to interfere or meddle in our elections, it would suffer serious reputational damage in our Caribbean, in our Latin America, as a rogue no better than any of its ancient tribes. Amidst all that has befallen us from the contradictions and challenges of the global political economy and climate change, we now have to face this dastardly, and determined conspiracy, against our competitive democracy. It is my duty to so inform this United Nations General Assembly.]

Your Excellencies, the raging genocide and neo-colonial oppression being committed against the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank before our very eyes on global television are continuing affronts

to the elemental human rights of the Palestinians, to civilised conduct, and to international law. How can one state, a member of this august body, act with such impunity against defenseless men, women, children? Surely, the hottest part of hell is reserved for these perpetrators of genocide and those who are complicit in it! Over two hundred years ago, the British committed large-scale genocide against the indigenous people of my country, the Callinago and the Garifuna, and we are still enduring the historical legacies of underdevelopment therefrom; similarly, the genocidal enslavement of African bodies in our Caribbean, in our hemisphere. It will take centuries for the pain, suffering, and legacies of the current genocide of the Palestinians to be repaired. We in the Caribbean are today demanding, justly, reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies, which occurred centuries ago. This tragedy, this madness, that has been unfolding, unabated, in Palestine must stop. [The authors of this genocide are storing up insecurity and unspeakable problems for themselves in the future. It is pleasing to note that even countries of the North Atlantic military alliance are recognising the independent state of Palestine. We hail

the distinguished President of Palestine and the indomitable spirit of his people!

Israel's recent illegal expansion of this war against the Palestinian nation into the State of Qatar is unacceptable. We stand in solidarity with Qatar. [Similarly, too, the war in Ukraine must be brought to an end. Surely, all reasonable persons must by now realise that victory on the battlefield is highly unlikely for either side. There has to be a negotiated settlement which is likely to satisfy no one, but is required to save lives, limbs, and treasure; perhaps, a mutually-agreed condition of dissatisfaction is the basis for a peaceful resolution, however tenuous that may prove.]

Your Excellencies, St. Vincent and the Grenadines calls urgently for a lasting peace across the Taiwan Straits and the participation of Taiwan in the specialized agencies of the United Nations. It is a continuing absurdity that this country of 23 million people, a functioning democracy with a settled yearning for self-determination, a legitimate institutional expression of the Chinese civilisation with "first world" living standards, a land of peace and ingenuity, cannot

be properly accommodated in the global bodies concerned with health, climate change, civil aviation, policing, and so forth. [Surely, it is high time that this lingering mid-20th century issue be peacefully resolved so that the Taiwanese people can take their rightful place in the comity of nations.]

Similarly, it is long overdue for the fractured relationship between the United States of America and Cuba be made whole in mutual respect, in accordance with international law, and consistent with the interests of both neighbours for peace, security, and shared prosperity. St. Vincent and the Grenadines implores the great American nation to listen and act upon the near-unanimous advice of this General Assembly which has repeatedly called for an end to the oppressive, unlawful embargo against Cuba. [My country has excellent bilateral relations with the USA and Cuba; it pains us greatly to see our friends and neighbours in such a condition of extreme dissonance. The continued stand-off makes no sense to us; and it does not benefit either side. It is time to heal once and for all this hemispheric rupture from 1961 and continuing. We in CARICOM are prepared to act as the healing balm of Gilead.]

Likewise, the recent ramping-up of tensions between the USA and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is most unhelpful to peace and stability in our Caribbean and Latin America. St. Vincent and the Grenadines calls for the sealing back of actions and rhetoric which are inimical to cordial, neighbouring relations; in particular, we find the foreign militarisation of the waters around Venezuela exceedingly troubling. Repeatedly, the countries of the Caribbean and Latin America have unanimously declared our area a Zone of Peace; we urge our American friends to abide by this declaration. By all means, let us all cooperate in combating drug trafficking and allied transnational criminal activities, but a unilateral militarization is decidedly not the way to do it.

In Haiti, matters political, economic, and social continue to deteriorate; gang violence continues unabated, and veritable Hobbesian state of nature exists in which life is nasty, brutish and short. Haiti's political and economic elites have been found wanting; but it is true, too, that the international community with the means to assist has not as yet summoned up the will to do so

disinterestedly, though in accord with the Haitian people's deepest longings for peace, security and a normal civilized life and living. The UN Security Council, with CARICOM's full support, is seized of this matter but an insufficiency of resources and will have attended it. [The cynics ask: Why is there such inordinate attention paid to the tribal war in Ukraine but so little, comparatively, bestowed upon the first independent Republic of black people in this hemisphere?]

Your Excellencies, in November this year, the Conference of Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) gather one more time, on this occasion in the great nation of Brazil. The issue of climate change is urgent and existential. The science is clear and there has been a growing, even overwhelming, global consensus as to what is required to be done, but sadly some powerful, and other influential, countries, are back-sliding, and reneging on their earlier commitments. [At Belem we must make concrete progress for the sake of our planet Earth and for our children, grandchildren, and generations to come. We cannot afford to fail; a terrible disaster will befall Mother Earth and all its inhabitants if we fail.]

[Looming, too, Excellencies, are the rising challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This august Assembly must take the lead, urgently, in advancing a global compact to regulate AI so as to secure the benefits to be derived therefrom, but at the same time to prevent its very harmful possibilities. The central question to be answered proactively is this: Will humanity control AI or will we allow AI to control us? Our humanity must always be prioritised.]

Excellencies, just over a year ago, on July 1st, 2024, a category 4 hurricane, Beryl, devastated St. Vincent and the Grenadines; lives were lost; and damage and loss amounting to one-third of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was incurred; in particular, nearly 20 percent of our houses were either severely damaged or destroyed. We have been rebuilding and recovering stronger and better than ever. We thank our regional and international partners, including worthy non-governmental entities, for their solidarity without which our tasks of reconstruction would have been even more onerous; we thank, too, our diaspora. But, to tell the truth, we have had to rely mainly on our own efforts at home. There is much, much more left to

be done; and I again plead for the enhanced support of our friends, allies, and good Samaritans.

[Since 2001, my country has been struck by twelve major weather events; volcanic eruptions in April 2021; the COVID-19 pandemic; the fall-out from the global economic depression of 2008 to 2010; the loss of preferential markets for our principal agricultural export; the knock-on effects of trade disruptions, tariff dislocations, the glaring contradictions of monopoly capitalism, the weaponising of currencies, and global turmoil; and a multitude of other external shocks, including the damaging run-of-the-mill impacts of climate change. Through it all, we have survived and thrived despite my country's inherent vulnerabilities and the historical legacies of underdevelopment wrought by native genocide, the enslavement of African bodies, indentured labour, and colonial oppression.] Our people's resilience, creativity, and disciplined endeavours have been a marvel to behold. This is a testimony to our people's genius and the coming to the fore of our people's hidden rationalities, their hitherto submerged resources and abilities, a renaissance of their spirit, and the reaffirmation of the idea of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

[But our efforts are always in danger of being undermined by the more egregious acts of commission and omission occasioned by the irresponsibility, and worse, of modern-day imperial giants and rising or risen hegemony, from the west and the east. Still, more than ever, we require both bilateral and multilateral solidarity in quest of peace, security, and shared prosperity. This is the plea not only of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, but of all small states globally which are disadvantaged by the very structures of economic dominance and global governance. Thus, our demands for appropriate reformation.]

[I conclude with five reaffirmations for those from the dominant metropolises of the west and the east, who may possess the good sense to listen to friendly advice from a spokesperson from the periphery: First, do not think that our mouths will be muzzled by the food we eat to live; secondly, know it well that while some sleep to dream, the rest of us dream to change the world for the better; thirdly, we have a voice and it will never be stilled; fourthly, while we are not better than anyone, no one is better than us; and finally, we, too, have a history of civilised life and living with a trajectory for further

advancement and ennoblement. We are not appendages to any other nation; we are a free and independent people made in the image and likeness of God. We are the embodiment of the idea of SVG! We are friends of all; and we strive for a better world! We are a small nation, demonstrably capable of mighty deeds!] Excelencies, we, small states, have an important role to play in global affairs for the betterment of all. Imperial giants and hegemons must not hold us back. Together, we have an obligation not to desecrate our future.

Thank you!