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Commonwealth of Dominica

Statement by

Her Excellency Sylvanie Burton, DAH
President of the Commonwealth of Dominica

On the Occasion of the 79th Session of the
United Nations General Assembly

**Theme: “Leaving No One Behind: Acting Together for
the Advancement of Peace, Sustainable
Development, and Human Dignity for Present
and Future Generations”**

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United Nations Headquarters

New York

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Mr. President,

Mabrika! Mabrika! I greet you in the language of my Kalinago people, the first people of the Caribbean whom I am proud to call my ancestors.

I proudly bring you warmest greetings from the citizens of the Nature Island of the Caribbean and the homeland of Olympian Gold Medalist, Thea Lafond-Gadson, the Commonwealth of Dominica. It is an extraordinary honour to address this august body in my capacity as the **first** female President of the Commonwealth of Dominica and as the **first** President of indigenous descent.

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Mr. President,

Our organization was born out of the need to enable dialogue and facilitate cooperation among its members to avoid international conflict. Over time, however, our understanding of human development's contribution to peacebuilding and civilization has improved to the point where cooperation to enhance the human condition now lies at the core of our organization's work.

Mr. President,

Progress in many spheres of human endeavor is not equitable, and deliberate action is required to ensure, that the most vulnerable among us, namely women, boys, girls, the physically challenged and senior

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citizens are brought from the shadows of neglect and into the light of opportunity.

In essence, Excellencies, though we are a small nation subject to the many challenges of growth and development, we insist that we continue to be our brothers' keeper and join our voice with those who believe that no one, regardless of location, race, ethnicity, gender, or religion – no one – is left behind in the relentless pursuit of advancement. To leave no one behind in our quest for a sustainable and resilient future, we must embrace multilateralism to combat the many major global challenges we face.

The Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda

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Mr. President,

We remain concerned that despite the resources and publicity given to UN Agenda 30, its outputs so far do not inspire confidence that we are on track to realize the much-heralded goals.

Alarming, the 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report indicates that far from building on the progress achieved during the first five years, **“fully half of the 17 targets are showing minimal or moderate progress”** while **“over one-third appear stalled or going in reverse”**.

It is, therefore, the hope of my Government and the Caribbean Community of which we are proud

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members, that this Assembly will be known as the forum, at which the United Nations family rededicated itself to ensuring that the SDGs remain central to our claim, that our civilizations are caring and progressive and that our collective management, scientific and diplomatic capabilities will be assigned to ensuring that the well-being of the present and future generations is guaranteed.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs)

Mr. President,

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For example, despite SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing, the growing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), is an urgent crisis that calls for a unified and aggressive approach by all global leaders.

The World Health Organization (WHO), concludes that NCDs such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases, account for 75% of all deaths worldwide.

These diseases not only shorten individual lives but also imperil the future of our societies, our economies, and our shared global development goals. The fight against NCDs is not one that any nation, particularly a nation as small as ours, can win alone. That fight requires strong leadership, innovative strategies, and collaboration at every level.

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In Dominica, we have made significant progress in enhancing our healthcare system, to better meet the needs of those at risk or living with NCDs.

I had the opportunity to share Dominica's perspective, vision and action on non-communicable diseases with the Global Group of Heads of State and Government for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, at their Third Annual Gathering held here yesterday at the UN Headquarters. Dominica is proud to play its part in this global effort, and we remain committed to working with international partners to share knowledge, resources, and best practices in the fight against NCDs.

Climate Change

Mr. President,

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Mr. President, we stand today at a critical juncture in human history. Climate change, as we know, is not just an environmental challenge; it is a threat to every aspect of life as we know it.

For Dominica, as for many Small Island Developing States, this is not a distant or abstract issue; it is a daily reality.

We have said it time and time again. We see it so vividly, year after year, that our communities are on the frontlines, facing intensified hurricanes, devastating floods, and prolonged droughts.

We recall our own devastation in 2015 with Tropical Storm Erika which wiped out 96% of Dominica's GDP, and then again in 2017 against the deadly Hurricane Maria which destroyed over 225% of Dominica's GDP in a matter of hours. Mere hours! That is why, this year, we watched in agony as Hurricane Beryl swept through the island-States of St Vincent & the Grenadines, Grenada, Barbados, and Jamaica.

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Mr. President, these tragic occurrences embolden us to state firmly that the time for rhetoric has long passed. Business as usual, simply will not suffice. We need urgent, bold, and decisive action to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as science clearly dictates.

But to do this, we must drastically reduce emissions, boldly honor financial commitments, and build critical resilience infrastructure in regions particularly vulnerable in relation to climate change.

This is a moral imperative, a matter of the utmost urgency, a matter of climate justice. Our very future depends on the decisions made in these halls.

Excellencies:

This Assembly is meeting at a time when the Commonwealth of Dominica and the rest of the

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Caribbean direct our gaze to the east and on the storms and hurricanes that emerge in the Atlantic.

There is no denial that climate change is happening.

We see. Indeed, we feel its disastrous impacts on a daily basis. Already the warnings of weather scientists regarding global warming and the consequent increase in frequency and severity of storms, have proved to be accurate.

The Government and People of Dominica stand in solidarity with our sister CARICOM nations and others adversely affected by this year's storms.

Dominica along with other Caribbean States have already prioritized the development of national climate adaptation strategies; invested in resilient

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infrastructure and agriculture, invested in community education and in renewable energy.

Still, the reality is that, as important as our interventions in this crucial space are, they will remain ineffective if our friends and partners in the industrialized world do not honour their commitments, to reduce global warming and provide the funding that is required, to enable our low-emitting States to become resilient.

We therefore seize this opportunity to again urge that the ethical pledges made via the Kyoto Protocol, the Paris Agreement, the Climate Action Summit and within the framework of the Green Climate Fund, be honoured in the interest of the global community.

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Prime Minister Honourable Dr. Roosevelt Skerrit has been sounding that call at every opportunity he gets. We are sounding that call **again** at this Assembly. The high-emitting countries need to recognize and accept responsibility for their destructive practices and do the noble thing. We will not relent until they do!

Mr. President,

Our world is at the crossroads. Now, more than ever, Leadership at every level matters.

My delegation is of the firm view that the fundamental principles of the UN charter must be respected, no

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matter which Member State may be under scrutiny. Mr. President, this is no source of joy to my delegation, but these critical times demand that important truths be spoken frankly.

Mr. President, a glaring hypocrisy clouds this august body when right seems to pass as wrong, wrong seems to pass as right, depending on which Member State is being impacted. This practice of might makes right must be discontinued!

Global Peace

Mr. President,

My delegation remains deeply concerned about the ongoing conflicts particularly in Ukraine, the Middle East, and Sudan among others. We recognize the

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crucial role of peace in human development. We are convinced that war is futile.

It is this conviction that impels us to urge that the fullest support be given to those entities that are engaged in promoting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Sudan, just a few examples of locations where war is setting back the human development gains achieved over the years.

The continuing loss of innocent lives, particularly the innocent lives of the most vulnerable amongst us, namely the innocent lives of women and children is of dire concern. There is no winner in these conflicts.

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And if history has taught us anything, it is that the cost to rebuild after such terrifying and inhumane conflicts is extremely prohibitive. To this end, as long as these conflicts persist, my delegation will not cease to echo the call for an urgent end to these conflicts which have decimated the lives of so many innocent ones.

Haiti

Mr. President,

We stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti and insist with the other CARICOM Member States, that the current crisis being confronted by our sister CARICOM State in no way nullifies the entitlement of its people to the recognition of their sacred

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sovereignty and their right to be central in the search for a fair and durable peace.

The Government of Dominica remains convinced that the present challenges faced by our sister CARICOM State are in part related to the glorious contribution Haiti made to the quest for justice and freedom in our region and the world.

Indeed, the current complexion of this august body would have been **unimaginable** without the heroic struggles of the Haitian people.

As such, the crisis in Haiti is much more than a Caribbean crisis even if the solution is an obligation that all of the Caribbean States accept wholeheartedly. My delegation therefore unreservedly

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supports the position of CARICOM on the situation in Haiti, a position that rightly calls for a Haitian-led-and-owned transition process to bring across systematic changes to our fellow CARICOM Member State. It is high time!

The heroic sacrifices of Haitian blood and treasure that opened the door to the liberation of so many of our countries, making it possible for us to be Members of this august body, deserve no less than the abundant peace and prosperity of the wonderful Haitian people.

It is, Mr. President, in this same spirit that we welcome the installation of the interim Government under the leadership of Dr. Gary Conille, and the

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swearing-in of a new cabinet of Ministers, on June 12th.

This process of normalization of life for the people of Haiti has been nothing if not daunting. However, with the support of the International Community, there is a glimmer of hope, the dawning of a new day, as progress is being made. We remain ever optimistic that ordinary Haitian citizens will once again be able to live, work, and feel at peace in Haiti; an outcome they so richly deserve.

Mr. President,

No mention of this glimmer of hope for the Haitian people would be complete without recognition of the strategic support of the Kenyan volunteers, who have

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played a major role in bringing the security situation under some measure of control.

The Kenyan people standing so closely in the struggle for peace and prosperity with the Haitian people is as natural as natural gets because their stance echoes the ancestral and historical connections that we share as well as the imposition history placed upon us to struggle for our liberation. We, therefore, thank the Government and people of Kenya for their mighty effort. We thank also the United States of America and Canada for their generous support for the effort to stabilize Haiti.

We also thank the other States which have made and pledged their support to Haiti towards the restoration

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of an environment conducive to peace and development. Recognition is also due to those who made material contributions to this effort. We urge Member States who have pledged financial support to honor those pledges so that the humanitarian gaps can be closed, and the food crisis can be resolved.

The Haitian people, a people as heroic and resilient as people ever were, deserve better. It is our firm conviction that we in the International Community have a responsibility to ensure that the living conditions of the Haitian people are brought to the natural standards of human dignity.

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Cuba

Mr. President,

The Commonwealth of Dominica is keen to underscore its commitment to advocating for unity, justice, peace and the sustainable human development that they foster.

In this regard, we continue to urge that the long-running economic embargo against the people of Cuba be set aside. It hurts the people of Cuba as well as the image of its sponsors.

The trade embargo imposed against our brothers and sisters in Cuba, continues to be of great concern to us in the Caribbean. Its lifting grows increasingly urgent.

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Therefore, the Commonwealth of Dominica once again joins the voices of the overwhelming majority of members of this global organization, to call for the immediate lifting of trade restrictions and export bans imposed on the good people of Cuba.

They are unjustified! They are unjustifiable! They are antiquated! They belong to a bygone era. They should cease to exist. They fall, in our view, within the grand narrative of yet another Caribbean people's struggle for liberation. It is for these reasons that the Government of Dominica strongly urges a radical reconsideration of these actions.

Venezuela

Mr. President,

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Our steadfast advocacy for respect for the United Nations norms of sovereignty and non-interference impels us as well to urge that the right of the Government and people of Venezuela to resolve internal challenges without outside interference be respected. We renew our condemnation of the United States' imposition of sanctions on Venezuela. The resulting hardship forced upon the people of Venezuela needs an immediate and complete end.

Kalinago Contribution

Mr. President:

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In closing, my delegation is pleased to leave this august body, with reference to a most valuable and appropriate gift for this forum at this point in time.

My ancestors, the Kalinago people, lived in harmony with Mother Nature, drawing on nature for food and general wellbeing, including medicinal products.

The benefits to a life in harmony with Mother Nature are many.

Their impact on the environment was minimal. The benefits to human health were long active lives, with minimal burden of chronic diseases.

My ancestors also lived a communal life marked by social cohesion. My delegation recommends this way of life, of our Kalinago people, to this body.

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Mr. President,

I wish Your Excellency and all the Delegations participating in this 79th Session, every success in their deliberations.

In the language of the Kalinago people, Ayohora Ayahora, which means thank you.

I Thank you for the courtesy of your attention.