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TEL.: 1 (212) 963.1234 • FAX: 1 (212) 963.4879

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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International Decade
for the Eradication of Colonialism: goals and expected accomplishments

Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
31 May to 2 June 2011

WELCOME STATEMENT

BY

H.E. Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves

Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines



ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

Administrative Bldg., 3rd Flr., Kingstown, St. Vincent • Tel: (784) 456-2060 • Fax: (784) 456-2610

Statement

By

Dr. The Honourable Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

at the

**Opening Ceremony of the 2011 Caribbean Regional Seminar of the
Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of
the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries
and Peoples**

31 May, 2011
Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

Welcome to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines! The government and people of my country are proud to once again play host to the Caribbean Seminar on the Eradication of Colonialism. We welcome the members of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation, in particular its Chairman, Ambassador Francisco Carrión-Mena. We are also pleased to host the United Nations Secretariat, the NGO community, and, most of all, the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing territories that have made the trip to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for this most important Seminar.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines places tremendous importance on the work of this Committee. In addition to being members of the Special Committee, we have, in the past, served as Chair, in the person of former Ambassador Margaret Hughes-Ferarri. We have also hosted this Seminar in the past, and we are proud to do so again. I hope that, in addition to the important work that you have gathered here to complete, you will also have an opportunity to explore our archipelago and enjoy our unequalled Vincentian hospitality.

Mr. Chairman,

A distinguished son of our Caribbean Civilisation, the late Bob Marley, penned a seminal commentary on African liberation struggles and the often-violent battles of our African brothers to free themselves from colonial shackles. That song, titled "Zimbabwe," began with a simple, powerful truism:

"Every man got a right to decide his own destiny."

Marley's truth is embraced, and only slightly less poetically, by the **United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples**. In addition to recognising the right to self-determination and the freedom of all peoples to exercise their sovereignty and integrity of their national territory, the UN Declaration also stated, unequivocally, that "*the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights.*"

It is that continuing question of the fundamental human rights of 2 million people, scattered across 16 territories, which is at the core of this week's meeting of the Special Committee. It is true to say that the heyday of naked colonialism is now thankfully behind us. Since the founding of the United Nations, populations numbering in the aggregate in excess of one billion people have freed themselves from the subjugation and exploitation of colonialism. Countless numbers

of those people made the ultimate sacrifice for their country's freedom, and many chapters of our modern history are written in the blood of peoples whose nationalist struggles made them heroes in the global anti-colonialist struggle.

However, sadly, colonialism has yet to recede completely into historical memory. This year marks the beginning of the UN's Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples is now 50 years old. And yet, the rights of 2 million people to decide their own destiny is still denied. Fifty years ago, the United Nations "*solemnly proclaim[ed] the necessity of bringing to a speedy and unconditional end colonialism in all its forms and manifestations.*" Judged by the standard of that proclamation, our continued and collective failure to wipe out the remaining pockets of unbridled colonialism remains a blot on the common resolve of the international community and on the individual states that maintain some form of this practice.

Today, the overwhelming majority of Non-Self-Governing Territories are small, with the 500,000 people of Western Sahara and the 250,000 people of Guam being by far the largest of the remaining territories under the Special Committee's review. But to a small nation like Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, whose 110,000 people achieved independence a mere 31 years ago, the need to complete the decolonisation exercise remains fresh, relevant and urgent. There is no nation so small that its people forfeit the right to make a sovereign determination as to their own destiny and their relationship with colonial powers.

In the Caribbean region, the Special Committee has considerable work yet to complete. Seven of the 16 non self-governing territories on the Special Committee's agenda – Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the United States Virgin Islands – are located in our region. With the exception of the USVI, all of those territories are either members or associate members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the fundamental human rights of our neighbours, brothers and sisters are of paramount importance to our region.

In recent years, CARICOM has expressed its particular concern with the decisions by the government of the United Kingdom to suspend the constitution, postpone elections, and impose direct rule on the peoples of the Turks and Caicos Islands, an associate member of our community. We remain hopeful that these issues can be swiftly and fairly addressed in the interest of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and we remind all involved of the words of the UN Declaration of 50 years ago: "*Inadequacy of political, economic, social or educational preparedness should never serve as a pretext for delaying independence.*"

In addition to the seven Caribbean non self-governing territories, the question of Puerto Rico has also occupied the attention of the Special Committee. The right of the Puerto Rican people to freely determine their own governance structure and relationship with the United States should also be viewed through the prism of the UN Declaration.

Mr. Chairman,

Further afield, there are many vexing issues still before the Special Committee. The competing interests in the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, Gibraltar and Western Sahara should not remain unresolved in this Third Decade of Decolonisation. I echo UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call for greater effort and dialogue between and among the Special Committee, the administering Powers, and, most of all, the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing-Territories. The work of the Special Committee cannot lapse into endless repetitions of tired positions, or formulaic recitations of boilerplate language on decolonisation. I challenge the Special Committee to be creative and bold in moving beyond the current stalemates and in crafting unique, tailored solutions to the needs of all people still under some form of colonial rule.

Mr. Chairman,

The Special Committee is populated by members who share the collective memory and psychic scar of colonialism. The members of the Special Committee are also well aware that modern colonialism has evolved in recent decades into an equally insidious and pervasive form of economic and political domination that respects neither sovereignty nor territorial integrity. It does not require a generous reading of the UN Declaration to see its continued applicability to the emerging forms of neocolonialism, even *vis-à-vis* States that are, strictly speaking, independent. Nor does the Declaration require any special interpretation to extend its applicability to the millions of people whose plight, for political reasons, the international community has chosen to ignore.

But before we can focus fully on these modern manifestations of colonialism, we must first secure the fundamental and inalienable human rights of the remaining peoples who have yet to determine their own destiny. I trust that, in the beginning of the Third Decade of Decolonisation, this Conference will act in acknowledgement of the fact that it has a pivotal role to play in the ongoing struggle to eradicate colonialism. Let me once again paraphrase Bob Marley's "Zimbabwe" to say that "*arm in arm, we'll fight this little struggle. . . we're got to fight, fight, fight for our rights.*"

I thank you.

