



**Address to the Nation by**  
**The Right Honorable Dr. Denzil L. Douglas**  
**Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis**  
**On the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence**  
**19 September 2013**

Citizens, Residents and visitors, I greet you with great joy and delight on the attainment of 30 years of nationhood by our beloved country. I share with you the spirit of celebration and gratitude that has pervaded our nation throughout the month of September, during which, we have been participating in a range of activities to mark this major milestone in our nation's history; and have been showcasing, with great pride, so much of our culture and our way of life. Indeed, the talents that have been on display during the course of this month, provide ample testimony of the great strides we have made as a nation over the past thirty years.

The theme of this year's Independence Celebrations, "Stability, Creativity and Prosperity," provides a most fitting caption for the story of our progress as a people. Even a cursory look at the current state of our nation will reveal quite clearly and definitively that when the advancement of our people is measured by reference to these three standards that have been so aptly included in this year's theme, we not only score a passing grade, but we achieve a grade of distinction.

In measuring our progress as a people we must take cognizance of the squalor, high infant mortality, high death rates and pervasive malnutrition especially among our children that was

reported by the Moyne Commission when it visited our territory in the 1930's. We must remember that as late as the 1950's the vast majority of our people could not vote nor hold political office. This was a right reserved for the landed class, the people who owned the land on which we had toiled for centuries. It took many years of intense struggle by our people under the leadership of the Right Sir Excellent Robert Bradshaw to bring about the demise of this unjust system.

In measuring our progress as a people we must also recall that the main reason for the failure of the West Indies Federation was the view among some of the larger countries of West Indies that the small islands of the Federation, such as St. Kitts and Nevis, could not maintain themselves and would therefore draw upon the larger islands for succor and support. Indeed, even after many of our islands achieved Independence there was still considerable doubt expressed in relevant economic literature in relation to the viability of small island states such as those in the Caribbean.

It took great courage for our people to move forward into Independence and nationhood. But we were determined; and we were confident in our worth as a people and in our ability to advance and accelerate the wheels of economic progress. As early as 1975 the Labour Government, under the leadership of the Right Excellent Sir Robert Bradshaw, made Independence a part of its manifesto and won the General Elections on that basis.

This initiated the struggle for Independence which was carried forward by our labour leaders (now deceased), the Right Excellent Sir Robert Bradshaw, the Right Excellent Sir Paul Southwell, and Sir Lee Llewellyn Moore. It eventually culminated in the lowering of the Union Jack and the raising of our National Flag on September 19, 1983 in the presence of Dr. the Right Honourable Sir Kennedy A. Simmonds who was leading the country at the time and who had continued the pursuit of Independence.

Citizens, Residents and Visitors when my Government came to office in 1995 I was very conscious of the skepticism with which a number of regional scholars had written about the Independence of Caribbean Nations. George Beckford in "Persistent Poverty" had argued that

although the form of Caribbean society had changed with nationhood and modernization, the plantation economic structure was still intact. Indeed, for many regional scholars writing decades after a number of Caribbean countries attained nationhood, political independence was a sham without economic independence. For them, with Independence and nationhood, 'all had changed yet nothing had changed.'

My Government was determined to make Independence have true meaning for every citizen of St. Kitts and Nevis. We knew that it would require bold decision-making and that small incremental step would not be enough. We decided to implement a comprehensive set of social and economic policies that would ensure that our nation take a quantum leap into the new century that was ahead of us when we assumed office in 1995.

We have held firmly to the view that people must be the centre of any successful development strategy. Consequently, our people have been the actors in the development process that we initiated here in 1995 and they have also been the object and purpose of our development effort. We could not see how it would be possible for our economy to make the required quantum leap in development if the majority of our young people were unemployed and in a state of frustration and disenchantment. We therefore implemented the Short-term Work Experience Programme with 100 days of assuming office and opened up new vistas of opportunity for over 1000 young people by giving them the training and experience they required to secure for themselves a permanent place in the workforce and to unleash their immense talents and capabilities for personal advancement and for the good of the nation.

This was consistent with our philosophy that it is our people who must be the primary instrument of development; and the empowerment of our people, through education, accessible health care, and other expansive social development programmes, is an important precondition for sustainable growth and development. In keeping with this philosophy we demolished the tattered, leaky and dilapidated buildings that carried the name, Joseph N France General Hospital, and built in its place a brand new hospital offering spacious accommodation and state-of-the-art equipment and technologies for the benefit of the people throughout our Federation. The hospital can now proudly carry the name of our distinguished

Nation Hero, the Right Excellent Sir Joseph Nathaniel France. We also reconstructed the Pogson Hospital in Sandy Point and made it a center of excellence in community medicine and in the fight against HIV Aids.

In the area of education we sought to bridge the technological divide by distributing free laptop computers in our schools so that our school children, rich and poor alike, would benefit from the world of information and opportunity that may be accessed through the use of computers. We have also expanded the financial resources available to our students through the Development Bank, Commercial Banks and Social Security so that more of our young people could pursue the careers or professions of their choice. At the same time, we have negotiated scholarships with friendly Governments so that our children could access tertiary education in Cuba, Taiwan, the United States, and Commonwealth Countries including Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. Our aim is that every child successfully graduating high school in St. Kitts and Nevis would have easy access to professional training or tertiary education through loan financing or scholarships.

We have also provided direct assistance to lower income families through the provision of affordable subsidized housing and through the implementation of an impressive array of social development programmes that give care, attention and assistance to the aged; protect the abused and the vulnerable; provide school uniforms to children of lower income families; provides free textbooks and meals to school children; pay the examination fees for student sitting overseas examination; assist poor families requiring medical attention overseas; and provide free health care to children and to the aged.

We also made sure that even the lowest earners in our midst were provided increases in their income. Hence since we assumed office, our minimum wage has increased by nearly 75%, the minimum pension paid by Social Security was increased by nearly 50%, and the non-contributory pension paid by Social Security to indigents was increased by nearly 100%. Moreover, we still have the minimum wage under review because we are determined that we will protect and improve the standard of living of the lowest paid workers among us.

Citizens, Residents and Visitors, this massive investment in our people has been accompanied by similar investment in our physical infrastructure. Our roads network was expanded and upgraded; our air and seaports have been dramatically improved in terms of carrying capacity and the use of modern equipment and technologies; our telecommunications and internet services have been revolutionized through the introduction of competition in the industry, and our electricity services continue to be improved through expansion, modernization and enhanced reliability.

Our quest to ensure that our nation takes a quantum leap forward determined, to a large extent, our approach to the hurricanes that visited our shores during the first half of our term in office. Our aim was not just to repair and rehabilitate the facilities damaged by the hurricanes but to rebuild, improve, expand, and modernize those facilities. Hence, we did not just replace the pier at Port Zante but we completely redesigned it and rebuilt it while securing the entire land reclamation facility through an extensive revetment programme. Similarly, as I indicated earlier, our battered and tattered hospital was not repaired but it was rebuilt, expanded and modernized.

In addition, for low income families with substandard houses in ghauts and waterways, we did not merely patch up their homes and put them back in the ghaut. We built brand new starter homes for them and for other poor families in various communities throughout our Federation. We also accelerated our housing programme through which we constructed some three thousand homes and increased our housing stock by at least 25%. Moreover, in recent years, we have also given duty concessions to low and middle income families to reduce the overall cost of their homes and permit them to qualify for loans at our financial institutions.

These initiatives resulted in substantial increases in debt. This was not unexpected. I know it is easy for some policymakers to be disingenuous and to seek to take credit for the programmes funded by debt but to deny responsibility for the debt. In our case, however, the Government understood fully that in order to move our country forward and lift our people out of poverty and deprivation we would have to increase the national debt. We knew that our people,

empowered by the programmes funded by debt and guided by the strategic leadership of the Government, would find a way to reduce debt.

We were not prepared to retract from the massive initiative that we had mounted against poverty. We knew that development processes must be appropriately sequenced and that we had to focus on people development before taking on the challenge of fixing our balance sheet. Of course, my public comments in relation to debt were taken out of context, distorted and broadcasted throughout this country with a view to persuading people that I was insensitive to the risks associated with debt. However, the tremendous success we have had in reducing debt after attaining some of the key people-centred development objectives that we had set ourselves, testifies to the validity and efficacy of our approach to development and debt management. Perhaps this is the reason why the comments attributed to me in relation to debt are no longer broadcast throughout the length and breadth of this country.

There can be no doubt therefore that our country and our people have, over the years, made great strides in combating poverty and achieving greater prosperity. In addition, the hallmark of the development strategy implemented by successive Labour Governments has been the boldness and the creativity that we have demonstrated. When we introduced comprehensive education here in St. Kitts and Nevis it was viciously attacked but nearly a half a century afterwards, it is being commended by the World Bank and other international development agencies, and copied by developing countries all over the world, including some in the Caribbean. Our short-term work experience programme has been tailored and copied by countries within the region and beyond. Our programme by which we provide free laptops to students is under consideration in a number of Caribbean countries and is being tailored and adopted in a major Indian province.

The Citizenship by Investment Programme that has been subjected to fierce criticisms and attacks by political aspirants here in this country, has been tailored and copied by legislators in Antigua and Barbuda and is likely to be implemented shortly. Similarly, Grenada has been exploring the possibility of introducing a citizenship by investment programme. Indeed, even in Barbados, consideration is now being given to introducing a citizenship by investment

programme. Earlier this month, NationNews quoted the Prime Minister of Barbados as saying “the world is changing very quickly, we are in a competitive global environment and we have to make sure that we always have a competitive edge if we are to be ahead of the game as it were, and therefore that matter is receiving our attention...” The matter that he was referring to is the feasibility of introducing a citizenship by investment programme in Barbados.

I am pleased that we have been ahead of the game and others are now following. We took up a virtually defunct citizenship by investment programme, restructured it, promoted it, and converted it into one of the primary sources of economic activity and human development in our Federation, especially throughout a period when the Great Recession has been impacting the whole world and wreaking havoc on the finances of developed and developing countries alike.

Citizens, Residents and Visitors, it is clear that our nation has made great progress in terms of prosperity and creativity. Our record in terms of stability is equally impressive. When crime threatened to get out of hand, I intervened to appoint a new Commissioner and embark on a programme aimed at upgrading the management of the Police Force, providing new facilities, modern technology and equipment to the Security Forces, and generally modernizing the Security Forces in our Federation. The programme is still ongoing and will be intensified as we seek to provide better accommodation, more training opportunities, and enhanced benefits for our Security Forces. We are pleased that this initiative is already bearing fruit and has resulted in a significant reduction in crime.

The overall stability of our Federation, in spite of systematic attempts by political aspirants to create confusion and foster public violence and mayhem, continues to attract numerous investors to our shores. Our ability to attract foreign direct investment has been unrivaled in the Caribbean. Even now, Marriot is being expanded; Kittitian Hill is under construction; Imperial Bay Resort, Ocean Grove Development, and Windswept Residence Club at Christophe Harbour are under construction; Koi Hotel Resort is engaged in land preparation with a view to commencing construction shortly; and Park-Hyatt Hotel, Pelican Bay Hotel and a range of other tourism-related facilities are well advanced in their plans to commence construction.

But we cannot take the stability of our Federation for granted. It is critical that we accord utmost respect to the Constitution and the Laws of our Federation if we are to continue to maintain a reputation for stability and peace. In any democracy there will be differing opinion and controversy from time to time but in resolving these issues we must always abide by the Constitution. For instance in the issues pertaining to the vote of no confidence before Parliament and the constituency boundaries realignment approved by Parliament, I have sought the best available independent legal advice to ensure that at all times we uphold the constitution. We are now celebrating our 30th Anniversary. I think it is important for me to sound my voice above the political noise and state clearly to the Nation my view in relation to these matters.

Based on the advice I have received, I have formed the view that the drafters of the Constitution were deliberate in their decision to avoid putting a deadline on the Parliament in respect of the consideration of a vote of no confidence. They understood that a vote of no confidence could possibly result in General Elections within three months, and that adequate preparations must be made before General Elections are held. Specifically, a budget for the holding of elections must be in place, the voters' list must be up-to-date, the institutional arrangements for the holding of elections must be satisfactory and all of the actions mandated by the Constitution to secure free and fair elections must be completed.

One of the actions mandated by the Constitution is that the Constituency Boundaries Commission must review the boundaries and submit a report to the Governor General "at intervals of not less than two nor more than five years." The Constitution did not give a discretion to the Parliament nor to the Governor General, nor to any other authority whatsoever. It says clearly and unequivocally that it must be done no later than 5 years apart. The fact that it was not done by successive Governments since the 1980's, does not justify repeated and continued breaches of the constitution. Our nation is now 30 years old so that we are maturing as an Independent Country. We must honour our Constitution and our Laws. I do not agree with the political aspirants and their supporters who argue that we could ignore the very clear and definite time limit imposed by the Constitution in respect of boundaries but that



we must proceed immediately with the vote of no confidence for which there is no time limit prescribed by the Constitution.

Citizens, Residents and Visitors, the requirement for boundaries reform is not just a trite administrative requirement as some would have us believe. I am convinced that it would be difficult to hold free and fair elections in St. Kitts and Nevis based on the existing boundaries. An analysis of the results of the last General Elections reveals that if the People's Action Movement had achieved an additional 272 votes appropriately distributed in two critical constituencies they would have won the same number of seats as the Labour Party in St. Kitts, although some 58% of the votes cast would have been in favour of Labour. This would have represented a gross denial of the right of the majority of the people on the island of St. Kitts to be governed by the Government of their choice. This is a formula for confusion. The provision in the Constitution that requires that the constituencies be roughly equal in inhabitants (with a few exceptions) is intended to avoid such confusion. As Prime Minister, except as directed by the Court which is the authority on the interpretation of the Constitution, I am not prepared to rush into General Elections based on a formula that seems at variance with the Constitution and that could potentially create such anomaly and confusion.

We must uphold our Constitution if we are to preserve our democracy. Of course, after 30 years of nationhood, there could be some changes to the Constitution if a sufficient number of our people require such change. For instance some people have expressed the view that there should be a limited number of terms of office for the Prime Minister and possibly other representatives. This is not a matter that does not require political controversy and conflict. There is a procedure for constitutional change which can be followed if that is the wish of the majority of our people. Indeed, a matter such as this one is not necessarily a political issue and I certainly would be prepared in a next term of office to pursue this as a matter of conscience rather than politics if sufficient people express interest in this matter. But we cannot approach this matter by ignoring the current provisions of the Constitution and demanding the representatives duly elected by the people step down abruptly and unceremoniously because some political aspirant, drunk with the taste of power, believes that it is now his turn.

Even in the absence of constitutional amendments, good management practice dictates that political parties refresh themselves by initiating internal changes from time to time. That is why the slate of candidates identified by the Labour Party for the next General Elections includes only two persons who were part of the winning team in 1995. And it is only a matter of time before the remaining two are replaced by younger and fresher personalities. This is the essence of succession planning. It involves bringing new people to the fore from time to time at a pace that would ensure that there is continuity in leadership and an appropriate blend of experience, energy, and innovation. In a democracy, a Prime Minister cannot properly choose a successor. Succession planning must take place in the political parties that contend for office because ultimately it is for the people of this country to decide on whom they would wish to elect as their Prime Minister or as their representatives.

Citizens, Residents and Visitors, development is a never ending process and we must continuously strive to protect our achievements in relation to prosperity, creativity, stability and all of the other goals that we set ourselves. I have summarized the great progress that we have made as a people over the last 30 years and they are quite impressive. In fact, in this term in office alone we have halved our national debt, reduced crime, improved the reliability of electricity, replaced all deficits in our fiscal account with healthy surpluses, and wiped out bank overdrafts with positive and substantial bank balances. It is not surprising that we have been labeled a high income country by the international financial institutions. But we have not arrived, there is still much to do as I reminded numerous thousands of citizens, residents, and friends at the Independence 30 Super Concert moments after midnight at Warner Park.

Our immediate goal is to increase growth. I am confident that we have turned the corner in this regard and that the numerous projects and initiatives that I have outlined here today, will dramatically raise the level of economic activity. In addition the double salary that was paid this month to Government workers and any increase in the salary of Government workers over the next few months will act as a fiscal stimulus. We are convinced that our public servants and pensioners deserve to be rewarded for their outstanding service over the years and we have

therefore set in place the appropriate mechanisms to decide on a pay increase for Government workers by year end.

In closing I invite you to join me in giving thanks to the Almighty for taking us forward as a nation over the past 30 years. Let us, in a show of appreciation for the blessings conferred upon us by the Almighty God, devote more effort to the pursuit of peace, love and harmony as we continue on the road of nation building. I thank you.