



**ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT
BY HER EXCELLENCY SYLVANIE BURTON, DAH
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SECOND SESSION
OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT ON FRIDAY, 26TH JULY 2024

***THEME: “TACKLING THE MAJOR CHALLENGES AS A COLLECTIVE
TO REALIZE DYNAMIC DOMINICA”***

Introduction

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, the listening and viewing public, a pleasant good morning, and every good wish for good health, peace and happiness, from my house and the Kalinago Community, to you and your respective families.

Mister Speaker,

First and foremost, I wish to thank you most sincerely for the kind invitation extended to me and my dear husband, Gilbert, to attend this Sitting of the House and for me to address Members of Parliament. My husband and I are indeed delighted to be here.

I am extraordinarily pleased to address this august body for the very first time in my capacity as the first female President of the Commonwealth of Dominica and as the first President of indigenous lineage, on this noteworthy occasion of the Formal Opening of Parliament, the First Meeting of the Second Session of the Eleventh Parliament, under the Commonwealth of Dominica Constitution.

I have chosen on this historic and special moment, to focus on some of the pertinent issues that overshadow our efforts to invest in the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to realize the ultimate goal; a Dynamic Dominica that is centered on resilience, sustainability, modernization and inclusiveness.

Expression of Thanks

Mister Speaker,

Please permit me at this stage, to reiterate my gratitude to the Honourable Prime Minister and Members of the House of Assembly for conferring the dignity and responsibilities of the Office of the President on me. I gratefully appreciate your confidence and trust.

Thus far, it has been a fulfilling and enjoyable experience serving my people and nation. I remain true and loyal to the promise made at my inauguration on the 2nd day of October 2023, to be a President for all citizens of our beloved Dominica, both here and abroad. It is my every intention to safeguard the dignity and image of this high office and to discharge the functions of the Office of President, with the highest sense of dedication, impartiality, objectivity, and fairness, in accordance with the provisions of the Dominica Constitution and applicable law, and in the best interest of our people and nation.

Congratulatory Remarks

Mister Speaker,

I further wish to commend and congratulate the newest member of this Honourable House, Senator The Honourable Chalikia Vidal, who was appointed on the 9th day of April 2024 on the advice of the then Honourable Leader of the Opposition, to fill the vacant position occasioned by the annulment of the appointment of former member Sean Douglas.

Senator Vidal, your parliamentary role is an important one and hence should be taken very seriously. Parliament is the supreme legislative body where matters affecting the governance and affairs of State are deliberated upon and voted into law. During your orientation, you no doubt were furnished with a copy of the Standing Orders, which are basically written rules which regulate the proceedings of the House, that should be followed and respected by every Member of Parliament. These Standing Orders are meant to safeguard and maintain order and decorum when debates are taking place. I therefore encourage you to familiarize yourselves with the Standing Orders of the House and have due regard to the rulings and admonitions of the Speaker. Take correction in good faith and aim to become an effective Member of Parliament.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mrs. Annette Thomas-Sanford on her election as the first Female Kalinago Chief. I am optimistic that she will work towards unifying the Kalinago people, putting all political differences aside and working towards the sustainable development of all Kalinago people both here and abroad. I am also hopeful that her responsibility and that of the Kalinago Council, as enshrined in the Kalinago Territory Act, will be taken seriously as the foundation for guidance in decision-making.

The Dominica Constitution

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

Having listened to some public discourse on matters relating to the Constitution and governance, drove me to conclude that the general public has a limited understanding of the provisions of the Dominica Constitution and the role of the various arms of government it establishes. This conclusion could not be ignored knowing the importance and significance of the Constitution – the Supreme Law of the State. Note worthily, the preamble to the Constitution begins with profound guiding principles representing what we are as Dominicans and what

we desire to become; it outlines the various arms of the State and their individual powers; it also speaks to the determination of a person's citizenship and outlines the fundamental rights and freedoms of the citizenry, among other things.

I therefore call on every citizen, more particularly Members of this House, to take his/her civic responsibility seriously by making a concerted effort to learn as much as possible about the Constitution and to get acquainted with the guiding principles contained therein. Such collective appreciation and understanding is what will instill a sense of true patriotism within us, cause us to put country before self and help build a gentler and more caring nation. Doing or thinking otherwise will retard our advancement as a people and nation, and this, we cannot entertain at this crucial stage of our development. If we are to succeed in confronting the innumerable global challenges, we must unite in mind, heart and purpose.

Including civic education in the curriculum of every primary school on island, would be a step in the right direction.

The Constitution is easily accessible. Copies are available for sale at the Government Printery at a subsidized fee. I invite every Dominican to invest in a copy. I further wish to recommend for reading, a publication titled: ***"The Constitution, The Government and You,"*** penned by Mr. Alick C. Lawrence, one of Dominica's senior and most respected lawyers.

Continued Climate Change Impacts

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

The world in which we live is filled with various crises but the one which is considered the greatest threat to humanity, is climate change. The changing of the climate continues to pose a huge threat to the global community, especially to countries and territories like the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) known

for their extensive marine and costal zones, limited access to finance and high vulnerability to natural disasters.

Climate change is wreaking havoc on the planet. People around the world are witnessing and experiencing firsthand, the disastrous impacts of polluted air, droughts, intense wildfires, warming seas and rising sea levels, coastal erosion, extreme heat, food insecurity, extreme weather events that are increasing in frequency and severity, etcetera. These are driven primarily by human activities through the burning of fossil fuels that generate greenhouse gas emissions. In June of this year, we witnessed the formation of the earliest and quickest Category 4 Hurricane in recorded history – Hurricane Beryl, which left trails of destruction in our sister islands of Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada and its islands of Carriacou and Petite Martinique, and Jamaica. It is hoped that this was a wake-up call to the developed world - the high emitters of fossil fuels.

It is rather unfortunate that small States like ours that are low-emitting countries, are the ones on the frontlines of the climate crisis. It is totally unfair that SIDS and their populations are the one suffering the worst consequences of the actions of the developed world. Their actions are taking a toll on our very existence, our development and our well-being. This situation calls for urgent collective global action. The high-emitting countries need to recognize and accept responsibility for their destructive practices and do the noble thing - honour the targets set out in the Paris Agreement and provide the funding that is required to enable our small States to become resilient, adaptable and sustainable.

Mister Speaker, the lack of action by the larger and more industrialized countries makes it look like SIDS are asking them for a favor. This is no favor. They brought this crisis upon us and it is only fair that they provide us with the required support to respond to its impacts.

Prime Minister Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit has been sounding that call at every opportunity he gets. Today, I join him in this campaign. Climate justice demands that the developed world honors its promises. We will not relent until they do.

Actions to Mitigate Climate Change

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

There is no doubt that the impacts of climate change and the slow corrective actions by the developed world are overwhelming, but all hope is not lost.

Historically, SIDS have been at the forefront of climate solutions. Many SIDS have taken that bold political step to commit to the national climate action plans known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs,) geared at targeting the global targets set out in the Paris Agreement such as a net-zero emission, climate resilient future. SIDS have also played a key role in climate change negotiations and have been the driving force behind loss and damage discussions and the establishment of a fund for responding to climate impacts at COP27. The aim is to reach net zero emissions ahead of 2050 by developing renewable energy resources.

I can proudly say without any fear of contradiction, that Dominica has become a global leader in resilience and sustainability. In response to the severe socio-economic and physical shock suffered first by Tropical Storm Erika in 2015, followed in two short years by the destruction of Hurricane Maria in 2017, the Government of Dominica made the bold decision to become the 1st Climate Resilient Country of the World by 2030, focusing on **Building Back Better**. This decision was complemented by the development of a strategy and a plan, the National Resilient Development Strategy (NRDS) and the Climate Resilience and Recovery Plan (CRRP), respectively. The **Build Back Better** strategic approach is reflective in every sector of the economy; be it in housing, health, education, tourism, agriculture, energy, information, communications and technology, the

environment, you name it. The Roosevelt Skerit led administration deserves a tap on the shoulder; the people of Dominica deserve a tap on the shoulder.

Key stakeholders from across the international community gathered in Antigua from 27th to 30th May 2024 for the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to discuss the unique challenges faced by SIDS, with climate change high on the agenda. Information shared by the Caribbean Asean Council indicated that the conference recognized the unique vulnerability of SIDS and also their potential, and called for the international community to assist such states in diversifying their economies and strengthening their productive capacity. Stemming from the discussion was also the call for reforms in the international financial architecture to make accessing concessional financing easier. Recognizing that the next 10 years are crucial for SIDS, the conference sought international support for the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of oceans, marine resources and biodiversity, and urged support for the establishment of a “SIDS Centre for Excellence,” which will include a “SIDS Data Hub,” and an “Island Investment Forum.” The conference marked a significant step towards addressing the unique challenges faced by SIDS and setting the stage for a decade of action and resilience.

It was heartening to have learnt of the outcomes of the 4th International Conference on SIDS. Let us hope and pray that the long-awaited support from our developed partners will be forthcoming this time around.

Gender Equality

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

Gender equality is of paramount socio-economic importance. It is one of the cross-cutting issues prioritized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is ranked fifth among the 17 Sustainable Developing Goals (SDGs) of the 2030

Agenda that are designed to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The goal of SDG 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. There is consensus that progress on all of the SDGs is realistically achievable if women's empowerment and gender equality are prioritized holistically.

The United Nations considers equality between women and men, boys and girls, both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, asserts that ***“Gender Equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a pre-condition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”*** End of quote.

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) have shown significant achievements in promoting gender equality, particularly in narrowing the gender gap in labor markets. The Caribbean region has seen women breaking barriers and attaining leadership roles across various sectors and industries, be it as Heads of State, Prime Ministers, Cabinet Ministers, Parliamentarians, Financial and Permanent Secretaries, Chief Executive Officers in banking, insurance and business enterprises, to name a few. These leadership roles are crucial for driving the gender equality agenda. Further progress was achieved through law reforms, policy implementations and targeted investments in gender-focused programming.

For instance, in Dominica, women make up 36.8% of members of Cabinet and 37.5% of members of Parliament with most of the holders of the position of Permanent Secretary and school Principal being women. Additionally, Dominica demonstrates its unwavering commitment to this just cause through the passage of relevant pieces of legislation that reflect international best practices and are in accordance with international conventions. These pieces of legislation were

recently reformed to reinforce the safety, protection and security of children, women and other vulnerable groups.

However, despite notable progress made toward gender equality, SIDS continue to face distinctive challenges that hinder gender equality, women's rights and the empowerment of women and girls. For example, intersecting crises in the region have significantly hindered the progress of gender equality due to their compounded effects on existing vulnerabilities and inequalities. We must therefore recognize and address the intersecting forms of discrimination faced by vulnerable populations in SIDS on any grounds, including gender, culture, race, ability, creed, age, socio-economic condition or other dissimilarity. Intersectional approaches are crucial in ensuring that no one is left behind in our quest for a resilient and sustainable future.

I had the opportunity to represent Dominica at a two-day, first-of-its-kind SIDS Gender Equality Forum which took place in Antigua from 25th to 26th May 2024, ahead of the 4th SIDS Conference. This forum was convened to primarily reflect on better practices and lessons learned in operationalizing the SAMOA Pathway, the Sustainable Developments Goals and to deliberate on the way forward to ensure a gender transformative resilient future for SIDS, in which all human beings can enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms, without being discriminated against. Following the deliberations, highlights of the forum and recommendations were drawn up and presented at the 4th SIDS Conference.

I wish at this juncture, to acknowledge the Bureau of Gender Affairs for its indispensable role in coordinating the gender equality efforts and all the non-governmental organizations who have been raising public awareness on gender related issues. In a nutshell, no society/country can develop economically, politically, or socially, when half of its population is marginalized. I therefore appeal to all relevant stakeholders in SIDS to join forces to create a more equitable and inclusive Caribbean. We must ensure that no one is left behind.

Environmental Preservation

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

The planet earth is our common home designed by God Almighty. The environment is the foundation of our health and well-being. It gives us clean air, water, food, materials, space for recreation and other essential needs. The environment is truly nature's gift that helps in nourishing life on earth. It is therefore critical that we attach significance to the conservation of the planet, its climate and ecosystems. Furthermore, the Bible tells us that we are not to exercise our God-given dominion in a way that destroys or abuses nature. Instead, we ought to be stewards of the earth. God Almighty summons us in Genesis 2:15 to ***“work it and take care of it”***.

Consequent upon the world's failure to protect the environment, we continue to experience much retribution from nature. There is absolutely no doubt that planet earth is under severe threat and stress, and may very well become uninhabitable, if we further delay decisive corrective action. Every day the global community is feeling the impacts, some of which I alluded to earlier in my address. The science is clear. It is well known that there is an urgent need to keep global temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius. However, our planet earth has already been warmed by 1.1 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and the world is on a trajectory to hit a possible 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2030. Indeed, urgent actions are needed to reverse this trajectory by safeguarding nature and the climate.

We here in Dominica are fortunate that we can still breathe in clean air, enjoy quality drinking water directly from the tap and take advantage of the excellent relaxation opportunities such as bathing in our rivers and seas, hiking the trails, etc. These luxuries will only remain at our disposal if we take care of the environment by practicing effective management measures. There is no disputing that everything that we need to survive and thrive depends on nature.

Hence, we ought to take care of the environment just as we care for ourselves. I wish to compliment Government for recognizing this reality and for investing so greatly in ecosystem health. The Ministry for Environment, Rural Modernisation, Kalinago Upliftment and Constituency Empowerment, through its various divisions and programmes, has embarked on several initiatives that seek to enhance our environmental sustainability through biodiversity, adaptation and preservation. Some of the foremost initiatives relate to:

- ✚ Reforestation and Ecosystem Enhancement;
- ✚ Integrated Physical Adaptation and Community Resilience; and
- ✚ Solid Waste Management

In 2019, Government in its continued efforts to preserving Dominica's breathtakingly beautiful natural landscape and en route to becoming the First Climate-Resilient Country in the World, placed a ban on common plastics and single-use Styrofoam cups and food containers. Since then we have seen the ever-growing global push as per the mandate of UNEA RESOLUTION 5/14 which seeks to "***End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument***". This treaty seeks to end plastic pollution especially in the Marine environment by 2040, by considering the full life cycle approach of plastic production.

Regrettably, there is still a wide use of common plastics on island that are not being disposed of in a responsible manner. There is need to consider a future ban on single shopping bags, better known as T-shirt bags, as these items are easily blown and once in the ocean pose a significant threat to turtles, dolphins, and whales, just to name a few.

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the various government ministries, divisions, groups and individuals involved in environmental advocacy. We too can play our part by engaging in planet-support activities such as clean-up

campaigns, tree planting, grass planting to help prevent soil erosion, practicing proper waste disposal and recycle, reuse and composting.

Protecting the environment is not only essential for enhancing human, animal and plant life but also for sustainable development as well as socio-economic advancement. To put it simply, natural resources are essential for life on earth. My dear people, let us not turn a deaf ear to the call to do something to save the planet earth, our source of life and livelihood. Let us make a concerted effort to conserve our natural resources, combat pollution and protect biodiversity. We owe it to ourselves, our society, our economy, our Nature Isle and future generations.

Protecting the Most Vulnerable in our Midst

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

God blessed us with special gifts – our children. He entrusted them to our care to raise them up in the right way, in a manner pleasing to Him. To love them, to protect them, to provide for their every need and to provide them with a good foundation. Children depend on us adults for their survival and well-being, especially when they reach the vulnerable stage of adolescence. At this stage, their bodies go through rapid changes that can trigger needs and behaviors that place them at risk such as a need to **“fit in,”** to be accepted by their peers, to find a place in society, to find a place in the world. Unfortunately, that protection and care is not always forthcoming and as a result many of our children and adolescents have become victims of abuse in one form or the other. The Social Welfare Division, for the period January 2023 to June 2024, recorded reported cases of child abuse as follows:

- Ages 0 to 4 years: 13 males, 22 females
- Ages 5 to 9 years: 8 males, 22 females
- Ages 10 to 14 years: 6 males, 35 females; and

- Ages 15 to 17 years: 5 males, 21 females

The various forms of abuse are categorized as follows:

- inadequate supervision: 4;
- failure of parent to provide: 5;
- runaways: 3;
- child beyond control of parent: 17;
- physical abuse: 38;
- neglect: 63;
- emotional abuse: 21; and
- sexual abuse: 54.

The aforementioned data represents 74.0% female and 26.0% male.

As revealed from the above reported child abuse cases, neglect is the highest form of abuse. And what in God's name would 35 innocent beings, 4 years and younger, do to anyone to merit any form of abuse? This is very concerning. For a small population like ours one (1) case of abuse is one too many. These are just reported cases. There may be many unreported cases out there. Those vulnerable and disadvantaged children and adolescents need our attention, our time and protection.

The Government is playing its part. What are the rest of us doing? Will we continue to turn a deaf ear to their cries for help? I hope not. We have to confront this societal problem as a collective, frontally.

I am particularly concerned about our young men who appear to be the ones most at-risk. Most of the societal ills are committed by our young men and lately, we have been losing too many of our young men through gang or drug related violence. Reports from the Police Department show that 15 males were victims of homicide in 2023 and thus far in 2024, 5 males. Almost one (1) homicide per month. It is also a known fact that our girls do better at school and our young

ladies are more inclined to pursue higher education than our young men. We need to find the real cause of this problem and address it.

The main root of the problem may well be associated with how we socialize our children. Where the girls should stay home and read their books, while it is okay for our boys to be playing or roaming the streets; where it is okay for our girls to express themselves and to cry, but it is not okay for our boys to express themselves and to cry because crying is a sign of weakness and they ought to be strong. We are all seeing the devastating consequences of this antiquated style of socialization where bottled up feelings have turned to anger that is being manifested in violence and crime, and other destructive ways. So, we as parents and guardians, need to re-examine our own preconceived notions about gender and create an environment where our boys can be their full authentic selves, to be able to express their hurt and their pain, without being accused of being weak. Also of great importance, is the influence of a good man in the lives of his children and in the lives of children beyond his own home; he has the power to impact his community. Men, your role in the lives of your children cannot be duplicated. Please play your part in helping our children, our boys, to grow and mature into responsible adults.

I am happy to report that the Office of the President is also playing our part and the President's Charities Foundation have with the valued input of relevant stakeholders, formulated a community outreach program that is geared at helping our vulnerable children and adolescents realize their true purpose and fullest potential. This program has been piloted in the community of Grand Bay with the intention to duplicate it in other communities. We are currently working in close collaboration with the schools and leaders of the youth organizations like the Scouts, Girl Guides and Cadet Corps, who play a pivotal role in helping to mold our children into well rounded citizens. We have been working with the youth leaders to help revamp these groups and have since provided them with financial support to procure uniforms for their respective organizations. I wish

to use this opportunity to encourage all parents and guardians to enroll your children in one of those youth organizations. Pretty soon, a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program to include a component of music, will commence at the existing Centre for Excellence Hub in Grand Bay. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of Dr. Jermaine Jean-Pierre, Secretary to the President's Charities Foundation and Youth Officer, Mr. Julien Pacquette.

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

I am also concerned about the well-being of our elderly citizens, some of whom I am aware are being subjected to abuse in most cases by their own family members. These include physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment; neglect; and serious loss of dignity and respect.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed that the rates of abuse of older persons increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has predicted that abuse of older persons will increase as many countries are experiencing rapidly ageing populations. The global population of persons aged 60 years and over, according to the WHO, is predicted to increase to 2 billion by 2050. We too do have an ageing population and hence the number of cases of elder abuse is likely to increase. We therefore need to formulate effective strategies to help prevent and respond to the abuse of older persons. Some of the strategies considered most promising include caregiver interventions; money management programmes for older persons vulnerable to financial exploitation; helplines and emergency shelters; and multi-disciplinary teams.

I wish to commend the Government for its kind intervention being executed through the "Yes We Care" Program, which from all report has made a great difference in the lives of the elders who receive this social service. Commendation is also being conveyed to the Dominica Council on Ageing for its leading role in raising public concern about elder abuse and for safeguarding their rights,

dignity and well-being. Our elders deserve the best of care and attention; we owe it to them. Older Persons must be recognized, cherished and held in high esteem for their contribution to nation building regardless of their colour, creed or social standing.

We, meaning the homes, the schools, the churches, non-governmental organizations and the business community, should join forces with the Government, the Dominica Council on Ageing, the caring institutions, and the uniformed social groups, to help protect and care for the most vulnerable in our midst.

Electoral Reform

Mister Speaker,

We have made great headway in addressing the issue of electoral reform that has loomed over us through several election cycles. The Sir Dennis Byron Report was received and Government engaged various stakeholders in consultations to review the report and recommendations by Sir Dennis Byron. The Cabinet, ably supported by the Attorney General Chambers, has thoroughly reviewed the offered recommendations and classified them as short, medium and long-term measures. This strategic approach was employed to facilitate implementation of the offered workable recommendations on a phase basis, as electoral modernization is an ongoing process and, hence, it is not feasibly possible to accommodate all of the recommendations at the same time.

To advance the process, this Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit led administration, has decided to commence the process by first focusing on three of the unresolved issues of electoral reform as it relates to; the Registration of Electors, the House of Assembly Act and the Electoral Commission Act. Respective pieces of legislation were drafted and made available to the public for review and comments. I trust that Honourable Members of the House and the wider public

made time to access and read the draft legislation. I read all 3 pieces of the draft legislation and found each one to be acceptable. It is a lot of information I must admit, but the clear and simple style used, made reading easy for persons of all ages. I wish to recognize the Attorney General and his team for their dedication and hard work and to commend them for a job well done.

The Prime Minister in one of his updates informed the nation that it was not possible to bring the Bills before Parliament in June as was intended, since the Electoral Commission requested an extension of time to review the draft legislation which it hopes to complete at the end of July 2024. When the Bills are tabled in Parliament, I urge members on both sides of this Honourable House to approach the debate from the point of view of ensuring that the rights of all eligible voters, both at home and abroad, are protected. No eligible voter should be disenfranchised, neither should the State make voting a difficult and stressful exercise for its citizens. I look forward to this Honourable House bringing this matter to a close.

Realization of Dynamic Dominica

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

By God's grace and goodness, we have been able to navigate through the various challenges and vulnerabilities that confront us and to place Dominica on a path for development that is sustainable and people-focused, through the adoption of resilient and sustainable practices that are reflective in every sector of the economy. Building resilience to future natural disasters and external shocks is critical to our continued growth and development and the realization of dynamic Dominica. Government has invested in several transformative projects that are geared at taking us closer to that realization. This is evident in initiatives like the digital economy, the green energy initiative which is prioritized on the development of our geothermal resources, the construction of major international hotels, the construction of the international airport and the soon

to commence cabrits marina. Dynamic Dominica is within our grasp. Let us continue to tackle the challenges and difficulties as a resilient collective and work towards achieving the ultimate goal – dynamic Dominica.

We are currently in a very active Hurricane Season. We thank our Heavenly Father for sparing us from the disastrous impact of Hurricane Beryl and pray that He will keep His eyes upon us and protect us from all future natural disasters, from harm and danger of all kinds.

We also lift up in prayer, our brothers and sisters in the region, whose lives and livelihoods have been shattered by Hurricane Beryl. We feel their distress and pain and pray that the healing process after this traumatic experience will be complete and that the international community will hasten and come to their aid.

Loss of Sense of Sin and Fear of God

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members,

I find it necessary to refer my fellow citizens and residents to the preamble to the Dominica Constitution which states, inter alia, that ***“the Commonwealth of Dominica is founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God.”*** Those principles are also reflected in our Symbols of Nationhood.

This need was triggered by the somewhat lack of sense of sin and fear of God being exhibited lately by the populace, particularly among the younger generation. These persons feel it is okay to do and say what they want, how they want, where they want and when they want, with no remorse and little or no regard for others; where little time is spent in prayer and with family, where

attending church or participating in church activities have become the least of their options; where most of their time is spent on social media and to have a good time on weekdays and weekends; as we would say in our local parlance, “to seewoo”.

This culture that is showing its ugly face across the country does not in any way represent what we are and what we desire to become as a people and nation. We are heading down a dangerous road and need to pause, acknowledge our wrongs and keep God at the centre of our lives. We are nothing without God.

King David reminds us in Psalm 32:12, that “**Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom He has chosen as His Heritage.**” God has been good to us, let us not do things that will cause us to lose favor with Him. We are a God-fearing nation; let this be always reflected in our words and actions.

May God bless us richly, and may God continue to bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members, do have a fruitful and successful Session.

I thank you for your patience and for the courtesy of your attention.