

TRUE INDEPENDENCE IS AN UNBREAKABLE SPIRIT

REMARKS AT INDEPENDENCE FLAG RAISING – COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

- **Dr Didacus Jules, Director General, OECS**

We have come together today as an OECS family to commemorate the Independence of our sister Dominica as we have done for several years now at the Commission. But this year, the context of these celebrations have changed dramatically. We join together against the backdrop of the most severe hurricane devastation that has ever ravaged an Anglophone Caribbean island.

In the past month or so the Dominica narrative has focussed on damage, destruction, devastation and initially on despair. But today – because we are celebrating the 39th Year of Independence of Dominica – we need to change that narrative and focus not on the loss but on the gains; not on the reversals but on the resilience; not on the pain but on the potential. In his first address in the aftermath of the hurricanes, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said *“we have lost all that money can buy and replace”* but the implication of that dramatic statement is that Dominicans did not lose that which money could neither buy nor replace and that is the resilience of the Spirit.

So today let us focus on that which has been neither been lost nor destroyed even if it may have been severely tested. Let us celebrate the courage and determination; the indomitable fighting spirit of Dominica. True Independence is an unbreakable spirit even when all that can be bought has been lost. It is that will to overcome; it is that defiance of all odds; it is that courage in the face of adversity that must mark our Independence.

The letter of the revised Treaty of Basseterre defines the formal parameters for the creation of the Economic Union and the single space that we are destined to become; the spirit of Treaty empowers us to think and respond – especially in times of crisis – as a single differentiated but unshakeably united family.

The spontaneity, the scale and the intensity of the support which Dominica received was not simply the instinctive extension of a helping hand by the Caribbean. It was the fruit of Dominica's own generosity being returned tenfold. We are reminded in the Good Book in Luke 6; to *"give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."*

Dominica the love that you gave to those devastated by Irma - even though you were still recovering from Erika - is the love that returned exponentially when you were yourself was violated by Maria. In this you have taught us all a lesson and set an extraordinary example.

Here at the OECS Commission – just as in all the Member States – we will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with Dominica through every phase of this new journey. We will work even harder to make the OECS member states climate resilient so that Independence will also come to mean a freedom from the fear of climate impacts, renewable energy security, sustainable livelihoods and a more equitable quality of life for all.

I would like to end by dedicating this poem by Derek Walcott ***A City's Death By Fire*** – which could equally be repurposed as ***A City's Death by Hurricane*** to the restoration of hope and the resurrection of the resilience of the people of Dominica:

*“After that hot gopeller has levelled all but the churchd sky,
I wrote the tale by tallow of a city's death by fire;*

*Under a candle's eye, that smoked in tears, I
Wanted to tell, in more than wax, of faiths that were snapped like wire.
All day I walked abroad among the rubbled tales,
Shocked at each wall that stood on the street like a liar;
Loud was the bird-rocked sky, and all the clouds were bales
Torn open by looting, and white, in spite of the fire.
By the smoking sea, where Christ walked, I asked, why
Should a man wax tears, when his wooden world fails?
In town, leaves were paper, but the hills were a flock of faiths;
To a boy who walked all day, each leaf was a green breath
Rebuilding a love I thought was dead as nails,
Blessing the death and the baptism by fire”*

The love of which Walcott speaks is not as dead as nails, Dominica. It is alive and well. One of the lessons of this chapter of shattered lives is that alone we can do so little but together we can do so much. Beaten but not broken, ravaged but resilient Dominica will rise again!

An la wout se tje; an mache ansamb!

