



Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica

ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY
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PRIME MINISTER OF
THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

*On the Occasion of the
43rd Anniversary of Independence
of the Commonwealth of Dominica*

Wednesday, 3rd November, 2021

3:00 p.m.



Fellow Dominicans, the celebration of Dominica's 43 years as an independent nation presents us with a time of reflection on how far we have come, and how the development of this country has been shaped by the efforts and contributions of so many who have gone before us. In the past few months, we have mourned the loss of the nation's first Prime Minister, Patrick Roland John, who proudly led our people to Independence.

Sadly, we also lost the Hon. Edward Registe, a brother, a comrade, a sitting Minister of Government and Parliamentary Representative, who died in the service of his nation and people. I wish to once again express deepest condolences on behalf of myself, my family, my government, and the people of Dominica, to the family and loved ones of former Prime Minister John and Hon. Registe.

As we remember our two fallen leaders, let us also call to mind all those who have died as we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. We are reminded of the fragility of life, and the importance of making every day count. The theme for this year's Independence is, "***United in Purpose, Our Health, Our Heritage, Our Future.***" I invite the country to join me in reflecting on what this theme means at both the personal and national levels, by asking ourselves these questions:

- What is our responsibility to ourselves, our families, our community, and our country?
- How do we become "*our brother's keeper*" as the Bible urges us to do, and as brothers care for and look out for each other in these challenging times?
- What is our responsibility to the most vulnerable among us?
- How do we move from reflection to action that will make a difference on these very serious and relevant matters?

Over the last 43 years we have had to face more than our fair share of natural disasters and external economic shocks, but through it all God has protected and guided us. We are now in the throes of the COVID-19 Pandemic having already lost too many of our loved ones and witnessed the hardship of others, whose families, lives, circumstances, businesses and incomes have been negatively impacted by this disease. Indeed, there are signs that this pandemic will go down in history as the worst health, social and economic crisis of our time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the contraction of economies across the globe, including within CARICOM, and Dominica has not escaped its effects. Those impacts have been magnified by the fact that we are still recovering from the worst storm in our history. This period for us has therefore been marked by large, unplanned expenditures associated with our efforts to control the spread of the virus. Put simply, this means that while Government is collecting less revenue than expected, in order to save lives and protect livelihoods, we have had to prioritise the health sector, and allocate significant resources to fighting COVID.

Saving the lives of our people is paramount.

Despite the challenges, your government has continued to provide for all of our people, particularly the most vulnerable. We have serviced our debt and kept the wheels of the economy turning, albeit slowly and under severe limitations. We have maintained all our social programmes and extended support to people affected by the pandemic. We have met the wages of all public officers on time, and sent no one home, including our NEP workers. In fact, we are fulfilling our commitment to public officers as promised under the collective bargaining agreement agreed with the Unions.

We have been innovative in developing other ways to keep economic activity going. This includes creating a safe corridor to allow us to receive cruise ship calls, and to allow visitors to return to our hotels, in a safe and managed way. Despite the constraints, we have also been keeping our manifesto pledges and commitments. By the grace of God, we have managed fairly well, but we must not underplay the effects of this pandemic. It can be likened to a prolonged global storm which has impacted developed and developing countries alike.

The International Monetary Fund's October 2021, World Economic Outlook, concluded that "Global recovery continues, but the momentum has weakened, and uncertainty has increased." This forecast, combined with the World Health Organisation's caution that the virus will be with us well into 2022, clearly signals that Dominica's economic fortunes will continue to be affected for some time into the future. The short-term effects of COVID have been severe, and the long-term effects have not yet fully emerged. This Government will therefore continue to do our utmost to protect citizen and country, while being prudent in our response.

We are comforted by the fact that we have not had to battle this disease alone. On behalf of a grateful nation, I wish to express Dominica's deepest appreciation to the friendly nations and organisations which have supported us with test kits, PPEs, equipment, training, medical personnel, and most importantly, lifesaving vaccines in the fight against COVID-19.

I know that Dominicans at home and abroad join with me in saluting our frontline workers; they are the heroes in this fight. They have been unselfish and have gone above and beyond the call of duty in ensuring that those who are infected, receive the best possible care, and their actions have saved lives.

The fight against this dreaded virus, however, is not for our health care workers alone. The entire country has a responsibility, through our collective actions, to eliminate this scourge from our shores. The power is in our hands to get our children back into the classrooms, our people back to work, and our businesses flourishing again, and to enable friends and families to reconnect and socialise without physical distance. But achieving this necessitates that we all work together.

Vaccine hesitancy has crippled the effectiveness of efforts worldwide to curb the spread of COVID-19. Despite this, almost 3 billion people have been fully vaccinated. The science has shown that vaccination works. The speed with which the highly infectious variants spread, and the resulting increase in deaths, is a clarion call for us to get vaccinated to stop the spread, especially amongst the most vulnerable. We trust science in other health matters; we must now trust it with the vaccine.

Please let me impress upon everyone, that a collaborative, national effort is required to sustain the successes we have realised thus far. We now need to renew our commitment to the creation of a more caring, healthier, and productive society if we are to minimise the impacts of the pandemic and continue building ***Dynamic Dominica***. I invite every Dominican, here and in the diaspora, to join hands in this national effort.

Amidst the pandemic we have not lost sight of our country's resilience agenda even in the face of severe national and global constraints and challenges. I will now share with you some of the major projects that are ongoing.

We have begun the rehabilitation of the East Coast Road. This 126-million-dollar project will ensure that residents in that zone will be safer and more secure when traversing that road daily, and limit impacts from extreme weather events in the future. Equally important, it will enhance the economic opportunities of the many communities.

The continuing work on the Hillsborough Bridge at Layou, is scheduled to be completed by January 2022. The Layou East Road between Hillsborough Bridge to Yorke Valley Bridge, is progressing satisfactorily, and is expected to be completed by December 2022. This EC\$11.5 million investment is expected to create new opportunities for investments in agriculture and tourism. The section of road between the Yorke Valley Bridge and the Warner/Sultan Junction will follow and be completed in the next phase.

The geotechnical surveys for the Loubiere to Bagatelle Road project, have been completed, and the detailed designs are being finalised. Construction works are on course to begin in the second quarter of the new year. This project will significantly improve the resilience and safety of the roadway and include the construction of the Mitcham bridge and several other new bridges.

Fellow Dominicans, our 2019 manifesto promised that the national housing stock will be amongst the highest quality and most hurricane resilient in the Caribbean. We have kept that pledge. We are changing the landscape of Dominica with new communities, and housing built to resilient standards.

Under the Housing Recovery Project, new homes are being constructed island wide and the European Union funded housing project in the Kalinago Territory will also begin shortly.

This Government's efforts to encourage home ownership have continued with the extension of the initiative of providing grants to first time homeowners, which has seen several people benefitting thus far.

In the next few months, we shall unveil a master plan for the creation of the Future Housing Development at Warner. This development will benefit public officers, young professionals and persons in the diaspora.

Home construction takes time, but these programmes will reach everyone, particularly the vulnerable. As part of our resiliency efforts, we are constructing regional emergency shelters designed to provide greater safety and security, lessen the anxiety of displacement, and reduce the pressure on schools to serve as shelters. This initiative will allow the country to return to normalcy much more quickly after a disaster.

The regional emergency shelter being constructed at Jimmit will be completed in December and the other in Castle Bruce in the first quarter of next year. We have also recently approved the preliminary designs for a multipurpose cultural center in the Kalinago Territory, which will also serve as a hurricane shelter. We expect construction to begin in the new year.

This year's Independence theme "**United in Purpose, Our Health, Our Heritage, Our Future**" should remind us of the major accomplishments of this Government in improving health care in our country. We have seen the beneficial impacts of our investments in the education of our people, with the increased number of specialists in various disciplines within our health service. The new Hospital Authority has now been established to ensure the provision of better patient care and improved customer service to our citizens.

Two weeks ago, we commissioned the new MRI machine at the Dominica China Friendship Hospital. Having this scanning service available on island will improve access, and affordability of early detection and diagnostic services to all residents. It eliminates the need for costly visits overseas to access these services and positions us to be able to provide MRI services to other countries in the region.

When the High-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) machine is commissioned in February, our Radiology Department will have all the features of a first world imaging department. In fact, Dominica will be the only country in the region with this machine, and we intend when the training is conducted in February, to have other professionals from the region participate.

This Administration is also partnering with the Brenda Stafford Foundation to develop our ophthalmology department as a centre of excellence for eye care. Additionally, we are concluding arrangements with the University of Michigan, to enable us to install permanent pacemaker implants right here in Dominica.

These advancements are complemented by the continued upgrading of our primary healthcare services. Six of our new Health and Wellness Centres are already in operation, and six others will be opened by the first quarter of 2022. Designs are also being finalized for the new Health and Wellness Centres in Roseau, St. Joseph and Savanne Paille.

I am pleased to inform you today, that the new Marigot Hospital is complete. We are now awaiting the delivery of the equipment and furniture. We expect that in the first quarter of next year, the people of the Marigot Health District will access a full range of medical services at this facility.

On many occasions, the Minister of Health and I have sounded the alarm about the increasing incidence of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases (CNCDs) in our country. While this Government is providing quality health care to all, it is important for all of us to self-care, by taking personal responsibility and investing in our own health. Reduce our intake of alcohol, cut out smoking, exercise regularly, and pursue other wholesome habits such as participating in sports. This connection of sports to health and wellbeing is one of the reasons we continue to invest in the sporting infrastructure around the country.

With our abundance of fresh foods, Dominica has the opportunity to set the example for the region, and so I encourage all of us to adopt a routine of better health practices and make 2022 the year of healthy lifestyle change.

Fellow Dominicans, we know only too well that this pandemic has placed a severe strain on our education system. I know that many parents are struggling with online learning, and balancing supervision of younger students with their work responsibilities. Furthermore, many children find this mode of learning difficult, not to mention the downsides of lack of physical interaction with their classmates. Our aim is to increase national vaccination rates and continue the reduction of current infection rates. We are continually reassessing the situation to determine when it's safe to allow our students to return to the classroom.

In the interim, we have utilized online learning to ensure that our students do not fall too far behind. To support this, we have distributed over 3000 devices to our students, and by the end of the year an additional 8000 would have been distributed. We have also taken action to increase internet access, by collaborating with the NTRC to expand broadband access to several communities and provide affordable internet connection at a subsidized rate of only \$10 per month to students. These measures will allow all our students to fully participate in this new mode of learning.

We have continued the renovation, upgrades, and reconstruction to our school infrastructure. The Delices and Morne Jaune primary schools were completed in September, and the Grandbay and WS Stevens primary schools are scheduled to be completed this December. The new Mahaut Primary School will also be completed in the first quarter of 2022. We expect that in the new year, construction will begin on six additional schools.

I am also pleased to inform the nation that the new organizational structure for government secondary schools, which included new and upgraded positions has been completed.

Over 300 applications were processed, and interviews conducted. I have been advised that recommendations for appointments in some 253 positions have been forwarded to the Public Service Commission. This is a positive step forward, which will not only benefit teachers, but very importantly students as well.

At the time of Independence and since, agriculture has been a main pillar of our economic development. Today, it is estimated that the sector and its related activities, directly or indirectly account for more than a third of Dominica's workforce. The sector accounts for an average of 62 percent of total exports and is pivotal to the growth of other sectors like tourism, trade, and health.

We continue to address food and nutrition security, to ensure adequate availability of affordable and nutritious food. The crop sector is currently the largest segment of agriculture.

Fish exports are also making their mark and Dominica's export capacity will be strengthened, when the rehabilitation of the fisheries complex at Roseau and Marigot is complete.

We remain committed to building agri-food systems that are better adapted to climate change, more resilient, more innovative and productive. As part of our Dynamic Dominica plan, this government has prioritised the development of two critical framework documents: a mid-term national agriculture policy and an agriculture and food systems transformation roadmap.

The interventions that are proposed and the transformative actions that we will implement, will take Dominica's agricultural sector to a much higher level while demonstrating commitment to environmental sustainability, innovation, and diversification. The sector will be market-driven and competitive, contributing to a prosperous economy, a food secure and healthy population, and a resilient nation.

In pursuit of this approach, we are delivering on our promise to put in place the requisite infrastructure and services to strengthen the delivery of programmes to our farmers, fisherfolk, agro-processors and vendors.

Within the last two years, this government has also laid the foundation to enable us to improve value addition activities of agro-processing and manufacturing. Six (6) mini facilities in the East have been recently completed and will be commissioned shortly. We are also pursuing a clear plan to develop the cassava, tolima and bay oil industries in a risk-informed and risk responsive manner.

Fellow Dominicans, we continue to make progress on the renewable energy front, cognisant that the energy sector is an active base for building resilience in all other sectors. We have a national target for power generation of 100% clean, carbon-neutral energy by the year 2030, from domestic renewable energy resources. Part of that responsibility is the promotion and encouragement of greater efficient use of energy and energy services by all consumers in the domestic, commercial, and public sectors. We have recently endorsed an Energy Management Guide, developed with the support of the Clinton Foundation which is now in wide circulation.

The Geothermal project is gaining momentum and we see a clear path to completion of this very important component of our country's development. Civil works in preparation for drilling are underway. A drilling contractor has been selected and a contract will be awarded in the coming weeks.

The geothermal development project requires long term vision and investment from the Government of Dominica, and we are very encouraged by the progress. We are very grateful for the extensive support and cooperation that we have received from the residents of Laudat, and all the partners who have contributed funding and technical support.

Fellow citizens, as government and citizens we have firmly set ourselves on a path to become a resilient nation. The participation of the private sector is critical if we are to achieve the transition to a low carbon, climate resilient economy. To this end, with the support of the Green Climate Fund and other partners, an array of financial instruments and capacity building support are being developed by the Government for this key sector, which will also serve to facilitate small businesses, as well as regional and international investors to facilitate our transition.

We have to be nimble, adaptable, creative, innovative and forward thinking. This is what survival in this new world demands. We are asking the private sector to “think big; think different; do big; do different” - form new partnerships, local, regional and international, diversify and move into the region.

The Subnational Global Fund, of which Dominica is a participant, has equity financing available for investments in renewable energy, energy efficiency, regenerative agriculture and nature-based solutions. The Fund is willing to invest a minimum of US \$5 million to a maximum of US \$75 million in viable private sector projects. Technical assistance is also provided for prefeasibility and feasibility studies, capacity development support, financial modelling, marketing, and bankability.

The first public consultation with Dominican stakeholders was held on the 27th of September. Very shortly that Fund will open a Dominica portal on its web page through which applications can be made. In respect of this we are encouraging the development of a portfolio of private sector investment projects for which funding can be obtained, and our GCF focal point, the Ministry of Planning, is continuing to engage with the private sector in that regard.

Additionally, Government is pursuing the development of a National Financing Vehicle (NFV), and we are targeting raising capital in the amount of US \$300m with the support of the Global Green Growth Institute, (GGGI). Raising this capital will allow your government to make available to the public concessionary loans, commercial loans, Letters of Credit, guarantees, equity, grants for feasibility studies and pilot projects. This funding will be available to support projects that are in line with our climate resilience plans, for green growth, clean energy, low carbon projects. Investors should start looking for new ideas and how businesses can be scaled up.

We are parties to the Paris Agreement and one of the activities encouraged is the trading of carbon credits. In furtherance of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement we will soon be signing an International Transfers Mitigation Offsets (Carbon Credits) agreement with Switzerland. The value of the carbon that we offset will be calculated and paid by Switzerland to us in a negotiated price arrangement based on a carbon market price. This will provide an annual revenue stream to select projects where there is a carbon offset, such as solar, energy efficient buildings, electric vehicles, reforestation, coral reef enhancement and the like.

With these various pathways for leveraging finance, we envisage a transformation of the private sector in partnership with the State.

As we continue to build a resilient and Dynamic Dominica, this Government is very encouraged by the level of interest being shown by individuals and companies looking for investment opportunities. We are a unique country in several respects, with strong, stable leadership and a welcoming people. Several of these investors have offered to partner with this Government to achieve some of our developmental objectives.

Some of these initiatives are under review, while the most recent is a partnership with Clear Harbor to expand its operations. This expansion will result in the establishment of a new branch for Clear Harbor at Picard, Portsmouth, and the permanent employment of an additional 150 individuals by January 2022, and a further 150 by May 2022. This is no doubt welcome news during these difficult times for so many of our young people who have graduated. We thank Clear Harbor for their sterling partnership with our country.

Fellow Dominicans we have confronted adversity and overcome it. We are transforming into a modern society. We are equipping our youth, individuals and businesses for the jobs and economy of the future. Our active education and job creation programmes are creating opportunities in the digital economy, remote work with global firms, tourism, construction and green technology for our young people whose future will be bright in the new and Dynamic Dominica. Times are tough for young people all over the world, but new opportunities are being created for Dominican youth.

Our digital transformation project is focusing on digital skills and technology adoption. Over EC\$75 million will be spent on activities to spur innovation, productivity, and growth, in areas of entrepreneurship development, health, cyber security, digital services. These investments are largely dedicated to our young people.

We will provide paid internship programs for young adults and youth who have received digital skills training, and we will assist those who are interested in creating businesses which focus on digital innovation. The Digital revolution is here. COVID-19 has forced us to embrace the online world, develop new skills and adapt. There can be no turning back. We must all embrace this change for which government is creating the enabling environment.

Fellow citizens, we continue to make good progress towards the development of our international airport. I can report to the nation that several key milestones have been realized to date. The 31 homes being built at Joe Burton, are almost complete and we expect that families will move into their new homes by January next year.

We have completed the construction of the lab where all of the material testing will be conducted for the international airport and the equipment is now being installed. Site clearance has started, and this will facilitate continued geotechnical and other site-specific surveys. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and mitigating measures identified, are being addressed.

A local expert has been contracted to ensure that all historical artifacts unearthed are salvaged and preserved for posterity.

Over the next few years, the Wesley/Woodford Hill area will be transformed into a hive of activity with business and employment opportunities for all. In the site preparation, earthworks, and construction there will be jobs for our people both skilled and unskilled, and in the provision of equipment and materials. There will be opportunities for those providing services, catering, shops, entertainment and for our farmers and fishers. The opportunities are endless.

I wish to announce that a construction contract for the international airport will be granted in December 2021.

As construction progresses, we are simultaneously pursuing route development. We are engaging in discussions with airlines operating in target source markets, so that when the airport is completed, we would have already secured Dominica as one of the new and exciting destinations on their routes.

Tremendous interest has already been generated by the direct flights from Miami to Dominica which American Airlines will operate from December this year. The response has been so encouraging that American Airlines has informed that they will increase their number of flights to Dominica, from 2 times a week to 3 times a week, from January 5th. These flights will increase trade, tourism, business and foreign travel for Dominicans.

We are witnessing the emergence of a new Dominica; a Dynamic Dominica, one that holds promise for our people, one that will enable us to fulfill our ambitions and live comfortable, progressive lives.

Government is doing its part. The foundation is being set. The celebration of our Independence is an opportune time to renew our commitment to nation building, to reflect on lessons learned and the new imperative to build a sustainable, resilient society.

We will fight challenges and build the future one sector at a time. We will, as a sovereign nation, chart our direction into Dynamic Dominica. This is a journey of faith and a labour of love.

We are fortified in the knowledge that in this journey God is by our side. In Isaiah 43 verse 10 he says *“Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”*.

Be assured that as your Prime Minister I remain committed to the well-being of every single Dominican. This government will work with every citizen to create a resilient Dynamic Dominica, with opportunity and prosperity for all.

Dominica will not cower; Dominica will not be fazed. We have shown that we have the capacity to overcome adversity. Your Government has shepherded you through the worst of times, and we will not fail you now. Dominica is on a progressive path to recovery, and we will emerge a stronger people, a stronger nation.

We have shown the world that Dominica is resilient. We have captured their imagination with our resolve to become the world's first climate resilient nation, and we will demonstrate that we can overcome our small size and limitations, to become a beacon of hope for all small island developing states.

I thank all our development and bilateral partners, all the friends of Dominica, and our citizens who are supporting Dominica along this journey.

In Matthew we read that light and a city on a hill cannot be hidden. Dominica is a country of hills. This government will work to ensure the light of Dynamic Dominica shines for all the world to see and in so doing, that all will see our good deeds and praise our Father who is in heaven.

Now is Dominica's time! Out of adversity, we are rising to meet our future as Dynamic Dominica.

May God Bless Dominica. May God bless our efforts. May God bless our people.

Happy Independence Dominica!