

OUR FUTURE – BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN DOMINICANS AT HOME AND ABROAD

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His Excellency Dr. Nicholas J Liverpool and Mrs. Liverpool...invited guests, leaders of all political parties, guests friends....

I feel honoured to have been asked to be the guest speaker at this important event.

The term “Our Future” demonstrates that we own our future, manage our future and are in full control of our future.

After three decades of political independence and global economic dominance on Dominican politics and development, we Dominicans are still threatened with economic challenges towards economic independence, face environmental degradation and still after Chaguaramas we are without a clear regional identity and vision towards some level of Caribbean unity.

The European countries have achieved this through the European Union and we as a nation are benefiting as a result from the EU funds. It tells us really that if we put our resources together we are able to achieve a lot, and interestingly the EU has adopted principles, standards and regulations and that if any member operates outside these standards they can be pulled up or penalized by the EU parliament. That tells me that this is a level of discipline and standard well embedded into their operating laws to best govern all member countries. The closest we have to the EU is CARICOM AND OECS and do we have this level of governance here or should we still be debating how far we go as a political or economic grouping?

Or are we too comfortable waving our own small island flags while we still contemplate on the gaps that can take us to some level of real economic union and development. Our dear Caribbean politicians continue to visit countries and institution making attractive promising speeches of what must be done, but they sometimes forget that they are the elected ones.

The Campaign for Dominica’s Future is the strategy centered for every progressive movement since independence in 1978. We quickly shifted our allegiance from what has been referred to as colonial UK to that of US imperialism, back to neo colonialism, onto IMF...ism and Chavez----ism. The question is have we as a people lost our purpose somewhere down the road to own, dictate and manage our own future our destiny to what I refer to as ROOTS.....meaning “Rely On Ourselves To Survive”.

The world has been talking of conservation and Green economy now for years and the EU has introduced strong policies for years now for all member countries to apply, comply and implement and today we still joke and laugh about Green economy. That should be a major

subject matter for our education system from ECD Nursery - Pre School to primary school, through to secondary and tertiary education. We are green we are surrounded by the eco-systems, the trees, birds, rare species, rivers, mountains, valley etc, we have it all, that is living green. And there is a reason why we open the season for hunting crabs, manicou, etc and why we protect the turtles.

Increasingly over the years in major supermarkets in London the section for organic produce has increased. One may have their doubts of organic grown products, but the fact is some countries are making much out of it, and even if we do not wish to view it as alternative lifestyle to healthy eating, we can begin to view it as opportunities for markets and business for us, our farmers.

Maybe we still do not know how to market and sell Dominica. When some of our policy makers laugh at and dismiss new initiatives rather than welcome it and chose to refer it to the past we seriously have a problem in understanding how to relate to changing economic demands on the global market or how we are comfortable playing musical chairs in our parliaments.

Just remember many years gone by we drank our bush tea by picking the bush from our backyard gardens, fresh, healthy, no chemical and some of us were ashamed to be seen doing so when overseas visitors came to our homes. We had reserved in a cupboard, a tin or package of processed coffee, English tea or chocolate drink. Today, the world calls it Herbal tea and it is big business, but we have been in this business long before. Our bush tea/herbal business is still struggling.

The goal is to forge the enduring progressive mind necessary to achieve the ultimate of shared prosperity and opportunities that our country Dominica is meant to be.

To attain our ultimate goal, we all, those who live here or in the Diaspora must help lead a compelling progressive agenda that addresses the kitchen-table issues working families face. Deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability are the faces of poverty which impede on our people on a daily basis and according to government`s chief social development planner, who addressed ChildFund Caribbean rebranding two weeks ago says that, “there are pockets of it (poverty) everywhere in Dominica”.

We regularly convene and educate progressive thinkers, organizers and community advocates so our voices will be coordinated, cogent and potent towards some level of economic and sustainable development. And we attempt to sow new seeds towards national campaigns on the critical issues that will redefine Dominica`s independence, purpose and direction for generations to come. But if these efforts (like this one) are not well co-ordinated for some reason we will remain lost and tangled in local partisan politics, unclear of our role in national and regional institutions, we continue to talk of unity but defend strongly our little island flag and we behave as if the world owes us something.

Therefore bridging the gap between Dominicans at home and abroad is essential and important in today`s world of schemes and things if we are to Rely on ourselves to Survive (ROOTS). Let us adopt the ROOTS mentality. Today our banana industry quota is subsidized by the same country who took us to the WTO to get rid of our preferential treatment to sell our bananas to the UK on the pretext of unfair trading practices versus our long standing “preferential treatment”. Yesterdays enemies or competitors become friendly or accommodating partners for the matter of convenience and opportunity.

The question is where we stand as a country –as a people in this global scheme of things?

We, the Windward Islands, with a dying industry today are unable to fill the banana boat like yesteryear to take our bananas to the UK. No longer will we see the long que of Dominican women in their madras dress at Fond Cole collecting their tokens after transporting bananas on their heads to the small boats en route to the banana boat docked out at sea and then sail off to the UK.

No longer will see the long que of pick up trucks outside Woodbridge Bay waiting for their turn to get their hard earned labour on board the ship to UK, that que is now less. We now see the que of buses waiting for their turn to receive the few tourists who may disembark at the Dame Eugenia Boulevard.

To stay in business we have partnered with and buy bananas from two Latin American countries, Ecuador and Dominican Republic to fill the boat. Where have we as a people gone wrong. Why didn` t we sow the seeds, or better yet, why is it we were unable to water the seeds. A country which boasts of 365 rivers, abundance greenery and we still do not know how to make it work to bring the necessary financial and economic returns to us. We as a people we are all responsible for this melee we are in today....., you , me, our leaders and 70, 000 of us out there and the estimated over 200,000 plus in the Diaspora. The meaning of governance MUST mean something for us.

Richard Samans Managing Director of World Economic Forum says:

“The rationale for business to engage in efforts to strengthen public governance is strong. Governance frameworks that enable sustained economic growth are far more likely to be developed if businesses collectively engage and capture the opportunities to align governance structures with their goals for advancing sustainable business practices. Demonstrating how weaknesses and shortcomings in public governance hinder business activity and sustainable economic growth... ..and providing examples of how businesses in partnership with governments and other stakeholders are helping to improve public governance”.

This is what this forum is attempting to address.

Friends, I feel that I have had enough or will soon get tired with partisan politics that divide us as a nation rather than promote participatory politics that should unite us in this fragile economy, exogenous or endogenous that squeezes us, a foreign/global impact that attempts to either weaken or dictates to us or stall or progress.

Stay with me, I will quote Dr. Lennox Honychurch Myth of Independence on this in a while.

But while partisan politics may be exhausted and tire us, usually and as a natural phenomenon people respond through a new awakening, a sense of belonging, a sense of direction indicating that progressives are just getting started. The quest and eagerness to redefine or be part of a participatory process for Dominica’s Future is driving our progressive movement towards offering new ideas towards a new vision, bright ideas and bold leadership Dominica rightly demands. This leadership is not singularly owned but involves all, a shared leadership which

demands respect for colleagues, recognition and respect for differing views and ideas, that sense of purpose, mission and direction. We all have that responsibility to help guide this process.

Today's process therefore is deliberately asking and challenges us with pertinent questions as to what our role is in meaningful development towards helping and assisting our government and governments in what is referred to it as our thing,.....*it is we ting*.

George Bernard Shaw SAYS:

“Democracy is a device that ensures we shall be governed no better than we deserve”.

I am therefore fed up of going into elections after elections in the past 10 years of allegations of corruption – bad governance etc and at some point to hear that it was a deliberate political strategy meaning that the tenure of a legitimate government in office was undermined. We have to settle down at some point, because what we sow may be what we rip and this approach will become a recurring decimal. When will it stop? If we set the right standards then we will establish the required template for governments to function. We the Dominican people deserve this, Dominica deserve this.

Secondly in this quest for democracy I firmly believe that we have too many political parties in Dominica and firmly believe that this creates some level of disunity and not good for our development.

The Current political climate and platform does not create a healthy environment for our youth to participate in which I was exposed to as a young person.....there does not seem to be this natural space for our youth to actively participate and engage themselves in matters of civic governance and understanding, the processes of governance, these seems to be GAPS emanating more now in our small society. There is a sense of indifference, where to turn, how to turn, how do I get involve, that search for leadership and direction, more so at village and community level.

I feel that after 30 years of political independence our country is now in need of an overhaul as to how we do business, with whom, why, on whose terms,the question is what do we want, how do we manage ourDominica.com....and what standards we set for ourselves on issues of health care, education, agriculture, local government, the environment, good governance, child care and protection, youth development, Early childhood care and Development, dysfunctional families etc. In absence of this I feel our youth are lost, in search of direction and guidance and if in pursuit of career study overseas asks should I come back to Dominica upon graduation. In further absence of this, too many of our youth are “paros” on the streets, juvenile offenders, at the prisons and at the psychiatric unit.

Gaps are the areas where you felt there was insufficient information and unanswered questions, and which sometimes lead to affecting ONES overall judgement of a situation.

Naomi Karsten says that “Inadequate communications include misunderstood or missed messages, contradictory or mixed messages, and messages that are intentionally sabotaged. As the author notes, these miscommunications "can have a damaging, puzzling, and counterproductive impact on projects and relationships." Karten helps readers identify many of the common factors that can cause communication gaps. For example,

- mistaken assumptions of understanding
- lack of follow-up
- unfixed project terminology
- emotional baggage
- personality conflicts
- Mismatched communication preferences

Naomi's book helps teams use communication as a tool for successfully carrying out projects, delivering services, implementing change, and strengthening teamwork."

For these to happen we must have strong and effective institutions where the processes of governance, service delivery, policy framework are seen to be functioning and working. These institutions include Political parties, a social and democratic structures which for the purpose of governance and democracy offers a platform or should offer a platform where anyone, in particular our youth feel that they are naturally invited to be part of. In absence of this we will refer to the Animal farm syndrome that our social commentators through calypso will continue to sing about.

We need to build these political institutions not kill them for convenience or political expediency. This approach deliberately kills the structure and foundation and the heart of our democracy and stability in our country. There must be an avenue for political discourse, be it the youth groups, political parties, NGO`s, drama clubs, CBO`s or at local government level.

In this section, let us probe the heart and soul of participatory democracy.

What are the skills we need in order to interact with each other in public life so that we can solve our problems effectively? And how can we build the qualities of character that will create the kind of public culture Dominica so desperately needs? To address this I wish to read an article from Dr. Lennox Honychurch, "Myth of Independence" which was published in the newspaper a couple years ago.

DEMANDS

The news that American Eagle has requested that their fees for entry into Dominica be lowered by 20% has not received wide publicity. The request came with the diplomatically couched ultimatum that if it were not granted the airline would have to pull out of Dominica. Naturally the government granted their wish pronto and, to be fair to all airlines (and to pre-empt them from crying foul), the cut was extended to the other two airlines, LIAT and Caribbean Star.

All this is quite understandable given the present climate. Everyone is using the "present climate" as an excuse to do what they have been longing to do for some time, especially in the airline industry. This does not help our two little struggling airports. They are in deficit to the tune of over \$3 million and rising. Arrears of revenue for Canefield, is \$1,159,715.30 and that for Melville Hall is \$1,946,146.72 according to the Audit Report. We cannot earn a profit from the airports that exist and yet we plan for bigger things. Is this economic reality or the myth of nationalism at work? (What then is our priority....?)

Some years ago Carnival Cruise Lines made similar couched threats about our head tax on their passengers. "Make demands and we cut you out of our itinerary" was the tone of their message.

We jumped to it and even went so far as to give them a deal on water that they had not asked for. Better bow to Carnival than face the wrath of taxi drivers and vendors. And Carnival knows local politics well enough to know how to deal with governments”.

Lennox goes on to ask?

WHO IS BOSS?

"In ten years time", a Dutch economist said to me, "the Eastern Caribbean will be controlled by a handful of international companies. They will let government continue, you hold your elections, you fly your flags drive around in your state cars, speak in the UN. But they will know who is really boss."

The World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, (our present lifeline to any aid at all) is calling the shots and do we jump. Already the IMF is appalled by the way we are managing ourselves. Their latest reports have been most critical and the next one will be worse.

Their officials stand aghast at the sight of our unfinished sports stadium, our unfinished sports complex, our financial complex and ask not only "How are you going to pay back for them?" but "How are they going to make any money?" It will call the shots on any future loans. The CDB asks the same questions about their projects. The funding agencies think we should have got our act together years ago. Still lurking around is the OECD who have already got us to do what they want on offshore banking laws and are even more demanding now that "terrorist money" is floating around the world. They shoot, we jump”.

What then is our plan.... who decides our path....where we go...how we go... what is our future?

Our politics is one big stage and we the people (politicians, voters, supporters, on lookers, interests group(s), individuals, experts, flag wavers, etc) are all the actors. We all have dressed rehearsals, and the script calls for a time to: laugh, cry, resign, jump political ship, wave loyalty to a party even if it is temporary where increasingly everyone wants a piece of the action, and a piece of the cake.

In a radio discussion Steinberg Henry makes reference to the Power and manifestations of Politics, a word most of us are scared of because one may be accused of being “political”. What is wrong with being political...this is what our system is; it is not a Theocracy we operate under.

However Steinberg reminds us that politics is power and whom so ever holds it could be visible or invisible, direct or indirect, deliberate or not and most importantly is influential. For example he reminds us that in the influences and power come from where one is positioned in society for example: the Class factor (higher lower), where you live, the wages one earns (can easily access you to a loan etc), land ownership bring status and power, the power of knowledge and articulation.

It amazes me how in the last 10-15 years the culture of politics in Dominica and the Eastern Caribbean has changed so drastically that I am yet to explain. However, one observation is that I strongly feel that we do not need more than two political parties in Dominica and that our

population, size etc, can only accommodate two. It does not matter which two, the principle is we need only two. I have argued in a newspaper article that with the emergence of more political parties in Dominica we will see coalition governments and possibly some level of fragmentation within our political institutions. I lived out of Dominica then when I said so and I witnessed both scenarios on my return. I honestly do feel that all our leaders and politicians wish Dominica well but there are too many distractions created and this is one of them.

I do not feel that we have to go that far to witness and see some level political stability in Barbados where they successfully operate under a two party system and I feel that as a sister island we should aim to raise the bar and our standards to that level of governance towards sound sustainable development. If not we will continue to struggle and go down the other way to the level that Haiti and some African counties are so desperately trying to get out of. We must ask ourselves how they got there. We as a people have that choice to make.

The real issue is that with the emergence of other parties in a small island like ours it certainly contributes to the confusion signaling that our best minds, irrespective of their experience, qualification and aspiration to serve are unable to come together and contend for the development of Dominica.

The issue is that most feel outside, excluded and not involved. On the other hand and most importantly as far as political institutions are concerned no one has the patience, wisdom, tolerance to help build people and party. The order of the day is to oust the serving party leader who himself watches his back closely, kick out the party in power and at all costs, and do everything to get back in or stay in power. George Lamming made reference to this scenario in his Emancipation lecture at the Fort Young Hotel about four years ago and senior counsel refers to it as a political strategy and Mighty Sparrow says, "We like it so..."

Furthermore, as Lamming indicates, not many come across with the patience and determination to be part of a team only if they assume the self-appointed role of leader. As professed leaders they are increasingly divided and as they continue to be divided among themselves they also contribute to the division of our people and country on party and independent lines. And because of that we are likely to see more coalitions or one party taking a clean sweep at the polls like what happened in Grenada two elections ago. There were about nine contesting parties in Grenada then, including one called the G.O.D party (Good Old Democracy). That winning party subsequently got the boot out of office recently by the same people who put them in.

Leadership therefore is the key to our sustainable development and trust is something that must be earned and cannot be bought. Dame Eugenia Charles waited for years in the opposition without shifting or compromising her ideals or principles and did not enter government through the back door. She finally won on her own merits as a leader. The rest is history. She was an advocate for the strengthening of political institutions not for its demise and destruction as she understood their role and place in nation building.

Intrinsically there is nothing wrong with political parties or our own democratic system; it is those whom process to be the architects of economic bloom who feel that this country cannot and we will not prosper with them not being in government. I sometimes wonder and ask myself the question, what is the attraction for being in the middle of this political heat? Is it a vocation, for self, to serve, money or popularity, what really is it?

Let me end by sharing some observations on the recent introduction of websites focused on Dominica and I wish to thank Steinberg as a recognised communicator for his insight and wisdom on this.

When one examines the current sites: thedominican.net, honestdominican.net, disapora.net, cacafete.com etc etc....these sites emerged it appears to connect Dominicans to social issues, promote socialisation, and of matters pertaining Dominica and its development. However one may also observe that the emergence of these sites may have also come about in response to specific issues as it relates to matters of governance, accountability, and overall the running of our dear country.

There is that urge to want to be informed while away from Dominica, I understand this, as I experience the same while I lived in the UK and in absence of the various sites then, we depended on visits to the UK by government officials, members of the opposition, family members and friends when they visited the UK. Today the messages are instant and in some cases live. Because of its demand we now have many sites and we therefore have a choice as to where we obtain our information and the challenge to the site owners and operators now is to maintain some level of standards because these sites could also be ignored and abused by the very people it is set up for. Remember we must not attempt to damage the image of our country, but address the issues as seen fit.

Therefore in times of crisis, questions of developmental focus, forward looking....what is the role of these sites...? Is it to inform, educate, entertain, raise awareness.....assist Dominicans overseas in the Diaspora how best to participate and contribute in its development.....are we also watchdogs, whistle blower, if this is the case we must all challenge ourselves that we continue to do so professionally.

Despite everything.....irrespective where we live we ALL have a role to play in Dominica`s development...and Gaps must not be created and most importantly a CODE OF ETHICS AND STANDARDS MUST BE SET to encourage and facilitate this process to ensure its credibility and consistency. Our contribution to these sites must be based on Principle, meaning that we do not shift views based on our alliance or allegiance to a politician or a political party. Our views and contributions must be based on the principles we set and what good governance stands for. That way we will encourage and ensure healthy debates at all times and a strong Dominica.

Come ye forward sons and daughters: I thank you.

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