

Address on the Occasion
of the
Official Start of Construction work
On the National Sports Stadium

**By: Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit
Prime Minister**

Windsor Park Site
Roseau
March 23rd 2005

SALUTATIONS

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In the Caribbean, there is a familiar saying, which goes like this: “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”.

Just over one year ago, I returned to Dominica from a visit to the People’s Republic of China. I announced at that time, the details of a technical cooperation agreement entered into by our two countries, as a result of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Commonwealth of Dominica and the People’s Republic of China.

Today, it is perhaps noteworthy that we meet on this site during Holy Week...for the story of the PRC’s relationship with Dominica can be likened to that of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

There were those who tried and condemned us for establishing relations with the People’s Republic of China. There were those who asked whether anything good could come from Nazareth?

Indeed, there were those who said emphatically that our projects and programmes were but pipe dreams. For them, they had to see the nail-pierced hands and they had to thrust their finger in the wound of the Master to ensure that it was he.

Today, I invite all doubtful Thomases to sit back and listen. The Windsor Park Recreation and Sporting Complex, which they said would not have been...IS!!

It is about to unfold before our very eyes!!

The technical people are here...the financial people are here...senior officials of the government of the People's Republic of China are here, and you, the fair-minded citizens of Dominica are here!

Additionally, the scores of persons who will find work on this project are also here. This is a joyous day for Dominica. Let us rejoice and be glad.

That which we were told could not happen...has happened. That which we were told would never materialise...has materialised.

Today, the critics have been silenced. The insensitive flying of foreign flags has proven juvenile, irresponsible and inappropriate. The perpetrators should hang their heads in shame.

Today, I welcome the Vice Minister and his delegation from China to Dominica.

I wish to assure you, my distinguished guests, that the vast majority of Dominicans welcome you and are happy to have you here.

The vast majority of Dominicans appreciate the genuine hand of friendship that you have extended to the Government and people of Dominica.

The vast majority of Dominicans appreciate the mature and dignified manner you have handled the provocation and insensitivity of minority elements in our country.

We appreciate your forging ahead with this and other projects, important to the social and economic development of Dominica.

One year later, I feel vindicated by my decision to pursue and establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. All Dominicans, who love this country and who want to see it advance, agree that that was a decision in the best interest of Dominica.

This project, ladies and Gentlemen, will transform the social, infrastructural and economic landscape of Roseau in particular and Dominica in general. It opens new vistas in the area of sports and cultural tourism for Dominica.

I want each resident, each man, woman and child to look carefully at the architectural rendering of the project that is about to unfold, and visualise it here, in physical form.

Consider Easter weekend two years from now, when hundreds of visitors from Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Lucia, Antigua, Barbados, Trinidad and farther afield, come here to Dominica for major sporting and cultural events.

Consider the economic impact of this on tourism, on restaurant activities...on taxi operations, on the business turnover of vendors. Consider Dominica being able to host major sporting and cultural Championships including test cricket, one-day internationals and qualifying matches for world cup soccer.

Consider all this, Ladies and Gentlemen, and judge for yourselves the importance and timeliness of this project.

At the same time, you must consider all this and then determine, whether we can jeopardise it all. This is important, because there is a clear and present danger of none of it happening...and it would not be the fault of our dear friends from the PRC. They are committed. They are ready and raring to go. They have put the funds in place and the technical know-how. But they can only execute this and other projects if their welcome in this country is maintained...and that is a topic that will form the basis of much discussion over the course of the coming weeks.

Dominicans I implore you to think long and hard about your actions and your attitude to this and related economic development projects over the course of the next few weeks.

Everything you do and say will send a message. You can send a message of appreciation or a message of indifference and ingratitude.

Dominica stands ready to benefit from \$300 million dollars worth of related economic development projects. Those projects are there and they are about to unfold...but that can only happen in an environment of friendship and mutual respect.

One year ago, when the Government of Dominica established relations with the People's Republic of China, some in our midst said it was short-sighted...that the move would be regretted. Since that time, one of our sister Windward Islands was stricken by the ravages of a severe hurricane and desperately needed tangible support and assistance. Again, it was the PRC that came to their rescue.

In international relations today, Ladies and Gentlemen, talk is cheap. Grenada had many professed friends before the hurricane, but after that disaster, there were few who stood tall by the side of the Grenadians...and the People's Republic of China was among them. That precipitated the establishment of relations between those two countries.

I said a year ago and I shall repeat here again today...the foreign policy of any government, which I have the honor to lead, shall be influenced and determined by the domestic policy and interests of that government.

It is against this backdrop, therefore, that I welcome all assembled on this very auspicious occasion. This is a great day in the history of Dominica. Not only is it the start of construction on this sporting facility, but it also signals the authenticity and the reliability of the technical assistance package negotiated by this coalition government, with the government of the People's Republic of China.

I feel compelled to remind you, on this occasion, that the other three pillars of that programme of assistance include the rehabilitation and upgrade of the west coast road, from Roseau to Portsmouth, the rehabilitation and upgrade of the Princess Margaret Hospital and the provision of a new Dominica Grammar School.

In addition, there are several other technical and financial assistance packages that have been negotiated and are currently under discussion, that will unfold in the months and years ahead.

Today therefore marks a significant milestone in the evolution of our friendship and relationship with the People's Republic of China. That government has stuck to its commitments, notwithstanding the disrespect shown by some in our midst.

One would hope, however, that soon we would put that unfortunate, reckless behaviour behind us, and that all Dominicans would unite, and fly with pride, the sole and appropriately declared flag of Dominica...the one that our forefathers fought and died for us to have the right to fly.

Your Excellency, the Vice Minister, and other distinguished Members of your Delegation, the government and people of Dominica appreciate very much your journeying this far to participate in this very important event.

I wish also to convey to the government of China, through your good selves, our love and appreciation for the work here in Dominica of His Excellency, Ambassador Ye Dabo.

Ambassador Dabo has been a tower of strength and support to all Dominicans over the past year. He has conducted himself and the affairs of China with pride, determination and dignity. He has withstood thoughtless and unfair criticisms and the disrespect by some, whose vision is but short.

Ambassador Dabo is a true credit to China and a proven friend of Dominica. I wish for you to convey to His Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, our heartfelt appreciation for and concurrence with the choice he made, when he nominated Ambassador Dabo as Head of Mission here in Dominica.

Fellow Dominicans, five years ago when our government took office, we found sections of the then Windsor Park being dismantled and other sections with foundations laid on a project that was started just prior to the 2000 general election.

The economic difficulties inherited by this government, the economic stabilisation which followed, along with the challenge of accessing grant funding made it virtually impossible for this government to proceed with this project.

We could not justify spending money on a stadium when there was no money to pay workers, service debts and meet other obligations, because of the mismanagement of our predecessors in office.

Yet, this government remained committed to the construction of a stadium that would meet the standards and satisfy the aspirations and dreams of the Dominican People.

The construction of the Stadium will bring to closure all speculation about our level of commitment towards the completion of the facility.

A national stadium is essential for the future development of Sports and Physical Education in Dominica and for creating the infrastructure that will allow this country to participate in regional and international tournaments.

Just last year in our Second Round World Cup soccer-qualifying match against Mexico, our home matches had to be played in Texas, USA, because of the absence of an appropriate facility here in Dominica to host the game.

Never will our home matches be played in another country or on foreign soil again.

With World Cup Cricket coming to the Caribbean, Dominica, in the absence of a national facility of international standards, was unable to put in a bid to host at least a one-day game. When this

facility is completed and functional, we will no more be outsiders, but this new stadium will give us a real chance at being participants in regional sporting activities.

Most importantly, this stadium will provide a facility where our young men and women can develop their skills as avid sports men and women. It will provide a venue where the creative potential and power of our people in sports can be unleashed and displayed.

We understand very well the ability of sports and sporting activities to forge social cohesion and national pride. We understand well the importance of appropriate facilities and equipment to enhancing the performance of athletes.

We also understand the importance of providing our people with the best facilities. These considerations, more than anything else, have driven our quest and commitment to having a venue that meets international standards, and that is accessible to all our people.

In keeping with our national sports policy and the proposed National Curriculum, this stadium, when completed, will be the cornerstone for increasing participation in sports and physical education in Dominican schools and in creating in our youth the sense of discipline, pride and dignity often associated with sports.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today marks the start of that reality.

The National Stadium, when completed, will be home to two sporting disciplines, notably football and cricket. It will provide seating capacity for 8,000 people with retractable seats. It will have all the accoutrement of international stadiums, as it will be designed to meet the ICC and FIFA standards in their respective disciplines of Cricket and Football.

This stadium will stand as a symbol of the relations between our peoples and will be a source of national pride and development. I thank you warmly, Your Excellency, on behalf of the people of Dominica, the people of Roseau and its environs, for the speed and determination that you applied to the implementation of this project.

We are satisfied with your desire and willingness to construct the facility, which, for generations to come, will symbolise the hopes and aspirations of our people, and will deepen and cement our relationship.

I have no doubt that in the years to come we will look back on this with pride and dignity.

Again, on behalf of the government and people of this country, let me say how elated we are about the commencement of construction of this stadium and we look forward to its timely completion. I thank you.