

**THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS
AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY
OF
THE DOMINICA STATE COLLEGE**

THURSDAY 25TH NOVEMBER 2004

SALUTATIONS

I rise to salute you, the 2004 Graduands of the Dominica State College at this spectacular and meaningful ceremony. Looking around the grounds I see many young people, looking gratified that they have persevered through the journey of success. I congratulate all of you for taking advantage of the educational opportunities that are available. I salute in particular the women for finding time in their busy schedules to study, despite the fact that many of you are also working mothers. I congratulate the mature students for realizing that education is a lifelong process. And I commend the men for not letting the women leave us too far behind.

I also want to thank the management and staff of the Dominica State College, as well as the friends and supporters of the College, for transforming a dream into a reality. For many years we have known that we needed an indigenous tertiary level institution to meet the enormous demand for higher education, a demand which cannot be adequately met by the regional institutions of further and higher education. I am convinced that even if the University of the West Indies were offering places to everybody in Dominica between the ages of 16 and 25, only a fraction of Dominicans would take up the offer.

Many would refuse simply because travelling abroad for long periods of study is very expensive and can disrupt families, friendships and work. In 2002, as Minister of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs and an ardent educator, I had the privilege of witnessing the establishment of this institution which I consider vital to the development of Dominica.

This graduation ceremony is an important rite of passage for all those who will graduate today. When you started on your journey, you committed yourself to completing the course. On the way you have had to make sacrifices. You have had to give up a lot of other activities to find time for studying. You have been tried and tested. I am sure there were times when you thought that the pressure, the challenges, the examinations would never end. In the depths of despair, when the assignments were piling up and time seemed to be against you, you kept your eyes on the prize and persevered. Eventually you succeeded.

Today is your big day. By the end of this ceremony you will have progressed from being a student to being a graduate. You will henceforth be qualified to claim recognition and rewards for the expertise you have acquired in the process. No one will ever be able to treat you as a novice. You will never again be intimidated by examinations. Above all you will have laid the foundations of future growth and development, for education is a life-long activity.

You must never forget the dedicated and hard working lecturers and staff that you have left behind at the Dominica State College who were instrumental in assisting you achieve your goal.

Do not forget your government which has assisted you as best as it could given the current economic circumstances and most importantly the part the good Lord has played in making you reach this finish line.

Like you, Dominica is being severely tested. However, I believe that our beloved country will soon graduate.....and with flying colours. As astute students, you will all be familiar with the challenges we have faced since independence. On that historic date in 1978 we embarked on a journey towards true independence with many of the colonial institutions and culture intact.

As the world changed, our circumstances changed: but our attitudes and behaviour remained almost the same. The result was the collapse of our traditional banana industry in the wake of ruthless competition in the global market place.

This economic crisis sent reverberations throughout the length and breadth of Dominica and threatened to destabilize the country socially and politically. The loss of two great charismatic, political leaders within a three year span did not help the situation.

The Dominica Labour Party, in collaboration with its Coalition partner, the Dominica Freedom Party, made bold decisions to stabilize both the economy and the polity. With the support of the masses, of ordinary Dominicans, the economy began to improve and show signs of recovery.

In my Independence Day address, I was therefore able to remind the nation of the significant progress that we had made. For example:

- **We were able to reduce the stabilization levy after one year; and to remove it altogether after two years.**
- **We were able to do this because our fiscal situation was improving, and the reversals in economic growth were on the way to being arrested.**

- **The IMF, in their latest review, found that the positive trends in our economy had continued.**
- **Economic growth, originally projected to be 1% this year, was (then) expected to be twice that level.**
- **The European Commission's Mid-term Review was successfully concluded and we qualified for additional resources amounting to eleven (11) million euro.**
- **Nearly every debtor was willing to review and restructure our debts.**
- **The confidence of our people had been bolstered through consultation and participation in the stabilization programme. They were poised to help build Dominica through the Social Partnership.**
- **As a nation, we regained our integrity and a measure of credibility in the international community.**
- **In some quarters the way Dominica dealt with the crisis was being seen as a model for small island states. What this means to you is a growing economy with better pay for graduates, with more choice of jobs and careers, with better challenges now and greater rewards and comfort throughout your lives to come. You have grown, you have struggled, you have emerged victorious and you have come of age just as our country has begun to do the same.**

Our progress is somewhat thwarted by a series of natural disasters. I want to make it clear, however, that there little we can do to prevent natural disasters, but we can respond quickly and comprehensively to such disasters.

On the morning of Sunday 21st November 2004, this country and in particular, the Northern areas around Portsmouth, bore the brunt of a succession of earthquake tremors measuring 6.0 on the Richter scale. Public buildings, private dwellings, business places and places of worship were severely damaged.

Within hours of the earthquake, I together with other members of Cabinet toured the affected areas and for a first hand assessment of the damage. The country has been dealt a tremendous blow. We shall undoubtedly need assistance from abroad to fully repair the damage. Already our richer CARICOM neighbours, as well as the French and Japanese Governments and our new allies in development, the People's Republic of China have pledged their support.

Once again I was amazed and proud of the resilience of Dominicans. As soon as the all-clear was given, people came out in droves and began the process of cleaning up and rebuilding. It is for this reason that I am confident that Dominica has passed yet another serious examination and is on the way to graduation.

If there is one lesson I have learnt from the tests which Dominicans have undergone in recent years is that we could not have made it unless we had come together.

If public workers had chosen to put self before country, our economy would have spiraled into deeper depression and our nation into disintegration.

Contrary to the assumption that success in the brave new world is based on rugged individualism, the fact is that individual members of ethnic groups and even nation states are binding together to overcome the challenges of a globalized world. The success of Asians in North America, Cubans in Miami and Haitians in New York can only be understood in terms of adopting a collective approach to the risks of living in a new environment.

Similarly, we in Dominica must learn to see the advantages of unity in the face of adversity. Indeed, your Government wants to build on this aspect of Dominica's culture. We need to learn from the

mistakes of our neighbours. Let us therefore not choose to use our educational success as an excuse for ostracizing ourselves from our brothers and sisters, but instead to help them to be progressive. Let us not create a system of inequality based on access to education. Let us share knowledge and create opportunities for advancement. Let us spread the joy of enlightenment.

There is no doubt whatsoever that if we are to succeed in an increasingly competitive world we have to produce workers with knowledge and skills that are on par with those of our competitors. A secondary education will not be sufficient to produce this calibre of workers.

More and more of our people will need to pursue further/higher education. It is therefore not a case of if, but when we will have to provide some form of tertiary education for all school leavers.

I accept that this Government's goal to provide universal tertiary education is not feasible in the short term. However, I am in a position to state that by the year 2010, my Government wants at least 50% of the given age cohort to be pursuing tertiary education. By then there should be a graduate in every Dominican household.

I also want to recognize the efforts of the Dominica State College who are currently exploring the options of offering a wider variety of courses which are vital to the development of Dominica. In six years' time I would expect the average Dominican to be attending college and studying subjects that range from Fishing to Computer Programming; from Dancing to English; from Physical Education to French; and from Disaster Management to Geography.

Ultimately I want to see the Dominica State College becoming less driven by the curriculum and instead see it responding more

imaginatively to the needs of its students. I envision employers, innovators, and students bringing challenges to the College and having a curriculum designed around solving each of their problems.

The learning methodology will be highly participatory and analytical.

The old paradigm of quietly absorbing and regurgitating knowledge will be abandoned for a more robust, critical and creative approach to learning. Time-tabling at the college will be so designed that a significant proportion of students could study and work at the same time. Many students will not even have to travel to campus. Distance Education will enable them to study at home or in any place of their choice.

In all this expansion we must never lose sight of standards. We are committed to making the Dominica State College a place where excellence is pursued. Not only will this enhance the quality of goods and services produced in Dominica, but also position graduates of the Dominica State College for other places of excellence in the Caribbean and further afield.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Dominica State College was created to be one of the key engines for growth and development. Its first task was to liberate the minds of its students and to educate them that the New Dominica must be created in their own image. This College, designed by Dominicans, for Dominicans, to address the needs of Dominica, is an excellent example of this mission.

The next stage was to equip them with the knowledge and skills to create goods, services and systems of a high standard. We eagerly anticipate the impact that this will make on our economy and our society.

We are satisfied that in only two years the College is carrying out its mandate and is producing competent and committed graduates. It therefore gives me great pleasure to challenge this year's graduands to continue the trend.

Among all the great things that we celebrate today, all the great things that you have earned today, perhaps the most rewarding to you and everyone around you will be the opportunity to help build and strengthen your country.

"Good Luck" in all your endeavours.

May God bless all of our Graduands, may God bless the Dominica State College, may God bless all present here to day and May God bless Dominica.