



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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## **Statement**

By

**H.E. The Honourable Sir Louis Straker**

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Commerce and Trade

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Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen:

For many of us assembled here today, this is our second opportunity within the last 12 months to avail ourselves of the warmth and hospitality of the magnificent peoples of the Islamic Republic of Iran; and to immerse ourselves in the splendors of this ancient civilization. Following on the heels of last September's Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, it is appropriate that we meet once again in this great State. Iran is, in many ways, emblematic of a number of the questions vexing our Movement and the international community. Issues of energy security; the disrespect and demonization of the Islamic faith; the economic struggles of developing States; and the interference of saber-rattling, triumphalist governments with hegemonic designs, are all central to the modern Iranian struggle, and to a greater or lesser extent, to the struggles of our Movement.

As the Iranian people are directly faced with these daunting challenges, we must congratulate them again – not only for the hosting of a second successful gathering of Non-Aligned Movement ministers – but, more importantly, for their willingness to engage in cultural, religious and political dialogue with both friendly and belligerent States, and for the principled defense of their sovereign rights.

I must also offer my most sincere appreciation for the effective, dynamic and inspired leadership of this body by the Republic of Cuba, which has given new life and energy to this revered Movement.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the end of the Cold War, membership in the Non-Aligned Movement has increased, although a central and clearly articulated *raison d'être* has been elusive. Many of us have spoken – almost defensively – of the Non-Aligned Movement's continued relevance, even as we acknowledge its need to adapt to modern geopolitical realities. However, it is these very modern geopolitical realities that make the Non-Aligned Movement more important than ever for small developing States like St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

In the wake of the collapse of the bipolar balance of power, we exist in a world today where priorities are set and advanced by those who employ unilateralism and imbalances in military or economic might to advance an iniquitous world order. This pursuit of hegemony by the few at the expense of the many – tinged as it is with a sense of entitlement and

triumphalism – has no space for tiny States like St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its myriad developmental challenges. Nor is there any space for genuine dialogue and exchanges of ideas in an international system seemingly intent on preserving the status quo through toothless lip service to the needs of the poor, retributive sanctions, and exploitative trading arrangements.

To us, the Non-Aligned Movement must exist to create this space for development and for the defense and advancement of sound ideas, universal principles and just demands. The developmental and ideological space that St. Vincent and the Grenadines requires can be found within the vast membership of this illustrious Movement, but only if we reinvent and re-imagine ourselves as both the world's conscience and its primary developmental forum. The Non-Aligned Movement must maintain its distinct and independent collective voice in global affairs by fostering genuine dialogue among its membership; by advancing the causes of the developing world; by tangibly fostering greater South-South cooperation; and by acting always as a bulwark against unilateralism and hegemony.

But, to realize its fullest potential, the Non-Aligned Movement must also seek to transform the numerical strength of our membership into substantive developmental advancements. While the end of the Cold War has added complexities and nuances to previously stark ideological differences, the yawning divide between rich and poor countries remains the most obvious barrier to the realization of human equality. It is a fact that the majority of the world's poor live within the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement. As such, we as a body must pay increased attention to the ways in which we can foster greater socioeconomic development among our membership. Even with our traditionally lean and flexible administrative structures, the Non-Aligned Movement can and should do more to expand our developmental opportunities.

Mr. Chairman,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines views many of the interrelated issues confronting the developing world today as ripe for active engagement by the Non-Aligned Movement. For example, climate change, born of short-sighted consumerism and wasteful excess of the developed world, is disproportionately and disastrously affecting small island states and poor countries. Similarly, climate change, the aforementioned consumerist culture, and a new raft of self-serving quick fixes are also culprits in the current global hunger crisis. The food crisis, in turn, has its roots in iniquitous trade barriers and the harmful prescriptions of Bretton Woods institutions. Many of our States are awash in illicit weapons – which we do not manufacture – and whose trade is fueled by narcotics, which we do not consume. Add to this odious mix the developed world's oft-promised but as yet undelivered pledge of 0.7% GDP for Official Development Assistance, and the continued anemic and inadequate lip service regarding debt relief.

What does this abbreviated litany of global ills have in common? Simply put, they share the common feature of having root causes that exist outside of the developing world, while excessively and unequally impacting the small, poor and developing States that comprise the majority of the Non-Aligned Movement. Surely, despite our diverse membership and perspectives, the Non-Aligned Movement can work towards meaningful consensus on

substantive action on these issues. Our Membership is demanding action on these issues in a variety of international bodies, often in a disjointed and discordant manner. But here within the Non-Aligned Movement, we should formulate real consensus – not merely on the content of an outcome document – but on a meaningful and manageable plan of action for our collective advancement.

Mr. Chairman,

In calling for a more active and activist body that is increasingly responsive to modern global challenges, it would be remiss of me not to mention our own responsibilities to look inwards. Our credibility as a force for change and progressive advancement must also take into consideration our own individual failings as member states. Among our esteemed membership are States that are experiencing tremendous social and political upheaval; that are in the throes of violent conflict; and that are abusing the rights of their citizens. This is an inescapable fact. We must deal with these unfortunate individual situations, not from a sense of moral superiority or a desire to name and shame, but in a spirit of genuine caring and a determination to reinforce the integrity and impartiality of our Movement.

Mr. Chairman,

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in the strict sense of the word, is quintessentially non-aligned. Our dynamic foreign policy is rooted in both principle and pragmatism, and beholden not to any nation, but to the interests, needs and desires of our citizens. However, we *are* aligned, and unreservedly so, to principles of sovereign equality among nations; proportionality among disparate powers; greater opportunities for the poor; justice for the victims of injustice; an abhorrence of unilateralism and political intimidation; and the purposes and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter. We humbly believe that the membership of this noble body shares these bedrock principles. Let us work together, in unity, to give flesh to these principles, in word and deed, to increase the space within which the developing world may truly develop.

I thank you.