



# **ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

Permanent Mission of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

800 2nd Ave., Ste. 400G, New York, NY 10017 • Tel: (212) 599-0950 • Fax: (212) 599-1020 • [www.svg-un.org](http://www.svg-un.org)

## **Statement**

By

**H.E. Camillo M. Gonsalves**

Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the United Nations

### **“Preparing for Bali and Beyond: The Human Dimension of Climate Change”**

13–14<sup>th</sup> November, 2007

Male’  
Republic of Maldives

Please check against delivery

[FORMAL GREETINGS]

In many ways, a visit to the Maldives is like a journey into St. Vincent and the Grenadines' not-too-distant future. We too are an archipelagic state, with a multitude of islands possessing varying degrees of vulnerability to climate change. We too live overwhelmingly close to our coastline, and almost 90% of our investments in tourism and civilian infrastructure are within a stone's throw of inexorably encroaching waters. We in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have not yet begun the construction of a network of sea walls, nor have we yet been inundated with catastrophic flooding, as the Maldives has. And our more mountainous geography presents different challenges than your low-lying islands. But the massive adaptation investment by the Maldives is nonetheless a sobering forecast of the imminent realities in my country's ongoing battle to cope with climate change.

We are all familiar with the phrase "no man is an island." Today, it is true to say that no island is an island either. Globalization, and now climate change, has taught us that painful lesson. The simple truth is that the greenest and most eco-friendly small island state will not escape the ravages of climate change, fueled by factors beyond our control and outside of our borders.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has no desire to deluge this conference with scientific proof of climate change or its seriousness. We have a saying in the Caribbean: "Who feels it, knows it." Gathered here amongst our fellow Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we all feel, and know, the stark realities of climate change. There are those who procrastinate by questioning the science while simultaneously *waiting* for science – and not behavioural change – to solve the climate crisis fueled by their consumerist excesses. It should not be necessary to remind them of other fields of endeavour, where scanty and ultimately erroneous evidence was more than adequate to stir willing coalitions to decisive action against imagined global threats. With climate change we have a real and gathering threat, with real evidence, but the global response is severely lacking.

But this conference is about more than macro-level litanies of scientific evidence. It is about the human dimension of climate change. So, in this limited time, let me mention peoples and places you may have never heard of, and may never visit. Let me tell you about how a storm's glancing blow destroyed homes in the village of Colonarie this year, forcing the relocation of surprised villagers who had lived in that coastal area for decades. Let me recall how my Government was forced to construct a concrete barrier at the waterfront village of Layout, because waves were destroying the road and washing into peoples' homes and businesses. Or about the fishermen of Calliaqua, whose age-old near coastal fishing livelihood is threatened, because fish are seeking deeper and cooler waters further away from our shores. Or the residents of Argyle, whose title deeds of recent vintage overstate the amount of land they now own, because the sea has reclaimed much of their property purchases. I could discuss the residents of the Grenadines, which have no rivers or lakes, and where increasingly irregular rainfall and salt water intrusion into ground water supplies will threaten their very existence. Or maybe I can talk about the Tobago Cays, the epicenter of our diving and yachting tourism, where coral bleaching and reef death could compromise or hard-won reputation as a marine paradise, and scuttle our plans for increased reliance on tourism. These problems and more speak to the fact that today, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, our citizens' basic rights to housing, property, safety, food and development are *already* being compromised by climate change.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines has been effectively globalized out of reliance on agriculture as the dominant engine for national growth and development; and now the fear is that it will be climatized out of similar reliance on tourism. We, like many other SIDS, are making multi-million dollar investments in leveraging our sunny climate, calm seas, pristine beaches, coral reefs and diverse marine life to lure foreign visitors. Climate change threatens to deprive us of these few marketable natural assets.

This conference's spotlight on the human dimension of climate change necessarily places the immediate focus on adaptation, because people affected today cannot wait for gradual post-

2012 solutions. Their lives and rights are being compromised at this moment, and their adaptation to safeguard these rights is critical and urgent.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines believes that we SIDS have the moral authority and imperative to be vocal and decisive players in the Bali negotiations. But in that role, we cannot allow the discussion to center on mitigation and emissions to the exclusion of equally important short-term needs of adaptation and financing for that adaptation, particularly infrastructural adaptation. Our people – particularly the poor – represent the face of this crisis, and their voice must be heard to demand immediate localized adaptation solutions, in concert with long-term global mitigation efforts. If we emerge from Bali without a larger adaptation fund, properly managed, and funded by an automatic process, not empty promises, then we will regret our timidity for decades to come.

SIDS like St. Vincent and the Grenadines are very much infrastructural works-in-progress. We are still building our road network, our airports, our schools, harbours, hospitals and hotels. Oftentimes, we are tapping traditional sources of ODA for these vital infrastructural projects. Adaptation cannot be an unnatural appendage to these processes, where we simply seek financing to retrofit existing infrastructure that could have been more efficiently constructed if coordinated adaptation funding was readily available at the outset. Bali must operationalize synergies between adaptation funding and ODA for the benefit of SIDS, who do not want to tap one source of funding to build a road, and a separate process to protect it from coastal erosion.

Similarly, we SIDS must not be afraid to raise the issue of debt relief at Bali. Many of us are still paying for infrastructural investments that are no longer viable, or whose effective lifespan will be severely curtailed by climate change. Many of us will have to borrow more to retrofit previous investments, which were often funded, designed and built by foreign donors. It is illogical and immoral that we continue to pay developed donor countries for items whose very use is compromised by their actions. At Bali, it is necessary for us to fundamentally review our debt obligations through the prism of climate change.

The overarching priority for SIDS at Bali is to be heard to speak with as unified a voice as possible given our diverse individual circumstances. And no proposed cure must be approved without a thorough analysis of how it affects SIDS. For example, the superficial, feel-good rush to biofuel production will barely dent the developed world's appetite for fossil fuels, but has already made basic foodstuffs noticeably more expensive in many SIDS. We cannot allow ourselves to be negatively affected by both climate change and its proposed solutions.

Surely we can speak with one voice on the need for greater and immediate adaptation funding; on access to drought- and salt-resistant crops; on the refusal to allow adoption of emerging green technology to be stymied by intellectual property lawyers; and on our own responsibility to educate our citizenry and mitigate the effects of this global scourge.

Combating climate change is the great cause of era, and great causes are not won by timid men and women. St. Vincent and the Grenadines echoes the words of your President Gayoom: "Let us say enough of expectation and promises – it is time to deliver. Enough of hesitation, it is now time for bold leadership." Bali must be the decisive turning point in the battle against climate change. The people we champion in this conference demand no less.

I thank you.