



# **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. La Celia Prince**

Ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines to the USA and  
Permanent Representative to the Organisation of American States

at the

**United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20)**

20<sup>th</sup> June, 2012  
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Please check against delivery

Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is grateful to the government and people of Federative Republic of Brazil for the hospitality, dedication and skill with which they have conducted this crucially important summit. It is our most sincere hope that this summit, like its predecessor two decades ago, will provide the impetus for meaningful action in the furtherance of our shared goal of sustainable development for all peoples.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio Centro Brazil, in what was indubitably the most endearing speech, 12-year-old Severn Suzuki said:

*“I am here to speak for all generations to come. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard...All this is happening before our eyes and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions... I'm only a child yet I know we are all part of a family, five billion strong, in fact, 30 million species strong and we all share the same air, water and soil - borders and governments will never change that... Do not forget why you're attending these conferences, who you're doing this for - we are your own children. You are deciding what kind of world we will grow up in.”*

Twenty years later and an additional two billion people later, we are still acting as if we have all the time in the world to address the concerns of a now-32 year old Severn Suzuki. We act as if nations are not being gradually swallowed by rising and encroaching seas and battered by storms of increasing severity; as if food and fuel crises do not threaten to upend fragile developmental gains; and as if three years of global economic crisis have not called into question the very modes of production, consumption and capital movement that undergird our modern financial architecture. Twenty years later, we still pretend as if we don't breathe the same air and share the same planet. Twenty years later and it seems that we have forgotten the reason for having the Earth Summit in the first place: It is not about giving as little as we can to satisfy a reluctant commitment made, but rather, giving as much as we can to ensure a future for our children.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let us be honest with ourselves: After many hours of negotiations, and millions of pages of suggested language, amendments and counterproposals, we have created a document that only a diplomat could love. While those of us with intimate knowledge of the bare-knuckles backroom struggles to achieve consensus of this text will have ample reason to praise our hosts and facilitators, I cannot see the citizens of the world feeling heartened or confident that their leaders have demonstrated the requisite commitment, urgency and ambition to effectively address extreme developmental needs confronting the planet.

Instead, we have produced a lengthy and unwieldy amalgam of disjointed paragraphs in which almost every interest group can claim ownership of some discrete phrase or concept, at the expense of coherence, cohesion, and a genuine sense of political commitment. In other words, we have lost sight of the forest for the trees, and allowed ourselves to let editorial and administrative minutiae distract us from the potential we have in Rio for a potentially epoch-making moment in our shared developmental history.

Nevertheless, by its very nature, there is fertile ground within our Outcome Document for our collective action and elaboration.

As a Small Island Developing State, it is important for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to reaffirm that SIDS are particularly vulnerable and remain a special case for sustainable development. As such, finance, capacity building and technology transfer are particularly essential for SIDS countries. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines notes that our Rio+20 outcome document contains a rather tepid reaffirmation of previous recognitions regarding the peculiar vulnerabilities of SIDS, and the impact of those vulnerabilities on our development. It is our sincere hope that the Third International Conference on SIDS, which we have collectively committed to host in 2014, will offer an opportunity to move beyond trite repetitions of previously-agreed language and forge instead a specific and action-oriented development framework that caters to the very specific challenges and opportunities inherent in the development of Small Island Developing States.

Despite over 20 references in our Outcome Document, the concept of the so-called “Green Economy” has yet to be defined, and seemingly means all things to all people. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is nonetheless cautiously optimistic that our apparent collective embrace of green economy principles will lead to the creation of a potentially important addition to our developmental toolbox. However, we caution that these principles cannot be applied in a “one size fits all” manner, nor should they be used to supplant the existing principles and goals of Sustainable Development. Under no circumstances should a subjective application of ill-defined green economy principles be used as a conditionality clause against developing countries or as a justification for the imposition of iniquitous barriers to trade.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has prioritised solar, wind, and hydro as significant renewable energy solutions in our own sustainable and low-carbon developmental context. However, as with most developing countries, financing and technology transfer are key to implementation. Unfortunately, both the specific issue of technology transfer and the broader question of how to implement our commitments have not been clearly addressed at this Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Economic and Social Affairs has said that Rio +20 must be about three things – integration, implementation, and coherence. My delegation would like to submit three additional elements – urgency, ambition, and commitment. These three elements you can see reflected in young Ms. Suzuki’s statement, and all three are necessary to the success of our Conference.

## **COMMITMENT**

The mandate of Rio +20 is to achieve renewed political commitments and to fill the implementation gaps. Instead, we fear the dilution of previously-made commitments and a reluctance to make new ones. While the heady commitments of the Earth Summit were made at a time of great optimism and hope for a “peace dividend” that never truly materialised, our current state of multi-year global recession is not an excuse to renege on or delay previous commitments. Indeed, it is the very disintegration of our current economic and financial architecture that demands the immediate honouring of decades-old commitments and the formulation of new and additional partnerships for development in our modern context.

While rich nations have the luxury of esoteric theoretical debates on the relative merits of growth versus austerity, we in the poor, vulnerable and underdeveloped periphery cry out for growth with a clarity and certainty forged through decades of developmental struggle. For us, there is no debate: commitments made must be commitments kept, in a timely and predictable manner.

**Principle 27** of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states “*and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfillment of the principles embodied in this*

*Declaration...*”, yet, through recent negotiations, we saw what appeared to be an ongoing trend of backtracking on those very principles.

Existing financial commitments that have yet to be implemented, and new financial commitments which have yet to be agreed to, are necessary tools for Rio +20 to be a success. Designing and implementing new processes such as the Green Economy and Sustainable Development Goals entail additional financial burdens for developing countries, and cannot possibly be implemented without the means to do so.

**Principle 9** of the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development declares:

*“States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development by improving scientific understanding through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge, and by enhancing the development, adaptation, diffusion and transfer of technologies, including new and innovative technologies,”*

This principle remains especially true for Small Island Developing States.

A commitment made without follow through is like a plate with no food – empty. If we cannot in good faith believe in previously-made commitments, is there a point to this conference? The legacy of this conference must be measured in terms of clear implementation and a record of commitments, rather than a litany of cruelly broken promises.

### **URGENCY**

As we speak, there are delegations here today who understand that it is only a matter of time before their homes become submerged under water. There are delegations here today who are intimately familiar with poverty and the challenge of food security and safe drinking water. There are delegations here today – including our own – whose national incomes will decline due to the ramifications of polluted marine environments and damaged coral reefs. There are delegations here today whose economic growth is hindered by desertification and land degradation. I could go on, but aren’t those enough reasons for each one of us to feel a sense of urgency to have a successful Rio outcome? Aren’t those enough reasons to not only reaffirm our previous commitments, but to enhance them?

### **COMMON AMBITION**

We have heard throughout preparations for this conference that the document needs to be ambitious. Ambition is defined as the “desire to achieve a particular end”. Maybe the problem isn’t that there is a lack of ambition, but that there are wildly divergent views on what that end should be.

Is our ambition twenty years later the same as young Severn Suzuki’s? She was speaking on behalf of the starving children of the world. Who are we speaking for? Perhaps, moving forward, we ought to evaluate our ultimate objective and ask ourselves whether we will be proud of the choices we have made here in Rio.

I thank you.