ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
HER EXCELLENCY SYLVANIE BURTON, DAH
PRESIDENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE FORMAL OPENING OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA
TUESDAY, 4TH AUGUST 2026

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Theme: Responding to the Global Realities in a Manner that Promotes and Protects the Well-being of our Peoples and Region

Mister Speaker,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Distinguished Guests,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Fellow Citizens & Residents of the Commonwealth of Dominica,

Good morning.

It is with a profound sense of duty and humility that I address this Honourable House at the Formal Opening of the First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the Eleventh Parliament under the theme: *"Responding to the Global Realities in a Manner that Promotes and Protects the Well-being of our Peoples and Region."*.

Expression of Thanks

Mister Speaker, I wish to convey my sincere thanks for your gracious invitation to attend and address this special sitting of Parliament. The inclusion of my husband Gilbert in this invitation is also deeply appreciated. Such an occasion holds great significance, and your thoughtful gesture contributes meaningfully to strengthening the bonds of respect and cooperation between our two institutions.

Today, my husband Mr. Burton joins me in first extending our heartfelt gratitude and sincere appreciation to Miss Miriam Blanchard for her many years of dedicated and exemplary service to the people of Dominica, particularly the residents of the Roseau North Constituency.

Having resigned as a Member of Parliament effective 12th June 2026 for medical reasons, Miss Blanchard leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of commitment, integrity, and selfless public service. As Parliamentary Representative for the Roseau North Constituency and as a Minister of Government for almost ten (10) years, she served our nation with diligence, compassion, and unwavering dedication.

We thank her for the sacrifices she made and for the steadfast leadership she demonstrated throughout her years in public office, and pray that God Almighty grants her renewed strength, good health, peace, and abundant blessings. May He guide her steps and grant her every success in all her future endeavors.

Expressions of Sympathy

It is with profound sadness that myself and Mr. Burton extend our deepest condolences on the passing of former Parliamentarian and Government Minister, **the late Mr. Ian Pinard**; local businessmen the late Mr. McMillan Jno. Baptiste and the late Mr. Valentine Poponne, who passed away on 17th April 2026, 20th July 2026 and 25th July 2026, respectively.

Mr. Ian Pinard dedicated many years of his life to the service of the people of the Commonwealth of Dominica. Throughout his career, Mr. Pinard served with determination and a deep sense of duty. His contributions to public life and his willingness to serve his country in various capacities will be remembered by colleagues, the people of the Soufriere Constituency, and all who had the privilege of working alongside him.

Mr. McMillan Jno. Baptiste will be remembered as a respected and accomplished businessman whose enterprise, dedication, and commitment contributed meaningfully to the economic and social development of our nation. Through his hard work and engagement with the public and private sectors and community, he earned the respect and admiration of many, leaving a legacy that will endure in the lives he touched and the example he set.

Mr. Valentine Poponne will be remembered as a respected businessman whose enterprise, hard work, and commitment to commerce contributed to the economic and social development of our nation. Through his dedication and perseverance, he earned the respect of many and touched the lives of those with whom he worked and served.

The passing of a community-minded entrepreneur is a reminder of the important role that business leaders play in creating opportunities, supporting families, and strengthening the fabric of our society.

We extend our heartfelt sympathy to their immediate and extended families, friends and loved ones, colleagues, and all who mourn their passing. May God Almighty grant them the strength and peace during this difficult time, and may they find comfort in the cherished memories of the deceased lives, their service, and the positive impact they made on the lives of many. May the Almighty God grant eternal rest to them.

Mister Speaker, our hearts also go out to the residents and communities in the eastern and northeastern parts of Dominica who were severely affected by the trough system that impacted the island on **Sunday, 26th April 2026**. The heavy rainfall, flooding, landslides, and damage to homes, farms, roads, and other infrastructure brought considerable hardship to many families, particularly those residents in Atkinson and the Kalinago Territory. We extend our profound thanks and appreciation to the Government and all other institutions, groups and individuals who assisted and continue to assist with the recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Mister Speaker, the devastating fires in our Capital City Roseau in March and again in May, which damaged and destroyed several buildings and businesses, were indeed heartbreaking. Please allow me to extend deepest sympathy and heartfelt solidarity to all the business owners, employees, families, and individuals whose lives and livelihoods were adversely impacted by this.

Mister Speaker, I also wish to express concern regarding the reported fire which destroyed several vehicles belonging to contractors engaged in the construction of the new International Airport in Wesley. Incidents of this nature result not only in material losses but may also have implications for business confidence and the timely advancement of projects that are important to our national development.

I note that the fires in Roseau and the incident at the International Airport project site are matters currently under investigation by the Commonwealth of Dominica Police Force. It would therefore be inappropriate to speculate on the circumstances surrounding these events while investigations remain ongoing.

However, should it be determined that these incidents were the result of deliberate criminal acts, it is our expectation that those responsible will be identified and held accountable.

Mister Speaker, the protection of lives, property, businesses, and critical national infrastructure is a responsibility we all share. Acts that threaten public

safety, undermine livelihoods, or impede national development have no place in our society and must be met with the full and fair application of the law.

I take this opportunity to commend the firefighters, police officers, emergency responders, disaster management personnel, volunteers, and citizens who responded with professionalism, courage, and compassion during these difficult circumstances. Their service reflects the resilience and solidarity that continue to define the Dominican people.

To all those who have suffered loss, we stand with you and remain confident in our collective ability to recover, rebuild, and move forward.

Mister Speaker, as a God-fearing nation, we must continue to reject violence, lawlessness, and the destruction of property, and instead uphold the values of peace, respect for the rule of law, personal responsibility, and mutual respect. These values are essential to the well-being of our communities and the continued progress of our nation.

Let us always be mindful of the words found in 2 Chronicles 7:14:
"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

May we continue to draw strength and guidance from these timeless words as we work together for the good of our nation.

Mister Speaker, before concluding this segment of my address, I wish to encourage my fellow Dominicans and Residents to keep in their thoughts and prayers the Government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as they continue to recover from the devastating earthquakes of 24 June 2026.

The scale of human suffering and destruction has touched the conscience of our region and the wider world. We mourn with those who have lost loved ones, stand in solidarity with those who have been displaced or injured, and commend the courage of the emergency personnel and volunteers working tirelessly to assist affected communities.

On behalf of the people of the Commonwealth of Dominica, I extend our deepest sympathies and unwavering solidarity to the people of Venezuela. May they find strength, comfort, and hope as they undertake the difficult task of recovery and rebuilding.

Introduction

Mister Speaker, **Honourable Members,** we meet at a time unlike any other in recent history. Across the world, uncertainty has become the prevailing mood.

The global community is navigating a period marked by innumerable challenges, and a growing erosion of trust in institutions once thought to be unshakeable. The world feels increasingly fragile and, for many, increasingly frightening.

Yet, history reminds us that moments of great challenge also present moments of profound choice.

The Global Reality

Mister Speaker, geopolitical tensions, armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, economic uncertainty, climate change, and rapid technological transformation continue to reshape the global landscape and affect nations large and small.

For small island developing states such as Dominica, these realities are particularly significant. Climate change remains an existential threat, while rising costs of living, economic volatility, and external shocks continue to test our resilience.

Across the Caribbean, recent natural disasters have once again reminded us of our shared vulnerabilities and the importance of preparedness, solidarity, and collective action.
At the same time, technological advances are transforming how we live, work, and communicate. While these innovations offer tremendous opportunities, they also present new challenges that require wisdom, responsibility, and vigilance.

In such an environment, isolation is not an option. The challenges of our time transcend borders and demand cooperation, partnership, and a shared commitment to the common good. Equally, we must resist the temptation to surrender to pessimism. Hope, resilience, and determination have always been the hallmarks of our people and remain essential to our progress.

It is against this backdrop that we must chart our course as a nation and region - confident in our ability to adapt, united in purpose, and committed to building a more secure, sustainable, and prosperous future for all.

The Dominican Context

Mister Speaker, as it relates to Dominica, these global pressures intersect with our own realities. As a small, open, climate-vulnerable economy, external shocks reverberate quickly through our society. We continue to rebuild physical, economic and social resilience, while safeguarding the well-being and dignity of our people.

Our strength has always resided in our unity, our adaptability, and our deep respect for community. These values must continue to guide our national journey.

Our National Responsibility

For Dominica, this moment demands vigilance, wisdom, and unity of purpose. Our survival and progress demand that we must continue to strengthen our institutions, protect the most vulnerable among us, and invest in resilience.

Food security, renewable energy, climate-resilient housing, and access to education and healthcare are no longer simply development goals; they are pillars of national survival. Equally vital is the nurturing of social cohesion, respectful dialogue, and trust in democratic processes.

Mister Speaker, I wish to highlight some of the actions taken by Government that can be framed as strategic responses to the realities of an increasingly competitive, climate-conscious, and interconnected global economy. Foremost to mind are investments in major infrastructural developments such as the new international airport, geothermal energy development, the marina, and the cable car initiative.

Responding effectively to global realities requires strategic investments that strengthen our resilience, expand opportunity, and improve the quality of life of our people. Two initiatives currently underway in Dominica exemplify this approach: the construction of the International Airport at Wesley and the development of our geothermal energy resources in the Roseau Valley.

The new International Airport is widely regarded as the single largest and most transformative infrastructure project in Dominica's history. More than an expansion of our transportation infrastructure, it represents a strategic response to the realities of an increasingly interconnected world.

In today's global economy, accessibility and connectivity are essential determinants of competitiveness. For many years, limited direct access has constrained the growth potential of our tourism industry and reduced opportunities for investment, trade, and business development. The International Airport addresses these longstanding challenges by creating a gateway through which Dominica can deepen its integration into regional and global networks.

According to the Ministry of Tourism, the airport is expected to fundamentally reshape the tourism sector by reducing travel barriers, improving international connectivity, and facilitating direct long-haul access from key source markets. It will also create opportunities for growth in conferences and events, wellness tourism, luxury tourism, sports tourism, and other high-value niche markets that depend on convenient and reliable access.

This project is closely aligned with the Ministry's Tourism Master Plan and its ambitious targets of achieving 500,000 stay-over visitors and one million cruise visitors annually by 2030. More importantly, it reflects our determination to build an economy that is more diversified, competitive, and capable of generating sustainable livelihoods for our people.

Mister Speaker, indeed, we are already witnessing the positive effects of investments aimed at improving air access and accommodating larger aircraft. Information provided by the Ministry of Tourism indicates that Dominica recorded strong growth in visitor arrivals during 2024. Total visitor arrivals reached approximately 420,585, representing an increase of 8 percent over 2023 and 34 percent above pre-pandemic levels recorded in 2019. Stay-over arrivals reached 83,976 visitors, reflecting growth of 12.5 percent compared with the previous year.

These figures are encouraging indicators of confidence in Destination Dominica and underscore the significant potential that expanded air access can unlock. With the completion of the International Airport expected in 2027, we anticipate even greater opportunities for economic growth, employment creation, entrepreneurship, and national development.

Mister Speaker, the development of our geothermal energy resources reflects another important response to global realities.

At a time when countries around the world are seeking to transition to cleaner and more sustainable energy systems while reducing exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets, Dominica has taken a bold and visionary step forward.

I am pleased to note that the commissioning process for the 10-megawatt geothermal power plant in the Roseau Valley is completed and that full commercial operations began at the end of July, 2026.

This achievement marks a historic milestone not only for Dominica but also for the wider Caribbean region. As the first geothermal power plant operating within a CARICOM Member State, it positions Dominica as a regional leader in renewable energy and demonstrates what is possible when vision is matched with commitment and innovation.

According to a status report provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade and Energy, the plant is expected to supply approximately 75 percent of Dominica's electricity requirements at full capacity, substantially reducing dependence on imported diesel fuel. This development advances our national objective of generating 100 percent of our electricity from renewable energy sources by 2030.

The immediate benefits are already becoming evident. Consumers can expect reductions in electricity costs ranging from approximately 12 to 14 percent, with the prospect of even greater savings as diesel is progressively removed from the generation mix. This project will also provide a measure of protection against fluctuations in global energy prices, strengthen national energy security, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve air quality, and enhance the country's attractiveness to environmentally conscious investors and development partners.

Beyond these immediate gains, the geothermal project represents a foundation for future innovation and growth. Expansion plans include the addition of a further 5 megawatts of generating capacity, extension of the transmission network to the north, and exploration of opportunities such as electricity exports to neighbouring territories, shore power solutions to support the decarbonization of maritime transport, and the development of green fuels.

Mister Speaker, these two transformative projects demonstrate how Dominica is responding proactively to the realities of the twenty-first century. One strengthens our connectivity to the world and expands economic opportunity; the other strengthens our energy independence and advances environmental sustainability.

Together, they represent investments not only in infrastructure but in people. They are investments in jobs, in resilience, in competitiveness, in environmental stewardship, and in the long-term well-being of present and future generations.

They remind us that even as a small island developing state, Dominica can lead through innovation, determination, and vision. By embracing sustainable development, strengthening our resilience, and positioning ourselves strategically within the global economy, we are laying the foundation for a future that is more prosperous, more secure, and more sustainable for our people and our region.

Mister Speaker, as global tourism continues to evolve, destinations must continually innovate to remain competitive while preserving the qualities that make them unique. Dominica is responding to this reality by investing in transformative projects that strengthen our position as a premier nature, adventure, and wellness destination.

The planned marina development in Portsmouth represents an important step in expanding opportunities within the Blue Economy and diversifying our tourism product. Modern marina facilities will enhance Dominica's attractiveness to the growing yacht and luxury tourism markets, creating opportunities for local businesses, generating employment, and stimulating economic activity throughout surrounding communities.

This investment builds upon the growing strength of our marine tourism sector, complementing world-renowned experiences such as diving, and whale watching. The significant increase in yacht arrivals in recent years demonstrates the tremendous potential that exists within this sector and reinforces the value of strategic investments in maritime infrastructure.

Mister Speaker, equally transformative is the Cable Car Project in the Roseau Valley. This project will redefine access to the Boiling Lake, one of Dominica's most iconic natural treasures, while preserving the integrity of the environment that makes our island unique. Upon completion, it is expected to establish Dominica as home to the world's longest detachable monocable cable car system, creating a landmark attraction of international significance.

Beyond its tourism value, the project symbolizes our determination to leverage our natural assets responsibly, creating new opportunities for economic growth while strengthening Dominica's global brand as the Nature Island of the Caribbean.

Together, these initiatives reflect a broader vision for national development - one that embraces innovation, expands economic opportunity, strengthens resilience, and enhances the well-being of our people.

A Call to Support Local

Mister Speaker, in an increasingly interconnected and uncertain world, national resilience begins at home. Supporting local is no longer simply a matter of national pride; it is a strategic imperative for economic security, sustainable development, and social well-being.

Every time we choose locally produced goods, support a local enterprise, or invest in Dominican talent, we strengthen our economy, create opportunities for our people, and build greater resilience against external shocks. Supporting local means keeping more of our resources within our communities and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship, and self-reliance.

In this regard, I commend the Government's investment in the rehabilitation of the National Abattoir, a project that speaks directly to the importance of food security and economic resilience. Severely damaged by Hurricane Maria, this facility is being rebuilt to modern standards and is expected to significantly strengthen local livestock production, reduce dependence on imported meat products, create employment opportunities, and support the broader goal of increasing agriculture's contribution to national development.

This initiative reflects a broader truth: that strengthening local production is essential to strengthening national resilience.

Mister Speaker, the responsibility to support local, however, must be shared. While citizens are encouraged to choose local products and services whenever possible, producers must also remain committed to quality, affordability, and competitiveness.

The most sustainable form of patriotism is one that benefits both producer and consumer. When local goods offer value, quality, and reliability, citizens will support them not only out of national pride but also because they represent the best choice.
By supporting local, we invest in ourselves, strengthen our communities, and contribute to a more resilient, prosperous, and self-reliant Dominica.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and National Well-Being

Mister Speaker, as Dominica continues to invest in transformative projects that will expand economic opportunities and improve our quality of life, we must also recognize that our greatest national asset is our people. The benefits of development can only be fully realized if we are healthy enough to participate in and contribute to our nation's progress.

It is therefore with a sense of urgency that I once again draw attention to the growing challenge of non-communicable diseases.
Despite increased awareness, conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, cancer, and obesity continue to affect far too many of our citizens and remain among the leading causes of illness and death in our country.

The latest health surveillance data from the Ministry of Health, Wellness and Social Services indicate that between 2020 and 2025, more than 600 new cases of diabetes, over 1,100 cases of hypertension, and nearly 600 cases of cancer, were diagnosed in Dominica. For a nation of our size, these figures are deeply concerning and serve as a stark reminder that non-communicable diseases remain one of the most significant threats to the health and well-being of our people.

My Fellow Dominicans and Residents, prevention must become a national priority. We must embrace healthier lifestyles through better nutrition, regular physical activity, routine medical check-ups, stress management, and greater attention to mental well-being. This responsibility does not rest solely with the health sector; it requires the collective efforts of families, schools, workplaces, faith-based organizations, communities, and every citizen.

Mister Speaker, in an increasingly complex and competitive world, good health is not only a personal asset; it is a national advantage. A healthy population is more productive, more innovative, and better equipped to contribute to national development and respond to global challenges.

As we build new roads, modern infrastructure, renewable energy systems, and world-class tourism facilities, let us also commit to building a healthier nation. For ultimately, the success of our development journey will be measured not only by the projects we complete, but by the well-being, vitality, and quality of life of our people.

Let us therefore embrace health and wellness as a shared national responsibility. By doing so, we will reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases and build a stronger, healthier, and more resilient Dominica for generations to come.

Regional and International Cooperation

Mister Speaker, recent events have reaffirmed an enduring truth: no Caribbean nation can confront today's challenges alone. Whether the issue is climate change, public health, food security, economic resilience, or disaster preparedness, our futures are inextricably linked.

For small island developing states, regional cooperation is not a matter of convenience; it is a strategic necessity. We must continue to strengthen collaboration through CARICOM, the OECS, and other regional mechanisms, particularly in climate advocacy, health security, trade, transportation, disaster risk management, and the free movement of people, skills, and ideas.

As a region, we possess a powerful voice when we speak together. Our shared experiences, our resilience, and our common aspirations give us both credibility and moral authority in global discussions that affect our future.

Mister Speaker, the international community must also respond more effectively to the realities of our time. Recent global crises have exposed vulnerabilities within international systems established to promote peace, development, and prosperity. They remind us of the urgent need for meaningful climate action, increased access to climate financing, reform of international financial institutions, and a renewed commitment to multilateral cooperation and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Dominica will continue to advocate for fairness, justice, and solidarity among nations. We will continue to champion the interests of small states, support sustainable development, and work with partners across the world to advance a more equitable and secure future for all.

The Importance of Our Constitutional Institutions

Mister Speaker, as we confront the challenges and opportunities of a changing world, we must also recognize that national resilience depends not only on strong economies and modern infrastructure, but also on strong institutions.

The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Dominica provides the foundation upon which our democracy, governance, and rule of law are built. The institutions established under that Constitution, including the Office of President, play an essential role in safeguarding stability, continuity, and public confidence in the affairs of the State.

The Office of President occupies a unique place within our constitutional framework. It serves not partisan interests, but the nation as a whole. Through its constitutional responsibilities, the Office contributes to the orderly functioning of government, the preservation of democratic norms, and the maintenance of constitutional governance.

Respect for our institutions is therefore not merely a matter of protocol. It is a reflection of our commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and the principles that bind us together as a nation.

As citizens, public officials, and leaders, we share a collective responsibility to uphold the dignity of our constitutional institutions and to strengthen public trust in the democratic system that has served our nation well.

In doing so, we help ensure that Dominica remains stable, united, and well-positioned to meet the challenges of the future with confidence and purpose.

A Message of Resolve

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members, history will judge this generation not only by the challenges it confronted, but by the wisdom, courage, and determination with which it responded.

We live in a time of great uncertainty, yet we must not allow uncertainty to diminish our confidence or weaken our resolve. While we cannot control every global force that shapes our world, we can choose how we respond. We can choose courage over fear, cooperation over division, and hope over despair.

The story of Dominica has always been one of resilience, perseverance, and renewal. Time and again, our people have overcome adversity with faith, determination, and an unwavering commitment to one another. It is that same spirit that must guide us as we navigate the opportunities and challenges of our time.

Mister Speaker, Honourable Members, this Honourable Parliament bears a sacred responsibility to ensure that the decisions made within these chambers are guided by wisdom, fairness, integrity, and a steadfast commitment to the well-being of present and future generations.

As you continue your deliberations, I leave you with the words of encouragement found in the Book of Joshua, Chapter 1, Verse 9:
*"**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go**."*

May these words inspire us all to serve with courage, humility, and purpose.

May God's wisdom guide your deliberations.

May unity strengthen your resolve.

May peace and prosperity bless our nation.

May God bless this Honourable House.

May God continue to bless the Commonwealth of Dominica.

And may God bless and keep us all.

I thank you for the courtesy of your attention.