

Opening Address by The Honorable Roosevelt Skerrit,
Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica

OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ECCEA-PEW
ENVIRONMENT GROUP "OCEAN LIFE SYMPOSIUM"

Roseau, Dominica, 23rd March 2009.

(The Prime Minister's address was not in written form; what follows is an unofficial transcript of a tape recording of his statement.)

I want to say to you very kindly and frankly that the Government of Dominica endorses and supports this workshop in Dominica, and I know that you have been following the debate in Dominica and many OECS countries about the environment. But we are in Government a strong supporter of the conservation and preservation of the environment and you will recall last year that the Government took the very bold decision after many decades of supporting the whaling issue. I say to you, contrary to what you hear from other Dominicans, that as long as I am Prime Minister this country will not renege on that commitment of staying clear of this voting for whaling.

We have taken this decision as it is in the best national interest of Dominica to do so and we are not going back on that decision, and in the forthcoming event that we maintain our support for the environment and of course for the marine mammals. So let not you all be troubled, and I know you want to hear from Government officially on this matter and very soon you may hear me making regional statements on this very important whaling issue because we believe that we need to protect the future and to ensure that the world where God put us we can preserve it for succeeding generations. So notwithstanding the support which we may get from various agencies Dominica always maintains a national interest, and of course there are times we have a regional agenda to follow and we've decided to depart from the regional consensus on this very important political issue. I recall when Roosie Douglas became Prime Minister in 2000 he removed the issue of whaling from the Ministry of Agriculture because he felt then that the whaling issue was a political matter and decided it should not be in the fisheries department but in the Prime Ministers Office where it still resides. So nobody in the government system can do otherwise unless instructed to do so by the Prime Minister of Dominica and he maintains the portfolio to steer clear of this whaling issue.

But let me say to you as a friend of the environment itself that as environmentalists I believe we must promote the preservation and conservation of the environment, but that we must not speak down to politicians because we have the responsibility to provide for those who have elected us and those who we represent and the task is taxing andthe old saying talk is cheap but when you have to implement the programs to create the jobs create the economy then that's the reality of the cases

As we look at fishing and I believe the work coming out of the discussions - and I would love to get the report coming out of the discussions to see what sort of advice you have for the government, proper advice on a way forward for the government. I would like to get it all and see which ones we can implement here in Dominica, also see how we can through the preservation and conservation of the environment create jobs for our people, bring in foreign exchange for the people, see some of the practical things for the man or the woman in the street would like to hear us propose as environmentalists, so we have to be careful that we do not only speak to the theory of conservation and preservation but speak to the practicalWhich the ordinary man and woman and especially the fishermen here from Newtown and Dublanc who are here representing the fishermen of Dominica would like to hear from us. And of course while the environment is a very charged political discussion we have to maintain a regional perspective of it and also a national perspective, it cannot be muddied or swamped in politics. Once it becomes a political issue then that's where there is a divide between what is real and what is proper so my advice to you is to allow discussion in due respect we will not always agree on certain matters, for the addressing the various issues because we see things from different perspectives but through true dialogue, consultation and participation I'm sure we can come up with a practical approach for addressing the various issues that confront us

So I came in here just to say to you that the government of Dominica supports what you are doing and when I look around the room I see very strong partners of Dominica, and partners of the region when I speak of Brazil, when I speak of France, the European Union and all the wonderful people from the various UN agencies who are here who have been strong partners for many years. I look forward to strengthening that relationship and also broadening it as time goes by. So we welcome you here in Dominica, please take the opportunity to enjoy what nature... it's a

beautiful country with many natural features no matter how we transform it

We are committed to it and sometimes you may not totally agree with what what the government says but because we come from a different temper in that respect and you have to appreciate that but through consultation, through due respect we can come close to addressing the set of problems confronting us as a people, as a world, so I look forward to the report coming out of the discussions. So please, whatever you feel we should do regarding the environment please tell it to me and I assure you will get the attention it that it deserves, so I thank you for being here and I hope you enjoy what nature has to offer here, so God bless you and thank you.