

**November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2018**

**Excerpts from the 2018 Independence  
Solid Progress Continues Amidst Challenges**

Introduction

Our modern, progressive, liberal-democratic nation-state known as St. Vincent and the Grenadines acceded to formal, constitutional independence thirty-nine years ago. Despite the material limitations of our small-island developing state and our excessively burdensome external challenges, including adverse climate change, we have built most assuredly a country which, according to the United Nations' human development indices, is located at the higher end of the category called "middle-income developing country".

More particularly, the material advances made in the last 18 years or so have been extraordinary, moreso in the difficult circumstances which came upon us from outside, not of our own making. The evidence is before us of our material progress in job and wealth creation; improved living standards; education; health; housing; physical infrastructure; social equity and safety net enhancements; the dramatic reduction in indigence and undernourishment; the universal spread of water, electricity, and telecommunications; sports and culture; good governance, openness, and transparency; regional integration; and an efficacious foreign policy grounded in high principle and practical considerations. We have chalked up impressive achievements by reason of our people's hard and smart work; our practical commitment to freedom and democracy; the efforts of our diaspora scattered overseas; the assistance and solidarity of our development partners; and wise, responsible, and responsive leadership. Underpinning all of this is our people's daily reaffirmation that our nation is founded on the belief in the supremacy of God and the freedom and dignity of man and woman. At Independence Day 2018, we thank God for our blessings and I congratulate our nation on its immense accomplishments!

Clear way forward

At Independence Day 2018, our lives, living, and production are in a better shape than they have been at any other time in our history. To be sure, there are awesome challenges, derived from internal and external sources, but our people and our government are alive to these challenges and the extant condition of all the relevant circumstances, and we have a clear idea as to the way forward. We are not innocent of our difficulties; and we are crystal clear as to the way forward.

The diversified economy is growing and being placed on a sound footing. Indeed, this year, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is experiencing economic growth, albeit modest, following upon marginal to modest economic growth in each of the last seven (7) years. At the same time the government's fiscal condition has improved despite the loss of substantial resources under the Petro Caribe agreement occasioned by the unwise banking and financial sanctions against Venezuela. Amidst all our challenges, we have not gone to the International Monetary Fund nor have we sold our citizenship and passports! Our passports and citizenship are not for sale. We oppose such sale in principle and practice.

### Ten Announcements

First, is the issue of the non-appointment of scores of graduate teachers. Last year I announced that those who were hitherto not formally appointed would be appointed in annual batches over a three-year period. This year (2018) over 100 graduate teachers who obtained their university degrees prior to, up to, and including, 2012, have been appointed. As of January 2019, another 120 or so graduate teachers will be so appointed in respect of those who obtained their university degrees in 2013, 2014, and 2015. And in January 2020, the remainder of the graduate teachers will be appointed as such. Thereafter, they will be appointed as a matter of course.

Secondly, the programme of facilitating farmers, who were accorded leases of agricultural lands, to obtain freehold title for those lands, continues apace. Further, later today at the Chatoyer National Park at Rabacca, some 120 persons will be allotted individual lots of land for housing construction. Some 5,000 lots of land have been distributed to deserving beneficiaries since March 2001. This is absolutely remarkable! An explosion of housing has occurred among the poor, the working people, the middle-income earners, and young persons!

Thirdly, for students now pursuing the four-year Bachelor's Degree in Nursing, the Government will pay one-third of the already subsidised fees in addition to providing for them monthly stipend of EC \$1,000 per month as was done hitherto with the RN and Associate Degree programmes. Further, supporting loans are available from the Economically Disadvantaged Student' Loan Programme. Clearly, nurses have been especially privileged in the pursuit of their education. Recruitment from our surplus of nurses to the United Kingdom will begin shortly.

Fourth, this year the government has made available the highest number of awards ever, 48, at one time, to students who sat the CAPE and Associate Degrees in 2018. There are 17 National Scholarship, 11 National Exhibitions, and Bursaries. This package amounts to approximately EC \$7.1 million. This is a huge investment in the 48 outstanding students in these 2018 Examinations; additionally, their economic costs are paid annually to UWI or other universities. This brings the overall package to in excess of \$10 million — absolutely remarkable. Of course,

several millions of dollars more are spent on university education for other students; and other scholarships, tuition grants, and diverse forms of assistance (including student loans) are always offered.

Fifth, my government is determined to bolster further the financial assistance granted to its employees (civil servants, police officers, teachers, nurses, nursing assistants) who are pursuing undergraduate studies at the degree, diploma or certificate level in approved priority subject areas at accredited institutions online, at the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Community College or at the UWI Open Campus. This assistance would amount to up to one-half of the cost of each course which is successfully completed.

Sixth, in an effort to boost private sector investment in the fishing industry, the Government has decided to accord a 100 percent duty-free concession to Vincentians on fishing vessels. This will surely stimulate more substantial fishing. The pirogues which use outboard motor engines up to 115 horse power already receive 75 percent duty free concession.

Seventh, as a companion to the Pan Against Crime Initiative, the Government will in 2019 implement a comprehensive “Sport Against Crime” Initiative in conjunction with those sporting associations which are interested in so doing. Two such national sporting associations have so far raised the matter with me.

Eighth, the Government will shortly establish a National Committee on the Re-naming of Buildings, Roads, and Parks to reflect the post-colonial condition of our peoples. It is high time to alter the nomenclature of colonials; even the names of minor colonials are on our streets and some villages. This is absolutely ridiculous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!

Ninth, Ian Allen, our former West Indies test cricketer, is now hereby appointed as a Sports Ambassador. At the same time we send “Independence Day” greetings to three of our nationals who are currently touring India with the West Indies Cricket Team: Sunil Ambris, Jomel Warrican, and Obed Mc Coy; Obed is actually playing One Day International today. We express condolences to Sunil and his family on the recent passing of his father, Walford Ambris.

Tenth, the date for the commencement of the duty-free concession on Christmas barrels is November 12, 2018; the concession will run until December 31, 2018. Last year, over 20,000 persons benefitted from such concession.