

**Aug 6th 2021**

**BUILDING BACK BETTER - THE RED ZONE**

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**Introduction**

Over the past months since the explosive eruption of the La Soufriere volcano, communities in the designated red zone have taken a “beating” from the elements that has resulted in much damage and destruction. While communities on the North Western (Leeward) side of the island experienced some damage, the bulk of the damage to property and infrastructure occurred primarily on the North Eastern (Windward) side of the island. The effects of the heavy ash fall from the initial explosive eruption on April 9, 2021, included the caving in of roofs under the weight of the ash, especially after rainfall that made the wet ash quite heavy. The damage suffered on the North Eastern side, in communities above the Rabacca dry river was far more extensive and not limited to the ash fall that covered the communities in the red zone. Those communities were also affected by the heavy flow of lahars, that occurred when heavy rains fell in the Soufriere mountains, causing flood like conditions of hot mud, carrying everything in its path. The dangerous mixture of hot flowing mud, huge boulders and massive tree trunks, was a constant threat to anything in its path including human lives and whatever livestock and farms survived the ash fall. The impacts of the constant lahar flow on the communities, especially Sandy Bay,

include significant erosion, damage to infrastructure, and damage to houses and other property that were situated either close to river beds or on river banks.

### **The Task of Rebuilding**

As residents from Sandy Bay and other communities above the dry river wait anxiously for the all-clear to move back to their homes, the ULP administration, lead by Comrade Ralph, is implementing ways to make their return safe. The reality is that much work must be done as the residents cannot return to a situation that existed before the explosive eruption of the La Soufriere volcano since a number of safety issues that were exposed need to be addressed. There has to be going forward, building guidelines adopted that would ensure that families who are constructing do not do so in areas prone to flooding and other impacts from extreme weather events. The government already has planned, a number of measures intended to address the weaknesses in building practices by residents that created high level of vulnerability to their property.

The task of rebuilding the battered infrastructure in red zone communities would be a mammoth one and the government is committed to ensuring the reconstruction of climate resilient public infrastructure. There is currently ongoing sea defence work in Sandy Bay that would address the rising sea levels that threaten the community. The damage done to roads and bridges and the constant

threat posed when flooding occurs in areas such as Noel creates additional need for the construction of bridges, much like those done at Mt Young, Caratal and Rabacca. With every event of heavy rainfall that occurs that results in flooding, Noel and other areas where the heavy flooding cuts off communities to the north come into sharp focus. This ULP administration has built more bridges during its tenure than any other administration and will make these vital infrastructural developments a priority.

While on a field visit that ended in Sandy Bay, Comrade Ralph assured residents that part of the government's plan to address the vulnerability of affected residents in Sandy Bay is to relocate them, to much safer areas. The government has already identified lots in Orange Hill and other places where homes would be constructed to relocate families deemed to be in areas that become dangerous during flooding. This move by the government is consistent with its policy of dealing with families whose homes are either destroyed during disasters or must be relocated as was the case in communities such as Argyle for the construction of the international airport "Hollywood" in Cumberland, Rose Place and now Sandy Bay. The caring ULP government, would never allow Vincentians to be displaced and rendered homeless, but has always provided for those affected by disasters and other unfortunate events.

There are also plans to relocate the Sandy Bay Clinic that is currently in need to repair as well as having a location that is not ideal, to an identified location that would be bought and with the existing building converted for such use. While this is being done, the Sandy Bay Secondary School which suffered significant damage during the period of the volcanic eruption, will be constructed as lands has also been identified on which the school would be built. In the interim, this government is constructing a facility in Mt Young that would temporarily house the students of the Sandy Bay Secondary School, ensuring that there is no disruption to their education when school reopens. There would be no “half-day school” under this ULP administration, since ample provisions would be made for students to access full classes even while their school is being constructed. Both lands identified for the clinic and construction of the school, offer a much better location that removes the uncertainty that was present in the previous locations.

## **Conclusion**

The caring ULP administration understands that as a country, we cannot abandon the communities above the dry river as they are fundamental to the historic identity of this country. Those who are advancing such a position are displaying a lack of appreciation and respect for this significance or are choosing to ignore it, this government will not adopt such a position. We however realise that as we prepare to move residents back to red zone communities, every

reasonable step must be taken to ensure that it is done in a manner that minimises the risks to residents. These risks will be minimised, as the government focuses on the reconstruction of infrastructure that can withstand severe climate events and ensures that residents adhere to building guidelines. The task ahead is a challenging one, but we are committed to ensuring that everything is done to protect the lives and livelihoods of residents in the red zone communities.