

March 19<sup>th</sup> 2021

**Ministerial Statement by  
Minister of Finance, Hon. Camillo Gonsalves  
[Presented to the House of Assembly on March 16, 2021]**

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**Introduction:**

This week, we publish excerpts of the Ministerial Statement delivered by Hon Camillo Gonsalves, outlining some of the social protection initiatives of the government in the continued effort at addressing the social and economic fall-out from the Covid-19 pandemic.

**SOCIAL PROTECTION**

Since this Coronavirus first came to our shores in March of 2020, the Government has introduced a variety of innovative interventions, designed to strengthen social protections for the vulnerable and assist affected persons in their management of COVID-related economic challenges.

As part of this ongoing system of social and economic interventions, the Government takes the opportunity to update this Honourable House about the introduction or extension of the following initiatives:

1. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has offered an extended programme of income support to Vincentians in the formal sector who have been laid off or had their hours of work reduced as a result of the COVID-related cutbacks at their employers. To date, the NIS Temporary Benefit Programme has paid \$2.7 million to 2,241 individual claims. The Government has paid

out an additional \$7.1 million to claims from the Hospitality Sector (3,894 – \$4.6m) and Seafarers (2,325 – \$2.5m). The NIS Temporary Benefit Programme and the Government’s Displacement Supplementary Income programmes were originally conceived as a 3-month programme back in April 2020. The income support initiatives are now in their 12<sup>th</sup> month.

As of 26<sup>th</sup> February, these programmes have paid a total of \$9.826,350 to 8,460 claims.

The Government has decided to extend the programme for another quarter, thru the end of June 2021. However, the NIS no longer has the flexibility to continue funding its portion of the initiative within the scope of its prudential guidelines. As such, for the upcoming quarter, the Government will bear the full cost of the intervention. The current administrative arrangements remain unchanged. We thank the leadership of the NIS for their tremendous solidarity and patriotism in partnering with the Government on this initiative over the past 12 months, particularly the nine-month period beyond the originally forecast duration of the programme.

2. The St. Vincent Electricity Services, Ltd (VINLEC) and the Central Water and Sewerage Authority (CWSA) have both agreed to renew their moratoria on bill payments and disconnections of service.

Under the VINLEC programme, residential and commercial customers currently experiencing difficulties in paying their electricity bill can take advantage of the moratorium thru May. 2021. In addition to halting the disconnection of service for non-payment during that period, VINLEC will waive reconnection charges for

those customers seeking to renew previously-interrupted service.

In order to encourage continued payment by customers who can afford to stay current, VINLEC will offer a 10% discount on outstanding balances during the moratorium period.

The CWSA moratorium extends to residential customers only, and runs thru June, 2021. Customers who continue to pay their CWSA bill during the moratorium period will receive a 10% discount if they zero their balance and a 5% reduction if they pay more than half of their monthly bill.

The Government expresses its gratitude to the management of both VINLEC and the CWSA for crafting and implementing these programmes in the interest of the Vincentian consumer, notwithstanding the difficulties that they will pose to each company's respective bottom line.

3. In collaboration with the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and regional governments, commercial banks have agreed to extend the loan moratorium programme until September 2021. The ECCB indicates that the Commercial Banking Sector in SVG is currently reporting that 1,642 loans are currently utilising the moratorium. These 1,642 loans have a total value of \$337 million.
4. The extended closure of schools has severely affected vendors within or adjacent to school compounds. Those vendors who depend on student purchases have seen their income dwindle to zero in recent months. Even with schools set to resume shortly, the Government is cognisant of the unique challenges faced by

these school-dependent vendors. As such, it is repeating its earlier 2-month subsidy of ~~\$XXXX per month~~ to those vendors and small shops located in the immediate vicinity of schools. The first payment will be made at the end of March.

5. This week, the Zero Hunger Trust Fund is in the midst of delivering nutrition support to 699 Vincentians. As this Honourable House is well aware, the ZHTF maintains an Adopt a Classroom Programme, at which students at 12 primary schools nationwide receive focused support. One component of that support has been to enhance the school feeding programme at those 12 schools. However, with the school closures currently affecting the delivery of certain benefits to classrooms adopted by the ZHTF, a decision was taken to provide direct support to the individual students at home. As such, from last Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March to this coming Friday 19<sup>th</sup>, the ZHTF is distributing a basket of goods valued at \$200 each to 291 students. The contents of the basket of goods were procured on the advice of the Nutrition Unit within the Ministry of Health. Parents of an additional 58 students of adopted classrooms in Fancy and Sandy Bay will receive a \$200 cheque instead of a basket of goods. In all, therefore, 349 students will receive this support by Friday.

Commencing today, as part of the ZHTF's Golden Years Nutrition Support Programme, 350 elderly Vincentians will receive \$300 Food Gift Certificates. This programme, now in its fifth year of operation, has stepped up its outreach during the COVID pandemic, and has provided an essential source of nutrition support to vulnerable Vincentians.

6. The Government shall add an additional 100 YES interns to the current complement of XXXX youth. It is hoped that the YES interns will gain valuable experience during this period of COVID-related job scarcity, which will better position them for permanent employment in the post-COVID job market.

The Government will also create a Community Improvement Brigade of part-time workers to engage in minor beautification, vector control and maintenance projects in villages nationwide. A minimum of 150 additional part-time workers will be employed in this initiative over the next six months.