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## CREATING A PLATFORM FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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*ADDRESS BY SEN. HON. SHACKELL BOBB, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY IN THE OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH.*

It is certainly pleasing to see all of you here this evening to witness such a momentous occasion for youths in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and by extension the Caribbean region and I include the region because I know for a fact that our regional counterparts are looking on or will be looking on. We often say youths are the future, which is a cliché saying albeit true; but how often do we stop to think of the significance of this statement. We may look around and observe that about 1/3 of our population are youths but make no mistake, no matter how small or large the number, the youths are in fact 100% of our future. It is therefore not lost on me that an initiative such as the formulation of the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Youth is of great significance to our country, and to the diversification of governance here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. I must commend the Prime Minister and by extension our government for the opportunities that I am positive will be made available to our young people in effecting change.

I always say that we as young persons need to be advocates, it doesn't mean that when an issue arise you have to speak or argue with someone about it but it means that we must know where we stand on issues and when a platform is provided for us to speak on matters which affect us, we do not shy away or hide in the shadows. Social media influence has kidnapped the mind of our youths, and has subjected them to irrelevant considerations as they go about their daily lives. We, the council intend to change that narrative for the youths in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A lot of us have the capability to make a positive impact through advocacy and action, however we often do not know / or see the support that may make us feel empowered to speak. One major component in youth engagement that is overlooked is youth empowerment, consequently the Council will focus on the key aspect of youth empowerment on a whole and the empowerment of the voices of our youth. Our aim is to be successful; it will not be a rushed process, as such we intend to create a solid foundation by tackling foundational issues such as the aforementioned. Afterall, a structure is only as strong as the foundation. And we do not deal with shaky foundations.

Youth Empowerment will be promoted within all communities and sectors so that they may be inspired and driven to take control of the future. I believe that with this goal in mind, we can help them to discover their full potential and capabilities which will ultimately result in unleashing their best traits and qualities as human beings. To truly empower youth, the Youth Advisory Council aims to be very intentional about the way in which we choose to maximize on youth inclusion. Some of the ways which have been proven to be successful in that task which I will expound upon are:

➤ **Include youth in decision-making processes**

The Prime Ministerial Advisory Council, aims to enhance youth involvement in the decision-making process of the Government here in our country. This is not a tokenized committee, and as a result the work that will be put in and the advice and recommendations from the council will be communicated to cabinet and considered in making decisions for the benefit of the country on a whole. That to me is no small feat. Here we are tapping into the leadership skills of young people and then ensuring that their voices are valued at the pinnacle of decision-making stage.

➤ **Honor the youth voice and give account**

In this way, we must ensure that the advice and recommendation communicated are valued and when implemented or acted upon, hold ourselves accountable in ensuring that we revert to these persons on how the information was acted upon.

➤ **Offering Guidance - being willing to share experience, adult power and privilege in order to make the community a better place for both young people and adults alike.**

I must highlight the motto of the YAC, which is “Balancing Experience with Youth”. This is well thought through given that this is not an experiment or fishing expedition. Those who came before us must be willing to share their power, privilege and experience where possible. This is very important because in order to know where we are going, we must know where we are coming from, as such the guidance of the government and other stakeholders is much needed and appreciated.

We have come along way under the current government, and we also have come along way as a country. I am esteemed to be a part of this new journey of governance where the voices of our young people are valued. When I met with the council last week, I was proud to say the least, to sit in a room full of young experts in a number of varying sectors in SVG. Notably, a lot of these persons I can say for a fact have benefited from nay I say, the superlative initiative that is the education revolution. The relevance of the education revolution resounds through business places throughout St Vincent and the Grenadines and beyond and now it anchors its relevance in this initiative that is the Prime Ministerial Advisory Council on Youth.

Tonight, we are here to launch this council and it couldn't be at a more fitting time. In the true spirit of patriotism and nationalism, and in an effort to give back to our country, these persons who will be identified later have accepted the challenge and has chosen to further the development of our country. We are in fact the newest agents of change in this country, our peers are watching and our country is watching, we cannot and must not let them down. I commend you for accepting the challenge and I cannot wait to work with you to make this Council a successful and meaningful one that will transform the lives of persons in our country. I also encourage persons to be bold, assume your civic duties and responsibilities by stepping up to the plate if an offer is made to you to sit on any of these sectorial committee. I cannot stress how much your involvement will help to enhance your lives personally and professionally.

In closing, I leave you with these inspirational words of Kofi Annan who served as secretary general to the United Nations "Young people should be at the forefront of global change and innovation. Empowered, they can be key agents for development and peace. If, however, they are left on society's margins, all of us will be impoverished. Let us ensure that all young people have every opportunity to participate fully in the lives of their societies."