

October 21<sup>st</sup> 2022

## **CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE SAFEGUARDING OUR SOVEREIGNTY**

---

### **Introduction**

On the 27th of October 1979, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines gained its independence from Britain, signaling that from that point, we were now in charge of both our internal and external affairs. Prior to that happening, this country's foreign policy was dictated by our colonial masters as were not an independent could not engage in direct multilateral diplomacy in organisations such as the United Nations. Added to that, our country was also constrained in our ability to establish diplomatic relationships bilaterally, and as such our friends and allies were essentially dictated to us by those who wielded power over us. Prior to 1979 therefore, our friends were those countries that England chose to befriend, meaning that any ideological or political differences between a country and Britain, determined how SVG viewed that country and whether or not we engaged them. Being a colony, we were not a sovereign nation and therefore couldn't speak of our independence since both concepts are mutually inclusive in international relations. After 1979 however, once Saint Vincent and the Grenadines became an independent nation, we could now refer to our sovereignty and together they became things that we can celebrate, cherish and protect. With independence came certain rights and privileges as now our elected leaders were completely responsible for the decisions relating to our internal governance as well as external relations. Governments were now able to craft SVG's domestic policy and craft a complimentary foreign policy that would aid our national development. The constraints were now removed and the freedom to engage nations based on mutual interest within an international order guided by generally accepted principles, conventions and laws, became ours. Forty-three years later, as we celebrate our independence, we

examine how defending our sovereignty and that of others offers us great satisfaction in the celebration of our independence.

## **Our Instruments of Sovereignty and Independence**

Our journey as an independent nation has so far been a mixed bag of challenges and triumphs, but as we celebrate our independence this year, we can say we have much more to celebrate. We have so far been able to navigate our way out of our most challenging circumstances and risen triumphant from the metaphoric ashes. One remarkable feat over the last 21 years of governance is the way the Unity Labour Party has used our instruments of sovereignty and independence to further our national development. Understanding these two very critical elements of nationhood, our government has crafted and practices a foreign policy that at its core establishes the respect for sovereignty and independence of states, a critical pillar of our international system.

Today, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has established diplomatic relations with a number of new countries, strengthened existing relationships with non-traditional allies while maintaining full cooperation with our traditional ones. In a multi-polar world, where traditional hegemonic powers are witnessing challenges from countries harbouring their own ambitions of greatness, even as old rivalries are reignited, SVG stands as a beacon of principle and consistency in its defence of sovereignty. Our government maintains that we can be friends of all, bold enough to demonstrate courage in holding up the principles of the charter of the United Nations in the face of blatant disregard by powerful friends.

More than this however, our country has been able in our engagements, to use our instruments of sovereignty and independence in ways beneficial to our country and its citizens. Many of the projects undertaken by this ULP administration were possible in part because of support from our diplomatic allies. The construction of the Rabacca bridge and other bridges, the many Learning Resource Centres, the Modern Medical and Diagnostic Centre, the Argyle International Airport, the Kingstown port currently

under construction, the proposed Marriott Hotel at Mt Wynne and a host of other projects are just a few of the examples of SVG working with other countries in our development interests. We can also speak of the many government-to-government scholarships offered to our students from Austria, Azerbaijan, Cuba, Mexico, Taiwan, Turkey, Russia, the UK and Venezuela contributing to our very successful education revolution. All of these partnerships between SVG and other countries, transcend ideological, political, cultural and religious differences, and instead focus on ways we can work together to achieve common goals.

Our work in International organisations enhances our ability to work with other states, even though there are differences in the way we chose to govern our affairs. The one consistent fact, is that our country believes in the unwavering adherence to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the respect for sovereignty which requires each country to refrain from interfering in another's internal affairs. SVG not only promotes this through our statements and actions on the global stage, we practice it as a central element of our interactions with other nations. Our country's belief that all nations are equal regardless of size, military or economic might is never lost and we recognise the importance of defending this principle regardless of who the players are. This principled approach has gained the respect of many nations, and enhanced our global reputation as a nation that believes in the adherence to international law. There are those among us, seeking to govern this country whose foreign policy is based on the question "what would America say", but we reject this notion completely as a mockery of our instruments of sovereignty and independence.

## **Conclusion**

It is impossible to celebrate our 43rd anniversary of independence in isolation of our constant efforts in promoting and defending the principle of respect for sovereignty globally. SVG defends these instruments regardless to where they are being violated and who the violators are, fully aware that to refuse to do so, would endanger our own sovereignty and independence. There are many criticisms when SVG stands up and defends Taiwan, Cuba, Venezuela, Palestine

among others, against unjustified and illegal aggression from major powers, who in many instances have no issues weaponising trade, the financial system, even humanitarian aid to achieve their goals and in so doing create severe hardship on those nations. At any moment any major power can threaten our independence through the violation of our sovereignty, it is therefore very important that we constantly defend these valuable features of our nationhood. Independence is much more than a word; we must appreciate that our governments safeguarding of our sovereignty by insisting that all nations respect those principles of non-interference and non-intervention are central to this nation celebration of 43 years as an independent nation. Happy Independence SVG!