

April 20th 2018

The Zero Hunger Campaign is two years old

Introduction

In the campaign for the 2015 general election, the ULP put forward as part of its strategy for the new term, the issue of a zero hunger programme, for a number of reasons. This was also a central plank of the 2015 election manifesto of the ULP. On page 35 of the document, it is stated that “the ULP government commits to achieve ZERO HUNGER before 2020, and the elimination of extreme poverty (dirt poor poverty) by that date also. We are committed to the goal of ending general poverty, the goal of ZERO POVERTY, by 2030”.

It is important to remind the readers about the background to this issue. When the ULP arrived in office in 2001, it found the country with a poverty level of 37.5 percent, and the indigence level at 25.7 percent. By 2009, through a number of targeted interventions, the ULP administration had reduced the level of general poverty to 30 percent, with indigence falling sharply to 2.9 percent of the population.

This is a remarkable story that is still to be told. In 1995, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations assessed that 22 percent of the population was undernourished. By 2012, that level had dropped to 3.5 percent of the population. In-fact on two occasions, the FAO formally recognised the country as being among a select group, to meet the Millennium Development Goal, the MDG's, of halving both the percentage of the population living in extreme poverty or indigence, and the number of persons who are under-nourished.

Vincentians will remember the amount of accolades heaped on this country for this achievement by the FAO, a credit to the sterling work of the ULP administration, and the people of this beloved country. But there was still more work to be done. It is generally accepted in mathematical circles that 2.5 percent is higher than zero, a fact that Arnhim Eustace and the NDP seem not to be aware of. Any responsible government will seek to tackle this issue by aiming to reduce indigence to zero. That is the goal of the ULP administration in the fourth term, to achieve Zero Hunger.

What has happened

Almost immediately, on its re-election to its fourth term, the ULP administration set about this quest to achieve Zero Hunger in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. A joint Inter-Ministerial Committee was established to put the wheels in motion. The Ministry of Social Development quickly produced from its data base, a comprehensive list of three thousand persons who were considered to be in indigence and hunger.

A draft plan has been drawn up, with the key component being the establishment of the Zero Hunger Trust Fund, the ZHTF. Among other things, the ZHTF will ascertain the precise extent of hunger in the State, to address the circumstances and conditions of those persons afflicted by indigence, and to establish programmes to address this issue appropriately and successfully. The ZHTF has been established by law, and is comprised of esteemed professionals and senior public servants, and it will support the existing initiatives by the government to reduce indigence.

It will be funded through the consolidated fund, along with a special levy on telecommunications, and grants and donations from individuals, and local, regional and international organisations. Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves himself has already pledged a donation of one month's salary over the next five years, towards the fund. Other Vincentians have made similar pledges, and they should be commended for their efforts to help their fellow citizens.

The response of the NDP

So, Godwin Friday and the NDP are not in support of the ZHTF. As far as they are concerned the country could live with the 2.5 percent indigence. The NDP seems willing to condemn three thousand Vincentians to a life of hunger and indigence. Godwin Friday and the NDP don't care if these Vincentians go to sleep hungry. This must be another black mark against a party that has shown no love for the people of this country, and the citizens must punish them at the polls on the next occasion, for this outrageous attitude.

But Vincentians cannot express any surprise at this attitude, since this is par for the course, in relation to the NDP. They have opposed every single project proposed and implemented by the ULP administration, all aimed at enhancing the lives of Vincentians. Recently they opposed the increased social welfare payments to poor people in the State, calling it an election bribe.

They opposed the international airport project at Argyle, the Education Revolution, the Housing Revolution, the expansion to the health sector, the bridge over the Rabacca River, and the list goes on. If you love Vincentians, if you love this country, you would want what is best for the motherland and its people. Not so for the unpatriotic NDP and Godwin Friday.

Conclusion

When the history of this country is written, it will judge the ULP as the most progressive administration to govern St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The ULP has shown an overwhelming and profound love for the people of this country, that is unmatched. That is why the Zero Hunger Trust Fund will succeed and will bring more than 3000 Vincentians out of indigence.

History will judge the NDP and will remember that party for wanting to condemn these 3000 Vincentians to a life of hunger and indigence, almost like a death warrant. What a shame on the NDP!

The Zero Hunger Trust Fund will continue its excellent work, providing support to those Vincentians who are affected by indigence. Expect the ULP administration to unveil new initiatives as the fight against indigence continues.