

**STATEMENT ON ALLEGED ASSAULT ON PEACE CORPS  
VOLUNTEER IN ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES**

**BY**

**DR. THE HON. RALPH E. GONSALVES  
PRIME MINISTER**

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On Monday, August 20, 2018, a 70-year old female Peace Corps Volunteer in St. Vincent and the Grenadines alleged that she was assaulted around 7:30 a.m. in the area outside of the Leeward Bus Terminal. The Volunteer had arrived in St. Vincent and the Grenadines a few days earlier on August 16, 2018, following her initial 5-week Peace Corps training in St. Lucia. She was placed with a host family in rural St. Vincent and had make a familiarisation visit by bus to Kingstown with her host family on Friday August 17<sup>th</sup>; this visit, among other things, was for her to learn the bus route from her host family to Kingstown and the Peace Corps training site locally.

Following the alleged assault, all the Peace Corps Volunteers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines were sent to St. Lucia for a two-week period. The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has not been informed about the possible return date of the Volunteers to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines will be quite pleased to have the Volunteers return soonest. I have been in touch with the local Peace Corps representative and he is hopeful of their return.

The Government and People of St. Vincent and the Grenadines highly value the contributions of the Volunteers. Indeed, since my Government came to office on March 29, 2001, and before that time, we in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have always warmly welcomed the Peace Corps Volunteers. Indeed, at the end of each Volunteer's tour of duty in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I, as Prime Minister, personally sign a specially-designed certificate of appreciation for each Volunteer. I do that for every single one of them at the end of every single tour of duty. The Government and People of St. Vincent and the Grenadines make every effort to ensure the Volunteers' safety and comfort. We see the Volunteers as persons who do good for humanity, and for the further strengthening of the relations between the United States of America and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We are fully satisfied that the Peace Corps in St. Vincent and the Grenadines have been true to the ideals which the late President John F. Kennedy had set the Volunteers when he first established the Peace Corps in March 1961.

The gist of the allegations made by the Volunteer are that:

*“At or about 7:30 a.m. on Monday, August 20, 2018, she disembarked her bus. She began to walk and enquired of the direction of the Peace Corps Office [which is in New Montrose]. As she was walking she was grabbed from behind in a bear hug; her arms were pinned and she was pushed into an alcove next to an empty market table and*

*partition. In the process of the alleged assault she was punched in her stomach, her button-up blouse was ripped open, her breasts were grabbed and squeezed; her head was slammed down on a vendor's table; and she was spat upon at the back of her neck."*

Those are her allegations in a nutshell: The alleged incident lasted two or three minutes, according to the reports.

The Volunteer alleges that there were two assailants, both of Middle Eastern descent, who did not speak with a Caribbean accent. The Volunteer further alleges that both of them were wearing olive green pants tucked into the top of black boots and a dark-coloured long-sleeve shirt tucked into pants; one had a scarf, a lot of cloth fabric, wrapped around his neck; and he had a full beard. The other alleged assailant had no beard.

The Volunteer further alleges that during the assault upon her, her assailants spoke many angry and derogatory words about the American President, the Peace Corps generally, and female Peace Corps Volunteers. She gave details of these alleged angry and derogatory words.

The Volunteer received directions from passers-by and made it to the Milton Cato Memorial Hospital after the alleged assault. She was attended to by a doctor and a nurse at the Hospital. I have been

advised that the Doctor's Medical Report affirms/ confirms scratches to the face, neck, upper arm and chest; and bruises to the left upper arm, left abdomen, and left breast of the Volunteer. The Police were called to the Hospital and met the Volunteer there along with Mr. Cuthbert James, aka "Mr. Cool", the local Peace Corps Coordinator. The Volunteer volunteered to take the Police and Mr. James to the location where the alleged incident had occurred three or so hours earlier.

As they drove in the general area where the assault was alleged to have occurred, the Volunteer's bag was observed on a table; in fact, she pointed it out. The Police retrieved the bag and the Volunteer identified the contents as her own; she noted the missing items were a Peace Corps folder and an identification card with her home address in the USA; later she said that EC \$60.00 was in a folder which was not touched. The alleged disappearance and alleged return of the Volunteer's purse \_\_\_ not the bag \_\_\_ with keys in it remain among the many puzzles for the Police.

The Police are still conducting their investigation into the matter and have been in touch with relevant officials from the US Embassy in Barbados; two such officials visited St. Vincent and the Grenadines on Monday, August 27, 2018, and have been working on the investigation with the Police. The Police have made available to them footage from CCTV located at a nearby building. I have been advised that the CCTV footage shows, among other things, what appears to

be a bag being placed by the Volunteer on a table, the very spot from which the bag was later retrieved, three or so hours later. There is no evidence on the CCTV footage of the alleged incident itself. A sketch artist's rendition of the Volunteer's description of her alleged assailants have been made available to the Police, courtesy the relevant officials of the US Embassy. The artist's sketches of both alleged assailants are being circulated to the public to aid the ongoing investigation. The Police are addressing this matter at the highest level.

Since the alleged incident the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and the American Ambassador spoke on two occasions on the matter. Representatives of our two governments are cooperating fully on this matter.

I have decided to speak on this matter today because of much "fake news" which have been in circulation about it including in one local newspaper and in an online regional publication. In the case of the latter, the brazen falsehoods were published that one of my sons has allegedly organised a "mongoose gang", a group of thugs, going about smashing vehicles belonging to the Peace Corps Volunteers because of their alleged links to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA. These crude falsehoods are published with the purpose of hurting the ULP government and its leader, but in effect do nothing but damage the good name of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the minds of unsuspecting people. All patriotic Vincentians, at home and

abroad, should join the condemnation of these purveyors of “fake news”, locally and regionally.

Meanwhile, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines continues its ongoing work of making St. Vincent and the Grenadines safer and more secure for our citizens, residents, and visitors alike.

You will no doubt appreciate that neither the Prime Minister nor the Police will answer queries about the details of the ongoing investigation in which there is much still to be discovered and/or clarified.

Statement made on 3<sup>rd</sup> September, 2018, to a Press Briefing.