

September 14th 2018

Building Bridges and Transforming Lives Through Diplomatic Relations with Taiwan

Introduction

St Vincent and the Grenadines established diplomatic relations with the Republic of China on Taiwan under the Milton Cato-led St. Vincent Labour Party administration in 1981. Over thirty-seven years of this relations, the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines benefitted immensely through a transformation in various sectors such as agriculture, health, education and infrastructure development. In 2001, the Unity Labour Party strengthened these relations and continue to recognise Taiwan as a sovereign state.

It is pivotal for us to recognise two significant contributions Taiwan made to the people and development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines – the construction and completion of the Rabacca bridge and the Terminal Building of the Argyle International Airport, which itself is a bridge linking St. Vincent and the Grenadines and its people with the global community.

However, despite the strengthened relations and tremendous contributions the Taiwanese government made to the government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in uplifting and transforming lives, the ungrateful New Democratic Party, led by then Opposition Leader, Mr Arnhim Eustace in August 2016 announced that they are no longer interested in having diplomatic relations with Taiwan. This policy move by the NDP is because they have adopted and recognised the “One China Policy”, thereby seeking interest in establishing diplomatic relations with mainland Communist China. This position by the NDP was reaffirmed by the current President and Opposition leader Dr Godwin Friday in September 2017.

ULP Stands by Taiwan

We in the Unity Labour Party stand with any country that places “people” at the center of its developmental strategy. After all, the philosophy of the party is that of social democracy, meaning empowering and building people through social programs and initiatives while enhancing democratic values and principles. Therefore, the ULP reaffirm its support to the government and people of Taiwan in strengthening our relations and to use this relation between both states to build and empower both of our peoples.

The benefits that we in St. Vincent and the Grenadines received from the government of Taiwan are too numerous to mention, but there are some that stand out when speaking of real change and transformation since the strengthened relation under the ULP administration from 2001. Since the inception of the Taiwan Scholarships Programme in 2004, an initiative of Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, 143 Vincentians have enrolled in degree programmes in Taiwan from these scholarships, which have brought closer ties between the people of the two countries. It must be mentioned that the programs are offered in areas of science, technology and social sciences. Today, a recipient from this program, Mr. Kenton Chance, started SVG’s first online news website. He is a journalist whose training and education in Taiwan under this

program helped him to use it in making a living for himself. He also has the ability to speak two languages.

Furthermore, in 2016, through the Foreign English Teachers (FET) Program, Vincentian teachers now have the opportunity not only to teach in Taiwan but also to explore Taiwan's culture. Miss La Toya Williams became the first Vincentian to teach English under the FET program and continued her teaching in Taiwan for three consecutive years. This year, we saw Miss Marva Rodney, a longstanding teacher for over thirty years from the village of Rose Hall, being the second Vincentian to teach English at a school in Taiwan.

Moreover, we saw the Taiwanese contributions in terms of eight school buses that will help transport students from rural areas to schools in both rural and capital city. That will surely alleviate the burden from poor families who have difficulty in meeting transportation expenses from such a far journey, and also transporting them safely to and from their destination. It is the policy and principle of the ULP, that no child should be hindered from getting an education due to their family's economic situation.

Additionally, in science, technology and agriculture, we have seen tremendous contributions from the Taiwanese government with recent contribution of twenty four pieces of agriculture equipment, the installation, testing and training of the Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) to digitize information in various government departments. That will improve efficiency and management so that ordinary Vincentians can receive better service and easier access to information from the government.

On infrastructure development, we must be grateful for Taiwan's assistance in building a US\$28 million terminal at Argyle International Airport that is benefitting Vincentians all over the world. This has made it easier for all to travel to the United States directly and in December this year we will see for the first time, American Airline flying directly from Miami to SVG.

Also, this week, we saw the Taiwanese contribution to the rehabilitation of the Rabbaca Bridge that has made it easier for everyone living above the dry river to travel even on a rainy day. No longer do persons above the dry river have to fear when it rains, as to whether they can go to work or that their child has to stay away from school. It is no wonder today we are seeing more persons above the dry river buying more vehicles than ever before and building better homes all because of the construction of the Rabacca bridge. This is something very transformative before our very eyes and yet the NDP opposed it.

The NDP's Ungratefulness

As the saying goes "ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft". NDP's ungratefulness knows no bounds. This is a political party that lacks principle of any kind. In 2017, current Opposition Leader, Dr Godwin Friday said "NDP still maintains its support and their commitment to the One-China policy." This is not surprising as the NDP only sees money since China is giving away millions and billions to various states throughout the Caribbean with tight strings attached. It is said globally around the world, that when China gives money to States, they take your Ports, such as Customs port and even Airports as repayment once you have difficulty paying. We, in the Caribbean, were recently cautioned by President of Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen , during her visit to Belize, that "Not everything that has sugar is sweet". We have to be careful not to let the NDP sell us to the highest bidder as commodities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is self-evident that the ULP is the only way forward as we continue to deepen our relations with the government and people of Taiwan in the interest of “people development”, bring real transformational change in all aspect of life, whether social, cultural and economic through health, education, technological and infrastructure development. The NDP continues to show their disdain and disregard for long-standing fruitful friendships developed over thirty-six years with the people of Taiwan. Can you imagine if the NDP treats our close, long-standing allies in this regard, the manner they will treat you if they suspect you are not for them? Let us continue to press forward and show the NDP that Taiwan is here to stay by remaining and continuing to support the Unity Labour Party and its policies to ensure continued positive transformational change in SVG.