

**November 23<sup>RD</sup> 2018**

## **Foreign Policy as a mechanism for the Development of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**

### **Introduction**

Many astute political observers have remarked on the fact that St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a resourced-challenged state, has not gone to the IMF, despite the multiple challenges to its economy and development. After all, there is no gold, no silver, no oil, no precious minerals with which to exchange for much needed revenue. And there is no selling of passports, as the NDP has been proposing, and which the ULP rejects completely.

First of all, it must be recognized that the ULP possesses a quality leadership that has been tried and tested in the extreme difficult circumstances of the worse global economic crisis in the last 100 years. This leadership has taken the country through some of the worst climatic events including storms, droughts and hurricanes, providing relief to Vincentians through a number of creative strategies.

Many of these strategies are grounded in a successful foreign relations policy, which has been bold and pragmatic. It is this policy, among other things, that has driven the “people-centered development” philosophy of the ULP administration, and has resulted in a series of developmental achievements, which has made the lives of Vincentians much better.

### **The Foreign Policy**

The foreign policy is pretty simple, and has been enunciated by government officials time and time again. It also included on page 61 of the ULP election manifesto of 2015. The policy is aimed at making friends and not enemies, so as to foster peace, international development, and in the interest of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. As the Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves says, “no one is better than us, and we are not better than anyone”.

The central purpose of the ULP’s foreign policy has been to enhance the country’s capacity to address in a more efficacious and compelling manner, its external environment, all in the interest of the nation. So, for example, it is this foreign policy that is responsible for the construction of the country’s largest capital project, the international airport at Argyle. Through the making of new friends, the government was able to put together the “coalition of the willing”, a grouping of friendly countries who were committed to providing assistance to the ULP administration, to construct the airport.

What has the government done to facilitate this process? Since March 2001, the ULP has embarked on a new approach to diplomatic relations. The ULP has increased its presence in countries which can meet the interests of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. So for example, the ULP administration has set up new embassies in Cuba and Venezuela, staffed by qualified and professional persons.

The government has also moved to strengthen the diplomatic postings in the United States. So for example there is now a resident ambassador to Washington, and the OAS, and an ambassador to the United Nations. The government has moved to establish closer diplomatic relations with the island nation of Taiwan, and has reached to countries in the Middle East and in Africa.

The benefits of this strategy can be seen before our very eyes. There are a number of projects which have been executed with assistance from some of the new countries who have established closer ties with St. Vincent and the Grenadines. When the Prime Minister visits the United Nations for the meetings of the General Assembly, he uses this opportunity to hold talks with Heads of Government and other officials. His address to the general assembly is always followed closely, since he addresses many issues which affect those countries with which we have close diplomatic ties.

### **Traditional friends**

In all this development, the ULP administration has not abandoned its traditional friends, the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. A substantial number of Vincentians reside in these countries and from time to time, they require consular services which must be addressed.

These Vincentians provide remittances to their fellow citizens and families in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. While it is true that the United States does not play a greater role in terms of project financing, a strong diplomatic presence is maintained in that country.

A similar situation applies to the United Kingdom, although the UK's grant-in-aid programmes are applied through the European Union. The OECS maintains a mission in the European city of Brussels for the business of diplomatic relations with European countries such as France, Spain, Italy and Germany.

### **Conclusion**

The maintenance of a strong diplomatic presence requires a great deal of administration and planning. The ULP administration has had to upgrade the skills set of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to meet the needs of an ever changing diplomatic field. Everyday there are new demands, and new fields of interest.

For example, the existential threats posed by climate change activities, has to be addressed in a fulsome way, through the cooperation of a number of international countries, who have expressed an interest in this area. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to be in a position to participate in the discussion on this topic.

Additionally, the ULP administration is making new friends with countries who have a wide and diverse interest, and so the Ministry must address these issues from time to time.

The ULP administration will continue to build on its excellent foreign policy foundation, strengthening relations with traditional friends and close allies, without in any way, creating any unprincipled discordance.