

HUGE PROGRESS ON RELIEF, RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION

OVERVIEW

The laser focus of the Unity Labour Party (ULP) government at this time is to deliver, optimally in all the practical circumstances, on its three conjoined processes of relief, recovery, and reconstruction [the Three Rs] in tandem with its ongoing, and prospective, programmes of sustainable development, while at the same time providing high quality governance in its day-to-day endeavours, in the people's interest.

In all these respects, optimal outcomes are in evidence, through the amazing efforts of the government, in communion with the people as a whole and our friends overseas. Only the eyes of the politically-jaundiced, the unreasonable, or the disinterested are not seeing the remarkable progress being made on all the relevant fronts since the damage, destruction, and devastation wrought by Hurricane Beryl on July 1, 2024, a mere seven weeks ago.

Huge progress is continuing despite the enormous challenges arising from the extent of Beryl's damage, destruction, and devastation [the Three Ds], the limitations of material resources, and the stretching of the constrained capacities in the public and private sectors.

SHELTER, FOOD, AND CARE

Let us sketch some basic facts, on the ground, relating to the people's condition arising from Beryl's Three Ds:

(1) In private homes on St. Vincent there are 4,472 households or 17,615 persons who have been displaced from the following locations:

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| (a) From St. Vincent itself | : | 3,608 households or 14,739 persons; |
| (b) From Union Island | : | 533 households or 1,803 persons; |
| (c) From Canouan | : | 164 households or 538 persons; |
| (d) From Mayreau | : | 38 households or 145 persons; and |
| (e) From Bequia | : | 125 households or 495 persons. |

Additionally, 250 households or 668 persons on Union Island who have been displaced have found refuge in households on Union Island. Thus, in total, 4,722 households or 18,387 persons who have been displaced because of Beryl have found accommodation, overwhelmingly on St. Vincenty, in private home placement. The summary data here are from the Ministry of National Mobilisation, dated August 16, 2024. The overall tally varies marginally from day-to-day as displaced persons go and come, hither and thither. We have detailed data, too, on the elderly; persons with disabilities; children; pregnant, or lactating mothers, in private home placement and shelters.

2. In 29 shelters throughout SVG there are additionally 1,027 shelterees, 14 of which are schools — 12 on St. Vincent, one on Bequia, one on Canouan. In last week there were 20 schools as shelters. Since then, the following six were closed as shelters: Calliaqua Government School, Belmont Government School, Lowmans Leeward Primary School, Bethel High School, and Buccament Bay Secondary School.

Persons have been relocated to other emergency shelters — Community Centres, Learning Resource Centres, and the Barrouallie Emergency Shelter. Between August 14th, 2024 and August 21st, 2024 (when this article was written), 182 persons have been placed from emergency shelters into private/tourism accommodation, and 31 from private homes into tourism accommodation. Consolidation from the shelters at JP Eustace memorial secondary School (79) shelters) and Kingstown Government school (77 shelters) will be effected during this ensuing week.

All shelterees are being cared for in respect of food, health, psychosocial support, etc.

3. Since July 10, 2024, food boxes (Government food boxes and also from the World Food Programme) are being distributed to persons in private homes placement; so, too, hygiene care packages, and shelter kits. The distribution of food boxes is being ramped up: It currently covers 60.3 percent of the displaced households (some 2,697) in private placement on St. Vincent: on Union Island, 316 households are receiving. Additionally, food supplies have been distributed to Mayreau and Canouan to support existing hot meals services on both islands executed by Community Kitchens. Further, on Union Island, the 535 workers employed in the clean-up programme are each provided with two hot meals daily by the two respective contractors. Moreover, the World Central Kitchen (WCK) has been providing food daily to the affected in the Grenadines islands, especially Union Island. The WCK programme closes at the end of this month.

4. On Union Island, at Clifton, a suitable building (formerly a restaurant and bar) is being extensively repaired and equipped as a Community Kitchen to provide 1,000 free meals daily. This facility will be ready before the expiration of the WCK programme. This Community Kitchen is vital for the recovery process in Union Island. This venture is being carried out through BRAGSA, NEMO (including the local committee), REACT (a group of former British army personnel), and Gumbolimbo (a group directed by Ian Wace, a wealthy home-owner on Canouan).

HOUSING

Across SVG some 600 houses (levels 1 and 2 damage) are currently being repaired by the Ministry of Housing. The Housing and Land Development (HLDC) poised is to commence its rebuilding programme on the more seriously damaged houses (Level 3) and reconstruction of Level 4-damaged houses. Individual house-owners are also rebuilding, oft-times with government's assistance. This is a massive task, and will take considerable time to satisfy all the needs. The government has delivered, and will continue to deliver, building materials to all affected Grenadines islands and across St. Vincent at established depots. More building materials are being ordered locally and from overseas.

The SVG government is in active communication with the Canadian government and a Canadian Company with innovative building solutions to craft an appropriate programme for housing reconstruction.

BACK-TO-SCHOOL

Repair and reconstruction work is being done on all schools across SVG, except the 14 which are still being used as shelters, currently. Most schools will be ready for re-opening on September 2, 2024, but some will be delayed. The Ministry of Education is addressing urgently, all matters relating to staffing, furniture, and equipment.

In the special case of Union Island, primary and secondary education will be offered to students either on Union Island or on St. Vincent, in accord with parents' choice. The Union Island Secondary School is substantially repaired and is expected to be ready to receive students by September 2, 2024. The rebuilding of the roofs and associated facilities at the Stephanie Browne Primary School has started. It is unlikely to be ready for September 2, 2024. The Mary Hutchinson Primary School is being rebuilt currently, from scratch; it is expected to be ready by the end of December 2024. The building on St. Vincent to house primary and secondary students from Union Island is likely to be ready for September 2, 2024.

Meanwhile, considerable additional resources have been put by the government to assist affected students across SVG in their return to school. The Ministry of National Mobilisation is carrying out this task assiduously.

ELECTRICITY IN SOUTHERN GRENADINES

The progress on electricity in the Southern Grenadines is as follows:

1. Canouan: 100 percent of high voltage lines installed: 88 percent low voltage lines installed, by end of the day on August 23rd, 100 percent of the low voltage lines will be installed; 200 electrical inspections done, 150 certificates received by VINLEC, 100 homes connected.

A number of transformers was damaged but existing transformer capacity is sufficient to energise all lines by August 23rd. New transformers will be added as they are received from overseas, as the load grows.

2. Mayreau: 100 percent of high voltage lines installed; 60 percent of low voltage lines installed – all will be installed by August 25th. Currently, the clinic is powered. All the line work will be completed and energised by August 25th for delivering of electricity to all buildings fit to receive electricity.
3. Union Island: high voltage line completed along main Clifton Road to the sea port and up to the Hospital and Flow cell site. On August 20th, the low voltage lines and 20 streetlights from Power Station to the Sea Port were installed. On August 21st, the low voltage lines to the Hospital were completed. The high voltage and low voltage lines to the airport are scheduled to be completed by August 25th.

The new containerised generator was commissioned on August 20th. One large step-up transformer and 11,000 volts switchgear were powered on August 20th. The high voltage lines were powered on August 21st. Some buildings that are ready to receive power in the places mentioned in the Clifton areas could now receive power.

The overall plan is to make power available to the entire island by year end. Work is ongoing on the transmission and distribution lines. Among the challenges-at-hand include any adverse weather conditions, and the arrival of transformer capacity. VINLEC is working assiduously with a number of overseas vendors to address transformers capacity and the long lead times required to acquire the transformers.

Cuban engineers and linesmen will be helping Union Island.

RECOVERY IN SOUTHERN GRENADINES

Canouan is being used as a beach-head to assist with recovery in Union Island and Mayreau. Daily 140 workers go to and from Union out of Canouan to work on recovery. On Union Island, work is being done on the two primary schools and the secondary school: the Rapid Response Unit (to house 40 persons rather than the original 12); the Hospital; the Community Kitchen (vital for the recovery process); and Jones' apartment building.

Other structures about to start on Union Island are two (or three) guest houses and 22 houses (levels 1 and 2).

The REACT Group (a group of ex-British soldiers) and Gombolimbo are helping on Union Island and Canouan. Nine construction personnel from Romania are helping on Union Island and Canouan; also 10 Canadian construction workers are helping in Canouan; houses are being repaired/rebuilt on Canouan; five or so houses are being repaired currently on Mayreau; the primary school at Mayreau is being repaired; so too, the two schools in Canouan. More repairs to houses and businesses are imminent.

LOTS OF RESOURCES REQUIRED

As evident from the above details, the required resources are huge. The government does not as yet have all the resources but we are working hard and smart accordingly. We will rebuild together in solidarity in faith, fresh hope and love!

Article for week of August 23, 2024