

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

THE ISSUE

Late last year, a commentary in The Monocle, a journal from South Africa, pronounced that, under the leadership of Comrade Ralph, St. Vincent and the Grenadines was a “small but mighty nation”. The commentary related to Comrade Ralph’s initiative in bringing the Presidents of Guyana and Venezuela, the leadership of CARICOM and CELAC together to fashion a pact for peace between Venezuela and Guyana in the “Declaration of Argyle”.

The author of the commentary, Gregory Scruggs, reaffirmed what objective observers across the world had been asserting for quite some time now: That SVG under the Unity Labour Party (ULP) government had been “punching above its weight” globally.

ROLE OF FOREIGN POLICY

In its 2001 Election Manifesto, the ULP emphasized that, for a small nation like SVG, foreign policy was of even greater significance than for a “self-sufficient” large country. The ULP Manifesto averred then, and subsequently, that the central purpose of our foreign policy is to engage most efficaciously with the challenging external environment in such a manner so as to enhance our country’s capacity to advance our people’s humanisation, peace, justice, security, and prosperity for all, globally. Imperialists and hegemon find our foreign policy problematic, but the bulk of the world does not.

The ULP has always emphasised that our foreign policy must be linked integrally with our nation’s domestic policy; both bundles of policies constitute a harmonious whole. We thus set out to elaborate a foreign policy grounded on the fundamental precepts of the Charter of the United Nations within the frame of “foreign policy coordination” in CARICOM, consonant with our people’s interest. Our foreign policy has been at once principled, independent, fearless, non-aligned to any big power or hegemon, wise, and mature. We raised our banner: “Friends of all; we strive for a better world”. Never is our foreign policy transactional or opportunistic.

Meanwhile, the ULP government restructured the administrative and institutional arrangements in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to execute effectively our foreign policy, led by the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs.

STERLING RECORD

Let us summarise some highlights of the sterling record of the ULP government in the area of foreign policy:

- (i) Very early in our administration, we signalled that despite our small size and limited resources/facilities, we could host significant global gatherings. So, in 2003, SVG successfully hosted the Meeting of Ministers of Legal Affairs and Attorneys-General of the 54-member Commonwealth.
- (ii) SVG repeatedly hosted successfully Heads of Government Conferences of both the OECS and CARICOM, and other high -level regional gatherings.
- (iii) As Chair of CARICOM in 2007, Prime Minister Ralph E. Gonsalves led CARICOM in its bilateral engagement with President George E. Bush of the USA, in Washington.
- (iv) In 2009, when Camillo was SVG's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, he was selected by the Global South at the UN General Assembly to be the Rapporteur to negotiate the final "Outcome Document" with the representative of the Global North (the Dutch representative) of the Special High-Level Session of the UN on the 2008-2009 Global Economic Depression.
- (v) Our UN Permanent Representative, Rhonda King, chalked up the distinction of becoming the Chair of the UN Fifth Committee on the UN Budget and Administration.
- (vi) In 2018-2019, SVG became the second CARICOM country, and the smallest country ever, to hold the Presidency of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), one of the major organs of the UN. ECOSOC has the oversight of all the economic and social programmes of the UN.
- (vii) In June 2019, SVG was elected as the smallest country ever to serve as a Non-Permanent Member of the UN Security Council. SVG defeated El Salvador by a vote of 185 to 6, with two abstentions at the UN General Assembly. El Salvador was strongly supported by the US government — the Trump Administration.
- (viii) In January 202, SVG was elected as the Pro Tempore President of CELAC. It was the smallest country ever to do so, and the first CARICOM country ever. SVG led CELAC at its Summit with the European Union and with engagements with our regional blocs

- including the African Union. SVG has led CELAC magnificently in the process of mature regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- (ix) In 2013-2014, SVG led the initiative at CARICOM to establish a CARICOM Reparations Commission and to push for reparations for Native Genocide and the Enslavement of African bodies.
 - (x) In 2014, SVG initiated the CARICOM Commission on Marijuana which has led to the de-penalisation of possession of small quantities of marijuana and for medical cannabis.
 - (xi) SVG expanded diplomatic relations to dozens of other countries. It also established permanent missions in Cuba, Venezuela, and Taiwan. It has appointed persons to the office of Honorary Consul to numerous countries.
 - (xii) The ULP government established the office of Consul General in New York to look after the consular interests of Vincentians in the USA.
 - (xiii) The ULP government has signed numerous relevant agreements it dozens of countries to advance our interests.
 - (xiv) SVG became a member of ALBA.
 - (xv) SVG joined the Non-Aligned Movement.
 - (xvi) SVG has been participating actively in the Non-Aligned Movement.
 - (xvii) SVG has strengthened immeasurably its relations with divers countries/organisations: the African Union, the European Union, UNESCO, FAO, CELAC, Association of Caribbean States, Taiwan, Japan, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, Honduras, Colombia, Argentina, the Vatican, Austria, France, Portugal, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Unite Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, USA, UK, Canada, India, Singapore, Qatar, Morocco, Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, South Africa, among others.
 - (xviii) SVG has built out a splendid core of diplomats, including at the United Nations, with structures to math.
 - (xix) Hosting of CELAC Summit on March 1, 2024 — most important hosting ever.
 - (xx) Ample delivery of benefits to SVG from our foreign policy initiatives.

DELIVERY OF BENEFITS

In practical terms, the foreign policy initiatives of the ULP government have delivered considerable benefits to our country. Among the most evident are: Mobilisation of hundreds of millions of dollars in soft-loans, grants, and in-kind assistance for SVG's sustainable development; the "compact of the willing" to build the Argyle International Airport and the Modern Port in Kingstown; mobilization of many hundreds of scholarships for university education; the construction of the Bridge over the Rabacca Dry River, Educational and health facilities, roads, bridges, houses, and the like; and the securing of the employment of Vincentians overseas.

Further, SVG has been able to ensure that Vincentians and other OECS nationals secure employment in regional, hemispheric, and international organisations.

Moreover, the prestige of SVG's foreign policy and diplomatic successes have enhanced our nation's prestige with knock-on benefits to nationals. Undoubtedly, it has boosted local, regional, and foreign direct investment.

RECOGNITION OF SVG

Many nations have explicitly recognised or extolled our country's foreign policy. Sometimes the recognition comes for SVG through the bestowing of honours and awards on our Prime Minister. For example, the following countries have bestowed upon Comrade Ralph their highest honours possible to a non-national: Mexico, Taiwan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Argentina, and Guyana. Many universities have also awarded honorary doctorates to the Prime Minister. Prestigious regional and global organisations have similarly awarded him high formal recognition. These honors and awards very much belong to SVG.

SUMMATION

Since the ULP's terms in office commenced on March 29, 2001, SVG has been experiencing a veritable golden age of foreign policy activism and successful diplomacy. SVG, our region, and the world are much better for it. Truly, "small but mighty".