

December 17th 2021

VACCINATION WILL HELP PUT PEOPLE BACK TO WORK

Introduction

Despite this year 2021 being one of the most challenging for Vincentians in our 42 years as an independent nation, our government is committed to ensuring that families across the country have an enjoyable Christmas. Our country, unlike others, had to deal with the economic fallout of a dengue outbreak, a global pandemic and a volcanic eruption all at once, the impacts of which we are still feeling. The ULP administration lead by Comrade Ralph has been working to ensure that things are put in place to reduce the impacts of this economic fallout by ensuring that public sector workers are shielded while at the same time providing support to the worst affected. Thousands of Vincentian workers in different sectors were directly or indirectly affected by job losses or reduction in income due to the slowdown in economic activity as companies either laid-off workers or reduced hours worked. Many of those sent home are still waiting to be rehired by their employers, or paid their severance in the unfortunate event that they aren't rehired. The fallout impacted fisherfolk who saw their markets dry up due to empty hotels, guesthouses and slow business activities at restaurants, worsened by the Covid-19 protocols that banned in-house dining. Farmers likewise had similar challenges with their markets, but had the additional challenge of complete destruction of farm produce and livestock in the Red and Orange Zones as a result of the volcanic eruption. Notwithstanding the difficult situation facing this country resulting from the pandemic,

dengue outbreak and the volcanic eruption, our government continues to support working in a variety of ways through these very difficult times.

Providing Income Support at Christmas

The commitment of this working-people government to improving the living standards of the working class, is as evident in this year of disasters (health and volcanic) as it has been throughout its tenure. As recently as the second half of 2020, the government gave title to lands to hundreds of citizens in North Windward with the intention to provide similar opportunities for landownership to more citizens. This year the need for direct assistance in cash because of the economic situation, meant that the focus was on easing the financial burden on families. Millions of dollars have been spent over the last eighteen months, and this December the government intends through a variety of income support measures to continue bringing relief to families.

During this month of December, more than 13,000 Vincentians would benefit from one or more of the programs of the government intended to generate more economic activity for the season. Following from the volcanic eruption, more than 3247 households would continue to receive food packages from the World Food Program or from the Ministry of Social Development. More than 221 small business owners from the Red and Orange Zones would receive a one-time payment of \$1200 to cover income support for the months of October, November and December. Additionally, 490 school vendors would receive \$600 to cover November and December and 91 vendors who ply their trade at tourism sites would be given \$900 in income support to cover the last three months of this year. This program of assistance and income support would reach approximately 4220 families at a total cost of \$3.376 million dollars.

Farmers living in the Red and Orange Zones from Belle Isle to Richmond and Mt Grenan to Fancy who suffered significant damage to crop and/or livestock would receive income support of \$1000. In total, 3689 farmers would receive a total of \$3.689 million dollars as part of the government's program for this month of December beginning around the 16th of this month (December). The payment intended to cover the government's commitment to farmers for the months of November and December would follow payments given for previous months of September and October. Fisherfolk would also benefit from income support and the fishing industry will also receive additional support for boats and other equipment as the government attempts to improve the fleet of boats currently in use.

The yearly country-wide road cleaning program that is done around this time is almost complete and provided employment for over 5000 individuals. The initial budgeted amount of \$2.5 million was eventually increased to \$3 million to facilitate the hiring of more individuals thus extending the reach of this year's program. This is by no means an insignificant sum of money and the impact on rural economies throughout this Christmas season will no doubt be felt.

Conclusion

The provision of much needed income support to individuals and families who were impacted by the disasters this year remains a commitment of this government since Comrade Ralph delivered his national address in March 2020. As we prepare for Christmas 2021, the injection of more than \$10 million dollars into the economy, with approximately \$7 million of that money allocated for income support is truly an amazing story. While other countries in the region offered support in 2020 because of the Covid fallout, no other country in this

region has had to sustain its income support for as long as this country because our circumstances demanded it. This ULP, a government of the working people, that is in tune with the needs of the people was able to respond and continues to respond in such a compassionate, yet fiscally responsible manner in addressing the varying circumstances of our people. In all, more than 13,000 Vincentians will be directly affected by income support or temporary employment during this month of December, but this policy reaches further as villages and communities experience the increase in activity as residents spend the money at local shops and other businesses in their communities. The injection of an additional \$10 million into the economy along with the payment of salaries for central government workers on December 16, 2021 will definitely see Vincentians experiencing a bright Christmas.