

December 30th 2022

A TIME OF RESPAIR TO REFLECT AND REJOICE

Introduction

The Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes admonishes those of Christian faith, that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun. As this year 2022 comes to its end, we can proclaim that no truer words have ever been spoken, when we consider the year, our country has had, or even more significant the many occurrences over the last 2 years. During this year 2022, our country experienced what can only be described as a “cooling off” period following a two-year period of convulsions that ranged from local disasters to global turmoil. This prompted our beloved Comrade Ralph to pen his latest publication “A Time of Repair: Beyond COVID, Volcanic Eruptions, Hurricane Elsa, and Global Turmoil, which now represents an oft repeated theme. It is traditional in SVG that our citizens fellowship on December 31 every year in thanksgiving to God for his mercies through the year and this year will be no different. Following on the admonition of the Old Testament prophet, we call on all Vincen-tians during this season or repair, to take some time to reflect on how far we have come post Covid-19, Hurricane Elsa and La Soufriere eruptions, and offer thanks to God for His blessings and saving grace.

A Time of Repair

It is unlikely that one would find this word in the dictionary, since it has been discontinued, however Comrade Ralph chose to revive it because of everything that the word represents. This beautiful 15th century word which literally means “fresh hope”, describes a recovery, and return to hope after a period of despair, or convulsion to use the preferred term of our Comrade Prime Minister. It is undeniable that this year was a year of recovery in many ways for the sectors that suffered significant damage and destruction over the last 2 years. The Covid-19 pandemic caused enormous strain on economic activity, halting tourist arrivals which negatively impacted hoteliers and their workers, taxi operators, and other stakeholders in that industry. Businesses in agriculture and fisheries as

well as other types of business suffered from not having the hotels and restaurants to sell to, brought on by the general slowdown in economic activity caused by the pandemic. The volcanic eruptions of 2021, wreaked further damage to agriculture, destroying crops and livestock, further deepening the challenges faced by our farmers across the country. The weight of the ash on the roofs of homes in the Red Zone destroyed many homes, and the heavy flows of lahars, damaged or destroyed homes as well as physical infrastructure. During this period where our country experienced many challenges, our government lead by the experienced Comrade was there to provide leadership that reassured us that we would get past this period.

During this year, the policy of the government in providing income support to farmers, fisherfolk as well as more than 4000 families for a period of 6 months through the VEEP initiative, helped many Vincentians who suffer job loss. The repairing of more than 700 homes and relocating 27 families to a new community in Orange Hill is another example of the amazing recovery effort that continues following the period of severe upheaval for many. Over this Christmas season, the new Orange Hill community displayed Christmas lights as they embraced fresh hope during this time of respair, the hope that enables them to look to the future with belief of a better tomorrow. This should represent the attitude of all of us, having come this far from where our country was less than a year ago, through determination, hard work and our faith that always see us through, signaling our return to hope, after a period of despair.

Reflection and Rejoice

To truly appreciate the enormity of the strides our country has made in our recovery effort, requires sober reflection of where we are compared to what could have been the other possibilities. Reflect for a moment on the fact that during the volcanic eruptions, approximately 20% of our country's population was displaced requiring relocation to shelters and private homes from their communities in the Red Zone. Remarkably the evacuation was conducted safely, even with minor "hiccups", with no injuries or death and without the mass confusion that characterized a similar situation during Hurricane Sandy in the USA. Too often, we can be guilty of taking many things for granted, and this may well be one such situation, because it was made to look easy. We reflect on the fact that quick and decisive actions by our government during the eruptions as well as

during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic were key to protecting lives and livelihoods, even as we remember those who lost their lives to this very deadly virus. Our government acted in our best interest in securing assistance for the most vulnerable, provided income support to those affected, and acted to protect those on the frontlines. In all our challenges, we reflect on the fact that our faith, in concert with our works helped us through those difficult times to get to this period of recovery and repair.

There is a line in a very popular song that goes “when I think of Jesus and what he has done for me...I can dance”, a contemporary interpretation of the Psalmist David’s call to make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye land. Together we stand on the cusp of a new year, where much potential and great promise await. We reflect on the year past with its challenges but also its many gains, where we as a people have come out better and stronger than ever before and move forward to build on the many successes of 2022. We can reflect on our accomplishments as a nation and rejoice as a people, rejoice with each other in thankfulness, and gratitude. As we say goodbye to 2022 and prepare to embrace 2023, let’s all reflect and rejoice during this time of repair.