

January 8th 2021

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Introduction

The traditional greeting offered usually at this time of the year, promotes happiness for all with further wishes of prosperity being offered to family and friends. The beginning of a new year always brings with it renewed hope and unbridled optimism for what lies ahead and Vincentians in welcoming each new year extend liberal doses of this hope and optimism to those we interact with. Following on from a challenging 2020, there seemed to be a deliberate effort by our people, to ensure that 2021 started the right way as if to signal to nature a determination to right the “natural wrongs” of a difficult year just ended. With all the challenges faced in 2020, and with the uncertainty that lies ahead for 2021, our people can still look forward to 2021 being a bright and prosperous year, taking comfort in the knowledge that a wise and experienced government lead by Dr Ralph Gonsalves continues to steer this ship in the right direction.

Old and New Challenges

The new year began with the sudden announcement that there was an immediate ban on amplified music in public and private places to which the public has access. This was in direct response to the positive test result of 4 Vincentian nationals with no travel history, creating a small cluster of Covid-19 cases that were under investigation through the commencement of contact tracing. This announcement and the advisory on social gatherings cast a shadow over what had

so far been a very festive Christmas season with activities such as the Nine Morning concerts and the Nine Nights at the Botanic Gardens carried out as planned. The disclosure of the new positive tests by the Health Services Subcommittee was followed by a mask advisory that from all appearances is being taken seriously by citizens, and the delay in the reopening of schools across the country.

As if that wasn't bad enough, the announcement was made that there was seismic activity at the La Soufriere volcano resulting in the oozing of lava in the crater, creating a second dome. A press briefing hosted by Prime Minister Gonsalves, that included a team from the Seismic Research Centre of the University of the West Indies by zoom, provided information on what was occurring at the volcano and sought to provide assurance that the activities were being closely monitored for any changes. The team of experts from the UWISRC, has since moved to this country and has set up equipment, continuing more in-depth monitoring of the volcano, providing regular updates to the government that is then given to citizens. This metaphoric "double-edged sword" of two very real and active challenges defined how SVG began the new year and the circumstances that shaped the emotional and psychological conditions of our people.

A Steady Hand During Challenging times

The importance of leadership was borne out during the General Elections of November 2020, as Vincentians were asked to choose between the tried and tested experience of Comrade Ralph or change to the inexperience of Godwin Friday. With General Elections being conducted in the heart of a pandemic, many Vincentians agreed that the wise leadership of the Comrade made all the difference in the way SVG was managing the Covid-19 pandemic compared to our neighbours. At no point during the pandemic, was the leadership of this country driven by panic or hysteria. Instead the voice of Comrade

Ralph rung clear “we must approach this situation with a patience and a calm, following the science and applying our hearts to wisdom”. Those qualities saw the management of the pandemic being done ensuring the continuation of life, living and production, with the Vincentian economy continuing with a vibrance not seen anywhere else in this region, all without any elevation in active cases, hospitalisation or deaths.

With news of the effusive eruption of La Soufriere, the response of PM Gonsalves and his government was the same: seek the advice of the experts, follow the science, approach the situation with a patience and a calm. The government has put in place all the necessary elements to prepare for any eventuality; the alert level was elevated to orange and individuals in the red zone were asked to prepare for the possibility of an evacuation order. NEMO has commenced a series of community meetings to discuss with residents in the red zone the community emergency plans and other communities on the process of receiving evacuees. The government, through the agency responsible for disaster management, is efficiently going about the business of preparation without creating undue panic, allowing Vincentians to go about their lives with as little disruptions as possible.

This kind of steady leadership reiterates and reinforces the correctness of the choice of the Vincentian voter in re-electing the ULP to govern the affairs of the country for the next 5 years. Imagine the chaos that would have engulfed this country had there been a change of leadership in these trying and challenging times. The ULP government has managed this country during the financial crisis, built back the country stronger after the 2013 floods, managed the Covid-19 pandemic well and would provide the same steady leadership as we deal with the effusive eruption of La Soufriere.

Conclusion

The words of former Attorney General, Parnel Campbell QC, can easily sum up the thoughts of many Vincentians as this country deals with the eruption of La Soufriere, during the Covid-19 pandemic *“the Lord knows what he was doing when he put back Dr. Gonsalves as head of the government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines... I can sleep in the knowledge that the country is in sound hands, experienced hands, because I have confidence in the judgement of Dr Gonsalves in dealing with something like the Soufriere.”*

Most Vincentians are confident that despite the challenges that this country is facing as we begin the new year, the experience possessed by the leadership of this country would manage its affairs to ensure that 2021 is indeed a prosperous year for us. The ULP can therefore confidently wish all Vincentians a happy new year and a bright and prosperous 2021. Let’s continue to lift SVG higher.