

**Jan 14<sup>th</sup> 2022**

## **CONFRONTING THE NEW YEAR WITH HOPE AND OPTIMISM**

### **Introduction**

Many of us were blessed to be able to usher in the new year, and no doubt did so thanking God for his mercies, albeit undeserved having spared our lives to see yet another year. As we looked forward, we simultaneously reflected on the year just passed and the many challenges thrown at us, and questioned how we were able to navigate beyond the impacts of those challenges to welcome a new year. The temptation to be ready to forget and move past the challenges of 2021 may be great, but we may be better served if we look at the way our country responded to those challenges and extract valuable lessons. These lessons would be filled with examples of determination, good neighbourliness, expressions of love for one another, innovation, creativity and a host of other positives that were exhibited by our people as we faced the challenges of 2021 head on. Surely, we can never be the same after the life altering experiences of a once in a lifetime pandemic and a volcanic eruption that spans a similar time period. As we enter 2022, one familiar challenge lingers and that is the ever evolving Covid-19 pandemic with it constantly mutating strains and a developing science that even with its limitations, remains the best information available. We became familiar with the phrase “the new norm” and it will no doubt define and determine our actions going forward, since most of what we knew as normal have been amended to fit the changing nature of our actions and interactions as demanded by the pandemic. As we bid farewell to 2021 and welcome 2022, we can do so with a certain level of confidence, based on the lessons we have learned and the excellent work of the government in addressing the challenges that we faced.

### **2022 - A Year of Excellent Possibilities**

The new year began with excellent news that some 61 students who excelled at the various Divisions of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Community College were rewarded with scholarships, exhibitions and bursaries based on their performances. It is worth noting that these 61 scholarships for the top performing students at the 2021 examinations, are additional to the over 600 tuition assistance awarded last September – 55 scholarships from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and 15 scholarships by the Republic of China (Taiwan). Through the expansion of the education revolution, more than 730 Vincentian students have been assisted by our government to further their education. This is excellent news with which we were able to welcome the new year, and based on information put forward by Comrade Ralph, many other initiatives through “shovel ready” project would provide even more opportunities in other sectors for Vincentians at all levels of training.

There are many “shovel ready” project that would begin by the start of the second quarter and many existing projects that would continue. The number of construction projects that will begin or continue in 2022, would require significant numbers of skilled or semi-skilled individuals, possibly more than what this country has available. The Tourism Sector would be in for a significant boost with new hotels being opened and the continued work on The Royal Mill and Mya Suites, and work being done on Beaches by Sandals, The Marriott and the Holiday Inn Express. Focused work in the Fisheries Sector will see the opening of Rainforest Seafoods and the initiatives by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, etc. to boost production in this sector through the offering of incentives and subsidies for local fisherfolk. Over the next few weeks, this column would focus on a number of the projects outlined in the 2022 Budget presentation by Minister of Finance Hon Camillo Gonsalves, that are a part of the government’s overall thrust to spur sustainable economic growth that would provide jobs and reduce incidences of poverty.

It would be difficult to for any Vincentian to contain his/her excitement, when faced with the prospects for national development through economic growth that is expected to occur this year 2022. Our ULP government, lead by Comrade Ralph and supported by his competent team of ministers remain steadfast in its resolve to deliver on their promises to Vincentians to lift this country higher. The government delivered creative and innovative programs to keep this country working during the very challenging times presented in 2021 and it follows that if this government could deliver in such difficult times, surely, it would he able to deliver even more efficiently in 2022. The clearly articulated program of action outlined in budget 2022 gives a clear indication of the priorities of the government, and how it intends to achieve those set goals in a year immediately following one of this country’s most challenging periods in our history.

### **Conclusion**

The joy and expectation with which we entered 2022, will not be betrayed as this country is already on a path to full recovery from the challenges of 2021, even as we learn to live well with the ongoing challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic. We continue to encourage all Vincentians who have not yet done so to get vaccinated and those who have taken both doses, to get the booster within the timeframe recommended. Even as the government does its part in implementing the right plans and policies intended to get this country through this post recovery period, we remain mindful that each citizen and resident had a role to play. The science is clear that vaccination is the best tool in the toolbox used to fight Covid-19, and will aid us significantly in our efforts to defeat this deadly virus and be on the path to full activity as a nation. As we go forward into this new year, ready to face the challenges that may come, know that the ULP government remains committed to serve the people of this country and will continue to deliver on the policies and programs that would lift SVG higher. May all experience a productive and prosperous 2022!