

Jan 20<sup>th</sup> 2023

## PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES IN THIS PERIOD OF RESPAIR

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### Introduction

The 2023 budget that details the income and expenditure for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was passed in the House of Assembly and is now ready to be implemented over the next fiscal year. This budget contains several initiatives, some of which are completely new and would begin this year, while others are a continuation of projects and programs that began in 2022 or a previous year. Some of the projects that began between 2020 and 2022, and experienced significant delays due to the many disruptions beyond our control, are expected to gain momentum this year. Many construction projects, both private sector and government driven, that suffered from supply-chain disruptions began to see improvements in their pace of execution and this is expected to improve further in 2023. Other projects are expected to be implemented over the course of this year that will provide opportunities for our young people, farmers, fisherfolk, our skilled workers and labourers. It is therefore very important that our citizens prepare themselves to take advantage of these opportunities, by accessing the information that's available. One of the hallmarks of this ULP administration is the availability of information, as our government continues to function in an open and transparent manner. Lead by Comrade Ralph who has convened more than 500 press conferences over his tenure as Prime Minister, and whose government has made the meetings of the Parliament public, there is never a shortage on information coming out from central government. Over the last 2 years, during one of the most tumultuous periods in our country's history, it was the constant flow of information that kept us hopeful, gave us the encouragement that we needed to get us through that period - the information on what our government was doing to get this country on a path to recovery. As we focus on recovery, on rebuilding our country, its economy, and our lives, it is this flow of information that will help to prepare us for the opportunities that lie ahead.

### New Initiatives Complement Existing Programs

During this fiscal year, 2023, several new projects will get started as part of our government's plans to further develop our country, putting it on a path to sustainable development. Some of these projects have been in development stages, with financing being negotiated or with plans and/or designs being developed, but are now at the stage of implementation where work will begin imminently. In the public sector, part of the more than EC\$450 million capital expenditure

include the construction of the modern acute referral hospital in Arnos Vale, the start of construction of the new parliament building and the halls of justice, and the massive road repair program to the tune of EC\$40 million. All of these projects will create hundreds of jobs in the construction sector and will complement the ongoing construction of the modern container port in Kingstown and the Holiday Inn Express at Diamond.

The well-established YES and SET programs are to get a boost with an increase in the stipend amount for those currently on placement and for subsequent interns. Young persons are continuously encouraged to pay attention for information on when the registration process for these programs begin so they can submit their applications to be part of the new intake of interns. The recent announcement by Comrade Camillo that a new program “On Site” will be launched this month to focus on on-the-job skills training will complement the YES and SET programs, by offering similar opportunities to young people but through skills development. This program would promote the on-site training in areas that include carpentry, auto mechanic, air-condition servicing and repair, welding, and electrical installation. This is necessary to prepare our workforce for the demands that it will face in the coming years to support the construction phase as well as the operations of the hotels, port, hospital, and other projects currently being implemented or would begin soon.

The continued investment in education to deepen and expand the revolution started 21 years ago will continue presenting opportunities to thousands of Vincentian students through the provision of scholarship, bursaries, exhibitions, and tuition assistance compliments this ULP administration. The significant increase in these opportunities, from 3 scholarships in 2021, to 73 in 2022 and from 50 tuition assistance grants in 2012 to 943 in 2022 underscores the commitment of the government to providing multiple avenues for our nation’s youth. Like every possible opportunity that is available to our citizens, it remains the individual responsibility, to pay attention to the information, and respond appropriately to put him/herself in the best possible position to benefit.

### Concluding Thoughts

It is important that in concluding this week’s article that we confront the issue of fake news and false information that are rampant in our society that invariably prevent many from being truly informed. Many in the mainstream media, as well as on social media take pleasure in distorting information and even preventing the free flow of information to their audiences, in a desperate effort to suppress information that can help our people. The idea of those seem to be that access to such positive information will negatively affect their political viability and they are therefore willing to sacrifice progress on the altar of political expediency. The opposition and those who willingly or unwillingly peddle their falsehoods refuse to promote and encourage our citizens to grab opportunities, preferring instead to attach false labels and negative messaging to all opportunities. The result is

that many become reluctant to pursue the many opportunities offered, following the poor advice of those they look to for guidance and are left only to complain and regret their decisions. The best advice that can be offered to all who are looking to take advantage of the many opportunities that will be available over the next year is to listen to your government for all information especially regarding possible opportunities, ignore the fake news and falsehoods that will prevent you from pursuing them and make the best of those opportunities once you have secured one.