

July 1st 2022

HAVE A SAFE, VIOLENCE-FREE AND ENJOYABLE CARNIVAL 2022

Introduction

After a two-year absence of Vincy Mas, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the eruptions of the La Soufriere Volcano, we are once again preparing to host our premiere festival this year. The Ministry of Culture and the CDC announced earlier this year that they were making plans to host Vincy Mas 2022 with the first event held on April 30. This was much welcomed news to the components of the festival: pan, calypso and mas, and pretty much every Vincentian who understands the impact of this yearly national festival on our local economy. The absence of carnival over the last two years had dealt a significant blow to SVG's economy that trickled down to the vendors who depend yearly on this festival to ply their trade during this very active period. It must be remembered that in 2020 at the first cancellation of carnival, the ULP administration under the leadership of Comrade Ralph offered income support to entertainers, DJs and vendors who had their income impacted as a result. Over the last two years, the government also lost much revenue from the cancellation of carnival due to the significant fall-off in visitor arrivals during the period and also from the significant reduction in economic activity that is associated with carnival. Already, this carnival season is looking "bright" and our country seems poised to host a very successful carnival 2022. Already a number of private promoters have hosted sold out events, and events by the CDC so far have seen fair attendance. The flights coming to SVG from North America and Europe are full to capacity as both Vincentians and visitors arrive to participate

in Vincy Mas 2022. Our Argyle International Airport is a buzz of activity, and while we acknowledge further challenges to regional travel since the reduction in flight activity by LIAT, we can boast direct flight access from international source markets, which is a welcome development. Everything around us currently points to a successful carnival, but we have a role to play in ensuring that it's safe, violence free and enjoyable.

Making it Safe, Violence Free and Enjoyable

Very often, when we hear the term “safe” in relation to carnival, it's usually conflated with the concept of the absence of violence, but in this case for the purpose of this article, both concepts will be discussed as individual but connected concepts. To ensure a safe carnival, for all who will participate actively, considerations must be given to addressing actions beyond violence and crime but must also include practices that improve health and wellness. Hence this article will promote wholistic safety for all during this carnival season.

Statistics appear to show that the world has gotten past the most deadly point of the Covid-19 pandemic, and with the development of a number of vaccines the level of critically-ill patients being admitted to Covid-19 wards also seem to be trending down. Even with these positive developments, we cannot become complacent and ignore the presence of this virus that is still very active and infectious. It is with this in mind that we urge Vincentians who have intend to participate fully in carnival to make the best use of all the tools available to fight the Corona Virus and these include vaccination which is the most effective tool in the tool box. As long as Covid-19 is with us, and all indications are that it will be for a very long time, we must adapt and learn to live well with Covid with vaccination offering us the best options for normal healthy living, even if Covid persists. All evidence in SVG indicates that the vaccines work, they are safe and effective and they offer a level of protection against the virus that reduces one's

chances of critical illness and even Covid-related deaths even as one may still contract Covid. As we participate in carnival activities including major events such as shows and going on the road where physical distancing and mask wearing may not be practical, the encouragement is to utilise the additional layer of protection by getting vaccinated, it's not too late.

Over the next few days, thousands of Vincentians and visitors alike will descend on Kingstown and other locations to attend many events, and this raises the possibility of falling victim to individuals intent on committing crime. Even as the ULP administration has done much to improve the police ability to effectively perform their duties and keep us safe, those with a propensity for criminal activities will always seek to look for opportunities to thrive. We must however limit the space within which they operate. To narrow the space within which the criminals work during this time, we all need to be very vigilant as we walk through crowded places, leave our homes at night or venture out in search of social events. We are encouraged to exercise every precaution including making sure that your homes are securely locked when you leave home, always travelling in groups and avoiding dimly lit areas and securing all personal belongings when going out. These will minimise your chances of you falling victim to crime, even violent crimes during this festive season. Avoiding confrontations and instead de-escalating situations will also help to prevent violent encounters as individuals enjoy the festivities in a clean, violence free environment.

It cannot be stressed how important it is for us to conduct this year's festival in a safe environment that is both healthy and violence free. We cannot afford to suffer from major spikes in Covid-19 after the carnival season that would see many visitors either stuck here on quarantine or testing positive on their return home. This can result

in red flags being raised for visitors to our country. Similarly, a carnival marred by violence and crime will do much to deter both residents and visitors from attending future festivals and this would be devastating economically. The appeal to all therefore is that we do our part to guarantee the sustainability of our premier festival, and ensure that this year it's conducted in a safe and violence free atmosphere.