

July 26th 2019

Renewal at forty begins in Epic style

Introduction

Saturday July 20th 2019 was an epic day in the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, as the citizens of the country launched a series of activities to mark the 40th anniversary of our attainment of independence in 1979. At the picturesque Community College, the organizers of the event contrived to assemble a potpourri of Vincentian artistes to mark the start of the celebration in song and dance.

Renewal at forty is recognition of the reacquisition of our independence from the British, and it allows us as a nation to celebrate the wonderful achievements that we have attained in the 40 years of independence. It is an appropriate time for our country to reflect on the journey thus far, and to design the new pathway that will take us over the next two or three decades.

As a country, we have to recognize that the world has changed since the independence date of 1979, and so it is important to reflect on the path that we have traveled, and further, to reflect on the journey that is now before us. As a people we have made tremendous gains, and have acquired a reputation that shows we are resolute, resourceful, creative and courageous.

The Launch

The launch event was something that we see often on television, but do not envisage that we are capable of. Coordinator Elvis Charles and his committee really worked hard to transform the already beautiful Community College grounds, into an exceptional arena.

And then came the performances. To single out a few, there was Kiokya Cruickshank-Jack who showed why she is one of the best gospel singers in the country. Kenneth "Vibrating Scares" Alleyne showed why his song "Our Nation is Born" is still regarded as one of the leading national songs. And then there was Darron Andrews, Rodney Small and Hance John, the Christopher siblings and the Union Island Cultural Conquerors, who left members of the audience hanging on to the edge of their seats.

Truly, it was a night to remember, and when Shaunelle McKenzie and the Melisizwe Brothers brought the curtains down, no one had any regrets, and all felt that it was an evening well spent. And then there were the three main addresses, delivered by the Coordinator of the Renewal at 40 Committee, Elvis Charles, the Minister of Finance Camillo Gonsalves and Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves. It was during his address, that Prime Minister Gonsalves officially announced that

the country was getting a new Governor General, and a woman, in the person of Susan Dougan, a former Cabinet Secretary, and former Principal of the Girls High School. As of August 1st 2019, she will replace Sir Frederick Ballantyne, who has had a distinguish tenure as Governor General.

What a wonderful way to begin the activities to start the Renewable at 40 process. Susan Dougan is a wonderful human being, an outstanding Vincentian who has done great work in the field of education and public administration. We are confident that Susan Dougan will be an exemplary Governor General, and will uphold the high traditions of this office, as representative to Her Majesty the Queen, in our blessed and beloved land.

Other Initiatives

As part of the Renewal at 40 exercise, the government is proposing to spend some six million EC dollars in renovating primary and secondary schools in the State. Much of the work in this regard will be done during the month of August, but BRAGSA has already started some minor work on some schools.

The government has also allocated some two million dollars for a cleanup of the capital city Kingstown. This work is overdue, and there has been a great deal of discussion on how this should be done. Nevertheless plans are now being finalized for the clean up and restoration of the capital city. A similar exercise will be applied to Fort Charlotte, to include the bridge leading to this tourism site. A total of eight hundred thousand dollars will be spent on this facility.

Other restorative works will include the further development of the Joseph Chatoyer Memorial Park, the rehabilitation of the Peace Memorial Hall, and a Garifuna and Diaspora homecoming event. The Renewal at 40 Committee will also embark on some cultural events, including a return to the best village competition of the 1980s, among other things.

One critical exercise which will be undertaken, will be the commissioning of a book on the history of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The country's historians will get a chance to indulge themselves, in the production of a book, on our history. The Renewal Committee will be providing guidelines for this exercise.

Conclusion

Renewal at 40 is indeed an appropriate time for us to reflect on the last four decades of our independence, to evaluate from when we came, and to determine

where we want to go in the future. Even as we celebrate our accomplishments, and they have been many, we must refresh and prepare ourselves for the next stage of our journey, as an independent state.

We know that our ascension to a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council will have a great impact on our journey. Some 185 countries, and counting, have indicated their support for this small country, that we are capable of delivering on the world stage, despite our size.

As our National Anthem states, "*what e're the future brings, our faith will see us through*". Happy 40th anniversary of independence, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.