

July 30th 2021

VISIT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY: A TESTIMONY TO OUR GLOBAL REPUTATION

Introduction

The United Nations General Assembly, with its 193 members, is the largest organ in the international organisation that is the United Nations. This organ that consists of the entire membership of the organisation, is the main deliberative, policymaking and representative organ of the UN. Every year, leaders from across the globe, gather in New York City, USA, at the headquarters of the United Nations to participate in the annual General Assembly (GA) sessions and debates where issues of national importance are presented. The GA session is presided over by its President, an individual elected for a period of one year, to coincide with the current session. Among the list of individuals elected to preside over the General Assembly session, are three individuals from CARICOM member states, Ambassadors Samuel Rudolph Insanally from Guyana, Julian Hunte from St. Lucia, and John Ashe from Antigua and Barbuda. Even with this history of a connection with past PGA, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has never before had a visit from this high-profile UN diplomat in their official capacity. It is therefore a very significant occurrence that in 2021, the PGA of the UN who is a Turkish diplomat, chose to visit this country to hold meetings with the Prime Minister, Dr Hon Ralph Gonsalves and conduct field visit to view the devastation in parts of our country in the aftermath of the La Soufriere eruption. Surely, SVG much like other CARICOM states has experienced natural disasters over the years, but the devastation has never prompted a visit of a sitting PGA. The question remains therefore, why the visit and why now?

Our Remarkable Work at the UN 2017-2021

Over the last 5 years, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines at the United Nations has had a remarkable performance, that saw this country elected to serve on very prestigious organs and committees within the organisation. The reality is that what has occurred over the last 5 years, is a direct result of the excellent work put in by our country's diplomats who have done their part in implementing the principled and consistent foreign policy of the ULP administration headed by comrade Ralph. It should be remembered that following the 2008 global economic meltdown, this country's Permanent Representative to the UN at the time Camillo Gonsalves was chosen by the countries of the north as their representative to co-chair a global conference on the impacts of the meltdown. It is also a good time to remind readers that SVG's campaign for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, began back in 2009 while Comrade Camillo was Ambassador. These and other events indicate clearly that SVG had begun to experience and improvement in its global reputation as more and more, our representatives distinguished themselves through their work in implementing the country's foreign policy.

Towards the end of 2016 therefore, it was no surprise that the current Permanent Representative of SVG to the UN, H.E Inga Rhonda King was elected to chair the financial and budgetary committee off the UN for the 70th session of the UNGA (2017). This is the committee that deals with the allocation of financial resources throughout the entire system. The following year, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was elected to serve as one of the Vice Presidents of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the body that deals with the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The following year (2019), our country was able to secure our election to the Presidency of ECOSOC, where we were involved in the setting of the agenda of the council and raise a number of critical issues including addressing the impacts of climate change on Small Islands Developing States. Many states, even larger states with more resources, have never attempted much less succeeded in such an ambitious agenda as this country between 2017-2019. SVG wasn't finished, the true test of the results of our work at the UN and recognition of our reputation and influence by member states lay

ahead. While serving as President of ECOSOC, SVG faced the election to the Security Council in July of 2019, the culmination of 10 years of preparation and campaigning. Our campaign, built on the excellent track record of this country, established through the solid work we had done on committees and organs over the years, would reveal just how effective our country had been. Even with noise from the unpatriotic detractors, who went as far as writing member states of the UN urging them not to support SVG's bid, this country of ours, small, but principled and consistent in its positions was able to defeat El Salvador by 185-6 votes to serve on the UNSC for the 2020-2021 period. This victory was one, not just for SVG, but for CARICOM and for SIDS, reinforcing Comrade Ralph's philosophy of "small island exceptionalism" and the clearest expression that "while we are better than nobody, nobody is better than us". The two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC comes to an end in December this year (2021), and we can be confident that our country served well, representing not just our interest, but those of SIDS in CARICOM and elsewhere.

Conclusion

As our term as a non-permanent member of the UNSC comes to an end, it caps off a remarkable run by this country internationally over the last 5 years. Make no mistake, securing the UNSC election was undoubtedly the most difficult of all the achievements, and possibly the strongest indication of our influence and reputation. The failure of Canada to secure such an election a year ago after spending over a million dollars including a concert by Celine Dion, tells us how difficult it can be even with money to spend. It is therefore no coincidence that the PGA chose to visit SVG at this time, as this country has established itself as a nation that believes and promotes consistently the principles of the UN Charter and has gained the respect of other countries as a result. As Vincentians, we can be proud of this country, knowing that the world respects us because of our work.