

June 10th 2022

PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH SUPPORT FOR OUR FISHERFOLK

Introduction

Coming off a two-year absence, the Fisherman's Day activities returned this year at the Calliaqua playing field on Monday June 6, 2022. Hundreds of Vincentians made their way to the venue to be part of this activity that was last hosted in 2019, but had to be put on hold because of the Covid-19 pandemic that restricted large gatherings as part of the protocols to prevent the spread of the virus. Fisherfolk from across the country participated in the various competitions with the usual fierce competitiveness vying for the chance to be crowned Fisherman of the Year, a title that apart from the prizes associated with it, carries bragging rights. For years, our fisherfolk have played their part in not only feeding their families, but also their communities with fresh fish caught in traditional ways. Many families survive from the fishing industry as the source of their income to feed themselves, take care of living expenses, and sending their children to school. The majority of our fisherfolk engage in subsistence fishing, that caters for their families with the excess being sold to communities, and greater surpluses sold to other customers, including restaurants. There are those that engage in fishing on a more commercial scale, who target restaurants and hotels on the mainland and in the Grenadines. Regardless of their clientele, the vast majority of fisherfolk either engage in seine fishing or line fishing for a few hours per day done relatively close to land. There has been either a reluctance or inability to engage in fishing on a much larger scale,

the kind that requires trawlers that spend days out at sea and harvest much larger quantities of fish. One thing is becoming more obvious, and that is, while the usual style of fishing may have been adequate in times past, it will not be able to fulfil the anticipated demands in the short-to-medium term. We must expand. The Unity Labor Party administration has a clear plan for the fisheries sector and the blue economy, and continuously provides support to our fisherfolk and this is set to continue through the recently launched fleet expansion program.

Global Inflation and Food Insecurity

One lesson reinforced by the Russian aggression against Ukraine, is countries that are heavily dependent on imports will always be vulnerable to exogenous shocks that arise from volatility in global supply chain. The Covid-19 pandemic that caused major lockdowns in many of the producing countries, created supply shortages that resulted in price increases for basic commodities across the globe as production centres closed. As if that wasn't bad enough, Russia's military action against Ukraine saw immediate increase in the price of oil on the global market, which is in turn driving increases in almost every product that is dependent one way or other on fuel for either production or transportation. Added to that, with Ukraine being one of the top 5 global producers of wheat, the situation which is still ongoing continues to create major shortages in wheat and wheat-based products which also exacerbated the increases in the price of food items in source markets. These increases have contributed to a rise in global inflation, and consumers are reeling from the impact where prices have more than doubled in some instances. The price of a gallon of gas at the pump in the USA for example has doubled on average, and consumers now pay twice time for a gallon of gas than they paid just over a year ago. All of these things impact SVG in

a very real way as our inflation is imported essentially stemming from our heavy dependence on imports. This situation threatens our ability as consumers to feed ourselves adequately, as a lot of what we eat, from meats, cereals, to starches, have become more expensive and our dollar buys less. We need to improve our food security as a country, and one way of achieving this is by eating more of what we produce. If we can do this on a greater scale, we will feed ourselves and possibly our neighbours, as we did this at the onset of the pandemic.

Fleet Expansion and Food Security

As a key sector of the Vincentian economy, the development of fisheries will be vital to sustainable food production and food security in SVG. It is a sector with significant potential for expansion since our country is blessed with a vast seascape that far exceeds our landscape, offering significant fisheries resource. The proper expansion of our fisheries sector will put this country in the position to be able to supply all the fish needed for domestic consumption, while also engaging in export of fish and fish products. It is with this in mind that the Unity Labour Party administration has developed a fleet expansion program designed to modernise the fleet of fishing vessels, to enable more efficient harvesting of fish by our fisherfolk. Through this program, the government will spend \$4 million on fishing vessels, and will train interested fisherfolk in the management and operation of these vessels. Training has already began and there is very high interest in the program by our fishers who recognise the amazing opportunity presented, and are taking full advantage of it. Local demand for fish and other products is expected to increase significantly, with the investment by Rainforest Seafoods, and with the hotels that will come on stream over the next two years. To meet such demand, it is absolutely necessary that our fisherfolk participate in

this excellent initiative by the government that allows for more efficient operations in the sector. This is a first step towards food security as we will become completely self-sufficient, and be able to engage in targeted export of our fisheries product. Having learned the lessons of our vulnerability to outside shocks taught us by the pandemic and the war in Ukraine that we must embrace the support of the government to the fisheries sector and work towards food security, because our lives depend on it.