

June 14<sup>th</sup> 2019

## Small country...Big Footprint

### Introduction

It is an accepted fact that Vincentians are feeling good about their country. Here and there, whenever groups of Vincentians gather, at parties, at popular bars, on the beaches or rivers, there is generally a discussion on the state of our country. The comments are generally very favourable, but here and there, a few people with political agendas try to be negative.

The plain truth is that St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a virtually “two-by-four country”, with no natural resources like oil or gold or silver, has established a big footprint on the world stage. In the Caribbean, and particularly among CARICOM member states, St. Vincent and the Grenadines is regarded as an influential country, principled in its approach to issues of socio economic development, and foreign relations.

Without a doubt, this change in the way Vincentians now perceive their country, began in 2001, when they voted the ULP into office. The ULP was like a breath of fresh air, bringing hope and sustained economic progress to a country, to replace the period of doom and gloom that we endured, under the NDP and Sir James Mitchell. Sometimes we tend to forget some of the dismal things the ULP had to correct when it assumed office in 2001.

Our infrastructure was in tatters, with schools, police stations and clinics in a state of disrepair. The ULP fixed this. Our country was on a blacklist for various reasons. The ULP fixed that. Schools in the State had to endure a shift system, with an estimated sixty eight percent of our primary school students unable to access secondary school education. The ULP fixed all that. Government ministers were mis-using their offices, purchasing State land in the Grenadines at knockdown prices, getting “sweet heart mortgages” at the National Commercial Bank, and using State-owned transportation as their own. The ULP fixed all that too.

### Big Foot Print

As Vincentians, we have come to the realization that we are a magnificent component of our independent authentic Caribbean civilization, with the knowledge that there is scope for even further ennoblement. At the campuses of the University of the West Indies we number more students than all countries, save and except the host country. Our students rise every year to become valedictorians at graduation exercises at the UWI. Our diplomats have done outstanding work particularly at the posts at the United Nations, the United States, Canada, Cuba and the United Kingdom. Now the country is poised to become the smallest nation

state to be voted as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. What an achievement that will be!

At the centre of this big footprint, is the political leader of the ULP, Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, affectionately known as “The Comrade”. As the leader of the country, he has provided direction and guidance as the country exhibits this big footprint. His advice is sought after by leaders in the Caribbean and further afield. He has written several books and articles as befitting his position as the longest serving Prime Minister in CARICOM. He has been invited to be the guest speaker at so many prestigious events that it is hard to keep track. Many organizations and groups have been disappointed not to have him as their guest speaker, simply because there is not enough time in a day for him to attend these speaking engagements, and still do the job which he has been elected to do.

His leadership and vision has led to some amazing achievements in the country, including the construction of a bridge over the Rabacca Dry River, the construction of the international airport at Argyle, and the Education Revolution that has led to some profound changes in the learning process for our young Vincentians. What a Prime Minister!

## **Conclusion**

This is a period when we are proud to be a Vincentian. We can boast of a country that is well-led, with a strong caring government, with a clear philosophy related to the socio economic development of the country.

The opposition New democratic Party, led by Godwin Friday, knows that it has no answer to the ULP and Comrade Ralph. Within the hearts and minds of the NDP and their supporters, is a feeling that the country is well led, and that the ULP is the natural party of the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

You will recall an incident at a Town Hall meeting held by the NDP in New York just before the 2015 general election. At that time, a member of the audience asked the former leader, Arnhim Eustace about his party’s fifteen year development plans for St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Eustace, poor fellow was at a loss to respond since his party had no such thing. He was therefore forced to offer up the lame response, “Ask Ralph”. Indeed this a shameful answer to a most important question related to a critical issue, the economic development of the country. The NDP could only say “Ask Ralph”.

The truth is that the NDP is experiencing what some people call “learned-helplessness”. The ULP has published its twelve year National Economic and Social Development Plan, 2013 to 2025. It is available to the public in hard copy, and can be found on the government’s website, [www.gov.vc](http://www.gov.vc).

The ULP offers continued hope to the people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, accompanied by a re-affirmation of our faith in God, made manifest in the deeds of our people, in tandem with each other and their leadership, so as to enable us to achieve mighty things, individually and collectively, as a nation.

As a small country, we will continue to leave big footprints.