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## **CUBA-SVG RELATIONSHIP: CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY AND FRIENDSHIP**

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### **Introduction**

The decision to establish diplomatic relations with countries is not one made on impulse, but requires serious consideration to determine the shared interests and values between states. As a member of the international community, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is fortunate to have the leadership of Unity Labour Party lead by Comrade Ralph that has crafted a pragmatic foreign policy that is rooted in inclusiveness. This country's foreign policy can be summarised by the simple mantra "friends of all, we strive for a better world", as was very evident during our campaign for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Our government believes in the principles of the Charter of the United Nations that are grounded in respect for the sovereignty and independence of states, non-interference in the internal affairs of states and the refraining from the use or the threat of the use of force. The adherence to these fundamental principles is vital to the maintenance of order on our planet, since those principles reinforce the equality of states regardless of physical or population size, and economic or military powers. Although countries within the international system share and practice different ideologies, and function under different systems of government, the principles of the Charter of the UN guide the interaction between states ensuring peaceful co-existence. It is because of this SVG can establish diplomatic relations with countries regardless of their ide-

ologies, be they democratic, socialist, or theocratic with the full confidence that our actions are guided by the principles that are the foundation of our international system. Principles guide our decisions to align, and those same principles guide our interactions and actions, making our country a highly respected member with a sterling reputation within the various organisations that hold our membership.

### **SVG-Cuba Relationship**

By establishing diplomatic relations with the Republic of Cuba at the height of USA aggression towards that country, the previous administration showed some courage. The action of the then NDP however, stop very short of anything meaningful since beyond the formal establishing of relationship, the government never bothered to have a permanent Vincentian diplomatic presence in Cuba. It was this ULP administration, under the leadership of Comrade Ralph that cemented the diplomatic relations, by appointing this country's first ambassador in the person of H.E Dexter Rose as our high-level representative to Cuba in 2005. This action, along with the number of visits to that country by Comrade Ralph, and other ministers and officials of the government, have together served to nurture the relationship between both countries to the point where it is strong, vibrant and enduring. Cuba has and continues to support our country's development agenda in the fields of education, healthcare, energy, airport development; simply put, in every aspect of Vincentian life. Many of this nation's children have been afforded university level training in medicine, engineering, ICT and agriculture just to name a few thanks to the generosity of Cuba. The "vision now" program that provided urgent eye care to many of our citizens continues to get the praise and gratitude of many Vincentians. The Argyle International

Airport, a critical pillar in our economic transformation, and the Modern Medical Diagnostic Centre in Georgetown that provides improved community healthcare delivery would not be possible without the assistance of Cuba. These and many other areas where Cuba has and continues to provide assistance to this country are a testament to the strength of the bonds of friendship between the leadership of both countries.

### **Principled Stance in Defence of Cuba**

Even with the existence of principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and other international agreements, there are instances in our history where relations between countries become strained and requires intervention from other nations to ease tensions. Since the start of the Cuban revolution, the relationship with that country and the USA has been volatile at best with the latter usually flexing its muscles in an effort to achieve the submission of the smaller and less powerful island nation. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines maintains that the best way to achieve any normalising of relations is through dialogue and that there must be a moving away from the old, “cold war” strategies that have not resulted in any meaningful outcomes thus far. The leadership of this country and its representatives have never shied away from speaking truth to power in urging restraint on the part of the powerful, and pointing out those in breach to the articles that are being committed by their actions. Our country recognises that any breakdown in international law will not only affect the principals involved in whatever conflict, but with further erosion coupled with member states inaction will only serve to create a world of chaos. SVG is not interested in defending ideology, political or otherwise; our country is firmly focused on defending principles. In 2021, SVG, along with 183 countries in the UN voted in favour of a resolution to demand the end of the US economic blockade on Cuba, for the 29th year in a row, with the United States and Israel voting

against. Similarly, on the most recent issue of the exclusion of Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua from the Summit of the Americas, SVG condemned the actions of the USA for not inviting those countries to attend, and in response, refused to attend the meeting at any level. Other countries choose to register their protest by not attending at the level of head or state of government, but instead to send lower level representation. Regardless to the form of protest, this country was not the only country to condemn the actions of the USA, but could be regarded as the country with the strongest position. We believe that these actions are not only critical but necessary not only to show support to member states that are faced with one form of aggression or another, but most importantly to defend international law. It is by these actions that we do our part to ensuring the peaceful coexistence of nations in a peaceful world, not just for today, but for generations. Our actions though erroneously touted as staunch defence of Cuba among other states, are in reality a defence of those principles that we depend on to protect us as a vulnerable small island state in a world where too often “might is right”, thus in fighting to help others we are in essence saving ourselves.