**OCTOBER 25TH 2019**

**Twenty Announcements that are People-Centre (Part I)**

**Introduction**

On Sunday October 27, 2019, Vincentians from across this multi-island state gathered in their thousands to Victoria Park in Kingstown to celebrate this country’s 40th anniversary of independence at the military parade. It was a spectacle, to behold the display of national pride and patriotism through the wearing of the national colours, the singing of the national anthem and the general appreciation shown by those in attendance. It is clear, that Vincentians, despite the attempt by some to try and tarnish the good name of our country, and their attempts to deny the progress and development this country is experiencing, are well pleased with the good governance and excellent stewardship offered by this ULP administration.

**Announcements**

In his address to this nation, our Prime Minister and Political Leader of the ULP outlined a number of initiatives that have at their centre the best interest of Vincentians and these announcements touch the lives of the poor, the working class and the expanding middle class of this country. In his first part of the two part series, the first 10 announcements as made by Prime Minister Gonsalves are presented.

“First, from January 2020, the monthly public assistance paid, to poor and vulnerable persons, numbering approximately 4,500, will be increased by $25.00. Thus, recipients who are over 65 years of age will be paid $275 monthly; those under 65 years of age, $250 monthly. Our profound commitment to the poor continues. I expect that in the new year, too, the minimum pension paid by the National Insurance Services will increase appropriately after the usual review.

Second, some 112 staff nurses and nursing assistants in the Community Nursing Services who were due certain on-call and weekend allowances but were not paid for various reasons, will be all paid in full these allowances in their December 2019 pay packet, the rate of $250 monthly for the staff nurses and $125 monthly for nursing assistants. Individual payments ranging from $375 to $28,875 will be paid; the aggregate of these payments amount to $995,332.56. I thank the nurses who brought this matter to my attention three or so months ago. I am pleased that we are righting this wrong! At the same time, I remind all our nurses and nursing assistants of their ongoing obligation to deliver the best service possible to the various communities. Please do not let us down; you are precious to us.

Third, the final batch of teachers, amounting to just under 100, who obtained university degrees but were not appointed as university graduates, although they receive a graduate allowance, will be appointed as graduate teachers in January 2020. Henceforth, the appointments will proceed as a matter of course.

Fourth, as has been done in respect of the graduate teachers, our government will embark on a similar process from January 2020 to address the position of the unappointed university graduates in the public service, roughly 140 in number, at the appropriate grade level. The Education Revolution has occasioned a massive increase in university graduates; the public service establishment has to be reformed to accommodate this welcome development in university training.

Fifth, in this 40th year of independence, hundreds of outstanding land title issues for grantees of state lands will be resolved to ensure the receipt of proper title; more distribution of housing lots will take place, too, as the land surveys and the requisite infrastructure are done. This government has, thus far, distributed, or accorded titles for, housing lots in excess of 4,500. On last Wednesday at Cabinet, nearly 200 titles to state lands were approved; tomorrow at a ceremony at Rabacca, 139 formal letters regarding these land titles will be distributed individually. We shall continue to turn dead property into live property; and we shall assist our nationals, always, in putting a roof over their heads.

Sixth, a clean-up Kingstown Campaign is about to commence. The Minister of Works will make the relevant announcements.

Seventh, the Public Access for Village Enhancement (PAVE) costing approximately EC $6 million is about to start. All over the country, on our rugged terrain, scores of paved footpaths will be built over the next year as a 40th anniversary gift to occupiers of their homes, in pursuit of the easing of access.

Eighth, a $3 million road-cleaning programme will be instituted towards the end of next month as a follow-up to the $2.5 million road cleaning in late August-early September.

Ninth, over the next few months, the Medical Cannabis Authority (MCA) will provide $1.3 million in assistance to traditional marijuana growers who have been licenced to transition into the legal medical cannabis industry. The MCA will also provide educational, health, and rehabilitative support in the sum of $200,000 to assist drug users who have a dependency on drugs. Further, the government will carry out a land distribution plan on over 200 acres of land on the north western part of St. Vincent for traditional workers and growers who are transitioning to medicinal cannabis.

Tenth, during the next twelve months, 35 housing units will be built by government at the Lowmans Bay area to accommodate the resettlement of 35 families from the Bay Front at Rose Place, the site for the Modern Port. Arrangements are also being made for the relocation of the boats to Edinboro. There will be a magnificent transformation, in the people’s interest, over the next few years, in the Rose Place area consequent upon the completion of the Modern Port Facility.

These first 10 announcements touch directly the lives of a wide cross-section of Vincentians; nurses, teachers, through their appointments the elderly and children, who are on public assistance through the increase in payment, through construction and clean up work, contractors, daily paid workers, tradesmen and artisans, farmers, through assistance from the Medicinal Cannabis Authority and finally those benefitting from having title to their land regularised. This government has at the centre of its policies, the improvement of the lives of every citizen and will continue to work to ensure that where ever gaps exists, everything be done to close those gaps with the use of common sense, people centred policies geared at lifting people out of poverty thereby enhancing the lives of every Vincentian.

(… to be continued)