

December 4th 2020

CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO WOMEN AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Introduction

The first session of the new Parliament was convened on Monday 30th November, 2020 and was in many ways a proud moment for Vincentians and a reinforcement for the supporters of the Unity Labour Party, that SVG only has one progressive party. This was truly a history making Parliament, as a number of “first” can now be associated with this session and the majority (governing) party that is responsible for those historic events. The new Parliament displays in unambiguous terms, the commitment of the ULP to the continued development and empowerment of our nation’s youth and women, by this government that has set the bar very high regarding the provision of equal opportunities for all genders and ages to excel and lead.

The record of this ULP is there and can withstand scrutiny, from the first female Head of State in H.E Dame Susan Dougan, (coincidentally also the first female Cabinet Secretary), to the first female Attorney General Mrs. Judith Jones-Morgan, and the first female Director of Public Prosecution Ms. Sejilla Mc Dowall. The number of senior public service positions occupied by females are too numerous to mention in this article, but the point would at least be made that of the eleven Permanent Secretaries in the Public Service, more than half of them, exactly seven, are women. During the 2020 elections, the ULP offered two excellent female candidates to the electorate, and although it is regrettable that they weren’t returned, we stand committed to presenting candidates of high quality to the electorate, including females.

Gender Equality and SVG Parliament

The sitting of the new session of parliament broke a number of barriers and undoubtedly sets a positive precedent for the composition of future parliaments in SVG. The election of barrister Ms. Rochelle Forde, to the position of Speaker of the House of Assembly, marks the first time a female has been elected as speaker on this country. Ms. Forde brings experience to the position, having

served as Senator in the House and Deputy Speaker previously. She also brings with her a strong sense of leadership and good judgement as was visible during the brief sitting of the House. The election of Senator Ashelle Morgan unopposed to the position of Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly completed what is now the first ever situation where both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are females. Ms. Morgan, a 34-year-old barrister at law is not the first female Deputy Speaker, however she does form part of the trend-setting team elected to positions of Speaker and Deputy Speaker, something that has never occurred before in all of CARICOM.

The appointments of senators, and nominations and subsequent election of females by the ULP in the Parliament indicates the Party's intention to continue its progressive policy of ensuring that Vincentian women soar like eagles. In all, the ULP nominated, and/or caused to be elected in the House, three (3) excellent Vincentian women in various positions, going beyond mere rhetoric, but instead showing in real terms its commitment to gender equality. In case it's taken for granted, Senator Peters, now heads a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, where the Permanent Secretary, Director of Trade and three (3) of this country's five (5) Ambassadors are females.

Faith in our Youth

Beyond the obvious and much talk about the prominence of females in the House of Assembly, there is the other less talked about, but just as significant promotion of youth by the ULP in Cabinet and Parliament. There was much discussion during the election campaign of the presence of youth as candidates for the ULP with Luke Browne and Orando Brewster being the youngest. With the election now over, and the youthful Brewster and Carlos James elected as first time Members of Parliament, the complement of youthful MPs on the ULP ticket has expanded beyond Comrades Camillo and Saboto. All four youthful MPs have been given very significant portfolios in the new cabinet and have hit the ground running in their various ministries. Apart from the elected MPs, both Senators Keisal Peters and Rochard Ballah, in their early to mid-30s, have been appointed Junior Minister and Parliamentary Secretary respectively in the Office of the Prime Minister. Senator Peters, takes up the very important position of Junior Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and Senator Ballah, as Parliamentary Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Information.

This ULP government trusts the youth and displays this confidence through various appointments in very senior positions throughout the public service and other parts of government. With the role this country's foreign policy has played, and continues to play in national development and with our global reputation very high, especially as we currently serve as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, there can be no denying that Senator Peters' appointment, as an example, speaks to the faith and trust in our youth. Both Senators Peters and Ballah, will work with their other youthful colleagues in Ministers Ceasar, Gonsalves, James and Brewster in representing the youth interests in this country, ensuring that there is fair representation of the youth perspective in policy creation. We wish them the best.

Conclusion

This ULP can stand proudly on its record of woman and youth empowerment, as this government goes beyond fancy clichés and popular causes to put in place concrete measures that shows its commitment to both women and youth. The examples existed before 2020, but the case has no doubt been made even stronger with the appointments in Cabinet and the recent elections of Speaker and Deputy Speaker in Parliament. The Unity Labour Party congratulates all elected and appointment Members of Parliament, and wish them all the best as they fulfil their appointments. If it is to be held true that actions speak louder than words, the actions of the ULP government over the last 20 years speak of a firm commitment to women and youth empowerment.