

Sept 18<sup>TH</sup> 2020

## The ULP: committed to free and fair elections

Recently, Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves responded to a letter from the SVG Christian Council, which addressed several electoral matters. The letter clearly illustrates that the ULP is committed to free and fair elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

We reproduce it here, for the benefit of our readers.

### Introduction

Thanks for your letter of September 7, 2020, on the work thus far of the National Monitoring and Consultative Mechanism (NMCM) spearheaded by the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Christian Council in preparation for the forthcoming general elections.

Please be assured that the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (GOSVG) under the political leadership of the Unity Labour Party (ULP), as endorsed by the electorate in general elections in 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2015, remain as committed as ever to the conduct of free and fair elections, democracy, and good governance in accordance with the Constitution and Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

I note that in your letter the SVG Christian Council placed on record its appreciation of my receipt of your concerns (including the distribution of building materials and the use of the National Media, NBC Radio) “readily and respectfully”. What you did not say, and I now reiterate, that nothing has been done by the GOSVG to cause any reasonable, unbiased person to have any doubts about the integrity of any general elections under my watch.

Indeed, I explained to the SVG Christian Council, by way of chapter and verse, my government’s clear and principled position on free and fair elections. And since I am of sound mind, I shall always be mindful of any concerns raised, however unfounded, in fact or law, any of them may be. It does not mean at all that my “mindfulness” suggests any agreement about this or that particular concern which is raised.

I note, too, that in your letter to me you stated:

*“We anticipate and appreciate your continued mindfulness of these concerns and other concerns that have, and will arise requiring your responsiveness towards ensuring we have an election that inspires confidence of all our citizens.”*

I am the only person currently active in electoral politics who has been a candidate in every general election since those of December 1979 — the first after St. Vincent and the Grenadines attained its independence. Thus, I have been a candidate in nine general elections: 1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2010, and 2015. Through the grace and blessing of Almighty God, I will be a candidate in my tenth general election — the titans Ebenezer Joshua and Sir James Mitchell were also candidates in nine successive general elections.

### **Free and Fair Elections**

From the vantage point of my extensive experience as an electoral candidate, every general election since independence has been free and fair, and represented the will of the people. I do not know how anyone can “steal” elections in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, given all the extraordinary safeguards.

Similarly, I do not know how in the current climate of a diversified globalised world of advanced science, technology, and the opportunity to garner a sufficiency of election resources in, among, and with, a small-sized electorate, that it is possible legally to have general elections other than “free and fair”.

Of course, there are illegal things which any group of people may do such as hacking, snooping, intercepting, or bugging one’s opponents’ telecommunications; threatening or carrying out acts of violence against political opponents; creating and disseminating locally, regionally, and globally fake news or defamatory material against political opponents; and so forth. These are matters to which the SVG Christian Council ought to direct its attention not merely as “concerns” but as direct threats to free and fair elections, democracy, and civilised life and living.

### **The conduct of the Opposition**

I urge the SVG Christian Council to direct its attention, too, to the conduct of the opposition New Democratic Party (NDP) since the 2015 general elections in diminishing the process of free and fair elections, and the people’s will. Examples abound. Some of them are:

1. The refusal to accept as legitimate, free and fair, the results of the 2015 general elections despite the judgment of Justice Stanley John in the High Court of Justice, in March 2019, dismissing the two petitions of two NDP candidates and reaffirming the victory of the two ULP candidates whose elections were challenged.
2. The public protest organised and led by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Lorraine Friday, on the very day of the High Court’s

dismissal of the two NDP petitions. Dr. Friday's screaming battle-cry was "No Justice, No peace". Bearing in mind that the absence of "peace" is "war". Why did not the SVG Christian Council denounce the elevation of "war" as a sacrament of our times? Can there be "justice" only if the NDP wins? Was not Dr. Friday's utterance a direct attack on the independence of the judiciary? Why is the NDP yet to prosecute its appeal in these cases expeditiously, rather than its pursuit of rabble-rousing on this issue?

3. The nearly four-year, daily, harassment of, threats towards, and actual violence directed against, the immediate past Supervisor of Elections, Ms. Sylvia Findlay, outside the Office of the Supervisor of Elections by leaders of the NDP and supportive fellow-travellers under a nomenclature, "Frontline". The silence of the SVG Christian Council was deafening, especially so since Ms. Findlay is an individual of the highest personal probity and professional integrity, and whose esteem as a faithful pilgrim of the Anglican Community, is recognised and embraced by all right-thinking persons across St. Vincent and the Grenadines.
4. The current campaign by the NDP to disrupt voter registration by insisting, wrongly, their right to observe registration inside of the registration centres.
5. The continued verbal abuse levelled by the NDP operatives and publicists against the current Supervisor of Elections and other election officials.

So, dear Father Mike, please believe me: The NDP will never have any confidence in the electoral system, if, as appears likely, they lose again for a fifth consecutive term. As far as the NDP is concerned, the general elections will only be free and fair if they win. The SVG Christian Council ought to be on alert to the continued political bad behaviour by the NDP. Remember their battle cry: "No Justice, No Peace". And "Justice" exists only if they win.

Please be guided accordingly!