



The Prime Minister  
St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
West Indies

November 14, 2021

Pastor Stephen Ollivierre  
Chairman  
Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies  
**St. Vincent and the Grenadines**

*My Dear Brother Stephen*

**RE: UNSIGNED AND UNDATED STATEMENT OF COALITION OF CHURCHES  
AND OTHER CONCERNED ASSEMBLIES ON VACCINATION**

I acknowledge receipt of an unsigned and undated document, sent by e-mail to my Office, entitled "Coalition of Churches and other Concerned Assemblies response to the COVID-19 Vaccination Mandate: 'Vaccination or Job Termination'." The covering note which accompanied the "document" indicates that it was sent by, or through, one Elvin Peters, PAWI Secretary, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Thus, I concluded that it was sent with your authorisation given your leadership role in the Pentecostal Assemblies of the West Indies (PAWI) and in light of a brief telephone conversation earlier last week between both of us on the very subject matter.

It would be helpful to know the constituent membership of your "Coalition" and the signatories of this document. Otherwise, it may appear to right-thinking persons as a phantom of sorts.

In replying to your Coalition's statement, I shall be straightforward and honest. I know that in so doing I risk damnation and denunciation from this or that pulpit of the Coalition; so be it. It is not my intention to pick a fight with your Coalition but I am duty-bound to represent my views forthrightly, even robustly, but respectfully. My conscience, my determination to uphold the public's interest, my leadership role, and my Christian beliefs prompt me to speak my mind.

First let us map briefly the context of relevance in which your Coalition's statement was made:

- (1) The deadly Gamma and Delta variants of COVID-19 have been raging in St. Vincent and the Grenadines for the past several months. Since the first week



of August 2021, the number of deaths from COVID have jumped from an aggregate of 12 over a period of 17 months (March 2020 to August 2021) to 72 in a mere 3 ½ months. COVID infections have increased geometrically; and hospitalisations due to COVID have sky-rocketed.

- (2) All the deaths from COVID in St. Vincent and the Grenadines relate to the victim's unvaccinated status; and almost 100 percent of the hospitalisations are unvaccinated. These, too, are the facts, more or less, in the Caribbean and globally.
- (3) Vaccines against COVID have been abundantly, and freely, available in St. Vincent and the Grenadines since January 2021. Indeed, we gave away almost as many vaccines as we have administered. Additionally, many thousands of the vaccines have had to be disposed of, because their expiry dates had come and gone!
- (4) Public discussions on the efficacy and effectiveness of the vaccines, initiated by our health authorities and others, have been ongoing since late last year. Part of that conversation, even before the arrival of the Gamma and Delta variants, was the necessity and desirability of frontline and strategic employees in the public and private sectors to be required to vaccinate or be PCR-tested at regular intervals. This is happening globally, too, including in the USA, Canada and Britain. Indeed, in many of these countries this or that vaccine mandate has been issued.
- (5) The major public sector trade unions from as early as February 2021 made public their opposition to any requirement of vaccination or PCR-testing for any public sector employee. They claimed that even testing was "invasive" and "an infringement of personal liberty and conscience".
- (6) Major churches and leaders of churches, were, and are, literally "all over the place" on vaccines and testing. There was, and still is, no single perspective: For example, leaders of the Anglicans, Methodists, Roman Catholics, the Pentecostal Assembly of the West Indies (PAWI), the New Testament Church of God, the Seventh Day Adventist, and many individual Evangelical, and Pentecostal and Spiritual Baptist pastors support vaccination and PCR-testing. Some of the leaders from the so-called "traditional" churches support targeted vaccine "mandates". But there are individual church leaders, including from single-leadership churches, who were unequivocally, even hysterically, opposed to vaccines, and testing. Many of these church leaders have flip-flopped on the issues-at-hand depending on their audience and/or their state of confusion. All, however, in their multiple contradictions and confusions, have been claiming that God, the Bible, and faith are on their side. Obviously, they cannot all be right in their vigorous disputations, held with unwavering certainty at any moment in time. Indeed, some have been most assured about that which they have been most ignorant.



- (7) The economy of St. Vincent and the Grenadines contracted last year by 3.8 percent because of COVID. This year, the contraction is estimated at 6.1 percent due to COVID and the volcanic eruptions. Health, the Economy, the Society (including Education), and Security (HESS) have been badly hit because of COVID. Uncertainty remains. Large sections of our people are suffering real, and increased, hardship. Despite the challenges on the revenue side, the government has fully protected the public sector employees with their salaries and other emoluments on a timely basis; they have become a veritable “aristocracy of labour”. Further, immense resources from the nation’s slender coffers have been put to creatively-designed, deep and wide, safety nets to protect the poor and the vulnerable. Yet the economic and fiscal challenges as a consequence of COVID are real, immediate, and urgent.

We must get back to normalcy soonest.

So, against this composite factual matrix, a “Coalition of Churches and Other Concerned Assemblies” has emerged in a quest to bring light to the issues-at-hand. Sadly, instead of enlightened leadership, it has pandered to the lowest common denomination and has brought a pall of darkness and unhelpfulness to the conversation and the true realization of the public interest and public health.

In short, the Coalition’s statement is a classic example of hobbling together a mock unity, a mirage of sorts, which places the vanity of a non-existent comity of pilgrims on the issues-at-hand, ahead of the requisites of the public interest and public health. It cannot, and will not, last; the centre cannot hold; things will fall apart as this ceremony of innocence drowns itself. Already, the Coalition’s statement is being disowned by some of its presumed members, for divers reasons.

Sadly, though, by their pandering, serious persons have allowed themselves to be sucked in by a flawed process and a “drafting by Committee” to deliver a document which can only be embraced by fringe elements and sectarians, or by dupes. To be sure, there are sentences, here and there in the Coalition’s statement with which all reasonable persons and reflective theologians may agree, but “the sting-in-the-tail”, so to speak, is the advancement of an anti-vax or permanently vaccine hesitant stance which is plainly injurious to public health and the public interest. I am aware that some who innocently endorsed the Coalition’s statement are not anti-vax or permanently hesitant, but they have unwittingly accorded it their imprimatur and respectability.

In its many flawed formulations, Un-Christian judgments, and denunciations, the Coalition’s statement will haunt for sometime to come. History is replete with occurrences of this kind. Indeed, many are detailed in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. But out of this kind of hubris, good often cometh. I am sure that “the Church”, which has been challenged on many fronts for some time, and which has now allowed itself to be plunged into a crisis of witness, theology, and Christian practice, will take a fresh guard and emerge stronger to serve our Living God and His people with love, faith, and hope. But the Church’s responsible and wise men



and women of God must lead and cease their pandering to those within the broad “churchical” ranks who are engaged in demagoguery, falsehoods and temporal vanities masquerading as revealed truths.

More than ever, “the Church” needs clarity, wisdom, balanced judgment, and strong leadership; it must not be driven by some ill-defined “fear” or the mouthings of some uninformed and dangerous prelates/pastors threatening to storm the metaphoric gates of the holy sanctuaries of “the Church” itself. Such prelates/pastors are of little influence; they come and go as the hours in the day and night. So, fear not!

I note that in ten paragraphs with some 750 words on the subject of the COVID-19 Vaccination programme, your Coalition’s statement did not once urge your followers/supporters/ members to take the COVID vaccine. I note equally that your Coalition’s statement requests of each person “to adhere to the protocols established by the Ministry of Health: Wearing the facial masks, physical distancing, hand-sanitising, and proper hand-washing”. Accordingly, I conclude, without more, that your Coalition is either anti-vax and permanently vaccine-hesitant, on the one hand, or indifferent in its estimation of the vaccine being good or bad, on the other hand. In the current condition of the COVID pandemic and a declared public health emergency, I consider an anti-vax or permanently vaccine hesitant stance, or indifference, to be irresponsible; an invitation to social disorder; and an insufficient regard of the consequential social pain, suffering, ill-health, and even death. None of this can ever be properly supported by recourse to religion or theology.

I am particularly dismayed by the following sentence from your Coalition’s statement: *“We strongly believe that in threatening people who have a difference of opinion in taking or not taking the vaccine with loss of livelihood, is Un-Christ like and therefore undesirable.”* [My Emphasis].

Let us deconstruct, in part, this latter sentence of your Coalition:

- (1) Has anyone “threatened” any other person with a “loss of livelihood” because that other person has taken the vaccine? This is surely an incorrect formulation because it has absolutely no factual basis. This falsehood was perhaps unwittingly or unconsciously framed, the effect of which nevertheless is to camouflage your Coalition’s pre-conceived position of not supporting the taking of the vaccine or being indifferent in its support or not.
- (2) *Has anyone “threatened” any other person with a “loss of livelihood” because the other person has not taken the vaccine?* Certainly, the government has not done so. Statutory Rules and Order (SR&O) No. 28 of 2021 entitled the “Public Health (Public Bodies Special Measures) Rules” and published on October 19, 2021, threatens no one. Within the framework of the declaration of the World Health Organisation of a worldwide outbreak of COVID-19, the Public Health Emergency (Declaration) Notice No. 38 of 2020 of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Public Health Act Chapter 300 of the Laws of St. Vincent and the Grenadines (particularly Sections 43B and 147 thereof), the SR&O was issued to require a qualification or standard (namely the COVID



vaccine) for particular public sector jobs which are front-line and/or strategic. The holder of any of these particular jobs has a choice to make; no one is “threatened”. Indeed, from the very beginning of time the Book of Genesis established, for all time, that choices have consequences. And to suggest that there is threat when there is none, is entirely disingenuous and wrong! Incidentally, such a requirement as in SR&O No. 28 of 2021 is permissible under the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

- (3) Having so misconceived the issues at hand, the Coalition’s statement then proceeds to make the purely UN-Christian, self-righteous, and divisive judgement that those who are doing the “threatening” (presumably, in the Coalition’s view, these persons include the Prime Minister and the Cabinet members) are “Un-Christ-like”. “UN-Christ-like” is taken reasonably as a synonym for “Un-Godly”. I feel sure that the Coalition’s members are not so arrogant as to consider themselves to be “Almighty Gods” or Infallible Arbiters with the power or right to issue authoritative judgements, edicts, or “fatwas”, authority for which belongs solely to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! Still, the ill-advised, judgmental and divisive posture damns “men and women of God” such as devout Christians and pastors in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in the region, and globally. I feel sure that the members of the Coalition will, upon proper reflection, regret its ill-conceived and prejudiced denunciations.

I note that the core of the Coalition’s reasoning rests on a limited one-sided, and incorrect formulation of the issue of “freedom of conscience”. Section 9 (1) and (5) of the Constitution of St. Vincent and the Grenadines addresses this issue aptly as follows:

*“(1) Except with his own consent, a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of conscience, including freedom of thought and of religion, freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and both in public and in private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.*

*“(5) Nothing contained in or done under the authority of any law shall be held to be inconsistent with or in contravention of this section to the extent that the law in question makes provision which is reasonably required —*

*“(a) in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health;*

*“(b) for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedoms of other persons including the right to observe and practice any religion without the unsolicited intervention of members of any other religion; or*



*(c) for the purpose of regulating educational institutions in the interests of the persons who receive or may receive instructions in them,*

*“and except so far as that provision or, as the case may be, the thing done under the authority thereof is shown not to be reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” [My Emphasis].*

Plainly, freedom of conscience is not an absolute, abstract right or freedom of an individual which is divorced from considerations such as those which are “reasonably required” for specific public purposes (such as public health) and which are shown to be “reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” Philosophically and legally, the SR&O Number 28 of 2021 does not in any way offend “freedom of conscience”. Indeed, it rests, too, on sound theology as distinguished Christians (pastors and laity alike) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Caribbean, and globally have authoritatively concluded or advocated. In this regard, I refer you to a statement made on September 28, 2021, by the Anglican Archbishop of the West Indies, Howard Gregory.

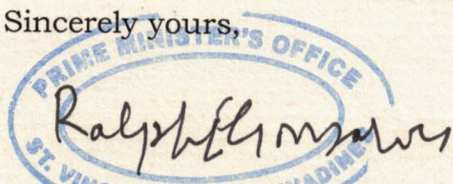
The individual does not exist in splendid isolation; he or she, as a social individual as distinct from an atomised individual, is part of a society which has public interests regulated by customs, and laws made by governing authorities which are set up by God, through people, to advance the public interest. Where are the Apostle Paul’s exhortations to “the community” of pilgrims or the collective of the Christian “community” in the Coalition’s statement? Where is the commandment of “love thy neighbour” in the statement?

Truly, I find your Coalition’s statement to be unhelpful in battling the pandemic in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is flawed in fundamental respects: Philosophically and ideationally; practically in the present and for the future; and constitutionally and legally.

I am enclosing for distribution to your Coalition, ten copies of my most recent publication entitled The Atomised Individual, the Social Individual, and the COVID Vaccine; it was published last week. I think that it answers your many concerns. Let us thus have a serious conversation, not one based on an unnecessary self-righteousness or a sectarian holier-than-thou attitude.

All the best to you, your family, PAWI, and our Christian community.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves  
Prime Minister

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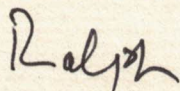
## **POSTSCRIPT**

Subsequent to the drafting of this letter, I met on November 15, 2021, at the Office of the Prime Minister, at the request of “the Coalition”, two of its constituent leaders, Pastor Stephen Ollivierre of PAWI and Pastor Dermoth Baptiste of the Seventh Day Adventists, two “men of God” and my friends. In attendance at the meeting was the Cabinet Secretary.

Pastors Stephen and Dermoth spoke to the issues which prompted the Coalition’s statement and conceded that in some vital areas the drafting left much to be desired. In particular, they accepted that an unequivocal stance in favour of vaccination against COVID, as their own respective churches had hitherto articulated, ought to have been included in the Coalition’s statement. They conceded, too, that the Coalition’s statement on the matter of “individual conscience” lacked completeness and ought to have reflected the connectedness between “conscience” and community solidarity as exemplified in the Christian teaching of “love thy neighbour”. They appreciated the God-ascribed role of government in regulating conduct in the interest of public health especially at the time of a pandemic. They regretted, too, the Coalition’s description of the government’s regulatory stance as “Un-Christ like”; they considered that it was a loose, unhelpful, and incorrect formulation; they emphasised that they held the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in high regard.

For my part, I explained the history, context, and circumstances of the COVID pandemic, the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the government’s approach to dealing with COVID, and the nature and purpose of SR&O No. 28 of 2021. Pastors Stephen and Dermoth expressed appreciation for the explanations; they opined that had there been such a discussion prior to the drafting of the Coalition’s statement, its formulation and focus would have been different, for the better.

I accepted the honesty and frankness of Pastors Stephen and Dermoth; I thanked them for their Christian work and fellowship. All of us expressed our deep and abiding concerns about our people and their welfare, including their health and that of the nation. We pledged to continue to work together, in greater understanding, for our people’s upliftment in these challenging and complicated times. Both Pastors Stephen and Dermoth prayed with the Cabinet Secretary and me at the end of the meeting. It was a good and promising meeting.



Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves  
Prime Minister

Copy: Leaders of the Christian Community