

MESSENGER OF CHATOYER

BY

UNITY LABOUR PARTY

COMRADE RALPH: THE MESSENGER

On March 14, 2025, Comrade Ralph Gonsalves, the longest serving Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the region, and countries globally which boast competitive, popular elections, was named a “Messenger of Chatoyer” by the Garifuna International Council. This was a signal honour for Comrade Ralph who for decades, has been consistently advancing the cause of the Callinago, the Garifuna, all indigenous peoples, oppressed persons globally, and those who have been marginalised or disadvantaged, historically and in the contemporary times.

Throughout nearly 57 years of political activism in SVG, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, Africa, and the USA, Comrade Ralph has battled against monopoly capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, racism, misogyny, and patriarchy and for democracy, justice, freedom, human rights, socialism and socialist orientation, equality, inclusive prosperity, and sustainable development.

The accolade, “a Messenger of Chatoyer” was in specific reference to his unstinting work for reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies in the Caribbean, and for the upliftment of the indigenous Callinago and Garifuna of Yuremein (St. Vincent and the Grenadines). The award of “Messenger of Chatoyer” was in the wake of Comrade Ralph’s leadership in his ULP government’s acquisition of the island of Balliceaux as a fitting memorial for the ancestral Callinago and Garifuna who died there at the cruel, wicked hands of British Colonialism in 1797, consequent upon the defeat of the colonial resistance led by the indomitable Joseph Chatoyer, Paramount Chief of the Garifuna, and the first and only National Hero of SVG.

The Comrade’s status of “a Messenger of Chatoyer” was bolstered by his official visit to Honduras and his engagement with the Garifuna communities in Cucuna and the capital city of Tegucigalpa, in Honduras, home to the largest number of Garifuna worldwide. At ceremonies in Cucuna and Tegucigalpa, Comrade Ralph was especially honoured as a defender of the Garifuna and a fighter for their upliftment.

THE RECORD: A BRIEF SUMMARY OF NATIONAL RECLAMATIONS

Comrade Ralph and his ULP government have been in the forefront of spearheading the quest for the building of our national identity, the reclamation of our people’s memory and independence through the prism of our own eyes, for

the further advancement) ennoblement of our Caribbean civilisation and its identifiable ethnic and cultural elements within the organic whole of an integrated society.

A summary of all this includes:

1. The passage of the Order of National Hero Act under which provisions the Right Excellent Joseph Chatoyer was proclaimed as a National Hero — the first one thus far.
2. The formal, juridical declaration of March 14th as National Heroes Day.
3. The legislative proclamation of Indian Arrival Day, recognising officially the arrival of Indian indentured labourers to SVG between 1861 to 1881, following upon the arrival of indentured labourers from Madeira (1845 – 1850).
4. The passage of the Spiritual Baptists Recognition Day legislation, observing May 21st as the “freedom of religion” day for Spiritual Baptists. This was followed by the making of May 21st a public holiday; this will be celebrated for the first time on May 21st 2025. Lots of our indigenous people are Spiritual Baptists.
5. The passage of legislation protecting our National Flag and National Anthem.
6. The refusal to sell-out our patrimony in respect of the selling of our passports and citizenship; we are unique in the OECS in not selling our highest office (citizenship) or the outward sign of the inward grace of citizenship, our passport.
7. The acquisition of Balliceaux for the purpose of establishing a memorial to the Callinago and Garifuna who died on that barren island after being banished there by the British colonialists.
8. Comrade Ralph’s leadership in putting the issue of reparations for native genocide and the enslavement of African bodies on the CARICOM and national agenda. Our Parliament formally recognised his work in this regard.
9. The establishment of a National Reparations Commission in SVG, and membership of the Regional Reparations Commission.

10. The commissioning of a panel of four esteemed historians to write a detailed history of SVG through our own sense and sensibility.
11. The pursuance of comprehensive root-and-branch constitutional reform which among other things sought to jettison the British sovereign as Head of State, and to terminate final appeals to the Privy Council, to be replaced by the Caribbean Court of Justice. This effort failed because of the NDP's backwardness.
12. The promotion of an all-round national culture through festivals (including food fairs) and all-round programmes in an effort to build a national conscience and to strengthen our national patrimony, dignity, and consciousness.
13. The publication of numerous books authored by Comrade Ralph which research and analyse our nation's history, political economy, culture, and a bundle of uplifting ideas of our society.
14. Uplifting the lives, livelihoods, and production in Callinago/ Garifuna communities in SVG through the following, among other initiatives:
 - (i) Building out in massive, transformative ways the physical infrastructure: Roads, bridges galore including the iconic Rabacca Bridge, sea and river defences; currently we are saving Sandy Bay from the ravages of the sea with a mighty sea defence.
 - (ii) The rolling out of the Education Revolution, including the building of a secondary school in Sandy Bay for the first time. We are about to start the construction of a modern secondary school at Orange Hill.
 - (iii) The effecting of a Housing Revolution: Repairing and rebuilding thousands of homes; allocating, and according titles to, housing lots to thousands of persons.
 - (iv) The provision of electricity, water, telephones, internet facilities to practically every household in Callinago/ Garifuna communities.
 - (v) The roll-out of the Health and Wellness Revolution, including clinics and hospitals (Modern Medical and Georgetown Hospital), ambulances, and so forth.
 - (vi) Keeping the arrowroot industry alive.

- (vii) Creating huge numbers of jobs, strengthening social security and social welfare, enhancing wealth and reducing poverty significantly for the Callinago, Garifuna and others.
- (viii) Rebuilding efficaciously after 12 national adverse weather events, 21 volcanic eruptions in April 2021, the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020-2021, the upending of our economy after the global economic depression of 2008-2010, global turmoil, and periodic droughts.
- (ix) Building playing fields and hardcourts like never before.
- (x) Paying workers at the Orange Hill Estates (mainly indigenous folks) their severance payments which had been owed them for 17 years by the former NDP government.

RESPECT FOR CALLINAGO AND GARIFUNA WOMEN

Colonialism and the inheritors of colonialism, including the urban bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie, peddled the notion for years that Callinago and Garifuna women were of easy virtue, and denigrated them. It is Comrade Ralph, comrades in YULIMO, Movement for National Unity, and the ULP who have repeatedly hailed these women as virtuous, hard-working, and the bedrock of their families and communities. Similarly, it is Comrade Ralph and the other progressive comrades who have repeatedly emphasised the heroic labours of our indigenous men in the building of SVG as distinct from the colonialist designation of them as lazy drunkards. Yet, the opportunists and colonially-minded urban and Grenadines-based leaders in the opposition NDP who had been repeatedly belittling, over the years, the Callinago and Garifuna men, are now proclaiming otherwise as Johnny-come-latelys. Hypocrites!

Over the past 24 years, the ULP has ensured the abundant growing respect for the Callinago and Garifuna people to the extent that even some persons who are not of indigenous blood now proudly claim indigenous origins. No longer, too, are the earlier derogatory words of “Yellow Caribs” and “Black Caribs” of the colonially-minded heard in public discourse. The former colonial talk of “Carib country” has given way proudly to OTR (Over-the-River) or Callinago/Garifuna territory.

It is to be noted that prior to 2001, there were four persons Over-the-River (OTR) who were university graduates, two of whom were medical doctors. After 24 years of the ULP government almost every house, OTR, has a university graduate. Of course, college graduates, OTR, are in abundance since 2001.

Please note, too, that Callinago/Garifuna occupy, under the ULP, top positions in government and the state administration. The first Deputy Prime Minister from OTR is Montgomery Daniel; the first Honorary Counsel of SVG overseas who is a Garifuna is Dr. Gill in California; and the first Callinago/Garifuna Hospital Administrator is Dr. Grace Walters; and the first Callinago/Garifuna Sporting Ambassador is Pamenos Ballantyne. And so forth! Respect to them all!

BONDING BETWEEN CALLINAGO-GARIFUNA IN SVG AND ABROAD

The ULP government has made it a matter of high public policy to ensure the bonding of the Callinago and Garifuna at home with their brothers and sisters overseas, particularly in Honduras, Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and the USA. The recent visit by Comrade Ralph and his delegation (including the exceptional Callinago/Garifuna women Dr. Grace Walters and Zoannie Nero) to Honduras (including the Garifuna communities in Cucuna and the capital city) is one example; there were several such visits before to Central America and the USA under the ULP.

We recall that as early as 2002 when Belize was ravaged by hurricane and Garifuna communities were devastated, it is the ULP government which raised money for relief effort locally among students and by way of a grant from our government; Comrade Ralph took the cheque of some US\$20,000 and delivered it to Prime Minister Musa in Belize. Our government, through the NIS, also loaned US \$10 million to the government of Belize. Further, after the visit by Comrades Ralph, Eloise, and Montgomery Daniel to Nicaragua (including to the rural Garifuna community of Orinoco and the Caribbean enclave of Blue Fields) our ULP government donated US\$40,000 to complete a community facility in Orinoco. Comrade Ralph was awarded two honorary doctorates by the two universities in Blue Fields; and the Comrade was also awarded the highest honour by Nicaragua, the Order of Sandino, named after the heroic revolutionary Augusto Cesar Sandino.

The wholly opportunistic proposal by the NDP under Arnhim Eustace (at the urging of the Garifuna maverick Wellington Ramos) to grant citizenship (amended thereafter to Honorary citizenship) to all Garifuna overseas would have been, if ever implemented, a completely disastrous initiative for entirely practical reasons. And Comrade Ralph exposed this folly, which the NDP ran away from as the 2015 general elections approached. Such a proposal to an uncertainly-defined group of

persons with ill-defined attendant rights portends a rupture of bonds between those at home and abroad which demand careful nurturing, not opportunistic gimmicks. For example, do the NDP and fellow-travellers realise that in Honduras itself the category “Garifuna” includes those who are descendants-by-blood and a much larger group of African descendants who accept the Garifuna designation or who define themselves culturally as Garifuna? In Honduras alone, 800,000 persons are identified as Garifuna but these include descendants, for example, of former enslaved Africans in Jamaica who were recruited at slavery’s end to work in Honduras on plantations.

Currently, all citizens of Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and the USA (including Garifuna) are entitled to enter SVG without visas for the usual temporary visitors’ stay. They can also work and reside in SVG if granted work permits (having obtained jobs) and residence permits in the normal way like everyone else who come to SVG for those purposes; they can also own property if granted an alien’s landholding licence in the legally-prescribed manner. Vincentians who travel overseas have similar opportunities in many, if not most, countries.

Let us continue to build the bonds sensibly and maturely for now and the future.

Article for week of April 18, 2025