

# **RECOVERY AMIDST CHALLENGES**

**BY**

**UNITY LABOUR PARTY**

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## **RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION: THE REAL ISSUES**

The recovery and reconstruction of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, consequent upon Hurricane Beryl of July 1, 2024, continue apace. The indices of progress are all around us. The raw data are actually quite impressive. On the ground lives and living of our people are improving; the pressure of Beryl's damage and destruction is easing on account of the innovative and creative policies being fashioned and implemented in tandem with our people's resilience and social solidarity of the majority.

Still, there is so much more to be done amidst structural challenges sourced largely externally but resident, too, in the extant condition of resource limitations of a small island developing state like SVG. Additionally, behavioural traits of sections of our population are problematic ranging from the violent criminality of tiny group of young males through to unhealthy consumption habits of too many and a debilitating tendency of some to enthrone individual selfishness, even extraordinary greed, way above any sense of social solidarity.

Yet, the challenges, limitations, and behavioral problematics do not, and cannot, undo or stop the real progress in the socio-economic condition of our nation, especially for the poor, the disadvantaged, and the marginalised. Moreover, SVG is on the right track in its recovery, its reconstruction, and its sustainable developed. Thus, despite the dissatisfactions about this or that, there are abundant satisfactions and a trajectory for their further enhancement. Our people, overwhelmingly, are stuffed with love, faith, and hope. Love, that ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken; faith, defined as the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of that which we have not yet seen; this faith must be accompanied by works so as not to undermine it; and hope, that feeling of expectation and desire for something uplifting to happen — this hope, refreshed and grounded in realism yet an ambition and innovative endeavours for betterment. And at this time of Christmas, we urge now, and always, peace, goodwill, and solidarity among all men and women.

## **HOUSING, PRODUCTION SUPPORT, INCOME SUPPORT**

The roll out of the recovery and reconstruction policies of the ULP government is evident in its programmes centred on housing, production support, and income support in respect of those affected by Hurricane Beryl, the residual

circumstances arising from the volcanic eruptions of April 2021, and the knock-on condition of the recent excessive rainfall, floods, and landslides all over SVG.

Some 6,000 houses are required to be repaired or rebuilt: nearly 5,000 due to Beryl; and another 1,000 or so as a consequence of the residue from the volcanic eruptions, and the recent damage caused by the floods and landslides. As at December 10, 2024, 2601 houses were actually assessed for immediate attention by the Ministry of Housing and the state-owned Housing and Land Development Corporation (HLDC). Of this number, 1,979 have been completed, or in the process of being actually repaired or rebuilt, or being accorded self-help through grants of building materials through the initiative of the Ministry of Housing. A further 144 projects of individual houses have been prepared by HLDC for complete rebuilding; of these 65 contracts have been signed with assigned contractors, and 38 are in progress. All these numbers do not include the 250 or so homes repaired or rebuilt in Canouan and Union Island through the efforts of the Gumbolimbo Group of Ian Wace, facilitated by the government of SVG.

In respect of production supports, substantial assistance amounting to over \$7 million has already been granted to 221 arrowroot farmers, over 2,000 banana and plantain farmers, and nearly 300 owners of fishing boats. Production support has been further approved for farmers of other commodities, and for more fishers with boats; these are being rolled out before the end of 2024.

Income support is currently being paid to 3,200 heads of registered households affected by Beryl on the basis of their loss of jobs or diminution of income. As at December 11, 2024, nearly \$4 million have been paid out; more is being rolled out. There is a further number of 2,440 households which are being assessed for payment before Christmas 2024; these households are those which for one reason or another have been registered late or were inadvertently not included on the original list for payment. The total allocation for all these persons is roughly \$10 million; the payment made is \$600 monthly for the months of October, November, and December 2024.

Similar levels of income support have been approved for 5,600 farmers, farm workers, fishers and their crew. The allocation here is in the sum of \$12 million.

Additionally, the Cost of Living Allowance (COLA Special) of \$170 per month for 3 months (November and December 2024 and January 2025) is being prepared for imminent roll-out. So, too, the relief assistance to university students/graduates on the Economically-Disadvantaged Student Loan Programme for the month of December 2024. PRYME, ON-SITE, SET, and YES programmes have all been ramped up. The 5 percent special payment for nurses continues.

Further, the government is supporting over 500 persons in shelters and some 600 in approved tourism accommodation (guest houses and apartments). Food

packages have also been provided for others. A miscellany of other supports is in place.

Meanwhile, \$3 million is about to be paid to the workers and truckers on the Christmas 2024 Road Clean-Up Programme.

### **SPENDING EXCEEDS REVENUE**

The Summary of the Fiscal Operations of the Central Government for the Period Ending November 30, 2024, show that although Total Revenue and Grants are performing well, Expenditure is growing faster due largely to the post-Beryl Recovery and the huge programme of ongoing Capital Projects. The deficit is being financed through loans, overwhelming on generous, concessional terms.

The data on the fiscal outturn up to the end of November 2024, in summary, are as follows:

1. Revenue and Grants: \$787 million, up 15.3 percent over the comparable period in 2023.

Of this sum, Current Revenue stands at \$699 million, an increase of 8.4 percent over the comparable period for 2023. Capital Revenue and Grants amount to \$88 million or 132.5 percent over the comparable number for 2023.

2. Total Expenditure (Recurrent and Capital): \$1.048 billion, up 24.2 percent over the comparable period for 2023. Capital Revenue and Grants amount to \$88 million or 132 percent above the comparable figure for 2023. Capital Expenditure is a whopping \$296 million or 70 percent more than the comparable figure for 2023. Indeed, it is expected that when all it is expected that when all the capital spending is journalised by December 31, 2024, the number will exceed \$450 million — a record of massive proportions.
3. Current Account Deficit: The current account deficit stands at \$53.2 million, more than double the number of \$24.9 million for the comparable period in 2023.

It is to be noted that given the trajectory of economic growth, growth in revenues, and the reduction of the rate in the growth of capital spending over the next 10 years, it is expected that the debt-to-GDP ratio would fall from 95 percent to 60 percent. Both the IMF and the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank are satisfied with these projections. Of course, climate change and the potential instability in the global economy are down-side

risks to these projections. Thus, it is vital that serious leaders continue to lead the government of SVG.

### **THE ULP AT WORK**

At this Christmas Season, the ULP, as always, is in the spirit of giving to those who are in need. As a party, we are spreading the joy and solidarity at Christmas 2024.

Across all the constituencies, the ULP has been organizing celebratory lunches for the elderly (Christmas — New Year), preparing to distribute food packages and other gifts, and actually rolling out party-sponsored assistance in other respects. Earlier this week, for example, Comrade Ralph has been about distributing toys for primary school children. In various communities, our party groups, either alone or in conjunction with others, have been engaged in putting up Christmas lights. Our party leaders, nationally and locally, would be making visits to various vulnerable persons over the season. All this is usual for our great party.

Meanwhile, Comrade Ralph as “Santa World Boss” has recently released the parang soca hit song “Tell me what you want for your Christmas”. This is a collaboration with the major soca artistes in SVG, at home and abroad. It is mashing down the air waves, and bringing joy to people.

### **SUMMATION**

Good things are happening in SVG. Big things ah gwarn in SVG. Still, we need more workers to rebuild; we need more resources; we need more social solidarity, and we hanker for less violent crime from the tiny minority of young males. On the latter issue, the community-at-large (family, parents, communities, churches, schools, media, entertainers, lawyers, etc.) must do their part; and the state institutions (the Police, the Coastguard, the Prisons, the Magistracy, the High Court, the Prosecution, etc.) in concert with CARICOM, RSS, INTERPOL, and other external agencies must deliver optimally.

Have a wonderful, joyous, peaceful Christmas 2024!

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