

THE ULP GOVERNMENT CARES

By

Unity Labour Party

THE ISSUE

It is now five months since the passage of Hurricane Beryl which wrought havoc and destruction to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In the process lives and livelihoods were lost; houses were damaged or destroyed; public utilities (water, electricity, telecommunications) were severely compromised; schools, clinics, hospitals, police stations, seaports, airports, bridges and roads were damaged or destroyed; so, too, hotels, guest houses, farms, fishing vessels, and productive facilities of one sort or another were wrecked or damaged. Economic damage has been estimated at around EC \$800 million; many more millions are to be added in consequential economic loss. Social dislocation has been massive. The task of relief, recovery, and reconstruction has been huge. It has not been easy, but we are making significant progress; still, much more remains to be done.

The communion between the people and their government has been amazing. Despite dissonances, some understandable but others not, the solidarity and unity of our people and their government have been encouraging. At this time, more than ever, quality leadership has been vital. And the support of our friends and allies overseas has been helpful; though largely, we have been on our own save and except for a few heroic interventions from outside.

Through it all, over the last 150 days or so, the ULP government has demonstrated its love, caring, fresh hope, faith, creativity, and uplifting activism. The favourable results are before all of us to witness.

SCHOLS REPAIRED/REBUILT

Dozens of schools and other educational institutions were repaired and rebuilt. Students of all ages, and at all levels of education, were back in school on time for the new term or shortly thereafter. In the special case of Union Island, the students' accommodation and education were effected more or less seamlessly on both Union Island and on St. Vincent. Ongoing reconstruction work is nearing completion at both primary schools on Union Island. All this has been absolutely amazing given the scale of the severe damage to, or destruction of, the educational facilities.

HOUSING RECONSTRUCTION

Almost 5,000 houses were self-reported or assessed as having been damaged or destroyed by Beryl. Since then, hundreds have been severely affected by the recent rainstorms and landslides. All these are in addition to a residue of affected houses from the volcanic eruptions of April 2021. All told, some 6,000 houses require urgent attention at one level or another.

Thus far, the government has tackled over 2,000 houses (completed repairs, ongoing repairs/rebuilding, self-help) across St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This work is ongoing and is being ramped up despite the challenges and limitations of a scarcity of resources (financial, labour, technical skills, etc.) and the special circumstances of the Southern Grenadines, especially Union Island.

REBUILDING OTHER FACILITIES

The damaged public infrastructure of all kinds is being restored before our very eyes. It has been a marvel to behold. Yet, much more remains to be done. Challenges and a limitation of resources remain.

PRODUCTION SUPPORT IN AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Most people forget that before Beryl, agriculture was ravaged by the volcanic eruptions of April 2021, by Hurricane Elsa of July 202`, and by the drought between January-to-May 2024. Then came Beryl on July 1, 2024. Over the last three weeks, excessive rainfall and landslides have caused further damage and loss. Some people gloss over all this mayhem of nature. Still, throughout it all have been the steady and creative hearts, minds, and hands of the ULP government.

Before Beryl, the government borrowed \$27 million from the World Bank for Emergency Support for its Food Security Project. Through this project, assistance has been provided directly to farmers and fishers. To over 2,000 farmers, thus far, direct assistance has been provided in the form of farm implements, fertilizer, day old chickens (broilers and layers), water tanks, irrigation devices, and so forth. Under this project green houses and animals (sheep and goats) are to be provided in early 2025; and more direct assistance as detailed above is to be made available to more farmers. The Montreal Garden Green House Park, damaged severely by nature, is expected to be up and running before the end of 2024.

In terms of post-Beryl relief, direct production support (Phase I) by commodity has been delivered to farmers: Arrowroot: \$212,000 to

219 farmers; Bananas: \$380,000 to 422 farmers; Plantains: \$1.5 million to 1701 farms; Tractor Services: \$360 to each of 200 farmers.

Phase II of this direct production support is to be shortly rolled out as follows: Arrowroot: A further \$15,000 to 15 farmers; vegetable and root crops: \$814,000 to 817 farmers; Honey: \$114,000 to 76 farmers; Sea Moss: \$175,000 to 13 significant sea moss producers; Small Animals: \$460,000 to 460 farmers; Cattle: \$144,000 to 82 farmers; Tractor Services: \$131,000 to 73 farmers.

Production support for the Fisheries Sector was approved at Cabinet last week in the sum of \$2.7 million for 256 fishers with seven categories of assistance, six of which range from \$1,500 per fisher to up to \$55,000 per fisher depending on size and scale of operation and damage. There is a further \$194,000 set aside for general fishing gears and supplies for fishers from Lulley's Fishing Supplies. Saboto Caesar outlined all the details in a Ministerial Statement to Parliament last Thursday (November 28th).

INCOME SUPPORT FOR FARMERS AND FISHERS

Income Support has been approved by Cabinet last week for 5,654 farmers, farm workers, boat owners and crew in the sum of \$600 per month per person for 3 months (October — December 2024) in the first instance. These payments are expected to be made by bank cards before Christmas 2024.

INCOME SUPPORT FOR OTHER AFFECTED PERSONS

Through the Ministry of National Mobilisation, other families affected by Hurricane Beryl (unemployed head of households, persons who

became unemployed through Beryl other than farmers and fishers) totaling some 4,000 are being accorded income support of \$600 per month for 3 months (October — December 2024). The payments for October and November (\$1,200) are currently being rolled out through BOSVG Bank Cards.

So far, the numbers are as follows:

- (i) Cards verified and built for affected persons in the Northern Grenadines: 142 with a value of \$170,400. (Over 100 of these were distributed last Friday, November 29th).
- (ii) Cards for the Southern Grenadines total 1,094 to be distributed as follows: Mayreau, 112; Canouan, 175; Union Island, 807. The total value on these cards for the ten months is \$1,312,850.

Note: Total cards built for the Northern and Southern Grenadines number 1,236 with a two-month value of \$1.4832 million.

- (iii) Cards verified and built to date for St. Vincent number 1,978 at a two-month value of \$2,373,600.

Note: total number of all cards for the whole of SVG, to date, number 3,214 with a total value of \$3.8568 million.

- (iv) The payment for December 2024 is expected to be made before Christmas. All of this is remarkable. Love and caring at work!

SUMMATION

Already the production support for farmers is paying dividends in revitalised planting of bananas, plantains, and vegetables.

The income support for the various categories of affected persons will undoubtedly ease some pain inflicted by Beryl.

Meanwhile, other supportive measures have been, and are being rolled out: Over 300 SET workers; over 600 YES volunteers; new batch of ON-SITE; a new bundle of PRYME recipients; the \$175 COLA Special for 3,000 specially-hurt persons for 3 months (December 2024, January – February 2025); and so forth.

What a government! Still, we have not reached Mt. Zion yet!

Article for week of December 6, 2024