



**The Prime Minister
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
West Indies**

April 14, 2020

Dr. The Rt. Hon. Keith Mitchell
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
St. Georges
Grenada

Dear Keith

Solidarity greetings from the government and people of St. Vincent and the Grenadines!

I regret that you were wrongly advised or badly misinformed on the facts and the issues, including those arising from my recent statement on Good Friday, regarding the movement to our Southern Grenadines (especially Union Island) of Grenadians who belong to Carriacou and Petit Martinique.

Your statements on the matter-at-hand contained several inaccuracies but I shall only mention the two which are the most egregious. For ease of reference I state below, respectively, the twin falsehoods and the corresponding facts:

(i) **FALSEHOOD:** That the borders of St. Vincent and the Grenadines were, and are, open at the time of COVID-19.

FACTS: From the very beginning, the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines placed certain explicit restrictions on entry to St. Vincent and the Grenadines of persons who originated from other countries substantially afflicted by COVID-19. These restrictions were tightened, extended, or ramped up on an ongoing basis as the circumstances merited. Indeed, from ten days ago — before your statements — anyone originating from a CARICOM member-state was required, among other things, as a condition of entry, to be quarantined for 14 days, whether or not he or she had symptoms of COVID-19. Further, in none of the Grenadines' Islands has there been a port of entry for yachts or pleasure boats for over two weeks now; and there was in place, before your statements, a controlled regime for a trade in goods. Please note, too, that the last international flight to St. Vincent and the Grenadines was on March 28, 2020 — long before your statements.

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(ii) **FALSEHOOD:** That the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines encouraged or invited residents of Carriacou and Petit Martinique to enter St. Vincent and the Grenadines in defiance of your country's closure of ports, curfew, and "lock down".

FACTS: The Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines specifically stated that given the history and culture of "free movement of persons" between the islands of the Southern Grenadines (respectively parts of Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines offered to assist, if assistance were required, with food, medicine, and cooking gas "but in a structured and organised manner". This genuine and helpful offer was in response to the residents of Carriacou and Petit Martinique arriving in Union Island — despite your government's curfew and "lock-down" — to purchase or to arrange in the purchase of the said commodities in more than modest quantities. After all, Grenadians are our dear brothers and sisters divided only by minuscule degrees of latitude and longitude. I thus find it quite amusing and ironical that some who are egging you on in your blast against me are agitating to raise aloft, swiftly, the fig-leaf of sovereignty against a friendly neighbour, yet the same persons oft-times, and easily, surrender it, in substance, to imperialism. I am sure that the distinguished Prime Minister of Grenada is not in that sort of ignoble company.

Underlying your comments, I sense an unstated assumption or implication that St. Vincent and the Grenadines has opted for a less focused approach than that of some neighboring countries in the fight against COVID-19. That imputation, too, is false! To be sure the authorities of St. Vincent and the Grenadines have not adopted draconian or near-draconian measures, but we have followed the science and the generally-accepted sensible protocols on COVID-19; and we have applied them efficaciously to our circumstances in their fluidity and evolution. Our approach, and its relevant details, were elaborated in my address to the nation on March 25, 2020. A copy of this address is enclosed. I do not in any way suggest that our approach is the preferred approach for any other country in the OECS or CARICOM.

It is to be noted that St. Vincent and the Grenadines has two broad draft plans of operational significance: (i) A National Health Disaster Plan; and (ii) A National Influenza Pandemic Plan (inclusive of COVID-19). These Plans are being refined on an ongoing basis. Our professionals have been doing excellent work, in every material particular, in the battle against COVID-19.

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It is noteworthy, too, that St. Vincent and the Grenadines is the first country in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean to have instituted quarantine measures on COVID-19 in respect of 15 persons who entered St. Vincent and the Grenadines; this was way before St. Vincent and the Grenadines had its first confirmed case on March 11, 2020.

At the same time, the leadership of the government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has not panicked and it will not panic in the face of the dreaded COVID-19; we are calm and focused; we have avoided the easy, alluring temptations of an excessive fear which paralyses and an hysteria which induces an unbalanced over-reaction. Equally, we have decidedly not been complacent in facing the monumental many-sided challenge of COVID-19; so, we have not under-reacted.

As at April 14, 2020, St. Vincent and the Grenadines has done 91 tests for COVID-19. Of this number, there are 12 confirmed cases, all of whom are directly imported — 8 of these are Vincentian crew members from cruise ships; there is no local transmission; no one with COVID-19 has been hospitalised in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; none of the confirmed cases has been seriously ill, requiring ICU treatment; no doctor, nurse, other health worker, or police officer has been tested positive; no one in St. Vincent and the Grenadines has died from, or with, COVID-19. We have carried out a relentless campaign against COVID-19 without recourse to a “lock-down”, curfew, or a state of emergency; we have used other levers at the disposal of the government to fight this dreaded infectious disease; we have taken the people into our confidence; and we have assured them that we are prepared to utilize the full panoply of constitutional and legal powers, if we consider their use reasonably required and justifiable in all the circumstances. Overwhelmingly, our people have been understanding and cooperative. We have preferred, metaphorically-speaking, to use the scalpel, not a chain saw; a carving knife, not a machete in our focused, scientific approach.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines, like all other CARICOM member-countries, is not yet out of the proverbial woods. So, we remain vigilant and focused. In the process we know always that we can count on the love, grace, and blessings of Almighty God to see us through this terrible ordeal of COVID-19.

Please be assured that the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines is not interested, and has never been interested, in initiating or engaging in any metaphoric village dog-fight with the Prime Minister of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petit Martinique. Both of us are the longest-serving Prime Ministers in CARICOM who surely must have better things to do with our time than to “throw words” across the Caribbean Sea!

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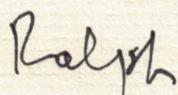
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There is, I believe, a settled certainty that your statements were not reflective of any malicious intent but that they had their genesis in wrong advice and/or misinformation. I suspect that a deliberately truncated audio of my statement, so doctored by those stuffed with political malice against me, has been brought to your attention and has gravely misled you; please note the vital omission from the maliciously-circulated audio in which I had emphasized that the actualization of the offer is to be effected in a "structured and organised manner". I feel sure that when you are seized of all the facts, including those which I have outlined herein, you are likely to reflect that your allegation of "irresponsibility" against me is wholly unfounded and wrong-headed. Accordingly, you may then grasp a measure of the honour which I know that you possess, and withdraw it. If not, it may be open to persons of objectivity to conclude that there is more in the mortar beside the pestle. I am sure, given our respective political histories, that you know what I mean.

So, I set the record straight in respect of this veritable storm-in-a-teacup and shrug my shoulders at it as nothing but water-under-the-bridge; I mix my metaphors in Caribbean candour and humour.

All the best to you, your family, the government and people of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petit Martinique.

Sincerely yours,



**Dr. The Hon. Ralph E. Gonsalves
Prime Minister**

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