

PM letter

Dear Prime Minister Dr. Honorable Ralph E Gonsalves, I write to you on day 35 of a very uncertain time stuck on the seas.

Other Vincentian sailors here share the same plight.

With all due respect, I could tell you that I've been an active ULP supporter since I became an adult and able to vote. In the scheme of things however, that is not necessary information, except to say that I have never been one to question your judgement on decision-making.

I have never been one to question your way of leadership. In my opinion, you are by far the most prestigious leader of our time but, ever since this pandemic some of the things you do seem very questionable.

I know leaders see beyond what the rest of us can see but a few developments are waning any benefit of the doubt I have given you so far.

One such development is your treatment of our situation as sailors stuck out here.

I have a few grey areas I would like to shed some light on so, I'm going to get this off my chest. On the Cover of my Passport says St. Vincent and The Grenadines with a Coat Of Arms stating Pax et Justicia "Peace and Justice", in other words I am a citizen of SVG and so are the rest of my fellow seafarers holding a Vincentian Passport.

Now, I may not know all of the facts surrounding this whole situation but what I do know is, the company that I am working for has been doing its best during this Pandemic to keep us safe and secure(Thank you NCL), we have been isolated for more than 35 days now, Social Distancing is in full effect, with regular symptom and temperature check 3 times per day every single day with no physical contact from anyone in the outside world (imagine a few meters away from the coastline but stuck on tons of floating steel, feels a lot like prison).

Despite your initial decision to not close our borders, to date, they are now technically closed, but without a declaration, a window is left open for us to return. Thank you very much for that decision despite the naysayers. I, and I am sure we the Seafarers appreciate that.

What I do not appreciate is the way I am understanding you are now trying to exploit the companies we are working for and from my perspective, trying to avoid the responsibility you have to us as citizens.

Now, according to MLC (Maritime Labour Convention) under circumstances as such this, the companies are responsible for our accommodation, food, medical supplies, etc and don't forget REPATRIATION.

Now, it was alleged that you require the companies to pay US\$150.00 per day for 21 days for all Vincentian crewmembers to be quarantined? Just a few questions.

1. What if the company refuses, will us Sailors be required to pay that US\$150.00 per day for 21 days?

2. What happened to the Supplementary Budget that was passed in Parliament not too long ago for COVID19 purposes or the the US\$4.5million that was activated on April 17th 2020 by the world bank for SVG Covid-19 response, and also money from other institutions such as East Caribbean Central Bank, NIS...etc?

Is it not supposed to involve covering the cost for the Quarantining of Citizens who has contract the virus (involving but not limited to Food, Accommodation, Security, Medical attention etc)?

3. If not, then what kind of Covid response budget would leave it citizens stranded on the proverbial road to Damascus waiting for an unknown good Samaritan to save us? WE will like to know.

Bear in mind, we are the same citizens abroad who contribution millions in remittances to the country? For all have contributed over the years, the government cannot at one single time of need contribute to us or meet us half way?

4. Also, why 21 days quarantine though when the requirement from the WHO is 14 days?

Now, I have no doubt that some Cruise Lines will indeed refuse to pay. After all, who can blame them, with the current economic state of the world they are not generating any revenue and to be honest, Why should they pay? They have lived up to their responsibilities to us, now where repatriation is concern once our feet touches the soil in SVG, we are no longer a responsibility of the Cruise Line.

At home we are Governed by our laws, under our constitution and therefore under the responsibility of our Government. And our circumstances will require unique attention.

So, again why should they pay for what the Government of SVG is responsible for?

And if the rumours regarding the Cruise Lines refusal to pay are true, then the crewmembers will have to pay. I personally have made up my mind that I will not bear any such expenses, at least, not by my self because I am a law abiding citizen and a taxpayer just like anyone living in SVG. Especially too not for 21 days since the WHOs recommendation is 14 days of quarantine.

I will like to plea with fellow Sailors and our families to speak up, speak out and air their views because our country has a democratic system and in this process, outcomes depend on what we do and say as a collective, no single force controls what occurs and its outcomes.

We hope that this issue can be solved amicably in the most commonsensical way and get us home quickly without damaging relations with our places of employment.